

The EU will not allow Serbia to be a black environmental hole, and it can influence because it is our biggest partner

Are only the Chinese to blame for the polluted air, or have we contributed to that ourselves and thus served the great powers so that the geopolitical struggle is waged through our environment as well?

Petar Đukić, a retired professor at the Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy, believes that what has happened in recent days is a shift in our consciousness. He says that something great has been done, despite the contradictory demands of the environmental uprising in the sense that we want clean rivers, preserved forests, clean energy, preserved ecosystems, to be without mines, but also to live better, which is not possible without sustainable development.

Things have started from a standstill in terms of an integral treatment of sustainable development and ecology. The fact that the government, instead of accusing someone of hostility and undermining social development, really did something, in a way instills hope.

- If you are engaged in economic development, you must treat the protection of the environment and natural resources. Observed long-term development, you can't just say close the factory or don't accept the mine, because if you ban everything, then everything will stop - says Djukic.

He emphasizes that we have unsustainable development as a whole and that it is not just a matter of Chinese investments. Our interlocutor reminds that even while the American "US style" was operating the Smederevo ironworks, there was a problem with pollution.

- It's not just about the Chinese, Americans or investments in mines. There is tourism and traffic, and above all the catastrophic situation in the domestic energy due to the exploitation of the worst coal in Europe. And at the same time, we get 51 percent of the total energy from it. We are the fourth country in the world and the first in Europe in terms of coal exploitation and share in energy. As such, we are big polluters - explains Djukic.

Our interlocutor emphasizes that the EU has the agenda of environmental protection and the fight against climate change, which is the most advanced in the world, and the first one increased renewable sources in energy last year and reached the state that a larger share of renewable than non-renewable sources. She has done great things, which she must implement and influence others.

- The EU will definitely not allow Serbia to be a black ecological hole, and it can influence us because it is our biggest partner in everything. However, there are also strategic interests of America and China to buy resources and put them under their control. I am not a supporter of any great boss on whom our future depends, be it Russia, China or America. They all work for their own strategic interest. But it is completely meaningless to say that the EU report on Serbia's progress, which draws attention to the state of the environment,

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is a matter of a strategic struggle between the EU and China – says Djukic.

According to him, factories cannot be expected to be closed, but investors should be forced to respect the laws, because they are not only polluters in Bor and Smederevo, but also in Kosjerić, Valjevo, Užice.

- The ecological picture is bad, but not only because of those investors, but also because of our traffic and energy, which is the most urgent. The fact that they closed several plants is a sign that someone remembered to say let's see if the laws apply. The Chinese do not respect labor legislation either. Someone allowed them to do that because they are precious to us. If we were to say that from tomorrow everything will be according to the top ecological standards of Europe and that our price of electricity must include all costs, including ecological ones, electricity would be twice as expensive as now. More than half of the investors would withdraw because they use cheap electricity, cheap work and do not pay environmental taxes – adds Djukic.

Ljubodrag Savić, a professor at the Faculty of Economics, believes that the government is convinced that we are sinking terribly and that we are going in the wrong direction when it comes to ecology.

- I do not want to believe that the closure of the plants in Bor and Perlez is a consequence of pressure from Europe and their showdown with the Chinese. That the Chinese do not care about the environment is a fact. They believe that development is in the first place, that everything is subordinated to it and that it has its price. The Chinese will not invest in the environment on their own, if we do not remind them of the agreed obligations. They just work that way. Some kind of pressure is needed. They do not even take care of their workers who came to work in "Ciđin" – Savić thinks.

According to him, all previous governments did not pay much attention and did not even insist on what was concluded in the agreements with investors. No foreigner in Serbia will invest a single dollar if they don't have to. We need to clear that up, to make them respect environmental norms and to behave the way they behave in their countries.

- It all depends on the government, to what extent it is ready to insist on respecting the law, and in most areas we have good European laws that are implemented in the Balkan way. Let's believe this is the beginning. Even if it started with the Chinese, it started. Anyone who is well-meaning, having in mind the level of environmental protection and awareness in the EU, will think that they are warning us because of us. But also, the EU does not miss to send a message that the Chinese have nothing to do on European soil – says Savić.

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