

Croatia still systematically ignores the potential for cleaner and more cost-effective energy production, citing the formal fulfillment of EU decarbonisation targets.

Two significant moments in recent times have pointed to key directions in the development of Croatian energy, although not fundamentally different from the previous ones. First, this summer, the Government of the Republic of Croatia declared the project of the large hydropower system Senj, along with the construction of the Lika reservoir Kosinj, a strategic investment project. Then, at the end of last month, the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Tomislav Čorić, at a meeting of ministers of related sectors in the southeast and the central part of the European Union, boasted that Croatia is successfully advancing towards the goal of decarbonising energy and economy.

A closer look at this area, however, reveals a significantly different, unfortunately less favorable picture of the real state of affairs. First of all, it should be said that Croatian energy long before the EU climate goals, thanks to its natural features, is based on abundant hydro potential. In the second half of the 20th century, a number of large hydropower plants were built, which are considered to be users of renewable sources. But in the meantime, new ecological knowledge has often revealed the devastating impact of dams and reservoirs on nature, so today they are looked at much more critically.

Bitter lesson of HPP Lešća

Croatia has not yet accepted such a modern perspective, as evidenced by the numerous negative effects of HPP Lešća on the river Dobra, the last hydroelectric power plant built by Hrvatska elektroprivreda. In this light, there are heated debates about the Kosinj reservoir, due to whose political favoring the Green Action activists recently filed a lawsuit with the Administrative Court. HEP replied that the project was justified in all relevant aspects - economic, energy, water-economic and environmental.

According to them, the Lika reservoir will “prevent further flooding of the Kosinj valley”, while the “avoided amount of CO2 emissions will amount to over 140 thousand tons per year”. Furthermore, the project will “undoubtedly raise the quality of life of the local population”, and the environmental aspects have been “exhaustively considered in the public administrative procedures carried out by the competent ministry”. On the other hand, it was also claimed for Lešće, and then in practice there would be negativities that today Croatia does not know how to neutralize.

Green action in court

In order not to subsequently state for Kosinj that the best solution is actually a return to its original state, the Green Action sought to overturn the aforementioned decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia. The Rijeka Administrative Court rejected the lawsuit

on the grounds that the government's decision was not an administrative act, and that it could not be the subject of an administrative dispute. "We appealed to the High Administrative Court yesterday," Zeljka Leljak Gracin, a lawyer with the environmental activist organization, told us last Thursday, "because the government's decision has all the characteristics of an administrative act."

In addition, the High Administrative Court is still awaiting the outcome of the appeal of the Green Action against the judgment of the Administrative Court in Rijeka rejecting its lawsuit against the decision of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Energy of the Republic of Croatia on Kosinj. Namely, the ministry assessed that the impact of the project on the environment is acceptable, with which the Green Action does not agree at all. However, a lot has been written about Kosinj, so almost four years ago we also warned here about various dubious doubts related to it, which the representatives of the executive and judicial authorities practically do not pay attention to.

The essential problem of Croatian energy is much more complex than one project, however, and it concerns the overall horizon of its long-term development. Tucked away in serenity thanks to the hydro potential that gives it a formal excuse, Croatia has drastically neglected alternative energy sources and new energy production technologies. The exceptions are wind and biomass energy, but which have served primarily to generate profits in the heavily subsidized private sector. However, high public investment did not result in a better structure of the overall Croatian energy sector, nor effects on the development of industry and the labor market, or savings for households.

Croatia is not China after all

Robert Pašičko, an energy expert from the Croatian Green Energy Cooperative, also an expert of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), believes that Kosinj can be viewed from several angles and with different conclusions: "From the point of view of the system end up worse or better, depending on how much his interest will be taken into account. After all, Croatia is not China, the relocation of the domicile population cannot be resolved by decree, so in part because of this, this will surely be the last large HEP power plant. "

"But such long-term agony and uncertainty for these people certainly falls hardest of all. There has been no prospect there for a long time, everything is on hold. And a completely different issue is the development of Croatian energy and the role of HEP, which lags behind in terms of development in almost everything ", continues Pašičko, adding that Hrvatska elektroprivreda tried everything in various areas of energy, but soon got stuck in everything. It is a sluggish and inert apparatus, centralized and party-politically

conditioned, with poor business characteristics.

Cheap sale of the sun

“Support for solar panels in households has been waiting for years, but HEP is not reacting, regardless of the fact that it has the largest driving capacity. Slovenia has done a miracle in this regard, it has simply provided many benefits to the people. The Netherlands has a million solar roofs on households, we have maybe a thousand and a half. And it is easy not to sell the sun through tourism, as if we cannot take advantage of the Mediterranean climate in parallel in electricity production. A truly ambitious goal would be a system of incentives and technological support for such a thing, rather than an outdated model with large hydropower plants,” insists this UNDP expert.

Finally, this means that the Republic of Croatia receives less than 1 percent of the total energy produced from photovoltaics, and most EU member states generate between five and 12 percent. The lethargy in which the Croatian energy sector and the associated state policy have fallen not only endangers nature and the environment, but also causes significant damage to public finances. The concept of energy democracy and civic electricity production, extremely well-known in more developed countries, does not seem to exist in Croatia yet. Kosinj therefore represents not only a possible environmental threat, but also a symbol of further abandonment of better trends.

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