

One of the topics that divides the local public is the planned construction of a waste incinerator in Belgrade at the site of the current Vinča landfill.

Everyone agrees that the unsanitary landfill should be repaired, but opinion on how waste should be treated in the capital of Serbia is controversial.

Nikola Jovanovic, vice president of the People's Party and head of the Alliance's Serbian parliamentary group, points out that the construction of the incinerator is very detrimental due to several aspects, both environmental and financial.

"While serving as the Deputy Head of the Alliance for Serbia Parliamentary Group at the Belgrade City Assembly, I requested that the debate on the incineration plant be put on the agenda, or that the decision to build it be annulled. Majority representatives in the City Hall did not accept the proposal. I also spoke with Dragan Djilas in front of the Alliance for Serbia at a press conference, at which we presented a number of arguable reasons why the construction of the incinerator is detrimental to citizens. The planned construction of the Vinča incinerator is by far the worst projected investment in Belgrade after the Belgrade Waterfront project. Through public-private partnerships, the city authorities have pledged to pay the concessionaire € 1.15 billion over 30 years. This is a huge burden for the citizens of the Serbian capital, who will pay it out of their own pockets. Also, according to the contract, the concessionaire undertook to build a gas processing plant that would be used for the production of heat and electricity. The problem is that the owner of that energy would be the concessionaire, which received from the competent authorities the status of privileged producer of electricity, which means that it would be purchased from him at much higher prices than the market ones" - explains Jovanovic.

He added that the project was also critical from an environmental point of view, as authorities had earlier said that the dealership pledged to repair the existing landfill in Vinca, but that the matter has not been mentioned at all lately.

"From this it can be concluded that the existing landfill that presents an environmental problem will not be repaired" - Jovanovic said.

When asked what would be an alternative to building a landfill, our interviewee points out that there are two.

The first alternative is to have a recycling facility built instead of the incinerator where most of the garbage would be processed and only small residuals would be incinerated. It is a practice that has been implemented recently in developed countries. Alternatively, if it is shown that the construction of the incinerator is necessary, then it should not be built through a concession, but rather by having the City of Belgrade take advantageous loans. In

the process, it could also count on some grants from the European Union and an investment with favorable credit would not amount to more than 200 million euros. From this it is clear that this is a more favorable variant than the one that the city authorities insist on - Jovanovic concludes.

Vladimir Radojicic, an activist from "Don't let Belgrade d(r)own" initiative, also cites financial and environmental aspects as the main reasons why the incinerator should not be built, but adds that the principle of private-public partnership through which this project should be implemented is harmful to citizens because it costs a lot.

The problem is that the waste will not undergo the necessary treatment before incineration, leading to the release of large quantities of ash into the air, as well as carcinogens, dioxins and furans, for which there is no laboratory in Serbia that can measure.

Also, the contract made with the concessionaire in connection with this deal does not show that he has undertaken the obligation to recycle the garbage, but only to build the incinerator and incineration from the ecological point of view is a harmful way of solving waste - says our interlocutor.

He adds that the problem is that the garbage will also produce electricity whose price will be two and a half times more expensive than the market, which increases the amount of bills for electricity of citizens, since the concessionaire received the status of privileged producer of energy.

When asked how waste treatment in Belgrade should be regulated without the construction of an incinerator, our interlocutor points out that the example of "zero waste" in Ljubljana should be followed.

"Most of the waste is recyclable so it is the best way to solve the issue of garbage. This is a practice that exists in Ljubljana. They also wanted to build a landfill there, but still gave up and decided to recycle" - Radojicic said.

On the other hand, Vojislav Vuletic, secretary general of the Serbian Gas Association, said that the construction of the incinerator is a good solution to repair the Vinca landfill and treat waste from which electricity and heat will be produced.

"The most important thing is that the landfill will disappear and a modern garbage treatment plant be built. An additional benefit is that thermal energy will be produced at the plant, among other things. These quantities are of great importance for Belgrade Power Plants, which will reduce their costs for gas procurement and will also have the potential to expand their distribution network" - says our interlocutor. He adds that the criticism of the construction of the incinerator is not rational given that there is waste that cannot be recycled. - "What to do with that non-recyclable garbage? That garbage just has to be

burned. Unfortunately, a big problem in this case is created by people who have absolutely no understanding of waste treatment and talk about it by heart” - Vuletic points out. By the way, the “Don’t let Belgrade d(r)own” Initiative has recently announced that the European Investment Bank has refused to finance the construction of the incinerator because such waste treatment is not in line with EU regulations, and in particular Chapter 27. A clarification has been received from the European Union delegation; on its territory the incineration of waste is allowed in exceptional cases when there is no other solution and that our country should strive to recycle most of the waste and only a small incinerator. It is recalled that a contract signed in autumn 2017 between the City of Belgrade and the Beo Clean Energy Consortium, comprising the French company Suez Groupe SAS and Japan’s Itochu I-Environment, provides for the rehabilitation of the ground and construction of a municipal waste treatment and energy production plant, and the project is said to be worth 330 million euros.

The plan is that by 2021 or 2022 everything will be finished and the plant will start operating. Before that, the existing landfill in Vinca will be shut down to start the exploitation of landfill gas for electricity production. Also, a contract on purchase of thermal energy was signed between the company Beo Pure Energy and PUC Belgrade Power Plant on the construction of infrastructure for the acquisition of thermal energy.

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