

Request for a moratorium on the construction of small hydropower plants in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Environmental associations Eco Action and the environmental-humanitarian association Gotusa have asked the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to introduce a moratorium on the construction of small hydropower plants (SHPPs), because of what they say is a threat to BiH's rivers.

Representatives of these associations have also prepared the text of the Water Conservation Manifesto in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which will be signed by BiH citizens in the coming period, and will eventually be submitted to BiH authorities.

"The manifesto means a complete moratorium on further construction, protection of our waters, so that it does not happen to us that some concessionaire will seize the spring tomorrow without people having any drinking water," said Anes Podic, from the Eco Action Association at a press conference in Sarajevo.

These associations state that the damage caused by the construction of small hydropower plants is enormous for the environment and that the benefits in terms of electricity production are minor.

Bosnia and Herzegovina plans to build over 400 small hydropower plants on over 250 water courses. These figures were reached by the two NGOs through the project documentation and planned by investors and BiH authorities.

So far, 95 small hydropower plants have been built, the others are in the process of seeking permits, these data are from Eco Action and the environmental and humanitarian association Gotusa.

"Damage is already visible, because there is no more water on certain river streams," Podic said.

He also pointed to the problem that exists on the Vrbas River, the right tributary of the Sava River, in western BiH.

"The upper stream of Vrbas is flowing from one pipe to another. Kilometers of the river no longer exist. That is not the only case," Podic says.

BiH produces enough electricity, Podic notes, so that of the total electricity produced, one third is exported from BiH.

"This is the official statistics of the state Electricity Agency (SERC). In 2018, we produced 17, 8 terawatt hours, we consumed 13.3 terawatt hours, the rest was exported. So, the share of all of these built so far, for 2015, 2016 and 2017, means that over 80 were built then, it is just over 2 percent," explains Podic.

According to estimates from Eco Action and the Gotusa Association, ten wind farms produce electricity as much as all planned small hydropower plants combined.

It was also said that private owners of mini-hydro power plants have a privileged purchase

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price, and that the state is obliged to buy all electricity produced by private hydro-power plants.

“What’s the use, and why are they being made ?! On the one hand we have a tycoon network, there are both domestic and foreign companies and our government. The entire infrastructure is designed to allow small hydro power plant owners to maximize profits. The state guarantees to the private owners the purchase of all the electricity produced, in the Federation it is 15 years in the Republika Srpska for 15 years at a privileged price, ”Podic explains.

The owners of these small hydroelectric plants, according to environmental associations, are mostly foreign companies, with one or two people working there.

“In Fojnica, on a small hydroelectric power plant in Kozica, Botun and Majdan have one person employed. It is only his duty to remove the branch, for example, meaning that the operation of these small hydropower plants is absolutely automated. A full-time employee who looks after these four mini-power plants - Mujakovic, Jezernica, Majdan and Botun, is Mr. Mustafa Memija - it is interesting that the man was the mayor of Fojnica municipality for two terms while issuing documentation for the construction of small hydropower plants, “Robert Oroz from the Gotusa association told reporters.

Most small hydropower plants are built in the Central Bosnia Canton (SBK). The citizens had previously protested because of this, but only the people of Kruscica, a village in the municipality of Vitez in central Bosnia, had succeeded in preventing the construction of a small hydropower plant on the Kruscica River.

We remind that the Coalition for Protection of Rivers of BiH has warned earlier that the authorities in BiH must understand that small hydropower plants are not a solution, but part of the problem, which, they say, causes the company significant environmental and material damage.

They also warn that BiH has no need for new hydroelectric power plants and that they only benefit investors who sign a contract on the guaranteed purchase price of electricity, and have benefits in the form of subsidies paid by citizens every month, given that the electricity bill energy there is an incentive item for renewables.

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