

Clean air and environmental protection in general are not only environmental issues but also rule of law issues. Members of civil society organizations and members of the National Convention on the European Union, who met in Subotica, discussed the relationship between environmental protection and the rule of law.

“Chapter 27 in the process of accession to the European Union deals with the right to a healthy environment, which is a constitutional category, and we tried to see how it is really protected through our system of rule of law, justice and everything that happens in the environment,” says Natasa Djereg, co-author of the analysis and coordinator of the Working Group of the National Convention for Chapter 27. As Natasa Dragojlovic, coordinator of the National Convention on the EU, which brings together 760 civil society organizations, points out, they are interested in whether there are adequate legal regulations in our country our laws are the same as in the EU, if they are not what we need to fix. “And if they are, why don’t they apply. How can we, as citizens, be sure that our right to a healthy environment is adequately protected, and these are topics we will discuss. As a civil society, we want to put public health and the right to a healthy environment in the foreground “, says Dragojlovic. In exercising this right, a working group that analyzed the link between Chapter 23, which deals with the rule of law, and Chapter 27, which deals with the environment, proposed a series of measures for the legislature and the executive, but also for the civil sector. In the first place, they propose the abolition of court fees when it comes to environmental protection because it puts citizens in an unequal position in relation to companies, they demand stricter penal policy for violating the law in this area, better cooperation between services engaged in this area and the formation of an independent national body will resolve public complaints regarding the environment. This recommendation, Natasa Djereg points out, is also a recommendation of the European Union. It is also proposed to establish a mechanism for monitoring the health of the population.

According to the standards and recommendations of the European Union, Serbia has a low number of inspectors and low administrative capacity in this area, so it would be necessary to hire about a thousand more inspectors.

“Our assessment is that the state of our environment is not good, it is not satisfactory, we have a lot of work in this area. The environment is not the job of just one ministry, there are also utility companies that have to get involved, there is also waste management, separation of waste at the source of pollution, industrial pollution, inherited historical problems that we have. We need a big turnaround and great cooperation and the attitude of the entire government, and not just one ministry “, says Djereg. She points out that they have good cooperation with the government and ministries on key issues, but that problems arise when

it comes to actual work in the field. In that sense, he also interprets the protests of citizens, such as those in Rakita, Bor or Smederevo, in order to protect their environment.

“Citizens take justice into their own hands when they see that the competent institutions do not react according to the law, and then local communities have no other way but to protest to protect their property, their natural good, the public interest that is recognized for them there.” If there was a real rule of law and the work of institutions, this would not have happened. It is also a big red alarm for all those involved, both for the Protector of Citizens and for the Ombudsman, and for all the services that are involved “, believes Djereg.

The National Convention has been following Serbia’s negotiations with the EU since 2014 and has managed to become the third actor in negotiations with the union.

“We want to help make our negotiating positions look better, to offer the government better creative solutions, because the administration can only do what it is allowed to do, and civil society organizations can do everything that is not prohibited by law.” That is why we think that we can contribute more, and point out how important the environment is, and how important the rule of law is, and to exchange opinions with citizens as it looks in practice throughout Serbia, “said Natasa Dragojlovic.

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