

“Medical waste, kitchen appliances and plastic bottles have piled up at this place on the Drina River in eastern Bosnia, an idyllic lake near the town of Visegrad, surrounded by mountains and wooden cabins on the shore. The markings on the bottles show that some of them floated downstream from Montenegro, where the source of the river is located, and Serbia, through which it also passes, “writes Hannah Lucinda Smith, a journalist for the British Times.

At one end of the lake, the hydroelectric power plant prevents further movement of garbage. The barrier built of iron oil barrels is designed to stop waste from moving on. However, the barrier does not work best, so half of the garbage goes to the turbines of the hydroelectric power plant, writes the Times.

Smith spoke with a local activist, 34-year-old Dejan Furtul, who said that in the spring, when the snow melts in the mountains, the water towards Visegrad carries large amounts of plastic. After that, the garbage is taken out and taken away before the beginning of the summer season, when tourists come to that area.

“Next spring, the cycle will start again. Tourists cannot believe that this problem is 20 or 30 years old and no one can solve it. We are writing to the government and we are not getting answers, “he said.

According to the Times, the problem of garbage in the Drina arose from the disintegration of Yugoslavia when one country through which the river flowed turned into three, and each is responsible for its own waste management.

### **When the snow melts, the garbage goes away**

Garbage dumps have been set up on the banks of rivers in each municipality along its course. When it rains or the snow melts, the waste slides straight into the river. Each country solves its problem when garbage goes downstream and crosses the border into the next. In recent months, increasing pressure from local activists has led to municipalities cleaning up some places along the river in Serbia, the Times writes.

Activists believe that the problem will not be solved without a mutual solution of the three countries. According to Serbian ecologist Sinisa Lakovic, Serbia has begun removing illegal landfills in recent years, but the job is “Sisyphean” if garbage comes from Montenegro. Serbian authorities have so far moved about 15,000 cubic meters of garbage from the river to appropriate landfills. There are no such efforts in Bosnia. The landfills by the river in Visegrad are the size of several football fields, according to the Times, and are filled with various debris such as old sofas, refrigerators, leftover wood and thousands of plastic lids for bins. The local population dumps waste in illegal landfills instead of paying for

transportation to the places provided for that.

“Politicians are always arguing about landfills. Is this legal or illegal? There is no transparency. It is a crazy situation. We have to clean up those landfills and find some other place for them – inland, not on the river bank,” he said. Furtula. Smith notes that this area is one of the richest wildlife habitats in Europe. Every day stray dogs come to landfills to rummage through garbage.

“It is ironic that the Drina, which eventually flows into the Sava, and which then merges with the Danube in Belgrade, has long been a metaphor for the often overburdened relations of people in the Balkans,” Smith wrote for the Times.

“This is the most beautiful river in the Balkans. But everyone wants to send their garbage to the neighboring country,” Furtula concluded.

Source: euronews.rs