

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia have not been able to agree on a demarcation line for 25 years, so the Drina River is considered the border. But the Drina is moving and that is causing problems. Due to large deposits of gravel in the riverbed, it spills to the left or right, creating a new riverbed and leaving 700 hectares of Bosnian territory in Serbia and 2,900 hectares of Serbian territory in BiH.

There is a sign between Bijeljina and the border crossing with Serbia that warns that it is the territory of Serbia. It was set up by Serbian politician Zivan Jaksic, who crosses the border every day and illegally digs gravel on the banks of the Drina. Although within Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), hectares of Jaksic's land belong to Serbia. Next to Jaksic's estate is the gravel pit of the company "DMS Company" run by the Bosnian politician Milan Dakic. His company is in BiH, and he is digging gravel illegally twenty meters away - from the Serbian country, on the same bank of the Drina. Both were elected by the citizens to be part of the government and work for the public good, and they took advantage of the lack of control in this area to make money illegally.

In order for Semberija to be protected from floods, gravel must be extracted from the riverbed, and not from its banks, as they do illegally. By digging up the banks, they enable the Drina to flood the fertile Semberija.

"Because of that wild exploitation of gravel, a very small number of people take it from the riverbed, the Drina is not cleaned," says the mayor of Bijeljina, Mico Micic.

The last floods in 2014 caused damage to the population of Bijeljina of almost 400 million marks.

Politics and business

Milan Dakic has been a member of the Democratic Alliance in the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska for six years, but he never participated in the parliamentary debate. Regardless of that, he does not give up politics, so this year he is the holder of the electoral list for the Municipal Assembly of Bijeljina. There is a famous gravel pit in Semberija. His company was only engaged in the cultivation of fruits and vegetables until 2013, when Dakic decided to dig gravel due to the announcement of major construction projects - the construction of a highway and a bypass around Bijeljina. Although he runs the business, the formal owner of the firm is his mother. If he remained the owner on paper, he shouldn't have done it. His company is on the very edge of "no man's land", on a plot that is listed in the cadastral books as the last along the border with Serbia. The maps accepted by the Dayton Peace Agreement mark the border with Serbia on the Drina, so a belt of river land several kilometers wide remained between the cadastral and Dayton borders. That is the

reason why the inspections of both countries mostly bypass this territory. Dakic takes out the gravel and dumps it on his landfill, which is located on a plot in BiH.

When asked by journalists where he got the stocks of gravel stored in piles around the company, he said that these were quantities that he had legally extracted from the Drina in previous years in the town of Medjasi. He claims that he has permits for that from "Vode Srpske", a public institution that regulates and controls water areas in the entity.

CIN reporters discovered that was not true. According to the data of "Voda Srpske", "DMS Company" last legally extracted 24,700 cubic meters of gravel from the Drina in Janja in 2014. Although it did not have a permit after that, the company sold 41,000 cubic meters of gravel more by the middle of 2018. Spotted with the truth about the permits, Dakic admitted that he was wrong. He tried to shift the responsibility for illegal exploitation to the workers. The competence of the inspectors of the Republika Srpska on "no man's land" is not legally regulated, so they do not control a piece of BiH land on the right bank. "The internationally recognized border is the Drina and, viewed from that angle, it is a different country for us," said RS Inspectorate spokeswoman Dusanka Makivic. And inspectors from Serbia rarely visit a piece of their jurisdiction on the left bank in BiH Municipality and communal inspectors have not been there in the last five years.

Water inspectors could work in joint controls on both sides of the river because Republika Srpska and Serbia have an Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Integrated Water Management of the Lower Drina River, but they rarely do so.

Any digging on the river banks, let alone uncontrolled digging of gravel, is prohibited in both Serbia and BiH because it increases the risk of collapse and flooding of settlements. Water companies give permits for the exploitation of gravel and sand from the riverbed just to clear the way for the free flow of water. For this job, they hire companies through a public call, which must pay the issuance of documentation and a fee for each cubic meter of extracted material. In this part of BiH, at least a mark and a half is paid for that, while in Serbia it is twice as cheap.

Although dumping waste on the shores is prohibited, Jaksic is convinced that by accumulating construction debris, he is protecting the coast from collapsing. "The inspector comes often, he says it's great," he praised to CIN reporters. The impressions of the only inspector who has been in the border zone in the last few years are different from what Jaksic claims. The chief of the Communal Police in Bijeljina, Ratomir Draganic, remembers that the former rich politician set fire to the tires brought and that the Bosnian inspection could not do anything to him.

The working groups for the border between Serbia and BiH have not met for 10 years.

Previously, the Serbian side requested that before signing the documents on the border, the cadastral lines be changed in four places: around the hydroelectric power plants “Zvornik” and “Bajina Basta”, the Belgrade-Bar railway and part of the municipality of Rudo. BiH rejected the request, asking for the border to be determined first, so that nothing has changed so far and negotiations on some border issues, “said BiH Presidency member Sefik Dzaferovic.

The president of the border commission that is conducting negotiations on behalf of Serbia, Veljko Odalovic, insists that all disputed points be resolved before the final confirmation of the border, but that will not happen if the talks do not start. “We will not solve anything like this. This way, you will get different information, people will be confused, inspection and other services, of course, will be disenfranchised “, says Odalovic for CIN.

The bottlenecks of the Drina, where the river most often overflows and floods Bosnia and Herzegovina, are located in Serbia. Due to the incompetence over almost three thousand hectares of land, “Vode Srpske” cannot hire domestic companies to clean that part of the riverbed. These locations are not profitable for companies from Serbia due to high transport costs, so the Drina remains full of gravel and under constant risk of floods.

Miroslav Milovanovic, director of “Vode Srpske”, says that because of that he asked his colleagues from the Serbian water management company “Srbijavode” to sign an agreement which would agree that Serbia takes care of the right bank and Republika Srpska takes care of the left bank of the Drina.

The floods of 2014 left the city with damage of almost 400 million marks. Many Semberija residents who grew up on the rivers say they have not seen them with the same eyes since. Ignoring the consequences of illegal gravel exploitation, they blame nature for the disaster. The mayor of Bijeljina, Mico Micic, knows that the Drina is not to blame for the floods: “The biggest problem is in the Drina, the Sava, Bosnia and others that the riverbeds are not cleaned. Either the embankment must be raised, or the riverbed must be cleaned. Well, it’s the same with the Drina. ” Although extracting millions of cubic meters of gravel from the riverbed would reduce the risk of floods, and the budget would make a profit, the entity and city authorities spend millions of marks a year on the construction of coastal fortifications and embankments. The construction of the Drina embankment should start at the beginning of next year. The planned length of the embankment is 32 kilometers, and only the first two kilometers will cost around three million marks.

Source: cin.ba

Politics and business are devastating the Drina River