

Projects for the construction of 500 small-hydropower plants in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the aim of harnessing water potential, have been designed as a way of circumventing the costly and complex environmental studies required by large hydropower plants. As water becomes an increasingly valuable resource, instead of its maximum protection, the cantonal authorities see an opportunity for quick profits and promptly issue the necessary permits to stimulate small-scale entrepreneurial impulses, regardless of the environmental and social consequences of such projects.

A document published in June 2016, a Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment Plan for the Adriatic Sea RBMP, commissioned by the Federal Agency for the Adriatic Sea RBMP, warns about the threat to waters in Herzegovina (or the Adriatic basin area that includes streams) rivers of the Neretva, Trebisnjica, Cetina and Krka in the Federation of BiH).

The document presents the state of the water infrastructure in the area, which is completely out of compliance with environmental and public health standards. For example, most of the population in Herzegovina is not connected to a sewer network. The largest city in this area, Mostar, has a sewage network only in the inner city area, but without a collector, making the Neretva polluted and dangerous to health.

Gornji horizonti on hold?

The report states that there is significant pressure from anthropogenic factors on 49 water bodies in the area, and particularly emphasizes the risk that may arise from the construction of hydropower facilities in the Trebišnjica River area in the Republika Srpska, should the Gornji horizonti project continue. The project envisages construction of several hydropower facilities and complete hydromorphological transformation of the whole area to the mouth of the Neretva.

Specifically, the project would have a significant impact on the decrease in the amount of water in the neighboring streams (Neretva and its tributaries) by changes in the flow of Trebisnjica. In the worst case scenario, it would lead to an increase in water salinity, which would have catastrophic consequences for agriculture, as the most important economic branch.

The story of the Gornji horizonti a few years ago was current in the Croatian media as the Government of the Republic of Croatia was involved in the project together with the Government of Republika Srpska. After the change of government to Croatia, the story of the Gornji horizonti fell silent.

However, new projects are emerging in the wider area of Herzegovina. In addition to the devastation of nature, energy-business is causing the upheaval of the still underdeveloped

civilian sector, as well as the local population. The second most famous hydropower project was started in the upper Neretva basin, in Ulog, Kalinovik municipality in Republika Srpska. The project of HPP Ulog has become the most controversial so far, because it was called the so-called on its own initiative, submitted by the Serbian Government businessman Vuk Hamovic's Energy Financing Team (EFT Group) to the RS Government.

The construction of the complex has been awarded to one of the strongest Chinese construction companies, Synohydro. However, after the start of the works, several breakdowns and fatalities of construction workers, work on this "capital project" was suspended.

Obvious amateurism is well illustrated by a spontaneous concession policy, which sought to sell the only natural resource in the region without employing locals from the expatriate and neglected mountain region of northeastern Herzegovina.

Which infrastructure and for whom?

Unlike the Republika Srpska authorities, which have embarked on cumbersome projects, in the Federation of BiH they have used the water resources in a more subtle way, using the model of small hydropower plants.

Namely, the authorities of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton have recently been intensively issuing concessions for the construction of small hydropower plants along the entire course of the Neretva, which has already been well utilized from the period of socialism.

Several interesting stories quickly emerged from the public with almost the same scenario: cantonal and municipal authorities quickly issue permits to investors, who then, without adequate examinations and impact studies, launch works, regularly finding resistance from the local population.

Namely, small hydropower plants often do not go through rigorous licensing procedures and, if necessary, are often done charlataneously or in the arrangement of private companies. One such example is the turning to the hydropower business of the best Bosnian basketball player and national team captain Mirza Teletovic, who started construction of a small hydro power plant near Jablanica. Finding resistance from the locals, Mirza waved at the environmental impact study, explaining that he had "all the documentation he needed" for his first entrepreneurial venture.

"All the necessary documentation" has become the ultimate flossus soon, waving against any criticism of the 500 announced mini-hydropower plants, which should be built in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the coming period.

A similar story is found in the settlement Buna near Mostar, where two mini hydro power

plants are being attempted on the river of the same name, which provoked active resistance of the local population, activists, as well as the professional public, ie the Geographical Institute from Sarajevo and its director Professor Muriz Spahić. In a statement to the analyze.ba portal, he warned of the interest behind “expert findings” and environmental studies: “Those who commission these projects, and even those who do, do not take sufficient care of nature for profit. Interestingly, the environmental program is a radio investor, which does not exist anywhere in the world. ”

The problem of such policies towards water wealth is also being signaled by one of the louder green groups in BiH - the Center for Environmental Protection in Banja Luka. According to them, many mini-hydropower plants are not a viable substitute for a pair of large ones, moreover: “small hydropower plants pose proportionally the same threat to small rivers as large hydropower plants to large rivers.”

Small hydropower plants that could soon flood the Kraška polja in Herzegovina are emerging as an arrangement of business and bureaucracy, without any positive impact on the community, since these are regularly poorly developed areas, with almost nonexistent infrastructure. While the real problems of communal infrastructure in Herzegovina are being completely bypassed, infrastructure projects are being activated that draw profits from the country and water for a few, that is, energy that will serve to maintain the energy stability of the rest of Europe.

Source: Climate and energy transition of the Balkans