

SEE: Governments of SEE countries should submit their ambitious and fair climate commitments as soon as possible

Today, on June 5th, World Environment Day, the existential threat to human life is climate change. On this occasion, SEE SEP network of CSOs from South East Europe calls upon the governments of the region to act promptly and put forward ambitious and fair climate commitments for the upcoming global climate agreement in Paris. We agree with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that “leaders must act” and that “there is a myth that climate action will cost heavily, but inaction will cost much more”, as he stated in November 2014.

The final text for the new climate agreement is being negotiated this week at the UN Climate Change Conference in Bonn, Germany. Representatives of several SEE countries are not present at this meeting. This, coupled with their oversized plans for coal investments, puts into question their true dedication to tackle climate change.

Christine Moro, the French Ambassador to Serbia, the biggest polluter in the SEE region, recently stated that the EU climate target of at least 40% reduction of emissions by 2030 applies to the countries that are aiming to join the European Union as well. As UN Climate Chief Christiana Figueres states that there is no space for new coal, what does this mean for the countries of the region, asks Garret Tankosić-Kelly, principal of SEE Change Net. “If the countries of South East Europe align themselves with EU climate targets, is that a luxury that they could afford? Coal is not ‘cheap’, and health costs clearly demonstrate that: annual projected health costs range from 2.3 to 6.5 billion EUR in the countries of the region - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia [1]. In fact, coal is an expensive addiction which we need to break”, says Tankosić-Kelly.

Moreover, World Health Organization (WHO) recently presented their first-ever study of costs for Europe [2], showing that air pollution damaged European economies by 1.6 trillion US\$ and also caused approximately 600 000 premature deaths and diseases in 2010. The figures for SEE clearly show the high economic cost of deaths from air pollution, that equal to 17% of GDP in Albania, 20% of GDP in BiH, 11% of GDP in Croatia, 20% of GDP in Macedonia*, 14% of GDP in Montenegro and 33.5% of GDP in Serbia. [3]

In reaction to WHO’s report, Vlatka Matković-Puljić of HEAL says: “This report is a wake up call for Balkan decision-makers about the high health economic burden of air pollution in their countries. By pushing for, and implementing strong national climate contributions (INDCs), governments have a unique opportunity to improve air quality and boost the health of their citizens.”

If nothing is done, we can expect to see an increasing number of unpredictable weather events, such as the floods that affected the countries of the region - Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia - last year, with flood damage estimated to 3 billion EUR by EBRD.

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SEE Change Net and SEE SEP network of CSOs from South East Europe are currently developing an energy model for 7 countries of the region that is supported by the European Commission, UNDP and UK Department for Energy and Climate Change. The costs in the energy model, that were audited by a Bloomberg trained expert Guy Turner of Trove Research, will shortly be unveiled and will definitely show whether or not it's possible to have an energy road map that will allow the countries of SEE to have INDC targets in line with EU standards - at least 40% reduction in emissions by 2030, and for less than the current cost of the energy system.