

What is the vision of waste management system based on the experiences that are useful and applicable in the Western Balkans? The basic hierarchy in waste management starts with reducing the amount of waste at source – and this is seen as a core prerequisite for good organization in this sector. This principle requires all-encompassing education of the citizens, investment in waste management facilities, and a well-organized system of communal services.

Waste prevention and reduction of harmful substances in waste are the priorities of European Union in waste management sector and these guidelines should be adopted by the Western Balkans countries and Turkey as part of the EU accession reforms. This was the conclusion of the online workshop was held as part of the regional project EPPA on 2 June 2020 and hosted representatives of the institutions and civil sector of Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, who went through training about problems and innovative solutions in the waste management sector. Lecturers and speakers were representatives of the European Commission and EU delegations of the country participants.

What's the Austrian model?

The experiences of Austria, which reached the highest standard in EU when it comes to waste management, are useful and often-cited example. This country went a step further from its European partners, creating a sophisticated system for gathering, managing, and processing data. The Austrian model is built on an integrated system of internet applications and databases. They include registers of companies, systems for waste disposal and treatment, databases about the amount, composition and treatment of waste, as well as applications that track import, export and exchange of waste among the companies. To ensure full implementation of legal regulation in this area, bureaucratic processes are simplified through integrated online applications and databases used for reporting, issuing licenses and permits, etc.

Is this vision realistic in the Western Balkans countries?

Can we implement the Austrian model?

Such robust waste management systems require serious investments – in resources, logistics, legislation, and monitoring its implementation. Milka Gvozdenović, coordinator for environmental policy and networking at Young Researchers of Serbia, believes that this workshop has shown the inability of the Western Balkans countries to implement required reforms in waste management system.

„There is no deeper understanding of good management and there is no cooperation

between the stakeholders in the system. Setting goals is based on imprecise information and finances are scarce and ill-planned. Poor participation of the institution representatives from Serbia and region in the conversation with European Commission and experts from the EU at this workshop reflects the overall situation in this sector," Gvozdenović concluded. One of the topics of the workshop was moving from linear to circular economy, a concept that has been promoted before in these meetings. New investments in this area will strengthen this initiative through Green Pact EU. Last month, on May 11, a new plan for circular economy of European Union has been adopted.

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