perspectives

POLITICAL ANALYSES AND COMMENTARY

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

green transition and social (in)justice

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Fostering democracy and upholding human rights, taking action to prevent the destruction of the global ecosystem, advancing equality between women and men, securing peace through conflict prevention in crisis zones, and defending the freedom of individuals against excessive state and economic power – these are the objectives that drive the ideas and actions of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. We maintain close ties to the German Green Party (Alliance 90/The Greens) and as a think tank for green visions and projects, we are part of an international network encompassing well over 100 partner projects in approximately 60 countries.

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just transition in unjust societies

Srđan Dvornik

If it were not for injustice, men would not know justice.

Heraclitus

After decades of warnings, it seems that the green transition – the huge change that should slow down, mitigate, and eventually stop, if not reverse, the threatening deterioration of living conditions on this planet – is finally on everybody's lips. Overall, the problem is acknowledged; no adequate and comprehensive remedy has been found yet, but many efforts are going in that direction. A deep change in the relationship between mankind and nature is still only a matter of political imagination, and not a workable political programme in any single country, let alone globally, but it is becoming ever clearer that it will have to happen in order to sustain life on Earth – at least what we would consider recognisable life.

That the remedy has something substantial to do with relationships *within* mankind, that is, with the social relationships that have produced the environmental crisis, is no less clear. Since the existing human societies have charted the path that has lead to the current climate and environmental crisis, it stands to reason that a radical change would involve an equally deep change in societies themselves.

One of the catchphrases that seek to summarise such an intention, such a combination of better relationships between human and nature and amongst human beings themselves, that is, within society, is the *"just green transition"*. Throughout history, justice has been a subject of moral reflection in philosophy, religion, literature and other forms of intellectual efforts, a problem which has never been fully resolved, and now has acquired a new element. While it has always had to do with inter-human relations, wherein non-human nature, at least in the Western tradition, played mostly the part of an object of ownership, which could be distributed more or less (un)justly, now the relationship towards nature, mediated through social relations, sets a limit to human affairs which precisely this relationship towards nature as merely an object threatens to take us beyond, where such a relationship becomes destructive not only to nature as an isolated thing that might be lost at a greater or lesser cost, but to the entirety of the world previously considered as solely man-made. Nature is no longer a set of landscapes that we might be sorry to see destroyed, or a species extinct, without too many repercussions on life as usual. In other words, the way society's effects on nature feed back onto society itself is now not only better grasped, but is growing increasingly intense, indeed, leading us to an ultimatum: if we proceed with business as usual, adorned just by minor modifications, the living conditions may deteriorate so gravely that this would make our generation a collective perpetrator of a mortal crime against our own children and grandchildren (let alone the natural world).

If this sounds exaggerated, think for a moment of the areas struck by ever more frequent, intense and lasting heatwaves as to make survival in the open impossible – even life underwater, as illustrated by the billion sea animals killed by this year's Californian heat dome. Think of wet-bulb events where the human body loses the ability to cool down by perspiring, or the endless droughts

that have turned even parts of Canada and Siberia into tinderboxes. Remember, after all, that one of the reasons for the growing instability that led to the protests in Syria and, eventually, to the still-ongoing war there is plausibly considered to lie in the massive internal migrations caused by the drought that began in 2006. Think about the Pacific countries planning for their effective dissolution as the rising waters swallow their land, or, on the other side of the world, the floods ever more frequently inundating the Eastern Seabord of the US, with cities such as New York and Miami at risk of being lost to the rising seas.

So, there is no doubt about the vital meaning of the just green transition: to prevent ecological disaster is to do justice to every human being by making it possible not just to survive, but to live a life that is more than mere survival in whatever circumstances – to live lives worth living. In other words, to avoid or overcome the ultimate injustice of mass starvation and mass death. In short, justice is reduced to not-injustice.

As it is normally understood, injustice is different from any other kind of misfortune that affects humans. It is a kind of misfortune that is caused by humans. When a natural disaster, in the form of a thunderstorm, fire, flood or earthquake, strikes a human settlement, killing people and livestock, leaving destruction in its wake, it does not make much sense to look for someone to blame (other than any supernatural 'agents' one might want to call to account). If, on the other hand, such damage is caused by more or less recognisable human agents such as violent neighbours, hostile armies or terrorists, it is an unjust act committed by a culpable agent. Just green transition then needn't be directed only towards an objective of saving humans from environmental disasters, but also against those who are recognisably culpable.

And this is where another kind of problems emerges. While facing the potential environmental disaster, we can treat mankind as a whole, because everyone is innocent when faced by a disastrous end. On the other hand, culpability and responsibility are distributed unequally. However, contrary to everything we have learned to feel about ethics, here the punishment cannot and shouldn't be equal or proportional to responsibility or guilt. Much as such ideas are probably popular among populist movements, media,

politicians, and committed thinkers, the search for a just green transition must look in a different direction. The immediate victims must be saved, assisted and supported no matter how much they have (not) participated in the developments that brought about the troubles with the environment. Likewise, the solutions must be sought in structural changes, where mankind can no longer be treated as a unitary whole, but as a mass of opposed interests and contradictory relationships..

While it is indeed a huge injustice that those who have least contributed to climate change tend to pay the greatest price for the damage wrought so far – whether because many of the poorest countries and regions are also located in areas most affected by extreme weather (although this may appear not to be the case as much anymore in view of this year's events such as the massive floods in Germany, fires and drought in the US and Canadian West, as well as Australia), or, more importantly, because the money needed for adaptation and mitigation is simply unavailable to poor, frequently overindebted countries of the Global South – there is no simple 'just' solution whereby responsibility is ascribed, and financial (and other) obligations distributed accordingly. If for no other reason than that there is no global power that can force rich countries to accept such obligations – and to hope for such changes of heart and sudden magnanimity of a kind never seen in history would be naive in the extreme. There will never be such a 'green social transfer' from the rich world to the poor (although it is imperative for progressive actors in rich countries to never stop reminding of the moral, if not financial, debt owed to the poor), and so the change has to be structural. That is to say, not just a deal haggled by country representatives at a COP, but a global change in the relationship between nation states and the globalised capital, that is, a coordinated effort to regulate the global chains of production, meaning, among other things, addressing the global tax regime, the secrecy jurisdictions, global trade deals and their capacity to act either as mechanisms of global de-regulation (such as through investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms), or as means of exporting better (if not best) practice (e.g. through labour rights or environmental standards clauses).

Thus, it is clear that the justice of the just green transition can by no means be reduced to social welfare – however generous. It

is not a correction that supplements the relentless market competition with a limited degree of solidarity, alleviating the predicament of the poor, sick, disabled and generally disadvantaged without abolishing poverty, systemic inequality and alienation. Production for human needs, and development of goods and conditions for a decent life, simply cannot go on without the full participation of those for whom it is intended. It cannot develop without developing the capacities of all workers and producers to grasp what is involved in such transformation and take ownership of it.

Meanwhile, in the years to come, we are going to witness gradual changes, often interrupted by counter-processes. As the painstaking progress towards a global solution through peacemeal changes in the series of COP conferences has demonstrated, two parallel and intertwined processes are at work: on one hand, the reports and warnings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provide ever more precise and comprehensive assessments of risks and the time remaining to remedy them. On the other, economic and political powers that be, as well as the systemic inertia, prolong delays and compromises that would prolong the life of existing models and investments. Only the most drastic manifestations of environmental destruction serve as signals that push the decision-makers in a desirable direction. Those in the periphery shouldn't have to only sit and wait, but their international organisation and pressure will also take time to grow strong enough.

In all these developments, the most critical point remains whether the governments of the most developed countries, and the international organisations that are still under the predominant influence of these states, are going to be able to take back a significant part of the power they have been yielding to business interests for the last forty years, if not longer. Whether this happens depends to a great extent on the development of political forces concerned with environmental protection and justice in these countries, and their international impact. The just green transition is not only a matter of knowledge and justice, but of power too.

In our part of the world – call it the Western Balkans, the post-Yugoslav space or South-Eastern Europe – the challenges are even greater. Firstly, carbon-dependent economies. Secondly, precarious socio-economic conditions, which work against big economic and technological disruptions closing down the industries that significant portions of the working populations and people still depend on in the absence of functioning social welfare nets, or a labour market that could absorb people with often otherwise obsolete skillsets. Thirdly, still relatively underdeveloped environmental cultures, which is perfectly understandable in light of the previous two points. And, last but by no means least, the situation where public institutions and even states have been captured, which makes it even more difficult to make them work as promoters of the green transition, let alone a just one.

The problem of captured states in this area is twofold, which makes it much worse: for as long as the post-communist 'transition' has been going on, the key agents of state capture have been the political elites (organised in oligarchic dominant parties), rather than business circles, which have always retained the client position. More recently international investors have emerged as significant players in state capture, cutting deals with national powerholders, not limited by legal regulations, independent institutions, media, or actors such as trade unions or local capitalists.

Are such governments even going to be able, let alone willing to lead reforms away from carbon-dominated technologies, utilising renewable energy sources, developing environmentally friendly industry, agriculture, transportation etc., protecting the environment? Without strong pressure, both international and local, from their own societies – hardly.

The only opponents to harmful policies and deals in our region are independent civil society organisations, created from below, which have developed some expertise and social capital through activism and international contacts. However, their impact is contingent on the public support they manage to mobilise. Given that the overall discontent in these societies seems to be growing, organisations capable of articulating it politically are not without a chance. In any case, a just green transition is a matter of cultural, social and political struggle, whose outcome is still uncertain.

are our societies ready?

dismantling monopolies in the green transition

Majda Ibraković

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country that has only gone through various reforms in theory, but not in practice. The process of transition in this area has been going on since the 90s. Thus, the word transition here is quite hated by the people, because it is not related to equality and justice – but to the enrichment of political elites. The energy transition, however, has been knocking very shyly on the door for some time now, and the fossil clock is ticking until 2050. For a country mostly dependent on coal, this is a major turning point.

There are two trends that will mark the rest of our lives: the greening and digitizing of everything. While digitalization may be more a matter of comfort and choice, the green transition is an imperative, a question of 'to be or not to be'. But the two still seem to go together. The European Union has introduced the European Green Deal in order to move and improve life and economy away from fossil fuels and greenhouse gas intensive industries and mitigate the socio-economic costs of transition. This is a pathway towards a zero-emission, carbon neutral economy up to 2050. The Plan is followed by a fund designed to support communities most affected by plans to close the coal sector and other carbon-intensive industries. It will support projects that include the closure of coal mines and the retraining of workers.

from green transition to just transition for the Balkans

After some time, the Green Agenda was adapted for the Western Balkans and adopted by WB states, and in 2020, with the signing of the Sofia Declaration, the stage was set for the grand finale – a decarbonisation date of 2050 was also determined for the WB countries (including Bosnia and Herzegovina) that did not have the bravery to announce a coal phase-out date prior to that. This unique opportunity also unlocks the funds for the Balkan countries to finance the so-called green transition.

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Through the recently launched Platform Initiative in Support for Coal Regions in Transition in Western Balkans and Ukraine, some of the largest financial institutions are included to support this shift in the regions and sectors for which the transition to a green economy will be the most challenging. Within this mechanism, at least 100 billion will be mobilized in the period 2021-2027 for the most affected regions. One portion, some 9 billion , will be available to the countries of the Western Balkans. How many pieces of that cake will each country really get, depends on each country's ambition for a green transition.

another transition that is unjustifiably late in BH

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country that has only gone through various reforms in theory, but not in practice. The process of transition in this area has been going on since the 90s. Thus, the word transition here is quite hated by the people, because it is not related to equality and justice – but to the enrichment of political elites. The energy transition, however, has been knocking very shyly on the door for some time now, and the fossil clock is ticking until 2050. For a country mostly dependent on coal, this is a major turning point. For most inhabitants, the year 2050 probably seems light years away, but – not to be forgotten, this is almost as far from now in the future as the unfortunate 90s are in the past. The intensity of system transformation that is currently taking place at the global level in terms of mitigating the climate crisis is inversely proportional to the domestic authorities' level of awareness and concern on this topic. Not only do the media, the

public and politicians in BH not perceive the existence and consequences of the climate crisis, but they do not even connect it with possible causes and consequences – in other words, there is no place or time for rational causality here. Not surprisingly, the climate crisis is just one in a series of crises led by the ubiquitous, political crisis.

from the Green Agenda to green energy transition

In order to get closer to the goals of the Paris Agreement, the Sofia Declaration and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, and in order to reduce its own emissions and contribute to mitigating the climate crisis, Bosnia and Herzegovina was supposed to start the energy transition process ages ago. Energy production is "in charge" of over 60% of greenhouse gas emissions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with emissions of 7.1 t/CO_2 per capita. Coal dependence is such that in 2020 a total of 67.9% of electricity in BH was produced in thermal power plants. Hence, energy transition, especially in energy production, is the first and possibly the most important step ahead.

Let's look at the postulates of energy transition, which should, in addition to being green, be fair and just as well. It tackles the process of decarbonization, applying the principles of energy efficiency and accelerating the use of renewable energy sources – including all stakeholders. It is based on three pillars: democratization, decentralization and digitalization – the 3D of the power system's energy transition. One of the postulates of democratization of energy transition is based on the idea that citizens and private companies, in addition to the role of electricity consumers, are given the role of producers – so-called prosumers. So, it is a revolutionary 'alternating current' in which every citizen gains a bigger say and stake in the energy system by contributing to the energy flow within the power grid.

who holds the monopoly in the current energy transition to RES in BH

Unfortunately, the current laws in Bosnia and Herzegovina completely exclude the possibilities for civic energy: prosumers or renewable energy communities. This

The most disastrous part of the law is the possibility that, through unjustifiably high incentives for electricity from RES, mixed with an already corruption-riddled state apparatus, the capital for renewable tycoons, especially investors in hydro and solar power, is fertilized quickly and generously. The law enabled a system of state-guaranteed prices through extremely high incentive prices for investors in solar and small hydropower plants, paid with citizens' money, while most of those citizens were completely prevented from becoming participants in the electricity market.

concept would allow citizens, apartment owners or members of local communities to jointly invest in the construction of small solar power plants on the roofs of residential buildings or on unused state and/or private land. However, this legal obstruction prevents citizens from having a shot at self-sufficiency, cost reduction and consuming electricity more rationally. They are prevented from compensating for surpluses or shortages of electricity – the government thus protects the monopolistic position of political party-besieged power companies and prevents the true opening of the electricity market, scheduled to happen as part of the Energy Community Treaty obligations.

renewables as a way to amplify the power of 'big fish'

Laws on the use of renewables in BH were of primary importance (and still are), given that their application should strongly direct the state towards the production of electricity from RES. Also, these laws were supposed to enable citizens to become active participants in the production of "clean" electricity (democratization of electricity), and help the economy reduce its dependence on coal. However, the most disastrous part of the law is the possibility that, through unjustifiably high incentives for electricity from RES, mixed with an already corruption-riddled state apparatus, capital belonging to renewable tycoons, especially investors in hydro and solar power, is fertilized quickly and generously. Thus, the law enabled a system of state-guaranteed prices through extremely high incentive prices for investors in solar and small hydropower plants, paid for with citizens' money, while at the same time most of those citizens were completely

prevented from becoming participants in the electricity market, meant that the possibility of realizing the concept of pure civic energy was multiplied by zero.

Not only that, but another fundamental idea of the abovementioned 3D concept of energy transition is blocked: that is that many "small" producers within one local community connect to the network to reduce losses. Instead, allowances – quotas for RES have been inserted into a common denominator with the major investors taking their place. That way, the incentive cake is distributed only to the big fish with political connections, money and power. In addition, these electricity moguls can be further enriched because there are no limits on the number of incentives; that is, for each power plant they build, they can receive guaranteed payments lasting between 12 and 15 years. Adding to that, a tradition of disregard for environmental impacts exacerbates the case even more, as mismanaged construction of small hydropower plants, which leave riverbeds completely dry, not only wreaks havoc on BH's environment, but also turns the general public against renewable energy altogether.

a change in political power is needed

Due to the targeted media silence and the lack of awareness of the majority of citizens about the importance of the green energy future of society, these laws have not yet received the public attention they deserve. In fact, almost no one seems to care about them that much, which is not surprising in a country where a large percent of citizens are faced with financial uncertainty, brain drain and instability in every sector of society. The Energy Community, however, now requires the necessary reforms and new legislation in both entities, in order to adapt to EU energy

and climate policy. The new laws on the use of RES, after two years of tailoring to the EU directive on renewable sources, cheaper market principles and the concept of citizens' energy, envisage several significant and positive changes that would bring them closer to the laws on encouraging RES in EU countries.

The most important should be to stop encouraging private pocketing of gains, with the energy inclusion of citizens, without whom there is no just green transition.

Finally, citizens and private companies throughout the country, in addition to their status as consumers, would be given the opportunity to become producers – prosumers. The amendment to the law should finally introduce the concept of energy communities, which are flourishing in the region. However, due to the constant exclusion of citizens from the process of their creation, these laws do not receive a sufficient public attention. Citizens, justifiably dissatisfied with the shameless stuffing of their money into the pockets of political tycoons and/or parties at the additional expense of their environment, see such laws as a powerful weapon of crime, instead of as a possibility of empowering themselves. It is therefore not surprising that, under such legislation, and given the kleptocracy of the power elite, people in this country feel the same contempt and disappointment that they feel towards the kleptocracy of the power elite.

what is there a green way out for BH?

We can no longer have economic growth at the expense of the planet and at the expense of the people. By adopting the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, countries in the region, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, have agreed to be a part of this plan. In early June, a political agreement was reached between the European Parliament and the European Council on a new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III), with a total budget of over 14 billion euros for the period 2021-2027, much of which is related to the Green Agenda. We have the guidelines for creating and implementing policies at the level of the European Union, political commitment in the Western Balkans and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we have the funding tools that will enable the transition only if we stop neglecting the facts and start accepting the transformation. Green transition is a topic that goes beyond ideological labelling and which must be in the focus of society. As a society and as individuals, local communities, politicians, NGOs, businesses, scientists – we are responsible for the state of the environment we are stuck in, but we also have the power to improve things. In green transition no one should be left behind, but also, no one should allow themselves or anyone else to be left behind.

prospects for independent action in the Western Balkans' energy transition

Pippa Gallop

In recent years, public action on environmental issues has increased across the Western Balkans, mostly due to choking air pollution and the tsunami of hydropower plants that has dried up rivers and streams. As well as bottom-up pressure, the EU's *Green Agenda for the Western Balkans*[1] has finally given a clear signal that a green transition is a high priority for the EU in the region, and the 2020 founding of an *Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine*[2] has further concentrated governments' minds on tapping funds for long overdue projects.

a just green transition or just a coal phase-out?

Although the countries need to cover all environmental issues as part of their EU accession process and the *Green Agenda for the Western Balkans* covers everything from the circular economy to farming,[3] in reality, most of the efforts made so far have been in the electricity sector.

This focus is relatively justified, despite the increasing urgency of issues like waste. Until recently, most of the Western Balkans countries had not built any substantial new electricity generation capacity for decades, and the region's antiquated lignite plants are fast reaching the end of their lifetimes. Of around twenty[4] new coal plants planned in the region in the last decade, only Stanari in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been built and Kostolac B3 in Serbia is under construction.[5] Even taking into account the region's massive potential for energy savings, new renewable energy capacity is therefore urgently needed.

3 Decarbonisation: climate, energy, mobility
   Circular economy
   Depollution of air, water and soil
   Farming and food production
   Protecting biodiversity
4 This includes some plants which were never seriously likely to be built, such as Kongora and Bugojno in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but nine of the plants got at least as far as having their environmental impact assessments approved.
5 Preparatory works for Tuzla 7 in Bosnia and Herzegovina have also taken place but construction has not begun. At the time of writing it is still unclear if the project will go ahead due to changes in the equipment supplier.

1 Regional Cooperation Council, Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, 10 November 2020.
2 European Commission, Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, 15 February 2021, updated 5 July 2021.

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The governments have gradually started promoting renewable energy, albeit selectively. Their excessive concentration on hydropower while sidelining wind, solar and energy efficiency has resulted in environmental damage and public resistance, but hardly made a dent on the electricity supply.[6] In 2018, hundreds of 'small' hydropower plants (<10 megawatts) received 70 per cent of renewable energy incentives in the Western Balkans but generated just 3.6 per cent of total electricity.[7]

This is now starting to change. Since 2018 wind installations have speeded up,[8] and several large-scale solar projects are now under preparation.[9] The countries' policy orientations are also changing, with North Macedonia recently pledging to phase out coal by 2027[10] and even Serbia[11] forming a decarbonisation working group.

Power sector decarbonisation in the Western Balkans will happen in the coming decades, but it remains to be seen whether it will avoid unsustainable digressions such as fossil gas, forest biomass, waste-burning and hydropower in sensitive locations. It is also unclear when and whether the nascent transition will extend to other sectors. Even heating and transport have barely been touched so far, let alone farming and the circular economy.

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also unclear when and whether the nascent transition will extend to other sectors. Even heating and transport have barely been touched so far, let alone farming and the circular economy.

The emphasis on the electricity sector partly mirrors the situation in the EU itself, which is advancing faster in renewable electricity than in other fields. In 2020, renewables[12] overtook fossil-fired generation for the first time, generating 38 per cent of the EU's electricity, compared to 37 per cent from fossil fuels.[13] But on the other hand, the EU is struggling to reform its unsustainable agricultural system[14] and to create a circular economy.[15]

But the energy sector changes in the Western Balkans are also a result of the Energy Community Treaty,[16] which allows the countries to participate in EU energy markets on the condition that they apply selected EU energy and environmental legislation. Progress in implementing the Treaty is slow,[17] but the consistent guidance and progress tracking by the Treaty's Secretariat has almost certainly ensured greater progress than would have been achieved by the EU accession process alone.

public participation in the energy transition so far

Whether the energy transition will be just, and the extent to which it will include the public as actors in the process, are key factors that will determine its success.

The most basic reason to include

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6   Only Albania has managed to build any new large hydropower plants, but ironically it is the country which can least justify them, as it is already totally dependent on hydropower for its electricity generation and is suffering from highly fluctuating electricity generation and high imports as a result.

7   CEE Bankwatch Network, Western Balkans hydropower: who pays, who profits?, CEE Bankwatch Network, September 2019.

8   Energy Community Secretariat, WB6 Energy Transition Tracker, Third Edition, June 2021.

9   See https://balkangreenenergynews.com/?s=solar for examples.

10 Powering Past Coal Alliance, Spain heads list of new Powering Past Coal Alliance members - PPCA expands into Western Balkans and Poland, 30 June 2021.

11 Vladimír Spasić, Serbian government sets up council for energy sector decarbonization, Balkan Green Energy News, 14 July 2021.

12 Not necessarily sustainable renewables, but all those eligible to be counted as renewable under the EU's Renewable Energy Directive, including controversial sources like bioenergy and hydropower.

13 Christian Redl et al., The European Power Sector in 2020, Agora Energiewende and Ember Climate, January 2021.

14 Greenpeace, European Environmental Bureau, BirdLife, Does the new CAP measure up? NGOs assessment against 10 tests for a Green Deal-compatible EU Farming Policy, June 2021.

15 Although the EU as a whole may have met its 50 per cent target for recycling glass, metals, plastic and paper by 2020 (final results are not yet available), several countries look unlikely to have met this target individually. In addition, Eurostat (ENV_WASMUN) figures show that improvements have mainly taken place in central and eastern European countries, with many of the previous frontrunners such as Germany and Austria stagnating in the last ten years. Circular economy goals received a boost with the 2018 revision of the Waste Framework Directive and the 2020 Circular Economy Action Plan, but the results remain to be seen.

16 www.energy-community.org

17 Energy Community Secretariat, Implementation Report 2020, November 2020.

the public in decision-making is to avoid a backlash, but even this lowest level of consultation has often not been implemented in reality. EU legislation is often misinterpreted in order to circumvent public participation provisions, or where public consultations are formally carried out, they have no impact on the final decisions taken.

In the energy transition context, there is all the more reason to meaningfully consult the public, as they are not only the end customers for the services provided, but they can also produce, store and consume energy, directly contributing to the success of the policy as well as feeling its benefits.

But the idea of including individual households in the energy transition is in its infancy in the region. Governments have failed to take advantage of opportunities like incentivising solar water heating or deep building retrofits of households.

Change is beginning to take place, but very slowly. The countries have all started adopting EU legislation on prosumers, but as of June 2021, Serbia and Albania still had no registered prosumers, Bosnia and Herzegovina had only one, and Montenegro six. Kosovo has the most – 56 – and North Macedonia has 42.[18] These differences largely reflect a lack of secondary legislation in some of the countries.

EU legislation promotes prosumers and community energy

The concept of prosumer can take many forms, whether a home or commercial building, generating or storing electricity or both. Energy cooperatives involve households or individuals buying shares in a legal entity that then invests in electricity generation, storage, or building retrofits. The number of energy cooperatives and prosumers in the EU is unclear, but the REScoop Federation of European citizen energy cooperatives represents 1,900 European energy cooperatives including 1,250,000 people.[19]

Information about the potential for independent energy initiatives in the Western Balkans is scarce, but in the EU, a study by CE Delft estimates that by 2050, 83 per cent of EU households could become energy citizens by contributing to renewable energy production, management or storage.[20] About half of the households, around 113 million, may be able to produce energy and, even more, could provide demand flexibility with electric vehicles, smart e-boilers or stationary batteries.[21]

Through the *Clean energy for all Europeans* package, the EU has introduced the concept of energy communities in its legislation, and it is only a matter of time before the Western Balkans countries have to transpose these rules via the Energy Community Treaty as well, although no deadline has yet been set. The new Directives enable active consumer participation as prosumers or through energy communities, and the latter can take any form of legal entity, e.g. a cooperative, partnership, non-profit organisation or small/medium-sized enterprise.

Such legislative support should help to fill the legal gaps for such initiatives in the Western Balkans countries and make becoming a prosumer or cooperative easier, even taking into account the delays and mis-transposition that are to be expected.

prospects for prosumers and energy cooperatives in the Western Balkans

It is not only the new legislation which will influence public bottom-up initiatives in the energy sector, as it is already possible to install solar photovoltaics on houses without selling surplus electricity to the grid. Some homes, public buildings and businesses have already done so, e.g. the Pecka Visitor's Centre near Mrkonjić Grad in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[22]

Some of the countries have been offering feed-in tariffs to incentivise such investments, but these were mainly geared towards meeting 2020 targets. The legislation in this field is currently changing, so it is unclear to what extent such incentives will exist in the future.

Such independent projects can and must continue to be developed, but without

18 Energy Community Secretariat, WB6 Energy Transition Tracker, Third Edition, June 2021.
19 https://www.rescoop.eu/
20 Bettina Kampman, Jaco Blommerde, Maarten Afman, The potential of energy citizens in the European Union, CE Delft, September 2016.
21 Ibid.
22 Balkan Green Energy News, First PV system in rural BiH installed thanks to crowdfunding campaign, 29 June 2021.

*Humanitarian campaign
"Ray of sunlight – light of hope"
Photo by Zelena akcija
CC-BY-NC 2.0*

governments and local authorities offering clear financial incentives and a favourable permitting framework, they will most likely remain a small number of demonstration projects rather than making up a serious component of the region's just green transition.

In theory the ability to sell surplus electricity into the grid and save more money on buying electricity should incentivise a greater number of investments into small-scale renewable generation. A December 2020 overview of EU prosumers found that the dominant motivation for becoming a prosumer is to reduce electricity expenses. "*Prosumers in Denmark and Germany for example, even without feed-in tariffs, are still motivated to adopt generation technologies to avoid paying high electricity prices, and to avoid taxes and tariffs.*"[23]

However, in the Western Balkans household electricity prices are still regulated at a very low level – often well below the real costs of generation. So without feed-in tariffs there is little incentive to invest in e.g. rooftop solar. Yet, many people still have difficulty in paying their bills because of overall poverty and because electricity is used inefficiently, including for household heating with old-style resistance heaters, often in poorly insulated buildings.

The need to increase residential electricity prices to stabilise the public utilities is a constant headache for governments and rumours of such increases are often met by protests. Politicians usually end up postponing or decreasing planned increases and the incentive to invest in

becoming a prosumer or energy cooperative remains minimal.

Costs of such investments are prohibitive for many people, but this can be overcome. It is easier if there is some level of political support for the idea at the national or local level though, as it makes it easier to access international donor funds, particularly for residential energy efficiency, which donors are keen to support but cannot implement at scale without willing local partners. Small and medium companies are also likely to be important actors in the transition as they have higher energy costs and more money to invest than households.

Another issue is that permitting processes for electricity generation are long and complicated, and are often not much simpler for a small installation than a large one. This can be changed, but depends on political will, which is often lacking. In the meantime, it might be advisable to encourage models of involvement in energy projects which build a feeling of investment and ownership but don't necessarily involve each individual household having to obtain tens of permits.

In North Macedonia, solar photovoltaics are being built on the former coal mine at Oslomej, a symbolic picture of the country's energy transition. However, this process, led by the state-owned utility *Elektrani na Severna Makedonija,* has not involved the local community either in designing or owning shares in the project. Such aspects should be considered in future projects to enable people to take ownership of their communities and to directly benefit.

One factor in favour of prosumers developing in the region is that many people, particularly in rural areas, have skills related to construction which can increase their engagement in installation and maintenance activities.

On the other hand, a lack of democratic organizing experience among much of the population, coupled with a frequent lack of trust of others when money is involved present challenges for the development of energy cooperatives in the region. Despite years of declining public services and a prevailing sense that politicians in the region do not act in the public interest, many people still expect 'the State' to lead everything, even as they improvise many aspects of their lives themselves. Thus, if becoming a prosumer can be perceived as an individual technical or financial decision, it might start to catch on widely, while energy

23 Smart Energy Europe, The SmartEn Map Prosumers 2020, December 2020.

cooperatives are more likely to become established among younger generations less burdened by past experiences. Indeed, this is slowly starting to happen, with the Elektropionir cooperative currently getting underway in Serbia.[24]

action beyond electricity

Although electricity generation is usually the first bottom-up energy activity to spring to mind, it is not currently the simplest one, due to the need for a clearer legal framework – at least in cases where surplus electricity will be sold on the grid.

Rooftop solar water heating is a lower-hanging fruit and one which continues to be woefully under-exploited across the region. Similarly, heat pumps can greatly reduce the amount of electricity used for household heating. These can be bought individually or collectively to obtain a better price, depending on the households' technical needs. This type of looser cooperation might be a good way to test the water before formalising longer-term cooperatives as well.

All the countries also have very high potential for energy savings. Bosnia and Herzegovina's energy intensity is the highest – more than 4.6 times as high as the EU average.[25] Energy efficiency is not being prioritised to anywhere near the extent needed and instead of being 'the first fuel', it is usually still an afterthought. So far, energy efficiency investments have mostly been carried out in public buildings and to a lesser extent in individual households or buildings based on incentives offered by local or national authorities.

Such incentives are still very much needed, but in parallel to pushing for them, one possibility is to focus energy cooperatives on energy efficiency investments and not only on investments in electricity generation. This approach has proven useful in the EU,[26] but would arguably be even more relevant in the Western Balkans due to the high energy wastage.

> Independent projects can and must continue to be developed, but without governments and local authorities offering clear financial incentives and a favourable permitting framework, they will most likely remain a small number of demonstration projects rather than making up a serious component of the region's just green transition.

Whatever form of action is chosen, advocacy needs to be part of it, even if this is not the initial goal of the initiative. Information needs to be shared with others who may want to do something similar, and difficulties in the process need to be highlighted to the relevant authorities in order to simplify the procedures.

Overall, there is high potential for bottom-up initiatives in the green energy transition in the Western Balkans, and this is likely to increase in the coming years as the legislation develops. Such actions can take many forms, but some can be more independent than others. Feeding electricity into the grid as a prosumer or cooperative is currently more legally complicated than some other forms of action such as installing solar water heating, heat pumps or retrofitting houses, though this should change in the coming years. Likewise, since the goal of most donors is to create change at scale, rather than to endlessly fund pilot projects, the greater the degree of involvement by local or national authorities, the higher the likelihood of attracting donor funds to reduce the costs of such initiatives. Independent action is much needed, particularly when national authorities are dragging their feet, but the more it is embedded in a wider framework supported by at least the local – and preferably the national – authorities, the more systematic the change can be. ▮▮

24 https://elektropionir.rs/
25 International Energy Agency statistics, Energy Transition Indicators, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018 data, last accessed 16 April 2021.
26 REScoop, Citizen-led renovation, accessed 25 August 2021.

just green transition challenges

Samir Lemeš

Bosnia and Herzegovina agreed to decarbonise its energy sector by 2050, meaning that all coal mines and coal power plants should be gradually phased out and decommissioned over the next three decades. Bosnia and Herzegovina produces 60% of its energy in thermal power plants and exports more than one-third of the produced energy. With intelligent planning, energy efficiency measures, strengthening the prosumer market and new solar and wind installations, Bosnia and Herzegovina could become carbon-free in a few decades. Lack of expertise and a high number of employees in this sector are the main obstacles to transition to a carbon-neutral economy.

The European Commission has developed an Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, called the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.[1] The plan was endorsed by all the politicians in the Western Balkans countries, as they saw an opportunity to get a bite of the 29 billion EUR cake (EUR 9 billion of IPA III funding and investments of up to EUR 20 billion through the mobilisation of a new Western Balkans Guarantee scheme). The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans is a blueprint for climate action, circular economy, biodiversity, sustainable food systems, rural areas, and the fight against pollution.[2]

Bosnia and Herzegovina did not hesitate to sign the Sofia Declaration in November 2020, endorsing the Green Agenda. Burdened with internal problems, such as the non-implementation of the 2020 election results, the boycott by Republika Srpska politicians following the changes in the national criminal law imposed by the high representative in 2021, and corruption affairs involving vaccines and ventilators in the Federation B&H, not a single Bosnian political stakeholder still mentions the obligations taken on in Sofia. The only recent improvement has been the establishment of the roaming free zone.[3] However, it has somehow been forgotten that the Regional Roaming Agreement signed in Belgrade in 2019, which entered into force in mid-2021, does not cover data transfer over the mobile network, making this achievement incomplete.

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1   https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/green_agenda_for_the_western_balkans_en.pdf
2   https://balkangreenenergynews.com/state-leaders-endorse-green-agenda-for-western-balkans-at-sofia-summit/

3   https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/news/western-balkans-become-roaming-free-zone-%E2%80%9Croam-home%E2%80%9D-regime-starts-1-july-support_en

economy. The World Bank estimated that the coal industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina has about 15.000 employees.[4] Bosnian coal mines are highly inefficient and burdened with remarkably high debts. The average miner's productivity in B&H is 500 to 600 tons of coal annually, 10 to 20 times less than their counterparts in Poland or Germany.[5] Bosnian coal mines' unpaid taxes and wage contributions of have reached half a billion EUR. The extreme air pollution with sulphur dioxide and dust, lack of investments in de-sulphurisation and de-dusting facilities, an announced carbon tax, and harsh European directives (IED and LCPD) mean the coal industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have a very promising future. However, the political establishment is not ready to cope with this problem.

Political corruption and incompetence are the very essence of these problems. The state-owned energy industry is mainly run by incompetent people appointed by political parties. Instead of a strategic asset, it is considered election prey; political parties divide the managing positions in state-owned companies amongst themselves according to their post-electoral agreements. Cases of competent managers with expertise are few and far between. They are primarily political pawns, strengthening only the electoral bases of their political parties. After their mandates are over, these managers often misuse their business connections to start their own businesses, further extracting public funds for their private interests. For instance, a former prime minister now owns a company that produces turbines for micro-hydropower plants.

micro hydropower plants are not green energy

Several civil society campaigns have been initiated recently against the micro-hydropower plants. The governments issued hundreds of concessions and licences to build such facilities as a form of green energy, subsidised with public funds, with symbolic concession fees. Their permits prescribed so-called "minimum environmentally acceptable flow", but no one ever checked whether these obligations were being

Mini-hydropower plant destroyed the Gostović river near Zavidovići Photo by Samir Lemeš

fulfilled. That led to the destruction of mountain streams and rivers, as all the water was directed through pipes, leaving dry riverbeds behind. This problem inspired civic campaigns, forcing the parliaments and the ministries to adopt declarations and decisions not to build more micro-hydropower plants. It is an ongoing effort, as the investors fought back, organising counter-protests of their employees and accusing the activists of being foreign mercenaries and ignorant laymen.[6] Despite the adopted declarations, cantonal and federal authorities still issue concessions for these energy objects and make space for them in their spatial planning. Theis is usually justified by the employment such projects are supposed to generate, which is nonsense. They only employ construction workers in the construction phase, and a small number of technicians for their maintenance. The civil society succeeded in convincing the general public that these facilities are harmful to nature and only bring profit for the investors.

environmental permits lost their purpose

Bosnia and Herzegovina introduced environmental permits in 2002/2003. Each existing polluter was obliged to submit a plan of activities to adapt their operations to stricter regulations within five years. Easier said than done; the first problems arose when the first permitting period expired. Only a few operators managed to fulfil their

4   https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/272791468776978759/pdf/305190Energy1TradeStrategy.pdf
5   https://bankwatch.org/publication/coal-jobs-fraud-update-2018

6   https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/burna-rasprava-oko-izgradnje-he-na-rijekama-poruceno-ni-kap-vode-im-ne-damo/422830

obligations and adapt their emissions to stay within the prescribed limits. Another round of permits was issued, with similar commitments, trying to keep the jobs and neglecting the environmental impact. Again, these processes were monitored only by civil society organisations, which complained or initiated litigation against these permits. The inspection authorities rarely acted against the polluters. Their activities were usually limited to checking documentation, and were seldom accompanied by actual measures or controls. The most common excuse was the alleged limited capacities of the inspectors.

The only operator whose environmental permit was not renewed was the coking plant Global Ispat Koksna Industrija Lukavac (GIKIL). As they failed to invest anything in environmental protection, the Federal Ministry for the Environment decided not to renew its permit and ordered the factory to suspend its operations.[7] Although GIKIL was instructed to apply for an environmental permit for decommissioning, it just continued operations without the permit. As the cantonal government had signed a very unfavourable privatisation agreement in the past, closing the factory would put the Tuzla Canton in a position where it would have to pay tens of millions of euros in compensation to the foreign investor. So, the big polluter continues its operations without proper sanctions for excessive pollution. Environmental justice thus became the victim of poorly managed privatisation. Again, under the complete control of the corrupt ruling political parties.

The ArcelorMittal steelworks in Zenica in 2020 Photo by Samir Lemeš

7   https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-industry-environment-idUKKCN1L81RA

Two examples show that the environmental aspects are always neglected when the polluter is aware of its economic importance. Not a single government, not any political party, dares to force the polluter to follow the regulations, always finding new excuses to protect the businesses. Environmental justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina is another unreachable goal, lost between corruption and corporate profit. The last barrier protecting the environment is civil society.

The global leader in steel making, ArcelorMittal, acquired the steelworks in Zenica in 2004. Four years later, the integrated metallurgical production was restarted, accompanied by enormous emissions of pollutants.[8] When the first set of environmental permits was in the process of being renewed, civil society experts appointed by the ministry discovered that the emissions monitoring system the operator installed was not in accordance with the standards. The new permit included an order to install the new system, within a 6-month deadline. The system was installed with an almost two-year delay, and it started to show much higher values than before. It showed that all the previous measurements, as well as the air pollution taxes paid were undervalued, but the authorities issued no sanctions. The factory is too big to be penalised, and the federal government is unwilling to act more aggressively against the polluter. The company applied for a third environmental permit only a week before the new, stricter environmental protection law came into force. It is worth mentioning that the public consultation process was used only by the local environmental NGO; it turns out that the civil activists are the only ones who actually read the reports and permits, while all other subjects and institutions remain silent or indifferent.

8   https://ba.boell.org/en/2021/02/02/zahrdala-obecanja-i-pravosudni-maraton

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should environmental movements step into the political arena?

More and more international actors (foreign embassies, international organisations) suggest transforming the strong environmental movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina into a political party or parties. The success of the former environmental activist Tomislav Tomašević, who was elected as mayor of Zagreb in 2021, and speculations that the Green Party's Annalena Baerbock is a serious candidate for the next German chancellor, contributed to this idea. The environmental NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina have shown that they are usually more competent than the authorities, that they don't have a problem with cooperating across entity "borders", that they are advocating the EU's green agenda, and they are already recognised as an unavoidable factor when it comes to decision making. At first sight, this would seem to be a potentially prosperous political subject, but it would not be a good idea. The political atmosphere in Bosnia and Herzegovina, electoral fraud, and well-established armies of public servants, loyal to the political parties that appointed them to their positions, and obliged to repay them with thousands of votes, fortify the position of the ruling political parties. Whenever politicians' corruption becomes

a topic of debate or is revealed, another round of ethnic tensions starts, and soon the corruption is forgotten, and the same old stories about ethnic conflicts arise. Even the traditional political classification in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not apply: the left political wing is the loudest defender of ethnic rights and other patriotic topics, while the far-right politicians promote themselves as the protectors of the social rights of the workers?! The hypothetical green party in Bosnia and Herzegovina would soon be lost in these circumstances, bringing another hazard to the stage.

The most recent investments in the Western Balkans came in the mining sector, especially in Serbia[9] and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[10] The greening of the global economy requires new sources of lithium and other metals, and there are already indications that this geographic area could be rich in these resources. Mining operations are rarely environmentally friendly, bear high risks of excessive pollution, and usually cause loss of water sources. The local politicians welcome these investments, as they see them as an opportunity to improve the economy, or worse, to be personally involved in real-estate corruption. The growing network of environmental NGOs is the only significant force ready to oppose these investments or work on making them responsible and sustainable. If these activists become political subjects, it is doubtful that they could reach the majority of votes. They would be forced to find allies in the existing political parties, making them a party in political trading. In that case, the only part of the society with a solid attitude, expertise and integrity would be cast aside, thus opening the space for international corporations who usually don't care about the environment. If environmental activists were to enter party politics, it would destroy the only remaining bulwark against the destruction of the environment, making Bosnian rivers, forests and mountains a prey to international corporate capital. ▪▪

9   https://balkaninsight.com/2021/07/29/rio-tintos-planned-jadarite-mine-sparks-protest-in-western-serbia/
10 https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-adriaticmetals-town-idUSKBN27F1XP

social peace or social justice for victims of green transition?

Kristina Cvejanov

gori mori, mountains of waste are melting

There is no doubt that July 2021 was the warmest month in 142 years of record-keeping. This flattering accolade has been confirmed by satellite measurements and by the most prestigious European and American meteorological agencies.[1] The combined land and ocean surface temperature surpassed the 20th century average (15.8 degrees C) by 0.93 of a degree C, according to data from the American National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

"In this case, first place is the worst place to be," said NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad, Ph.D. "July is typically the world's warmest month of the year, but July 2021 outdid itself as the hottest July and month ever recorded. This new record adds to the disturbing and disruptive path that climate change has set for the globe."

An additional reason for alarm lies in the fact that this year, the highest ever temperature registered in Europe has been recorded in Sicily, with an unbelievable 48.4°C. As usual, along with the high temperatures, the world was faced with dramatic fires, the Balkans region having registered the greatest number of wildfires over the past decade. Greece, Turkey, North Macedonia, Albania, BH, Montenegro burned, while a wildfire of unprecedented severity also ravaged the Vinča landfill near Belgrade for several days. For days, the blaze on the landfill, which frequently catches fire, was top news in Serbian media, where we could also learn that the extent of the pollution and its effects will never be known, as in Serbia, emissions of dioxins and furans, the carcinogenic gasses emitted when waste is burned, are not measured.

It is still unknown whether the fire was caused by glass disposed at the landfill, as in high temperatures glass acts like a lens, easily causing fires in contact with flammable materials, or by a cigarette butt discarded by one of the informal waste collectors who earn their crust far from the public gaze by collecting recyclable waste on Vinča, as well as many other landfill sites around Serbia.

Regardless of which of the two possible scenarios is true, both show that the waste management system in the Serbian capital is (still) not functioning, because neither recyclable glass nor informal waste collectors belong on the landfill. Nor for that matter does methane itself,[2] a greenhouse gas whose negative effect on the living environment places it right behind carbon dioxide, and which is the by-product of decomposing organic matter, because this gas can successfully be extracted from sanitary landfills and used to generate energy. However, in Serbia, like in other non-EU states, municipal waste still largely ends up in unsanitary landfill (dumpsites), from where methane leaks directly into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change.

It is difficult not to ask oneself whether it is possible that, while global average temperatures and sea levels undoubtedly rise year-on-year, we in Serbia still have 87% landfill sites leaking methane and feeding informal waste collectors?

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1 https://www.noaa.gov/news/its-official-july-2021-was-earths-hottest-month-on-record

2 https://www.mpg.de/405362/forschungsSchwerpunkt?c=166022

It is possible.
And perfectly understandable.

lack of awareness = lack of responsibility

Pollution is mainly quite groundlessly attributed to a lack of environmental awareness, which overlooks the fact that low environmental awareness cannot be the cause of the problem, as it is itself its consequence. In its essence, low environmental awareness is a state of being deprived of information and knowledge, a result of a systemic failure in citizens' education. Therefore, institutions, and especially educational institutions have a very clear responsibility to inform and educate citizens about the state of their living environment, reduction of pollution and adaptation to the climate change. Yet, it is often neglected that giving the public accurate and timely information is an ethical obligation of all polluters – from facilities emitting harmful gasses to companies placing products (and their packaging, which makes up a significant share of household waste) on the market. However, it is as if there is a lack of real competitiveness in this sector; regardless of their size or ownership structure, companies are generally tight-lipped when it comes to information about their harmful effects on the living environment. Responsible and transparent public communication is by and large replaced by greenwashing campaigns, serving more to conceal rather than truly reveal things to consumers. Whether it appears under the guise of the State or Business, capital feels no need to "be answerable" to citizens for its impact on the living environment and natural resources that "should" belong to everyone. This made it possible for environmentally conscious Europe's waste to end up in Chinese rivers for years,[3] without its inhabitants having a clue that this was happening.

waste management tailor made for capital

We will never know whether the citizens of Europe would have protested had they learned that European companies were

What is already clear is that energy transition will not be possible without creating new green jobs, both for the victims of the previous economic transition, and for the future victims of decarbonisation. They hold enough ballots in their hands to make anyone in power take these groups' interests seriously. However, it is important that those in power also bear in mind that such interests must at the same time be the interests of the living environment, as otherwise everyone loses.

exporting the contents of their waste bins to East Asia, because it is cheaper to process waste in Chinese facilities lacking any applied standards for the protection of the living environment.

We will never know whether mass protests would have been organised in major European cities if news had hit the headlines in the European media about how each year, 2.75 million tonnes of waste plastics ended up in the Yangtze river, the leftovers from the process of recycling waste from the European and American continents.

We have also been unable to measure how environmentally and socially conscious the inhabitants of Europe truly are, as even without their help, China has banned the import of waste, deciding that it will no longer be the Western world's waste dump

Waste dump
Photo by Kristina Cvejanov

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3   https://www.verdict.co.uk/yangtze-river-plastic-pollution/

The crisis that hit the waste market after China's waste import ban[4] and the millions of tonnes of waste collected on the European continent with no-one to process it have shown the true extent of waste imperialism. Exporting waste to China, Vietnam, Malaysia, is essentially a brutal conquest and destruction of another state's land, water and air, carried out in the interests of capital on both sides. Countries that are the victims of such conquests are characterised by lower economic standards in relation to their conquerors, which is precisely what makes them desirable targets. Even with the transportation costs, processing in Asian plants, without proper wastewater treatment, waste management systems and treatment of exhaust gasses, was a cheaper option than treatment in modern recycling plants in accordance with the highest EU standards. This is the point at which the fairy-tale about the environmentally aware Europe disintegrates, and another sad story of social injustice at the global level emerges.

Destabilisation of an already politically unstable region because of a vision of a carbon-neutral Europe in 2050 will not be a very palatable option for policymakers. As was the case with the low prices of municipal services, in this case too, maintaining social peace and securing the political backing of the 18,000 workers in the thermal power sector in Serbia will have primacy over care for the living environment.

Thus, the pollution of Chinese rivers was not the result of low environmental awareness of the citizens of China or Europe, where the waste came from, but a decision by the capital that made extra profits on the pollution, consciously inflicting social injustice on the inhabitants of Asian countries.

pollution as a consequence of social injustice

Social injustice and pollution are what connects China and the Vinča landfill fire. The low standard of managing municipal waste and a large number of unsanitary landfill sites, the low proportion of waste separated for recycling and the involvement of informal waste collectors whose status

4   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China%27s_waste_import_ban

in society is unregulated, are all the consequence of an unjust social transition underwent by the majority of the former Yugoslavian republics.

Burdened by the conflicts of war, and sanctions as in the case of Serbia, the transformation of social capital was painful, often characterised by depredation, and quick, in order to ensure the creation of a new economic elite that would assume management of public property. Hundreds of thousands of workers were left jobless, while even those employed in the public sector – health, education, science, culture, the arts – found themselves within touching distance of the poverty line.

The price of municipal services became a social category, and in non-EU countries, the system of setting charges by household size or square metre of living space, while neglecting the fact that the amount of waste produced depends primarily on financial capabilities, and that applying the pay as you throw principle is the only fair way of charging. In Serbia, municipal service costs between 3 and 5 euros a month, which is 4 times less than in Slovenia, and only a tenth of the price charged in Austria. It stands to reason that the municipal waste management system must be less efficient in Serbia by a similar ratio – the secret of the 87% of the unsanitary landfill sites. Public utilities companies, with their limited financial and human capacities, have difficulties providing even the existing level of services, while any improvement towards primary and secondary selection of waste, construction and management of sanitary landfill sites, would imply additional costs for the users of the services.

As measures to increase municipal services are not popular and have negative political effects, decision-makers are avoiding having to bring the price of municipal services in line with what is realistically necessary for the sustainable development of a municipal waste management system. This way, social harmony is preserved, and the victims of transition shielded from the burden on their household budget that an increase of a couple of euros would represent. In such an atmosphere, it is logical that the poorest should become the main suppliers for the recycling industry that has been developing in the region in the face of all the obstacles. Thus, tens of thousands of informal waste collectors in Western Balkans countries have taken on the role of a waste management service. With no social

protection and no pensions, they perform work that is useful to the society, but, just like in China, their cheap labour often results in the pollution of the living environment. The most drastic example is the air pollution, with the carcinogenic dioxins and furans that results from burning cables in order to extract the metals that informal collectors sell on to be recycled. In order to grasp the problem of municipal waste pollution, it is necessary to understand how rooted it is in social injustice, and realise that the only direction in which to seek the solution is to rectify the injustice.

Thus, the only just way is to place the responsibility for improving the current state of affairs on to those who profit from such a poorly organised system – the companies whose products or packaging end up as municipal waste.

does the polluter pay what it should?

EU legislation has set two principles as the key motivators of the green transition: the polluter pays, and extended producer responsibility.[5] The former pertains to all polluters whose emissions pollute the living environment, while the latter defines the producer's duty to manage the disposal of its packaging or the product that becomes waste once it is no longer used. In practice, both principles represent a financial mechanism whose aim is for capital to take responsibility for managing the pollution it produces. The financial resources needed for green transition and socially just sustainable development could be secured if it were guaranteed that none of the money obtained through such mechanisms (which is not the case in Serbia) is misallocated, and if the prices charged were equivalent to the costs of collecting and processing waste, or the costs of reducing air pollution.

Observing the Western Balkans countries, one comes to the conclusion that green transition has the capacity to reduce the existing social injustices, which are pronounced in this part of Europe, and are a consequence of its difficult economic transition.

For these reasons, the issue of monitoring and control of the polluters, and the establishment of an efficient system of

Woman at the wate dump
Photo by Kristina Cvejanov

charging "polluter" companies, must be part of the political agenda of all green, left-wing and social-democratic parties. For capital to take full financial responsibility for waste or pollution is the only effective path towards sustainable development in countries with lower economic standards. Faced with such an obligation, capital will seek to apply the logic of business to managing such expenses and find an effective way to improve the current situation to its own benefit, thus creating the potential for the development of new green businesses.

the green deal as an opportunity for a green transition

The European Green Deal is a set of goals and policies guided precisely by such logic – it is incumbent upon business to secure green transition, or else the pollution it creates will cost it dearly. The European Union's awakening following the Chinese import ban and the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about CO_2 taxes on EU imports of products from countries with carbon-intensive economies, as well as a tax on non-recycled plastics. On 3 July, EU states began implementing the directive prohibiting single-use plastics. However much it may appear that the European Union has picked up the pace of its "housecleaning", the long hot summer is a warning that not much time remains. Outside the EU's borders, it seems that time has stopped.

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5   https://www.expra.eu/uploads/downloads/EXPRA%20 EPR%20Paper_March_2016.pdf

a green agenda for the Western Balkans – is the whip long enough?

In order to motivate the Western Balkans countries to undertake decarbonisation measures, and thus allow the goal to make Europe a carbon-neutral continent by 2050 to be realised, the European Union has approved an assistance package to the tune of 9 billion euros so that urgent measures to mitigate climate change could be undertaken:[6]

- (I)   climate action, including decarbonization, energy, and mobility
- (II) circular economy, addressing in particular waste, recycling, sustainable production, and efficient use of resources
- (III) biodiversity, aiming to protect and restore the natural wealth of the region
- (IV) fighting air, water, and soil pollution and
- (V)   sustainable food systems and rural areas

Naturally, the priority European Union policy is the closure of existing thermal power plants, which will not be an easy task. Countries like Serbia and BH are not only not giving serious consideration to the call to urgently shut down the existing TPPs, but are actually discussing and realising the construction of new ones with the Chinese. Energy security and concern for the future of the workers, who number in the tens of thousands in the thermal power sector (just Pljevlja employs 3,000), are the most common argument made by political leaders distancing themselves from EU demands. It is clear how much of a threat losing their subsistence represents for the workers in this sector, and that environmental awareness and concern for the future of the younger generations easily takes the back seat in the face of this threat. These parts of Europe have known hunger, as well as power cuts. Coal can both be used for heating and sold in order to buy bread. To judge people without a choice in advance as environmentally unaware would be unjust. Such people are also easy to incite, so no-one should be surprised that this spring, the Kolubara Mining Basin Union Organisation held a protest[7] against the planned

discontinuation of the construction of the Kolubara B thermal plant. Destabilisation of an already politically unstable region because of a vision of a carbon-neutral Europe in 2050 will not be a very palatable option for policymakers. As was the case with the low prices of municipal services, in this case too, maintaining social peace and securing the political backing of the 18,000 workers in the thermal power sector in Serbia will have primacy over care for the living environment.

What is already clear is that energy transition will not be possible without creating new green jobs, both for the victims of the previous economic transition, and for the future victims of decarbonisation. They hold enough ballots in their hands to make anyone in power take these groups' interests seriously. However, it is important that those in power also bear in mind that such interests must at the same time be the interests of the living environment, as otherwise everyone loses.

is there hope for the Western Balkans?

The green transition will be neither quick nor easy, but it is clear to everyone that it is essential.

Environmentalist voices in the Western Balkans are growing louder, and will become an important factor in securing political support in the future. The European Union, concerned about China entering its territory through the Balkans backdoor, will have no choice but to invest additional effort, as well as funds, to secure the influence it needs.

However, the magical elixir that turns base metal into gold, unsustainable into sustainable, linear into circular, is in the hands of the economy. The wheel of history shows that where one industry saw its end, another was born, feeding on the same needs. As in every transition, the "green" one too contains the potential for economic growth, but also for the creation of a more just society. Only a society characterised by solidarity and responsibility towards people has the capacity to be truly responsible towards the living environment and natural resources.

If the hot summer did not teach us this, some future hardship caused by climate change certainly will. It is in our interest to master the lessons as soon as possible.

6   https://balkangreenenergynews.com/eu-presents-guidelines-on-green-agenda-for-western-balkans/

7   https://rs.n1info.com/biznis/protst-rudara-i-zaposlenih-u-tent-u-zbog-obustavljanja-izgradnje-kolubare-b/ (Serbo-Croatian only)

just energy transition

Diana Milev Čavor

Coal was one of the main drivers of the economic development of Europe after World War II. However, international obligations to keep global warming significantly below an average temperature rise of 2°C before the end of the century – the Paris climate change agreement, the EU's mid- and long-term climate goals, the United Nations' sustainable development goal, the G7's obligation to decarbonise the global economy during this century, as well as the EU's commitment to transition to a circular economy, point without doubt to the EU's decarbonisation. The goals are already clear, and changes inevitable.

The economic model wherein carbon continues to be used for energy production is contested by climate science, which demands more ambitious climate policies and actions in order to secure the future of humanity and biological diversity, as reaffirmed by the Paris Climate Change Agreement.[1] On the one hand, to achieve this goal, the Paris Agreement provides that greenhouse emissions need to be cut, which means gradually ending the use of fossil fuels, in order to rationalise resource use in the energy sector, while simultaneously increasing the use of renewable energy sources.

> A just transition will not happen of its own accord, which means that loss of jobs is likewise not an automatic consequence of the implementation of climate policies, but a result of inadequate planning, social and economic policies and investment.

Abolishing the use of coal, and ultimately of all fossil fuels, is undoubtedly a huge challenge, as this would entail significant changes in the energy sector, forcing those employed in it to adapt to new circumstances, which are, among other things, a source of fear over losing jobs. Therefore, a well-planned just transition needs to preclude fears and opposition to potential social impacts of climate action, providing instead a future that offers security and opportunities.

The fight against the climate crisis is a global challenge that can represent a great burden for individual regions, or even countries. If they are managed properly, climate actions can be a programme for change and social justice, although the transition to a green economy may also lead to significant disturbances in energy production. Nevertheless, this transition is unavoidable if a healthy living environment is to be achieved, but also if the perils of climate change are to be avoided.

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1   https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement

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A transition to a sustainable and climate-neutral economy requires significant investment throughout the EU. However, the concentration of extractive industries (bituminous coal, lignite, peat or oil shale), and the production of energy, as well as carbon-intense industry (e.g. production of cement, aluminium, synthetic fertilisers or paper) that are associated with such industries, are a considerable challenge for the areas where such activities play an important role. These regions need to restructure and diversify their economies, maintain social cohesion and retrain the affected workers as well as young people, in order to prepare them for future work.

A just transition will not happen of its own accord, which means that loss of jobs is likewise not an automatic consequence of the implementation of climate policies, but a result of inadequate planning, social and economic policies and investment.

By signing the Sofia Declaration on The Green Agenda for The Western Balkans at the summit held on 10 November 2020, the leaders of the Western Balkans countries have committed to working together with the EU on the goal of making Europe a climate-neutral continent by 2050, as well as to aligning their legislation with EU climate legislation. The Green Agenda is an element of the European Green Deal, a set of measures to make the EU climate-neutral by 2050.

When it comes to the Western Balkans region, a holistic approach is necessary, as this relatively small territory contains a large number of coal-rich areas, as well as due to the entire infrastructure that is bound up with coal, which needs to be used for other purposes, making it easier to grasp the technical impacts of the transition than the socio-economic ones. It is characteristic of the regions in the neighbourhood that among those in work, the dominant fear is of loss of jobs and intransparency in implementing the transition; there is also the problem of the age structure of workers in the coal sector (with an average age of more than 53); the inequitable distribution of work by sex (men dominate the coal sector); the low standard of living in all the countries; distrust in the possibility of implementing an inclusive and just transition; as well as a lack of trust that state institutions will carry out the process of transition properly. In addition, there is the pronounced uninformedness among the local population, local communities unpreparedness, poor coordination between the national and local levels when it comes to the transition; significant dependence of local economies and budgets on coal-related activities; while the environmental problems that arise after the closures will also need solving.

The struggle against the climate crisis is at once a global challenge and an opportunity for sustainable growth and development. If they are managed correctly, climate actions may be a source of change and social justice. Just transition to a decarbonised economy can combine both ambitious climate policies and taking care of jobs, health and business opportunities – if it is designed so as to protect those who need protection, helping them develop new skills and diversify the economy, offering a chance to modernise the industry and prepare the labour force for future green jobs, as well as to improve living conditions in coal-rich regions.

Coal.
Photo: Pixabay /
Public domain

The energy transition must go hand in hand with eliminating energy poverty, so that the poorest and most vulnerable households may benefit.

For all the reasons mentioned above, those employed in mines and thermal power plants, together with their unions, local communities, political parties and the civil sector / non-governmental organisations, need to play the key role in shaping the transition, guided by the fundamental value of social justice. The local populations need to be included in the process to the greatest extent possible, as they alone know best what their local needs and abilities are, as well as in defining their own paths towards a clean economy.

This transition does not imply simply the abolishing of the most affected energy sector dependent on burning coal in order to protect the climate. It is rather a targeted set of policies to transform the industry in a way that would make it compatible with the ambitious goals of climate protection, by using modern technologies and processes. Nevertheless, the transition will surely arouse misgivings that an ambitious climate policy will be carried out to the detriment of jobs and development, and that it will lead to destruction of the industrial culture that local communities are founded upon.

When speaking about Montenegro, the Montenegrin Electric Enterprise must invest more effort to shift energy production, as things stand very much dependent on coal, towards renewable energy sources. Such fears might lead to resistance towards climate action in the Pljevlja region, whose economy is largely based on coal, as around 1,200 people work in the coal mining and energy generation sector, with a further 1,500-2,000 workers indirectly tied to this sector, and where the loss of these jobs would entail significant challenges for the ability of the community to sustain itself. In a decarbonised economy, carbon-intense jobs will be replaced by low-carbon jobs.

Many enterprises will adapt to the new environment, while the existing jobs will be redefined. Introducing clean energy, energy efficiency and climate adaptation measures, all offer a huge net potential for creating new jobs, while at the same time contributing to the competitiveness of the national industry, cleaner air, healthier living environment and more beautiful urban spaces. Transition to a decarbonised economy provides the potential for opening new jobs in new sectors. However, although

mitigating and adapting to climate change will create new jobs in both existing and new sectors of the economy, they will also produce disruptions in the established industries and threats to existing jobs. Nevertheless, most sociological studies that addressed these issues have found a positive effect on net employment and BDP growth from transition to a low GHG emission economy.

Thus, in Montenegro, the sector that will be most imperilled by the potential loss of jobs is the carbon-intense energy production, which made up 46% of GHG emissions in 2019, while employing around 1,200 workers. For this reason, the transition must be organised in a way that would make it a winning situation for both the living environment, jobs and the economy. Thus, it should not be a sudden structural break, but a gradual structural change involving the society, politics and enterprises, as transition must in fact be just transition to a green economy, involving all the stakeholders, opening the path towards new jobs and industries, and where employment and the social costs of transition must be fairly distributed, and its benefits fairly shared.

Thanks to the increasingly competitive renewable energy sources, climate policy is only one of the drivers of industrial transformation, in addition to the wider economic trends affecting jobs and social protection systems, such as globalisation, demographic ageing, automatisation, digitalisation and artificial intelligence. Just transition thus must also be embedded in the energy strategy (the National Energy and Climate Plan), based on full harmonization with EU regulations aimed at solving these challenges. Achieving better

Key to the just transition is social dialogue, with an emphasis on opening jobs in emerging green sectors, as well as on greening the existing jobs in carbon sectors; providing workers with access to education and training, so that they are abreast of the necessary skills for jobs in the decarbonised economy; providing social security by means of active labour market policies and social welfare; as well as large financial investments in order to create the basis for establishing new and transforming existing industries.

economic resilience and social justice is not only a question for the carbon-intense region, although the region must be at the centre of any future action. A just transition is necessary for the entire country, and targeted support measures are needed in all the regions and sectors.

Key to the just transition is social dialogue, with an emphasis on opening jobs in emerging green sectors, as well as on greening the existing jobs in more carbon intensive sectors; providing workers with access to education and training, so that they are abreast of the necessary skills for jobs in the decarbonised economy; providing social security by means of active labour market policies and social welfare; as well as large financial investments in order to create the basis for establishing new and transforming existing industries.

Sectoral plans for developing new skills, retraining and employment in non-carbon-intense industries, supported by sufficient funds, as well as investment in education and strengthening the culture of life-long learning, must constitute the groundwork for a just transition in the region. Cooperation between private and public actors is essential to identifying the main skills deficiencies in the region. Hence, it would be possible, based on research into the deficiencies, to establish a public centre offering training for jobs in the energy transition, that is, training for certain kinds of work, such as jobs in renewables, energy efficiency, electromobility or battery or hydrogen production sectors. The training centre would give new green jobs visibility, encouraging young people to enrol in training programmes in growth sectors.

Just transition, the idea that justice and fairness must be a constituent part of the transition towards a low-carbon world is increasingly being mobilised in opposition to the idea that protecting the living environment is incompatible with protecting jobs.

Climate goals may be considered as investment goals, as implementing an ambitious climate policy can be turned into needs for investment. Thus, closing jobs that depend on carbon exploitation is an inevitability, which is reflected in the fact that from 2012 until 2015, employment in the carbon sector in the EU fell by 20%, from 240,000 to 185,000 directly employed workers.

A speedy transition towards low-carbon development will have long-reaching effects on the whole society, and will impact a much broader public in the process, not only those working in industry and the energy sector.

If the transition is initiated on time, in order to prevent the catastrophic effects of climate change, coal-rich regions will undergo radical transformations. These need not be painful, and just transition is the kind where quality jobs are created to replace the existing ones, where all the stakeholders are included to make sure that no-one is left behind, where the living environment is re-cultivated, as much as possible, where the local culture is nurtured, and where social justice is served.

A fully clean economy, which does not pollute the planet, is surely not reachable within this decade, but public resources are limited, and should in the future always be used solely for green technologies. ▪▪

political challenges

first we need trust for justice to be "just": a view on energy transition from the coal-impacted community of Lazarevac, Serbia

Maja Pupovac

Throughout the year – and especially during winter months – as passengers approach Lazarevac, one of Belgrade's 17 municipalities, the slightly hilly landscape in front of them disappears in smoke and fog. For decades, as residents of Lazarevac admit, their municipality has primarily been associated with unpleasant smells and thick dust in the air, coming from the nearby thermal power plant in Veliki Crljeni and the open pits of Serbia's largest coal mining and smelting complex – the Kolubara mining basin (*Rudarski basen Kolubara* – RB Kolubara).

RB Kolubara is the largest division of the state-owned power utility company, the Electric Power Industry of Serbia (*Elektroprivreda Srbije* – EPS), producing around 30 million tons of lignite annually and providing around 75% of the lignite used for EPS' thermal generation. Via a 30 km long industrial railway, most lignite is transported to the thermal power plants in Obrenovac *(Nikola Tesla A and Nikola Tesla B* – TENT), 30 km south-west of the Serbian capital, Belgrade. Combined, power plants within the Kolubara and Obrenovac mining complexes produce more than 50% of Serbia's electricity.[1] Therefore, being EPS' largest coal supplier, RB Kolubara plays a vital role in the country's energy independence.

The region's coal exploitation is also of crucial importance for the local economy. RB Kolubara employs 11,880 people, and there are about 150 companies and 400 sole proprietorships operating in the mining industry and related activities. Almost 40% of the labour force in Lazarevac works in the mining and quarrying industry. As a result, Lazarevac has continuously performed above the national and regional averages in terms of average net salary, contributing to its reputation of being among the most economically developed municipalities in Serbia.[2] As lignite is, from an economic standpoint, the most important natural resource within the municipality, RB Kolubara plays a vital role in the local population's economic standard and general well-being.

What would the future of Lazarevac and its citizens look like without coal exploitation? How ready is this particular community to face the challenges of just energy transition?

1 Official data of the Electric Power Industry of Serbia, available at: www.eps.rs [accessed: 5 August 2021]

2 Official data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, available at: www.stat.gov.rs [accessed: 5 August 2021]

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just transition attitudes and perceptions

Recognising the importance of the "bottom-up" approach, i.e. of taking into account what members of the coal-impacted communities think and believe, the research[3] conducted for CAN Europe in the period from September 2020 to February 2021, explored the attitudes, perceptions, needs and desires of the local community in Lazarevac concerning the processes of just energy transition. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research

methods, such as in-depth, semi-structured and structured interviews, formal and informal conversations, participant and non-participant observation, an online survey completed by 21 civil society organisations (CSOs) in Serbia and Lazarevac, and a standardised questionnaire filled in by 118 residents of Lazarevac.[4]

The study showed that a significant percentage of respondents – 79%, equally distributed among all generations and gender balanced, did not know what just transition means. After being provided with the definition of just transition, the respondents recognised the Government of Serbia and Lazarevac's local authorities and institutions as the main stakeholders in raising awareness about just transition and its consequent planning and implementation. The respondents also welcomed the European Union's (EU) involvement in this process, especially concerning its pro-active role in policy advising and financial control.

However, the research also showed that citizens of Lazarevac do not have trust in almost any of the stakeholders potentially involved in the just transition implementation process (including the state and local authorities, trade unions, the employers – RB Kolubara and EPS, civil society organisations (CSOs) and the EU). Non-compliance with existing regulation (61.7%), corruption (60.9%), lack of knowledge (60.9%) and lack of political will (53.9%) have been recognised as the

The 6-month research revealed that there is not enough awareness and collective consciousness to get the citizens' voice heard in the local community's affairs. The majority of respondents (66%) stated that they do not actively participate in solving their local community's problems, including the ones concerning environmental pollution and phasing out coal. When asked what is the reason for lack of the involvement, the respondents predominantly answered that they do not have enough time (40.8%), they do not believe that they can achieve anything with it (33.8%), and that they do not think that they would have enough support from their fellow citizens (23.9%).

3   Pupovac, Maja (2021): "A Wake-up Call for Us All: Just Transition Attitudes and Perceptions in the Coal-impacted Community of Lazarevac, Serbia", the study conducted for Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe, which commissioned, supervised and funded the study. The information and views presented in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of CAN Europe. Expected publication date: September 2021

4   Compared to the available official data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the sample is representative by gender, age and income, but has a limited representativeness by level of education and urban-rural residence (population of area of residence).

primary issues which hold Lazarevac back regarding the region's transition towards renewable energy sources in a socially just and least harmful way. Moreover, even though the majority of respondents (73.5%) acknowledged environmental issues (such as air, soil and water pollution) as the most significant disadvantage of living in Lazarevac, the research in the field revealed a substantial amount of apathy, passivity and inertia with regard to environmental degradation and environmental protection in general. The majority of the respondents believed that Lazarevac would become "a ghost town" if or when the coal-mining activities came to their end – 65% of them stated that they would emigrate from Lazarevac if given the opportunity, 11% said that they would not leave Lazarevac, while 24% were not sure what their decision would be.

With these findings in mind, it is worth exploring whether there are potential social movements (such as civic groups and organisations) to pressure the relevant stakeholders towards assuring citizens that the ongoing energy transition will happen in a transparent and just manner. Who could these potential agents of change within the coal-impacted community of Lazarevac be? What kind of support would they need?

preserving the status quo: necessity or choice?

In the formal and informal interviews and conversations, the residents of Lazarevac frequently raised their concern about not being informed enough about issues of crucial importance for their lives and their families' welfare, such as the questions of environmental pollution or the just transition process. Furthermore, a considerable number of Lazarevac's citizens demonstrate a certain level of disengagement from, and disinterest in the causes of the severe environmental pollution in their municipality, or show an inability to gain an understanding of them and take action. The 6-month research revealed that there is not enough awareness and collective consciousness to get the citizens' voice heard in the local community's affairs. The majority of respondents (66%) stated that they do not actively participate in solving their local community's problems, including the ones concerning environmental pollution and

phasing out coal. When asked what is the reason for their lack of involvement, the respondents predominantly answered that they did not have enough time (40.8%), did not believe that they could achieve anything with it (33.8%), and that they did not think that they would have enough support from their fellow citizens (23.9%).

"I can feel that people in Lazarevac are apathetic. Many generations have been lost here, not just this one, or the future ones. When you try to educate them about climate change, they ask why are you worried about something that will happen in 50 or 100 years? I will be dead by then, why should I care?" (Milan, 63)[5]

In addition, many residents of Lazarevac are interested in preserving the status quo because they feel satisfied with the economic standard and stability which the work in coal-mining and related industries ensures. Older generations have provided for their families, have secured jobs for their children, and are not very motivated to participate in a process that could (possibly) endanger their future financial prospects. Middle-aged generations have secure jobs, simple lives for their families, and, in many cases, loyalty towards their employers or the state and the local government authorities. Younger generations are satisfied with the good salaries and the lifestyle these salaries provide. Many residents of Lazarevac have moved to the town looking precisely for employment opportunities and have "a plan B" in case they remain jobless in the years or decades to come.

"[In Lazarevac] we have a complacent and self-sufficient community where people are satisfied with their salaries that are, let's be honest, higher than the average salary in Serbia. So they say: Let's stay silent, it is all good, as long as the money keeps landing in our pockets every first and fifteenth of the month. You do your eight hours of work and everything else after that is great, we have a nice life! We also drive expensive and fast cars, live in huge houses, we don't want for anything! So why should anyone care about pollution?" (Slobodan, 54)

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5   The interviewees' names have been changed in order to respect their wish to remain anonymous.

citizen activism: when there's a will, is there a way?

Those citizens of Lazarevac who are most informed about energy and just transition also belong to the category of urban and better educated people who have been actively engaged in their local community affairs through some form of citizen activism. However, they believe that even when they do act, their activism mostly fails to make a larger impact on the wider local community. Only 14.7% of respondents thought that their active engagement in solving their community's problems in recent years was "very noticed", and 13.2% that it was "noticed". Furthermore, many active members of the Lazarevac community also distrust their co-citizens, being convinced that they are not willing to get actively involved either because they are not being properly informed, or because they have become indifferent and submissive.

The questionnaire respondents and interviewees believe that citizen activism regarding environmental questions has been highly discouraged by the local government or by the management of TE Kolubara and EPS. Those who believe that they should pay more attention and accord more importance to the environmental problems in their municipality also believe that they lack support from the local self-government to achieve these goals. Some of Lazarevac's activists complained about being suspended or fired from work in the RB Kolubara, others were demoted and received pay cuts, while others admitted to being followed or interrogated by the police. The respondents feel that corruption is omnipresent and represents a major challenge that cannot be handled by a handful of local activists. They are watching the issue of just energy transition being tackled by the responsible stakeholders in precisely the way it should not be tackled, yet feel silenced when they suggest how things might change for the better.

"They [the authorities] have become so distant from the people; they do not understand what our lives look like. They think that if you are not with them, it must mean that you are against them! They see you as their enemy!" (Slobodan, 54)

civil society sector: hitting the wall

The residents of Lazarevac involved in some of the local CSOs (youth, women's rights, environmental) seem to be informed about energy transition, but considerably less so about just transition in particular. Moreover, none of them seems to be actively involved in raising awareness about these issues, focusing instead on more pressing and "tangible" problems their local community faces on an everyday basis. However, due to a lack of human resources, financial capacity and know-how, even these issues seem to be addressed in a manner that is not particularly effective or impactful.

Some residents of Lazarevac believe that some local organisations are financed by, or are otherwise connected to the local government or the management of the RB Kolubara. Although local organisations could be better positioned to understand the current situation in Lazarevac, many locals view them as being intertwined with

Many residents are interested in preserving the status quo because they feel satisfied with the economic standard and stability which the work in coal-mining and related industries ensures. Older generations have provided for their families, have ensured working positions for their children, and are not very motivated to participate in the process that could (possibly) endanger their future financial prospects. Middle-aged generations have secure jobs, simple life for their families, and, in many cases, loyalty towards their employers or the state and the local government authorities. Younger generations are satisfied with the good salaries and the lifestyle these salaries provide.

local and state authorities, serving their own interests and not truly believing in the ideas they purportedly try to promote. Many respondents and interviewees have no trust in the Serbian and international CSOs either, perceiving them as having only superficial interest and short-term engagement in solving the local problems, mainly through suggesting "what needs to be done" to the coal-impacted community instead of offering ideas about "how things should be done". On the other side, the local civil society organisations themselves feel (even purposely) excluded from the local decision-making process, which often has a domino effect on the remaining active citizens, discouraging them from continuing their efforts.

"Ecological organisations in Lazarevac have hit a wall. You cannot achieve anything if your idea or opinion contradicts the state. No matter how good your idea or suggestion is, you cannot do anything if you are seen as the opposition [to the government]. We have experienced it here in our municipality. If you have a good idea, you have to cooperate with the local government, and then they are automatically in a position where they have control over you." (Sara, 39)

"just" implies trust

What is common to all these three categories of Lazarevac's citizens is the fundamental distrust towards practically all of the stakeholders involved in the just transition process, including the local and the state government, the employers (RB Kolubara and EPS), the trade unions, the EU, CSOs at the state and local level, as well as the majority of their fellow citizens in Lazarevac. The distrust primarily originates from the impression of omnipresent corruption characterising all the stakeholders mentioned above. Additionally, there is a general feeling of low social cohesion and unity, lack of collective identity, absence of motivation among the youth, or public consciousness about issues of vital importance for the local community's future well-being.

The first step towards regaining trust is providing the citizens of Lazarevac with accurate and timely information about the just transition process. Furthermore,

Thermal power plant in Veliki Crljeni, Lazarevac
Photo by Maja Pupovac

the process needs to be transparent and inclusive, whereby ownership over just transition will not remain the privilege of the leading decision-makers in the country but will also be in the hands of those citizens directly affected by the ongoing and upcoming socio-economic changes. Those citizens who opt for preserving the status quo need to hear affirmative messages and be informed about the positive aspects of energy transition, to dispel any fears of its potential negative consequences. The environmental activists should not be intimidated and discouraged but welcomed as partners within the just transition process. Due to their awareness of the energy transition and willingness to actively participate in making it happen in a just way, civic activists could be seen as the prospective agents of change in the coal-impacted community of Lazarevac. The same applies to the local environmental CSOs, whose capacities need to be enhanced in several aspects, including human resources, financial capabilities, technical assistance, networking, and know-how.

The EU and international CSOs must pressure all stakeholders involved in the just transition process to address the issue transparently, secure fact-based and timely information flow, and become more open towards grassroots ideas and proposals. Such a transparent and democratic process could lead to greater trust in local, national and international decision-makers. Finally, a higher level trust would create a sense of security and confidence that, in the decades ahead, no one in the coal-impacted community of Lazarevac will be unjustly forgotten or left behind. ▪▫

decarbonisation of the region – a sustainable and just energy transition

Viktor Berishaj

We are living in a very particular time in history, where the paradigms must shift and are shifting. It is a moral duty and obligation to contribute to moving away from the current unsustainable social model, characterized by the deep inequalities between people, genders, races. Therefore, the transition we face, in achieving obligations which stem from the Paris Agreement, requires that we redefine the model which will lead to a fairer, sustainable society where the protection of natural resources, the people and their wellbeing are central.

about the region

Western Balkans is a very carbon intensive region. The energy sector is the leading emitter of greenhouse gasses, accounting for more than 75% of the overall emissions.[1] The emissions champion is the electricity production sector, which relies almost exclusively on coal, specifically lignite, the lowest grade coal.

The 'black gold' has been seen as both a blessing and as a curse for the region. It carried the bulk of the industrial and economic development of the region in the 1960s and 1970s, while at the same time having a devastating impact on health and nature, taking up the land, skies and waters of the region.

Prompted by the geopolitical agenda of accession to the European Union, Western Balkans countries have a few alternative forms of engagement with the EU available to them, such as the Energy Community Treaty, a legally binding initiative aiming at creating a pan-European energy market, between the European Union and its neighbours. All of the Western Balkans countries are part of this initiative; it is the leading driver of the energy transition in the countries of the region.[2]

Due to the carbon intensity of the region, the Energy Community Treaty also plays a vital role in its decarbonisation. With the signing of the Sofia Declaration in November 2020, the Western Balkans countries made a political commitment to achieve climate neutrality by 2050,[3] in line with the EU climate neutrality goals.[4]

Therefore, the region is facing a challenging task of decarbonisation, where the core driver is the sustainable and just energy transition.

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1   Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe, 2021,
    'Western Balkans Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction
    Targets 2030 – The Path to Achieving Climate
    Neutrality by 2050', p. 7, Table 3. https://caneurope.
    org/content/uploads/2021/07/WB-GHG2030-policy-
    and-recommendations_final_July-22021-1.pdf

2   At present, the Energy Community has nine
    Contracting Parties – Albania, Bosnia and
    Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Georgia,
    Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine. Two of
    the founding members of the Treaty establishing the
    Energy Community, signed in 2005, Bulgaria and
    Romania, joined the European Union in 2007. This
    was also the case with Croatia, 1 July 2013.

3   Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), 2020. "Sofia
    Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western
    Balkans". https://www.rcc.int/docs/546/sofia-
    declaration-on-the-green-agenda-for-the-western-
    balkans-rn

4   The European Green Deal. https://ec.europa.eu/info/
    strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

coal business – a human story

Prishtina: It was late spring evening in 2005, when more than thirty families were forcibly evicted from their homes during a police night raid to expand the Sibovc mine in the Municipality of Obiliq, ten kilometres from the Kosovo capital Prishtina. This was the involuntary expropriation, following the voluntary one in 2004. Citizens in pyjamas, police lights and homes bulldozed.

The expansion of the mine feeds the two coal power plants in Kosovo that account for more than 95% of electricity production in the country. The expropriation was always one of the key problems for the citizens in the Obiliq Municipality, ever since the first blocks became operational in the early 1960s. For sixty years the citizens of Obiliq lived under the continuing torment of heavy machinery, dust, pollution and the never-ending challenge of their right to their land.[5]

The local community, supported by the civil society at the time, advocated for resolving the problems and called for a humane approach to the problems at hand, holding numerous meetings with Kosovo authorities as well as the World Bank, which was providing multimillion dollar technical assistance for this process. The process was so faulty that even the World Bank's Inspection Panel concluded that the World Bank had broken its own rules.[6]

Belgrade: As in other coal regions, the residents who suffer daily from the effects of the coal mines that feed the coal power plants (the main one being Kolubara Power Plant), work in the mining or the power sector. They are constantly reminded that their livelihood is bound to the 'dust and rust'. The same holds for the Lazarevac region, whose coal feeds several coal power plants in Serbia. The income in Lazarevac is the third highest out of 18 regions of Serbia, reflecting the importance of the work in the mining and power sector. Nevertheless, the citizens find themselves in a limbo, forced to choose between work and a safe living environment, reminded daily that this is their survival line.

In May 2021, the Energy Minister of Serbia sent a letter[7] to the director of the Serbian utility company EPS, instructing him to halt the plans to build the new coal power plant, Kolubara B, in order to review these plans in light of Serbia's plans for reaching climate neutrality goals. This prompted a number of workers from Kolubara, and, strangely enough, from other coal power plants too, to stage a protest[8] regarding the letter.

While the plan to halt the progress of developing this new fossil fuel project is a way forward for Serbia's energy transition, it just revealed once more how much citizens are left out of the planning and consultations, although their participation is guaranteed by the constitution in every Western Balkans country. The citizens are not only not engaged, but also not informed about their rights and that any transition needs to be based on the principals of just transition, as the recent publication on the profile of Lazarevac has shown.[9]

> The centrepiece of these challenges is the decarbonisation of the energy sector, which cannot happen without involving the workers and affected stakeholders in the process. Just transition must be included in the long term planning and the current and ongoing processes, such as the National Energy and Climate Plans, currently under development in each of the Western Balkans countries, energy strategies, low carbon development strategies, climate laws, etc.

Sarajevo: The number of workers in the coal sector has been in decline in the Western Balkans, despite the opening, and even expansion, of new coal mines.[10] This though has not been the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, at least in certain times. Although the number of workers has been

5   The University of Queensland, University of Nottingham, 2018. "Landsat Time Series Kosovo-Hade 2000-2018", video presentation. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ep2GxXR_Kjs

6   The Guardian, 2016. "World Bank broke own rules as coalmine left Kosovo village 'in limbo'". https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/nov/14/world-bank-broke-own-rules-as-coalmine-left-kosovo-village-in-limbo

7   https://www.reri.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Dopis-EPS-MRE.pdf

8   https://rs.n1info.com/biznis/protst-rudara-i-zaposlenih-u-tent-u-zbog-obustavljanja-izgradnje-kolubare-b/

9   Maja Pupovac, PhD, 2021, commissioned by Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe. "A wake-up call for us all". https://caneurope.org/jt-lazarevac-serbia/

10 Electric Power Industry of Serbia, 2020. "2019 Environmental Report", pp. 46, 59. http://www.eps.rs/eng/Documents/energyEfficiency/PE%20EPS%20Report%20on%20Environmental%20State%202019.pdf#search=environmental%20report

decreasing in the mining sector between 2008 and 2018, according to several news reports, the number of employees in the coal and electricity sector tends to grow during election years.[11]

It is unfortunately a known tactic of politicians to make such manoeuvres. This is also true for each of the coal-dependent countries in the Western Balkans; even though they have been committing to finding a roadmap to decarbonising their economies, they still use investments in coal as assurance of the creation of new jobs and stability of the economy.

2050 decarbonization goals and just transition

They are constantly reminded that their livelihood is bound to the 'dust and rust'. The same holds for the Lazarevac region, whose coal feeds several coal power plants in Serbia. The income in Lazarevac is the third highest out of 18 regions of Serbia, reflecting the importance of the work in the mining and power sector. Nevertheless, the citizens find themselves in a limbo, forced to choose between work and a safe living environment, reminded daily that this is their survival line.

The region currently faces the challenging task of setting its development path, taking into account some key political factors: mitigation and adaptation to climate change[12] in line with the Paris Agreement; the Energy Community Treaty and the EU accession; economy-wide decarbonisation by 2050, in line with the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.

The centrepiece of these challenges is the decarbonisation of the energy sector, which cannot happen without involving the workers and affected stakeholders in the process. Just transition must be included in the long term planning and the current and ongoing processes, such as the National

Energy and Climate Plans,[13] currently under development in each of the Western Balkans countries, energy strategies, low carbon development strategies, climate laws, etc.

With the aim of supporting these processes, the Energy Community Secretariat, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, Poland's National Fund for Environment Protection and Water Management, and the College of Europe in Natolin founded the platform for Coal Regions in Transition in Western Balkans and Ukraine,[14] with the aim of supporting the countries and regions in their efforts to move away from coal towards a carbon-neutral economy, while ensuring that the transition is just.

The civil society from the region has advocated that the platform adopts some key principles as soon as possible, in order to guarantee the success of this initiative:[15]

- The Platform must have clearly defined, consistent and measurable goals, set up within a clear time frame.
- The Platform must ensure that all relevant groups – local communities, NGOs, trade unions, educational institutions, local businesses, etc. – are involved, from participation in the Platform's meetings, to the selection of pilot regions, to project selection and implementation. This principle must apply on all levels downstream of the Platform, so planning processes in the countries must take a bottom-up approach starting from the local level and engage communities in coal regions.
- Any funding channelled by this initiative must be conditioned on local and participatory plans, exclude any kind of support for fossil fuels and incentivise reasonably fast coal phase-out dates.

11 RTV BN, 2019. ''U izbornoj godini 300 radnika više'' [300 workers more in the election year]. https://www.rtvbn.com/3946497/u-izbornoj-godini-300-radnika-vise
12 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2021. "Sixth Assessment Report". https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/
13 National Energy and Climate Plans are 10 year plans, developed to help achieve targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions, increasing the share of renewable energy in the energy mix and increasing the impact of energy efficiency measures. https://www.energy-community.org/regionalinitiatives/NECP.html
14 Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine. https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/oil-gas-and-coal/coal-regions-in-the-western-balkans-and-ukraine/initiative-coal-regions-transition-western-balkans-and-ukraine_en#related-links
15 Joint CSO position, 2020. "18 NGOs call on the Coal Platform for the Western Balkans and Ukraine to commit to public participation and climate action". https://bankwatch.org/press_release/18-ngos-call-on-the-coal-platform-for-the-western-balkans-and-ukraine-to-commit-to-public-participation-and-climate-action

The initiative should incentivise the adoption of territorial just transition plans, which should be consistent at least with National Energy and Climate Plans. If needed, to ensure consistency with achieving climate neutrality in the region by 2050, the just transition plans should go beyond the NECPs.

We are living in a very particular time in history, where the paradigms must shift and are shifting. It is a moral duty and obligation to contribute to moving away from the current unsustainable social model, characterized by the deep inequalities between people, genders, races. Therefore, the transition we face, in achieving obligations which stem from the Paris Agreement, requires that we redefine the model which will lead to a fairer, sustainable society where the protection of natural resources, the people and their wellbeing are central. Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe calls it a Just Transformation[16] and calls for respecting ten core principles to guarantee it:

- Define a long-term vision for socio-economic and environmental resilience, with binding interim milestones and targets.
- Implement transformative action through detailed and comprehensive roadmaps developed inclusively with and for all stakeholders.
- Recognize social partners as key actors for social dialogue and collective bargaining in industries, enterprises and sectors.
- Build resilience through sustainable economic diversification, aligning social goals with climate objectives and environmental protection.
- Integrate the gender perspective into all the policies, plans and projects for the just transition.
- Tackle inequalities in quality of life, environment and access to opportunities, and injustices caused by climate change and its drivers.
- Leverage and reallocate fairly financial resources from public and private sectors to foster social and environmental resilience.
- Plan locally to transform globally while rebuilding the society.
- Embed sustainable development goals and circularity in production and consumption.
- Tailor and provide direct support for just transitions in developing countries.

16 Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe, 2021. "Just Transformation Vision". https://caneurope.org/just-transformation-vision-principles/

how to restore social well-being and whether decarbonized energy is possible in the Western Balkans

Nataša Kovačević

The Western Balkans is one of the regions in Europe most heavily affected by the impact of climate change, and this trend is projected to continue, with estimates of temperature increases of 1.7-4.0°C, and even exceeding 5.0°C by the end of the century, depending on the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement, ratified by five Western Balkans partners, commits its signatories to take action to ensure that the global average temperature increase is kept well below 2° and to pursue efforts towards limiting global warming to 1.5°. In line with the European Climate Law, Green Agenda and the Sofia Declaration, climate neutrality will be reflected in the EU's bilateral relations and accession negotiations with the Western Balkans states, which should promptly start transforming their societies accordingly. Although the EU, through the EIB, will mobilize an estimated 40 billion in investments for helping territories and regions most affected by the transition to a climate-neutral economy, Western Balkans countries are still strongly dependent on coal, not planning to shut down coal-fired power plants before 2030 or 2050 (with construction currently stopped but planned to continue on Block 7 of the Tuzla power plant), which will prolong transition and multiply costs for the countries. Sixteen power plants are operating in the region, with another 12 projects planned and awaiting construction or seeking financing.

> The current energy transition seems to be quite slow due to a lack of political will for faster changes. There are still huge amounts of hidden and non-hidden subsidies of fossil fuels in the Western Balkan countries. Energy policy is under strong influence of companies dealing with fossil fuels and coal mine unions. One of the consequences is an implementation of fossil energy lock-in measures in the region (new TPPs, natural gas infrastructure, new equipment for coal mines, etc.).

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why the energy transition is so difficult for the Western Balkans countries

Energy transition plays a key role in greening economies as coal is still fundamental to the energy sector in the Western Balkans, accounting for around 70% of electricity produced in the region, rising to as much as 97% in some countries (Kosovo). Over 30,000 people are employed by the coal industry in five Western Balkans countries, out of which two thirds are employed in opencast coal mining, and the rest in power plants. The number may not seem strikingly high if the overall population of the five coal producing countries is taken into account – some 14.5 million – but for the regions where coal is being mined and burned, this industry has been the dominant employment option for decades. This kind of mono-cultural economy led to the complete devastation of a possible alternative economy environment and opportunities, even causing great deviations in social values, where countries with coal reserves are considered "rich", while neglecting the health impacts from coal-based air pollution.

Solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change can impact all aspects of Western Balkans people's lives and, if poorly designed, can leave many vulnerable and disadvantaged groups behind.

the problem with energy transition is technological, but also social and political

Today some 25% of the Western Balkans population refuse to believe that climate change is a result of human action, despite growing evidence, while half don't believe that the region will achieve climate neutrality by 2050.[1]

Reducing and eliminating the causes of climate change and large-scale pollution in WB countries will require deep economic, technological, and social changes, but perhaps above all a serious change in the collective awareness. This change will mean the adoption of a completely new perception of the dangers of pollution, which harms

not just children, the elderly, those with other/underlying health conditions, and other vulnerable groups but the society as a whole, and the harms which we have seemingly learned to live with. We have to recognize the unacceptable and dangerous economic and technological processes that have led to the normalization of the existing harmful situation, in order to take the firm view that profound changes in such a state are possible even after we have started to put such processes into practice.

Decarbonization and digitalization are the foundational technologies of the coming industrial revolution, which will inevitably cause changes in both global and local socioeconomic and political relations. Ultimately, the new industrial revolution will require a more comprehensive concept of development according to which the creation of economic values will be carried out with full respect for the social and natural environment.

Stakeholders in the energy transition have varying degrees of political and economic power. Understanding how political and economic factors influence clean energy transitions is crucial to effective policy formulation and facilitating transitions to sustainable energy systems. The current energy transition seems to be quite slow due to a lack of political will. There are still huge amounts of hidden and open subsidies for fossil fuels in the Western Balkans countries. Energy policy is under the strong influence of fossil fuel companies and coal miners' unions. One of the consequences is an implementation of fossil energy lock-in measures in the region (new TPPs, natural gas infrastructure, new equipment for coal mines, etc.).

Balkan Barometer Public Opinion, Analytical report by Regional Cooperation Council

Figure 95: Do you think that reducing CO2 emissions and bringing them to the level close to zero which will allow achieving climate-neutrality in the WB by 2050 is feasible?
All respondents, N=6000, share of total, % of agreement or disagreement)
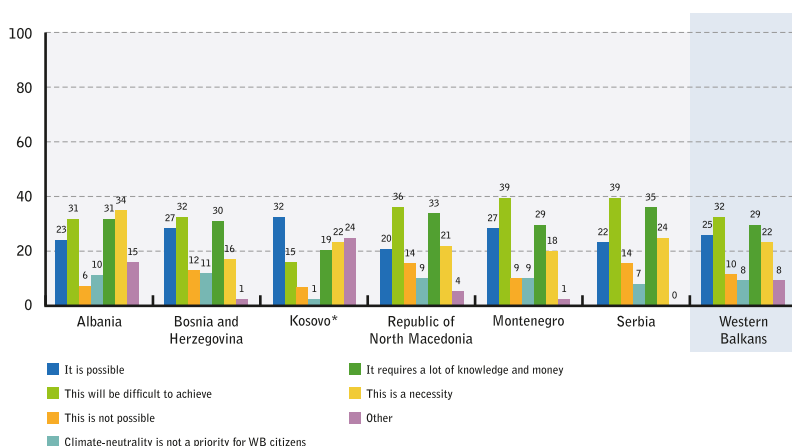
1 Balkan Barometer Public Opinion Survey, April 2021.

Structural dialogue between all stakeholders is needed to make energy transition socially digestible. The energy transition should be fair (it is necessary to treat the "losers" of the transition humanely) and inclusive (it should include as many social actors as possible, especially citizens). Policies and measures that implement decarbonization in addition to contributing to sustainable development should be based on 1) smart management of natural and energy resources, 2) environmental protection and management and 3) use of clean (renewable) energy. At the same time, they should contribute to sustainable socio-economic development. Thus, sustainable development, in addition to the positive global effects on climate change and local effects on the environment, includes the creation of development opportunities for economic development and the creation of new and sustainable jobs. In countries such as Montenegro, this approach also enables the reduction of energy poverty and a harmonized management of development in less-developed areas.

Additionally, there is an urgent need for a more rigorous approach to the analysis and anticipation of demand for green job skills, with better information and data on skills and occupational needs to address the skills challenge and enable the green transition. In less developed countries where such frameworks do not yet exist, this need represents an opportunity to create structures such as a national human resources development council.

why we need a planned and just transition and what is needed for its realization

The devastating economic and social consequences of sudden and unregulated abolition of coal-based energy production were shown on many examples of mine closures. The most notorious example is the closing of mines in Great Britain, where a complex sector was shut down in just a few years,[2] or the example of a mine in Aninoasa, a town of 4,800 inhabitants in the Jiu Valley in Romania, which had to declare bankruptcy due to the unplanned closure.[3] In this case,

even EU financial support failed to mitigate the severe consequences of unplanned mine closures, due to the nonexistence of diversification plans. Belated thinking about what would happen when the mine closed due to environmental and commercial regulations led to a complete collapse of life, complete unemployment, and even the shutdown of street lighting due to unpaid electricity bills. Years after the bankruptcy and closure in Jiu Valley, Romania, medium-term planning processes have been established to gradually and systematically close mines, and financially support local communities in preparing and implementing economic diversification plans. This would not have been possible without the involvement of local authorities, interested civic initiatives (both local and national), and without the financial support of European funds. The complexity and size of the problem, and its potentially catastrophic and long-term consequences, have led the European Union to establish the Platform Initiative for the Western Balkans and Ukraine as a sister-platform to the Coal Regions in Transition initiative.

Just transition requires involvement from employers, unions, governments and communities, all working together to plan and deliver the transition of their economies, sectors, and companies to carbon-neutral and socially and environmentally sustainable activities. It promotes a bottom-up approach, starting from the needs of local communities. On the other hand, the heads of the regions and the local authorities have an essential role for many reasons. To start the just transition process, all stakeholders should be considered decision-makers, and therefore all parties should be involved in reaching an agreement on the process and have a shared understanding and vision.[4]

A just transition, one that moves our energy systems away from dependence on polluting sources that damage human health and our planet, towards renewable, sustainable solutions, will have major environmental and social benefits, but is also almost sure to have major negative social impacts if sustainability criteria and planetary boundaries are not properly respected. The scale of the challenge that transformation poses to society and the economy require that all stakeholders are

2   https://www.theguardian.com/business/ng-interactive/2015/dec/18/the-demise-of-uk-deep-coal-mining-decades-of-decline

3   https://www.mining.com/romanian-ex-mining-town-goes-bankrupt-32404/

4   Eight Steps to a Just Transition in the Western Balkans, April 2021. CEE Bankwatch Network

The WB countries must immediately join the global process of energy transition and decarbonization. If WB countries want to prove their path commitment within the new development cycle – the EU Green Deal and the strategic documents (National Energy and Climate Plan, Nationally Determined Contribution, Low Emission Development Strategy) – they must plan ambitious goals for the decarbonization of the energy sector. The basis for this should be the achievement of a social agreement that the energy transition is the backbone of the future development of energy and economy in WB countries.

involved from an early stage, where the choice of the most sustainable and resilient options is open for discussion and changes.

the decarbonization process must begin immediately

The process of decarbonization in the energy sector, which needs to be fulfilled by 2050, should be urgently planned and its systematic realization should start immediately. There is no time to wait. The next decade (2021-2030) is key to the success of this generational endeavor. It is time to take decisive action as climate change threatens to cause irreparable damage to the global ecosystem. Therefore, WB countries must immediately join the global process of energy transition and decarbonization. If WB countries want to prove their path commitment within the new development cycle – the EU Green Deal and the strategic documents (National Energy and Climate Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions, Low Emission Development Strategies) – they must plan ambitious goals for the decarbonization of the energy sector. The basis for this should be the achievement of a social agreement that the energy transition is to be the backbone of the future development of energy and economy in WB countries.

The EU is ready to financially support the WB policy of decarbonization, but this support depends on the fulfilment of each country's obligations to decarbonize, and especially the fulfilment of obligations undertaken by ratifying the Energy Community Treaty. It is important to emphasize that the EU plans to have a selective approach in its support for WB countries in the coming period, depending on the seriousness with which each country approaches the fulfillment of its decarbonization obligations. It represents a major economic, political, technical, and social challenge for WB countries. However, decarbonization is also a development opportunity. By joining the implementation of the international obligations, WB countries can build a modern, competitive, environmentally and climate- sustainable energy system, which is a prerequisite for attracting foreign direct investment, especially in industrial production intended for export to the EU. This requires decisive and quick political decisions, defining a long-term vision and plans for energy transition, and reaching a social consensus on the transformation of the existing conventional energy model according to a modern model based on sustainable development. ▪▪▪

references:
- Secretariat's WB6 Energy Transition Tracker (https://www.energy-community.org/regionalinitiatives/WB6/Tracker.html)
- Eight Steps to a Just Transition in the Western Balkans, April 2021. CEE Bankwatch Network
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- https://www.just-transition.info/
- https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_930

eternal ramble – two faces of energy policy in Serbia

Jovan Rajić

As Serbia remains a heavily coal-dependent country with more than 70% of electricity produced from coal power plants and new ones still (questionably) planned for construction, it seems there are no firm indicators that a radical turn in energy policy is really possible or even wanted by the decision makers. Four out of six of the most polluting thermal power plants (in terms of SO_2 emissions) are located in Serbia, which completes, in general, the poor situation in all six of the Western Balkans entities, where 16 thermal power plants (8,7 GW capacity) emit approximately 100 tons of SO_2 more than the 250 plants active in the entire EU (156 GW).

In May 2020, Aleksandar Vučić, president of Serbia, proclaimed the Kolubara mining basin "the heart of the country's energy system", asserting that the recently opened surface excavation Radljevo-Sever should provide coal reserves "for the following 60 years" (i.e. until 2080), "when it should expand even further".[1]

However, at the meeting with Janez Kopač, the director of the Energy Community Secretariat, in April this year, President Vučić emphasized that "Serbia's priority remains the energy transition to clean energy sources, as well as the transformation of state-owned energy companies".[2]

Just a few days before this text was written, in August 2021, during a conversation with the management of the company "Serbia Zijin Copper", the operator of the mine in Bor, President Vučić demanded that the "emissions of harmful gases in the smelter in Bor should be reduced and that citizens of Bor should have clean air by the end of the year at the latest,"[3] practically confirming that the situation with air pollution in this city requires urgent improvement and immediate reaction from the decision makers. At the same time, government representatives use every opportunity to emphasize that a new mine, Čukaru Peki, will be a "green mine" [sic], and comply with the highest environmental EU standards.

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1   https://www.danas.rs/politika/vucic-novi-otkop-u-kolubari-obezbedjuje-ugalj-za-narednih-60-godina/;
2   https://vucic.rs/Vesti/Najnovije/a38427-Prioritet-Srbije-energetska-tranzicija-ka-cistim-izvorima-energije-vucic.rs.html;
3   https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/ekonomija/1025487/boranima-cist-vazduh-2022-vucic-predstavnicima-zidjina-razgovarao-rudarskom-basenu-cukaru-peki;

As incoherent and contradictory as these statements, and the Serbian President's rambling speech between two extremes – sashaying between the energy transition and continuing exploitation of fossil fuels – may sound, they certainly have their purpose, indeed, a twofold purpose – for indoor and outdoor use.

As Serbia seems destined to be an eternal candidate country for full membership in the European Union (EU), with candidate status approved in March 2012, the "European" perspective looks highly uncertain and still vague, without a set (even approximate) date of accession. Having in mind that none of the negotiating chapters have been closed yet, while the negotiating framework with the candidate countries has been redefined due to internal turbulences within the EU itself, due to the fatigue on both sides the negotiating process seems to have reached a dead end. What has most certainly been and remains the official policy of all Serbian governments (with negligible exceptions) since 2000, is the declarative intention of joining the Union, and thus, acceptance of the obligation to harmonize domestic regulations and policies with those of other member states and with EU standards.

Since 2006, Serbia has been a member of the Energy Community (EC), an economic (energy) union established by the EU, Southeast European countries and the countries of the Black Sea region – Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, established with the idea to provide harmonization with EU legislation in the field of energy.

At the EU-Western Balkans (WB) Summit, held in November 2020 under the framework of the Berlin Process initiative, Serbia signed the Sofia declaration on the green agenda for the Western Balkans[4] (Green Agenda). Under this agreement, WB countries undertake to conduct a number of specific activities, including decreasing and gradually phasing out coal subsidies, introducing market-based renewables support schemes and carbon pricing instruments.

The Green Agenda is widely supported by the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, adopted by the European Commission earlier in 2020, which envisages 9 billion EUR for projects focused on decarbonisation, the renewable energy sector and building renovation.

Serbia: Dorcol Belgrade Photo by IFC Infrastructure (CC-BY-NC 2.0)

Therefore, it may be concluded that the commitments undertaken through various international treaties and the political orientation towards EU integration do not leave much room for decisions other than those oriented towards energy transition and full decarbonization until the middle of current century.

But is the situation really like that in practice?

As Serbia remains a heavily coal-dependent country with more than 70% of electricity produced from coal power plants and new ones still (questionably) planned for construction,[5] it seems there are no firm indicators that a radical turn in energy policy is really possible or even wanted by the decision makers. Four out of six of the most polluting thermal power plants (in terms of SO_2 emissions) are located in Serbia, which completes, in general, the poor situation in all six of the Western Balkans entities, where 16 thermal power plants (8,7 GW capacity) emit approximately 100 tons of SO_2 more than the 250 plants active in the entire EU (156 GW).[6]

Apart from the poor technical condition of the existing plants and lack of desulphurisation facilities, what concerns the most is a lack of strategy and planning of further energy policy. The abovementioned statements by the government officials, as well as the lack of a proper social and educational strategy clearly indicate Serbia's lack of a plan in each of these fields. Educational programs in universities and

4 https://berlinprocess.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Leaders-Declaration-on-the-Green-Agenda-for-the-WB.pdf

5 https://balkangreenenergynews.com/rs/srbija-obustavlja-gradnju-elektrane-na-ugalj-kolubara-b/

6 https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Chronic-Coal-Pollution-report_SRB.pdf

vocational schools are not (sufficiently) adapted to the "green" future, while social and retraining programs for the existing workforce in state-owned energy companies practically do not exist.

This double game was probably best visible during the process of adoption of the National Emission Reduction Plan (NERP) – a strategic document which Serbia was obliged to adopt on 1st January 2018 and apply until the end of 2027. In accordance with Article 4 (6) of the LCP Directive,[7] member States of the EC were obliged to define and implement the NERP,[8] taking into account, *inter alia*, compliance with the emissions ceilings as set out in Annexes I and II of the LCP Directive.

The Serbian Ministry of Environmental Protection enacted (but did not adopt) the NERP in December 2017, notifying the EC on the content of the NERP and its application starting from the planned date from the beginning of 2018. The NERP has an introduction outlining the reasons why Serbia decided to "adopt" the NERP, and the way it was enacted, following by the purpose and initial status of the NERP. The most important parts of the NERP are its rules, procedure regarding monitoring of implementation and reporting on its implementation. Finally, the NERP contains a list of plants that are to come under the plan. It is stated that combustion plants covered by the NERP must comply with the annual maximum emissions listed in Appendices 2, 3 and 4 of this plan, starting from 1st January 2018.

Everything seemed fine looking from the sidelines, as the obligations were clear and direct implementation of the NERP defined by domestic regulation (mainly the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia[9]) and the ratified international treaties. Serbia has met its international obligations by ratifying the Treaty Establishing the Energy Community, enacting the Regulation which stipulates the obligations set out in the Directives, and finally the NERP (which contains a list of combustion plants obliged to perform as prescribed in the NERP). In other words, Serbia has listed the combustion plants that are required to reduce operating hours per year to reach the prescribed maximum emission values, as specified in the Regulation and Directives. Therefore, the NERP was a mandatory and enforceable document, based on the Constitution, the Regulation, the Law on the Energy Community, which refers to the LCP Directive and the imperative provisions contained in the NERP. It is important to note that the NERP refers to environmental laws and prescribes the competence of carrying out inspections in connection with the monitoring of the implementation of the NERP. Also, the NERP obliges the state to report to the EC on its implementation and refers to obligations which stem from the aforementioned international acts.

However, the situation is slightly different in practice.

The Serbian government has decided to officially adopt the NERP (despite its direct and mandatory application due to the reasons mentioned above) in January 2020 (sic) by adopting a "conclusion" on a government meeting that took place exactly two years after the commencement date set for its implementation.

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7   Directive 2001/80/EC of the European Parliament and Council of 23 Oct 2001 on the limitation of emissions of certain pollutants into the air from large combustion plants;

8   This was an obligation for those member states of the EC which chose to adopt the NERP, rather than to use the opt-out mechanism or comply with the stricter criteria imposed by the LCP Directive.

9   Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette of the RS'', no. 98/2006);

Apart from the poor technical condition of the existing plants and lack of desulphurisation facilities, what concerns the most is a lack of strategy and planning of further energy policy. The abovementioned statements by the government officials, as well as the lack of a proper social and educational strategy clearly indicate Serbia's lack of a plan in each of these fields. Educational programs in universities and vocational schools are not (sufficiently) adapted to the "green" future, while social and retraining programs for the existing workforce in state-owned energy companies practically do not exist.

When they were asked about the implementation of the NERP and non-compliance with the emission limits from the polluting premises envisaged under the NERP for 2018 and 2019 in front of the local stakeholders, government officials practically claimed that they were under no obligation to apply the NERP before it was officially adopted (in January 2020) and that there was no legal ground to ascribe blame for non-compliance before this date, a claim that was the direct opposite from what had been "served" to foreign partners and stakeholders.

This is especially interesting in light of the fact that during 2018 and 2019, emission limits for SO_2 from plants owned by the national electricity company (EPS) were exceeded by a factor of 6, compared to the maximum values envisaged under the NERP. This was confirmed by the EPS' official annual reports and reports by the Serbian Environment Protection Agency submitted to European Environment Agency, which was the legal ground for a claim against the EPS, submitted by the Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute, for jeopardizing public health.

On the other hand, in both official and unofficial (though mostly unofficial) conversations with international partners and representatives of the EU and EC leadership, government officials keep stressing their clear commitment to emissions reduction and implementing the NERP in the form that had been submitted to the EC and started from the beginning of 2018, and acknowledging that there had been some difficulties and challenges in implementing the NERP, but reassuring foreign partners of their firm determination to comply with international standards and undertaken obligations.

Meanwhile, as Serbia is late with its adoption of other strategic documents, such as the National Energy and Climate Plan and the Air Protection Strategy, what concerns the most is the lack of implementation of existing laws and policies and the lack of a sustainable transitional policy. As a coal-dependent country with more than 25,000 people working in the mining sector with (for Serbian standards) a more than decent salary, any discussion of energy transition and its consequences is anticipated as highly politically unpopular. This remains a topic that is given a wide berth, especially by populist governments such as the current one in Serbia. As long as the powers that be are led by struggle for votes and current interests, instead of a strategic approach and a long-term vision, it seems there will be no fundamental changes and a "double-game" policy will not have an alternative in the foreseeable future. At least, until the government is forced to change this principle. Either from outside or inside.

green transition and citizens' action

from zero to 10 000 protesters, or how the living environment became topic number one in Serbia

Milja Vuković, Radovan Božović

Around half the funds intended for developing sustainable energy sources are spent on hydropower. In addition, through their monthly electricity bills, all the citizens of Serbia are paying for the incentives for privileged power producers (micro-hydropower plants among them). It is important to notice that the sum allocated for the privileged producers is around 25 times higher than the funds available for improving energy efficiency.

Protecting the living environment is by no means a new topic in the Serbian media space. The environmental collapse that has manifested itself in the over-exploitation of natural resources and mass extinction of animal and plant species as its direct consequence is one of the paramount topics in the global society. However, as a country on the margins of global goings-on, Serbia always lags behind the current global trends, including in the context of transition towards ecological and sustainable models of economic development.

It is only in recent years that problems related to the climate crisis and the living environment have become the focus of the wider Serbian public. These issues were never a priority for any of the leading political parties. At the last national election, held in June 2020, environmental issues barely got a mention. Likewise, when it comes to citizens, although climate change has already negatively impacted Serbia through the damage it has caused to agriculture and the economy, it is still absent from citizens' environmental protests.

Environmental protests in Serbia are still primarily motivated by local environmental problems that are clearly tangible on the ground, such as: threats to water, air and land quality, logging and other problems relating to the living environment. Starting with the environmental protest that took place in September 2018 in Pirot, one can follow a series of public gatherings and environmental protests in cities and towns big and small, with the impression that there are ever growing numbers of people on the ground seeking change and concrete solutions. Accordingly, the question arises: how did the situation change in the three years, from total lethargy, to a highly varied and widespread – if disjointed and fragmented – movement that is present in all parts of Serbia?

The basic trigger that launched the birth of the activist scene in Serbia, and with it all the protests over the last few years, is actually the Serbian state's negligence and attempts to relativise the issues around protecting the living environment. By way of example, we can highlight the President's statement that our pollution rose because our standards of living did,[1] or the Prime Minister's statement that it is not true that

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1 https://www.juznevesti.com/Drushtvo/Vucic-za-zagadjenje-vazduha-krivi-bolji-standard-gradjana.sr.html

the level of pollution rose,[2] which directly contradicts the data provided by the Environmental Protection Agency.

micro-hydropower plants

The case which marks the starting point for the rise of the environmental movement in the Serbian public is certainly that of micro-hydropower plants. At the local level, such protests go years back, but have intensified and gained media attention since 2017. An informal group called Let's Defend the Rivers of the Old Mountain [Odbranimo reke Stare planine] certainly enjoys the greatest public visibility. Their work on social networks and frequent media appearances have gained them more than 155,000 followers on social networks, and not merely passive followers, but people who have repeatedly shown a capacity to organise larger protests, protests that have nowadays become a regular occurrence. The environmental protest "trend" that began in September 2018 in Pirot culminated in the April 2021 Environmental Rising in Belgrade, which gathered more than 10,000 participants.

The various actors linked to the aforementioned environmental protests have appeared to be very heterogeneous so far. The organisers' persistent insistence

that political parties were not welcome, that is, characterising the protest as apolitical, has led to groups with all kinds of political beliefs taking part in them. The situation that clearly demonstrated the upshot of such apolitical positioning was the protest that took place in a village called Rakita in August 2020, where members of the extreme right such as the National Patrol and civic activists from the Let's Not Drown Belgrade initiative could be seen standing side by side. As a result of the avoidance of politicisation, environmental protests have become a neutral zone in which citizens otherwise occupying opposing sides, and sometimes even in open conflict, could meet. It needs to be stressed that there is a broader circle of actors who show up when a bigger event is announced. Nevertheless, it is important to analyse who the organisers of the protests are, that is, who are the people at the coalface. It is a mixture of local populations, activists from elsewhere and academic stakeholders. It is difficult to assess the influence each of these group has, as they work together and cannot do without each other.

So far, the biggest protests and activities took place on Stara Planina [Old Mountain], although the problem is not as localised as that would suggest, as micro-hydropower plants exist in as many as 856 locations around Serbia. What can be noticed is that there are several factors why the resistance by the inhabitants of Stara Planina was

2   https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/brnabic-o-zagadjenju-nema-mesta-ni-razloga-za-paniku/

so much more efficient and visible in the media than the resistance that took place in other hot spots such as Goč, Golija, and the area around the city of Kraljevo.

The question is why has the resistance shown by the inhabitants of Stara Planina been more effective, and thus more visible in the media? It was likely the insufficiently strong reaction on the part of the local population in other trouble spots (Goč, Golija, the area around Kraljevo) that was behind the absence of a greater response by the media and the public, despite the links with a wider circle of environmental activists.

Naturally, it also helps that the protests are entirely justified, not only from the viewpoint of environmental protection, but energy policy as well: the 110 micro-hydropower plants that have come online by 2019 are producing only around 0.8% of the electricity needed in Serbia. If we compare this with the information that losses in the power grid amount to 11.5% of the total production, we gain an insight into the level of senselessness of this investment, so very costly to the living environment. In addition, these data make it clear that investing in overhauling the transmission network would have a greater impact than all the planned micro-hydropower plants. The second, very controversial fact concerns these projects' financing. Around half the funds intended for developing sustainable energy sources are spent on hydropower.[3] In addition, through their monthly electricity bills, all the citizens of Serbia are paying

for the incentives for privileged power producers (micro-hydropower plants among them). It is important to notice that the sum allocated for the privileged producers is around 25 times higher than the funds available for improving energy efficiency.

Such a policy runs counter to the interests of the majority of the population, and serves only the minority who are investors, which justifies all the citizens protesting regardless of whether their existence is directly threatened. A change in the national policies and an end to subsidising micro-hydropower plants would certainly result in their shutdown, as otherwise their construction would not be cost-effective for the investors. The message for the local populations is that their lives, their health, their rights, are much less important than the investors' interests. As a graffito in the Rakita village, written in the local dialect, symbolically states: "Život nema, smrt ne doodi" [Life there be none, and death does not come].

the air pollution

Clean air protests were another example of civic protests during the past three years. The most significant such protest so far was the one held in Belgrade on January 2021, when, in spite of the serious epidemic situation, several thousand citizens came out on to the streets. The protest was initiated by an informal group called *Eko straža* [Eco-guard].

When it comes to air quality, 31 January 2019 stands out as a very important day: this Belgrade winter day was very foggy, with the smog reducing visibility to barely a metre or two. Over the following days, the news that Belgrade was the most polluted city in the world[4] caused a stir in the media. From then on, reports about measurements carried out by citizens themselves and data about the catastrophic air quality have become commonplace. The Serbian Environmental Protection Agency has measured air quality and regularly published the results ever since its establishment in 2010. Looking at the data, it is clear that in the period from 2010 until today, the air has constantly been very polluted during certain times of the year. The media have written the most about airborne particles of various diameters,

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4   https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/alarmantno-beograd-je-jutros-bio-najzagadjeniji-grad-na-svetu/yj7ynts

*Waste management
Photo by Stefan Gara
(CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0)*

labelled PM2.5 and PM10 [Particulate Matter], which is exactly the kind of pollution that gave rise to the protests.

When we look at the data on the sources of particulate matter pollution, two sources come top: in the first place, individual stoves, and in the second, the production of electricity and heat. The rise in the number of individual stoves is directly connected with the drop in the economic standard and with energy poverty: the costs of central heating are beyond the citizens' economic standard and often represent a significant burden on the household budget. For example, let us take the situation in Belgrade. The majority of the consumers connected to central heating do not have the option of paying for heating according to their consumption, instead paying a fixed annual price. The price for a 70 m^2 flat is 8,357.48 dinars a month, which adds up to 100,289.70 annually. According to official data, in May 2021, half the employed earned up to 49,869 dinars. A calculation will lead us to the finding that in Serbia, for an average person in work, central heating is an expenditure that amounts to at least 16.75% of their monthly earnings, that is, two monthly pay-checks a year.

Such an expense is too high for the majority of materially at-risk households, and users disconnecting is becoming an increasingly frequent phenomenon (for instance, 775 users were disconnected in Belgrade in 2017,[5] and 3,300 requests to be disconnected were submitted in Niš

between 2016 and 2019[6]). They choose cheaper alternatives (wood, air conditioning devices…), which are a seasonal expense, one that will not burden them year-round. The quality of the fuels used in individual stoves is also an important problem, as materially at-risk households often do not use only the standard wood and pellet fuel, but also plastics and other carcinogenic materials, poisoning themselves and their living environment. In addition, with changes to the relevant legislation, very poor quality lignite[7] appeared on the market, and its use has been on the rise in urban centres.

Evidently, this situation is a direct consequence of state negligence. Subsidies for citizens are low; for example, the city of Niš allocated 11,160,000.00 dinars in 2021 for co-financing measures to reduce pollution caused by individual stoves. These are funds that will be distributed among a maximum of 200 households,[8] which is negligible for a city with more than 180,000 inhabitants. With such a low level of investment, expecting a change for the better would be unrealistic. The impact on the health of the population will only increase, as will dissatisfaction.

5   https://www.blic.rs/vesti/beograd/centralno-grejanje-beograd-iskljucenje-sa-sistema-daljinskog-grejanja/332wfh0

6   https://medijskakutija.rs/gradska-toplana-nis-sve-manje-gradjana-se-iskljucuje-sa-grejanja-ali-ih-i-dalje-ima-na-stotine-godisnje/

7   https://www.danas.rs/ekonomija/lignit-veoma-loseg-kvaliteta-iz-kolubare-kriv-za-zagadjenje/

8   https://www.gu.ni.rs/2021/06/02/javni-konkurs-za-sufinansiranje-mera-smanjenja-zagadjenja-vazduha-u-gradu-nisu-poreklom-iz-individualnih-lozista-u-2021-godini/

waste management

When it comes to waste management, here too one gets the impression that many citizens (and the odd representative of business) are more prepared for radical change and more engagement than the state has allowed and supported. Civic initiatives such as "A Cork for a Disability" or "With a Cork to a Smile" have won greater sympathies and more trust than the official channels for collecting recyclable waste, which fail to transparently communicate the data on their activities even when they do successfully pursue recycling. Unfortunately, many municipal services companies' work on collecting and trading in recyclable waste merely serves to unremittingly shake citizens' trust in the possibilities of recycling.[9]

Through social network activities and various actions, workshops and lectures, it is clear that there is a critical mass of citizens interested in issues like civic and municipal composting, reducing waste generation, the sharing and renting economy, the practice of fixing and limiting planned obsolescence, as well as other environmental practices linked to the zero waste approach such as reducetarianism and veganism, reducing carbon footprints, energy efficiency and similar topics.

Around 2,000,000 tonnes of municipal waste[10] is generated annually in Serbia, and approximately another 400,000 tonnes of municipal waste ends up in wild landfills. These are a serious problem, which has arisen in Serbia through the combined (in) action of the citizens and the state, and are to no-one's credit. A mere 5%[11] or so of municipal waste is recycled. In addition to municipal waste, it is also important to bear in mind the volume of commercial waste in Serbia, especially in light of the new unrest related to the mining activities of the Rio Tinto company: in 2020, commercial sectors generated around 56,000,000 tonnes of waste[12] in Serbia, 79.9% of which was non-hazardous, and 20.1% hazardous waste. It is precisely in the mining sector that hazardous waste makes up the greatest share of overall waste (24.6%).

During 2021, initiatives that have arisen as a reaction to the opening of new lithium mines, primarily in connection with the activities of the Rio Tinto company, have also shown great power to motivate. The Let's protect Jadar and Rađevina association is the most active when it comes to this environmental issue, or even, we might be permitted to say, disaster.[13] At this moment, lithium batteries may even be leaving the stage of history, to be replaced by sodium-ion batteries, and Serbia is getting ready to sacrifice an entire large agriculturally fertile area. An environmental impact study is currently being drafted, with publication planned in autumn 2021,[14] though the media are already brimming with activities and protests concerning this burning environmental issue.

An informal group such as *For less rubbish and more joy – Zero & low waste Serbia* has shown to what extent the citizens are not only interested, but even willing to engage not only in recycling, but also in all the more difficult steps that precede recycling and are essential to the functioning of a circular economy, which involve preventing and reducing the generation of waste. Through social network activities and various actions, workshops and lectures, it is clear that there is a critical mass of citizens interested in issues like civic and municipal composting, reducing waste generation, the sharing and renting economy, the practice of fixing and limiting planned obsolescence, as well as other environmental practices linked to the zero waste approach such as reducetarianism and veganism, reducing carbon footprints, energy efficiency and similar topics.

9   https://nationalgeographic.rs/ekologija/a26814/
     reciklaza-otpada-srbija.html
10 http://www.sepa.gov.rs/download/otpad2011-2017.pdf
11 https://www.danas.rs/politika/u-srbiji-se-reciklira-
     samo-pet-odsto-komunalnog-otpada/
12 https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-latn/vesti/20210702-
     stvoreni-i-tretirani-otpad-2020/?s=2502
13 https://rs.n1info.com/biznis/a686975-aktivistkinja-
     ako-rio-tinto-otvori-rudnik-u-srbiji-nepovratno-
     unistenje-macve/
14 https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/13/
     ekonomija/4461112/rio-tinto-jadar.html

degrowth

It Is also interesting that when it comes to transformative and pioneering social movements such as degrowth, the first steps can be seen in citizens' self-organised activities. Degrowth is a movement that fundamentally and creatively approaches the creation and designing of new, sustainable, more humane systems of community life. Unlimited growth is impossible on a limited planet. By relativising the necessity of economic growth, degrowth questions global social and environmental justice and suggests an alternative, sustainable economic and social model. The two-month Little School of Degrowth held in spring 2021, which was organised by the plavoizeleno.rs platform with support from the zajednicko.org platform, has elicited great interest from citizens, with more than 200 applicants who attended. At the same time, in the media, the academic circles, in broader political discourse, let alone state institutions, there is no trace of degrowth. By way of comparison, in the neighbouring Croatia, the Institute for Political Ecology has been intensely engaged with degrowth for a number of years, through activities such as organising international conferences, issuing publications, and similar.

It would seem that more and more people are becoming aware that the current consumerist and extractivist model is unsustainable and unethical. More and more people are seeking alternatives, and are willing and eager to change their lives. This movement of change is global, it is not tied solely to Serbia. The new data published in the Sixth Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change[15] illustrate the necessity of fundamental change, which we need to approach as a society, as soon as possible, immediately. It seems that the struggle for a more humane way of life and for a cleaner living environment, for a transformation of the society towards a socially and environmentally better model, is precisely the struggle for this historic moment. Looking at activist and civic initiatives in Serbia, it also seems that the citizens are more willing than ever to enter this fight, while the state constantly lags behind on this path.

All this allows us to conclude that the citizens want change, that is, a turn of national and local policies away from dirty extractivist economic models, towards a model of an economy that is aligned with the goals of green transition; but that there is still no political option available to them, which would be closely aligned with this change. The government does not appear to intend to change anything in its policies that might suggest a shift in its valuation of protecting the living environment. Certain opposition parties are beginning to speak out about these problems, while at the same time promoting extremely nationalist policies,[16] thus violating some of the basic principles of green politics. The citizens' environmental movement has not yet grown into a political, party option. As of this moment, there is no concrete political option that would place the living environment and sustainability at the top of its agenda. There are various indications that some of the citizens' environmental organisations will come together in a political initiative that will have environmentalism as a priority in its programme, but this has not yet happened. What is certain is that the protests will continue. ▮▮

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15 https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/

16 https://dveri.rs/vesti/saopstenja/odrzan-okrugli-sto-pod-nazivom-politicka-ekologija-i-zeleni-patriotizam-kako-da-zastitimo-zivotnu-sredinu-u-srbiji/

Montenegro - challenges on the path to democracy development

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introduction

Montenegro is a country in the Western Balkans, with a population of 640,000 people. In a referendum held on May 21, 2006, it became an independent state after many years of being a member of the Socialist Federalist Republic of Yugoslavia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the state union of Serbia and Montenegro. Shortly after the declaration of independence, in June 2006, Montenegro became the 192nd member of the United Nations. It has been a candidate for membership in the European Union since 2010, and on June 5, 2017, it officially became a member of NATO.

the electoral system of Montenegro

Until 1990, Montenegro had a one-party system, as a republic of the former SFRY. That year the first multi-party elections were held and taken as the beginning of multi-party system. The drafting of election laws was entrusted to the competent state body, the Secretariat for Legislation, whose legal experts tried to comply, in a very short time, with the legalistic and theoretical-political requirements issued to them. In this latter respect, this was particularly evident in the discussions at the Democratic Forum, which was active in the first half of the 1990s. The forum brought together all the relevant political groups in Montenegro. Although the discussions at the Forum were conducted mainly at the level of general principles, without a more detailed scientific elaboration of the problems in certain segments of the electoral system, they undoubtedly contributed to the basic legal solutions receiving almost comprehensive support. The mandate of the Assembly, the President and the Presidency of the SRCG,[1] derived from the first multi-party elections, lasted for two years. In the meantime, by a decision reached in the referendum held in March 1992, Montenegro became one of two members of the federal union called the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Constitution, adopted in October of the same year[2] established a parliamentary system in Montenegro. The government is elected in a unicameral assembly by a majority vote of the total number of deputies.

In Montenegro, the parliamentary seats are allocated based on a proportional electoral system using a modified D'Hondt formula. The modification relies on a closed ballot system, because the so-called "pure" D'Hondt method in theory primarily binds to an open ballot system. The proportional system was something that distinguished Montenegro from the other republics of the former SFRY. This is because in most republics, more precisely in Serbia, Croatia and Macedonia, the first multi-party elections were conducted using the majority electoral system, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia these elections were conducted using a combination of majority and proportional electoral systems. In the electoral system of Montenegro, from the beginning we have a prohibitive clause, i.e. the so-called electoral threshold which today is set at 3%. This is the proportion of votes that electoral lists must achieve in

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1   Socialist Republic of Montenegro (ed.)
2   Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro, No. 48 of 13 October 1992

elections in order to achieve parliamentary status.

One of the major parties that have participated or still participate in the political life of Montenegro is, above all, the Democratic Party of Socialists. This party was formed as a successor to the League of Communists and was actually in power until the 2020 elections. In addition, during the initial period of the multi-party system, the People's Party, the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro and the Social Democratic Party of Reformists played a significant role. After several coalitions, both with "natural" and "less natural" partners, the People's Party lost its significance on the political scene. The Liberal Alliance of Montenegro froze its activities in March 2005, but this political option is seen as the precursor of the idea of an independent state of Montenegro, a member of the European Union. The SDPR soon merged into the Social Democratic Party.

After the split in the strongest party, the Democratic Party of Socialists, in 1997, a new political party was created under the name of the Socialist People's Party and soon grew to exceptional strength. This party played a significant role in the pre-referendum period as a leader in the idea of Montenegro remaining in the state union with Serbia.

Montenegro since gaining independence in 2006 until today

In the referendum held on May 21, 2006, Montenegro became an independent state. 55.54% voted to secede from the state union with Serbia, while 44.46% voted to remain. This was also a kind of rarity because the majority required for the decision to secede

Bird sanctuary Solana Ulcinj
Photo by Alma Sukic

was 55% of the total votes, and not, as is always the case, 50% plus 1. Since gaining independence, Montenegro has had a great development opportunity, with full potential for reforms and investment. However, as this year marks the 15th anniversary of independence, the general impression is that the potential that existed has not been used. This has largely been due to the political legacy and way of thinking that permeated the previous arrangements and systems. This political thinking has largely shaped the atmosphere and scene in Montenegro. Although in the heart of Europe and with huge natural resources, especially for such a small geographical area, the state of Montenegro is still among the poorest countries on the continent. The youngest state in Europe simply failed to break away from certain patterns of behaviour that were largely created by the ruling elite. With the start of negotiations on EU membership, expectations have increased that Montenegro will embark on the essential reforms it needed. What was positive in the political life of Montenegrin society was the fact that almost all relevant political actors

Due to the unceasing sale and privatization of state and natural resources, many citizens' associations have emerged that have tried to counter this trend. There are numerous examples where the local populations united in the desire to oppose the sale of their forests, rivers, streams, lakes. It is in Montenegro, as the only state whose Constitution declares it as ecological, that a kind of ecocide was committed. The environment, the issue of resource management has become a point of connection between people of different profiles, education, national, religious and political affiliation. This has led to the rise of critical thinking and a turn towards green policies.

have publicly and unequivocally advocated Montenegro's entry into the EU family. However, reforms were lacking, and the process stagnated, in some areas even regressed, which was clearly reflected in the European Commission's Progress Reports. The major challenges concerned in particular Chapters 23 and 24, namely the specific fight against organized crime and corruption, especially high-level corruption. The Democratic Party of Socialists, as the successor of the communist regime, more precisely the people at the top of that party, completely captured the state, treating it as private property. Over time, scandals involving top party and state officials began to emerge. In Montenegro, institutions have shown a complete lack of independence from political dictate and, quite simply, an inability to implement the most basic democratic postulates. This primarily refers to the possibility of replacing those in power. The three-decade regime was completely rife with nepotism, crime and corruption, which is why it was clear that Montenegro would not, with the then leadership, make changes on the way to fulfilling the criteria from the European agenda. Until August 2020, Montenegro did not experience a

> In the Balkans, it is not uncommon for green parties to lack power and need to form coalitions with bigger parties. However, in Montenegro this is not the case. The Civic Movement URA, a Green Party, is in government and was a decisive factor for the formation of a parliamentary majority after the previous elections. The very fact that the Green Party is part of the governing coalition is an indication that this is one of the changes that the state needs and that the citizens' commitment to green policies is very real.

peaceful change of government in the elections. With the historical experiences of war in the former SFRY, nationalist rhetoric and the long-lasting regime, the society is extremely divided along numerous lines. This division is still present today, along almost the same seams, 15 years after gaining independence. All relevant reports and parameters suggest that Montenegro has not achieved full social, economic and democratic capacity. For the majority of citizens, the change of government that took place after the elections in August last year gives some hope that Montenegro has been given its second chance to affirm itself as a democratic society worthy of EU membership.

critical thought and civic activity with special reference to green policies

Awakening civic awareness in Montenegro is a process that has begun in recent years. The NGO sector is largely responsible for such an observation. NGOs played a significant role in raising public awareness and, in many situations, were a strong corrective to the government. Unfortunately, the topics they dealt with were abundant. From student protests, through critical civic thought to large-scale protests against the regime, Montenegro has learned democratic lessons in the last five or six years. Due to the unceasing sale and privatization of state and natural resources, many citizens' associations have emerged that have tried to counter this trend. There are numerous examples where the local populations united in the desire to oppose the sale of their forests, rivers, streams, lakes. It is in Montenegro, as the only state whose Constitution declares it as ecological, that a kind of ecocide was committed. The environment, the issue of resource management has become a point of connection between people of different profiles, education, national, religious and political affiliation. This has led to the rise of critical thinking and a turn towards green policies.

As a state, Montenegro has always been dual, divided by certain double standards and templates. Green policies have made a step forward in the direction of unifying people, advocates of environmental protection and sustainable development. Many eco activists, NGOs, and later a political party, have been able to introduce green policies into the public discourse and bring them higher up the agenda.

One of the best examples of this joint struggle of social actors are the problems that arose during the construction of the Bar-Boljari highway. Works during the construction led to the relocation of the riverbed in the canyon, which is one of the great natural sites, not only in Montenegro, but also in Europe. This relocation of the riverbed disrupted the biodiversity of the area and changed its flora and fauna. Due to this alarming situation, almost the entire society reacted, which was a way of uniting around certain values.

When the problem of the Tara River was discussed by the European Parliament, the government reviewed the work that led to the return of the river to its original state. Unfortunately, the consequences could not be eliminated, but further destruction has at least been prevented. This, in a way, marked a symbolic struggle for environmental issues.

Another outstanding example of the progress of critical thought with the environmental aspect of the problem is the Solana, which preoccupied the Montenegrin public and the region because it represents the wetlands of international importance. Solana has a great wealth of biodiversity and represents a significant point in the process of bird migrations, providing food for flamingos, which, according to some data, come from as far as the coast of Egypt. The former regime had a plan to build a hotel and tourist complex in this area. With the local movement, petitions, organization of protest walks, and the cooperation of the local population, the citizens' action was successful and the construction was postponed. Later, under pressure from the public and the civil society, Solana was declared a protected area, which means that it cannot be built on in the future. The government formed after the elections in August 2020 returned Solana to state ownership, which was a kind of victory.

Civic Movement URA is currently the only party on the political scene, which is green-leaning, and which belongs to the Green party family Europe. In the Balkans, it is not uncommon for green parties to lack power and need to form coalitions with bigger parties. However, in Montenegro this is not the case. The Civic Movement URA, a Green Party, is in government and was a decisive factor for the formation of a parliamentary majority after the previous elections. The very fact that the Green Party is part of the governing coalition is an indication that this is one of the changes that the state needs and that the citizens' commitment to green policies is very real.

Montenegro faces a number of challenges in strengthening the rule of law, respect for human rights, development of critical thinking and progress on the path to democracy. The potential that Montenegrin society has is huge, in every aspect, and indications are that it will succeed on that path. Due to all of the above, we can expect Montenegro to become the next member of the European Union in order to complete the reform process, which it has embarked on, in the right way.

the social impact of hydropower on affected communities

Rea Nepravishta

For centuries, water was shared by the community in an equal way, and no one had the right to exploit resources to the detriment of others. This sense of mutual responsibility survived through centuries of communal living because it was crucial for the survival of the community to look after each other and have strong ties. As times changed and the old way of life fell apart, the values promoted by the capitalist system put the individual and private interests at the centre of the system.

hydropower corroding democracy

Hydropower plants built along the rivers of Albania do not only pose an environmental problem to the communities, but they impact the social fabric of the society when it comes to democratic decision-making. In the last 15 years, a phenomenon has been evidenced throughout the country related to the distortion of the public consultation process, a condition imposed by the law on building hydropower installations. The phenomenon has several facets: the falsification of signatures of members of local communities in votes to approve, inclusion of deceased people in the consultations, inclusion of people living outside the relevant areas, or simply public consultation processes that are purely formal and lack substance, and do not truly represent the will of the local people. All these irregularities converge in one single result: failing to inform and take into account the voices of the people who are stakeholders in the issue by virtue of their being directly impacted by

the investment. It is important to mention that public information and consultation are strictly defined in the international treaties, such as the Aarhus convention, and in the Albanian legislation.

Beside representing a clear breach of the national and international laws, which is often disputed in the Courts, at the social level this misrepresentation of the will of the people leaves deep wounds in the community. According to a WWF Adria report on the Valbona Valley National Park, "only 15% of the respondents feel satisfied with their participation regarding the decision to construct the hydropower plants. 77,2% do not feel satisfied with their participation." Often people found out about HPP construction projects only when trucks came to the river and works started, to their full astonishment. Anger and despair are the first reactions people have to this phenomenon, coming from a deep feeling of being left aside, marginalized and totally neglected. Their views and voices do not matter, they feel invisible and alienated in the processes that impact their everyday lives in the first place.

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Thus, in Albania during the last 30 years of transition from the dictatorship towards a democratic capitalist society, the hydropower issue has shown how fragile democratic processes are in the country. In a capitalist system, where the profit of the powerful is the established order, democracy is more of an attractive, inflated concept than a truly applied system.

the sense of identity and belonging

People are greatly dependent on their rivers for their everyday lives, as they use them for drinking water, irrigation, leisure etc., having done so for generations. A river is not just a physical place, but also a cultural one, around which traditions, storytelling, legends, poems, songs and fairy tales are born and handed down from one generation to another. A river is a spiritual place to be inhabited.

A sense of belonging and identity are derived from the land and its features. Exceeding mere practical importance, the land and the river are part of the people, and give them a shared appreciation and understanding of who they are and where they belong. People also see the value of the river for the rest of nature, creating and sustaining a precious biodiversity that should be protected and maintained.

Destroying a river puts this whole spiritual heritage at risk. The river, representing a space inhabited by emotions and traditions, is damaged and distorted in the collective imaginary of local people. But not only the local people, as some rivers (such as the Valbona and Vjosa in Albania) have an impact on the collective imaginary that goes beyond their specific areas, but matters at the national level, closely linked to national identity.

Among the consequences of the process of corroding identity is definitely the migration of local people from the areas where they live. Demographic movements from rural to urban areas has been a problem that has blighted the Albanian society for 30 years, posing significant threats to the common wellbeing of the people, by creating, on one hand, slums in big cities with huge marginalized communities, and, on the other, turning places of unique beauty and abundant nature into ghost villages inhabited by only a few elderly people. In a vicious circle, in the abandoned and empty

rural areas no one is left to protect natural resources from exploitation, including more hydropower and other projects harmful to the environment.

A community is primarily created from ties of identity and feelings of belonging. By destroying nature, we are also destroying our emotional ties to the territory and to each other, and thus our communities.

capitalism and exploitation

In the past, before the creation of the Albanian state in the early XX century, particularly in the Northern Albanian areas, communities regulated their social lives through the customary law, mainly the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini and its various derivations. Special provisions on water

Entering the mountains-Valbona NP - Valbona National Park. Albanian Alps
Photo by gailhampshire (CC-BY 2.0)

It is clear that the hydropower issue showcases a deeper global problem that is exacerbated by the capitalist system. By fighting this system at its roots, we go closer to the solution to the problems of our societies. At the same time, by fighting against hydropower and for protection of the environment we make another contribution to a radical change in our society. We need to think radically, shifting from an exploitative mindset towards a caring and protective way of life, in every sphere of our global society.

were foreseen in the Kanun, arising from the basic principle that Water is life. Even today in those communities, elderly people, but also young people, recall the way water resources were shared and managed inside the community: they all concur on the fact that there was equality in sharing resources and the public interest prevailed over the private interest. For centuries, water was shared by the community in an equal way, and no one had the right to exploit resources to the detriment of others. This sense of mutual responsibility survived through centuries of communal living because it was crucial for the survival of the community to look after each other and have strong ties. As times changed and the old way of life fell apart, the values promoted by the capitalist system put the individual and private interests at the centre of the system. Hydropower development is one clear example how this happened. While in the past, the water of the river was accessed equally by everyone in the community in a system characterised by sharing and fairness, in the present, private business companies exploit the water resources by building hydropower. The latter is subsidized by the State (using tax-payers' money) and produces very little energy which in turn does not supply the local community, but goes into the centralized network. Local resources are exploited to the benefit of the few business companies who get subsidized by the state.

This degradation of values is not unique to Albania or the hydropower sector. Economies that are globalizing bring pervasive cultural and societal changes, and harshly impact the social fabric of local communities. While people are still attached to traditional values, fast-changing transformations leave societies without a referential system of values to anchor to. Therefore, the economic system that serves the private rather than public interest corrodes the social fabric and leaves people with a sense of isolation and alienation. Unemployment and poverty affect the majority of the population, while inequality between the rich and the poor grows.

It is clear that the hydropower issue showcases a deeper global problem that is exacerbated by the capitalist system. By fighting this system at its roots, we go closer to the solution to the problems of our societies. At the same time, by fighting against hydropower and for protection of the environment we make another contribution to a radical change in our society. We need to think radically, shifting from an exploitative mindset towards a caring and protective way of life, in every sphere of our global society. Particularly in the last 10 years, environmental activism in Albania has grown and acquired a proper voice, becoming one of the most important civic movements in the country. While this is hopeful and inspiring, the pandemic crisis of the last year and a half has posed new challenges to the civic movements. Focus on survival and more autocratic states have shifted public attention away from important causes such as environmental protection. The risk is that environmental rights and standards decrease and the society is not as focused as before on demanding and fighting for them. For this reason, social movements should re-acquire their inspiration, drive and determination to continue struggling without compromise for a more just and equal future.

the energy and environmental potential of the Komarnica river

Vuk Iković

The Komarnica river (Montenegro) is the main tributary of the Piva river, which together with the Tara river forms the Drina. The Piva has been turned into a reservoir lake and has been used to produce electricity since 1976. About 70% of the upper course of the Komarnica remained unsunk and therefore represents the biological minimum of the Piva catchment area, given that all the species that disappeared or could not survive in the Piva reservoir tried to find refuge in the Komarnica canyon.

The Komarnica river is about 50 km long and cuts through the 4 kilometre-long Nevidio canyon on its way to the Piva.[1] The Nevidio canyon is unofficially considered to be the most impassable canyon in Europe. After leaving Nevidio, the Komarnica flows through a canyon valley, after which it flows into the artificial Lake Piva.

Its specific nature is reflected in numerous springs, waterfalls, rapids, cataracts, tall smooth rockfaces, cascades and natural wells. Such a specific area is inhabited by species that are closely bound only to such living conditions. These are some of the reasons why the Komarnica has been proposed as an Emerald site and why the upper part of the Komarnica and its surroundings have been declared a nature park.

Large reservoirs contribute to unfair distribution of resources, increasing the gap between the poor and the rich. Economic growth usually happens at the expense of the poorest. Those in control use all or most of the water potential. A similar thing happened in the municipality of Plužine with the construction of the Piva power plant, where citizens have been divided in socio-economic terms into those who are employed in the power plant and those who are unemployed and depend exclusively on their agricultural land.

As is the case with many other wild and free rivers, the Komarnica provides many services. The Komarnica is not only important for the animals that live in it and the people who visit it, but is also connected to the local community in many ways. It is a source of drinking water, as well as economic, landscape and intangible values. Additionally, it contributes to the quality of the water we drink, making the area unique and regionally recognized.

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1 Radojičić, B. 2005. Vode Crne Gore, the Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić Institute of Geography.

Vuk Iković
The KOD organisation, Podgorica
https://www.kod.org.me/

People want to spend time on rivers that are preserved and wild. The more natural a river is, the more it can offer. In fact, such a river has the best chance of diversifying the economy of an area. The Komarnica is fun because it is natural and free – and fun can be a lucrative business. That is why local communities can make a living out of this river. Rafting, fishing, swimming, hiking, wildlife promotion and local food production are just some of the opportunities provided by the Komarnica. It attracts people and therefore money. Recreation on the river can create many jobs. Actually, a large number of locals in the vicinity of Lake Piva do not base their tourism business on this artificial lake, but rather on the Tara River. Visitors can take part in the adventures of discovering a canyon whose sides are up to 300 meters high and which in many places is only two meters wide. They can fish in this canyon, rent kayaks, eat at local restaurants and stay in hotels, all of which contribute to the inflow of money into the local community.

To understand a river, we need to socialize with it first. That is how we can experience the value of its water, its springs, waterfalls, cliffs, its trout and otters. That way we will know what we could lose by damming it up. Ultimately, we understand that the Komarnica connects ecosystems, creating a network of them and making them functional. This enables the continuity of the flow of water and wildlife migration.

Its biological wealth is attested by the fact that out of 88 habitat types (according to the Habitats Directive) in Montenegro, a total of 21 types[2] have been identified in the Komarnica canyon. Of these 21, there are two priority habitats in the canyon, which means that the whole or almost the entire area that includes these habitats in Montenegro should become part of the Natura 2000 network. A portion of the canyon, together with the Bukovica river and the Vojnik mountain, has been proposed as a potential Natura 2000 habitat under the Birds Directive.[3] In addition, the canyon is a habitat for numerous animal species that are important for the European community, such as: the brown bear, the eurasian otter, the goat-antelope, the yellow-bellied toad, the Balkan goldenring and others. In addition, the largest percentage of endemic species from all categories live in the ecosystems of cracks in the carbonate rocks of the Drina basin, which includes the Komarnica canyon (about 50 percent).[4]

However, this is not a sufficient reason for the Komarnica to remain wild and free. The Montenegrin government believes that it is more justified to flood this canyon in order to produce electricity.

If the flooding happens, at least 16.7 km of the river will disappear, turned into a lake covering an area of 3.8 km^2. An entire river ecosystem would disappear only to be replaced by an artificial lake, submerging over 300 ha of economic and protective forests.

In addition, the Strategic Environmental Assessment confirms that it is impossible to stipulate measures to reduce the negative impact of the power plant on the environment. It also states that over 90 percent of the species that exist in the area covered by the plan will be significantly negatively affected by the construction of a power plant.

Such a facility would fragment the river ecosystem, as the dam would be an insurmountable obstacle for upstream and downstream migrations of river organisms, thus losing the river continuum.

Consequently, the Strategic Environmental Assessment proposes that this canyon should be removed from the list of Emerald areas in order to enable the construction of the Komarnica hydropower plant.

This would make some sense if this hydropower plant were to solve the key upcoming energy problems in Montenegro, which primarily concerns the imminent shutdown of the Pljevlja coal plant, which provides Montenegro with 40% of its required electricity. However, the planned Komarnica hydropower plant would produce only 15% of the total energy

2   Izvještaj o strateškoj procjeni uticaja na životnu sredinu detaljnog prostornog plana za prostor višenamjenske akumulacije na rijeci Komarnici [Report on the strategic assessment of the impact on the living environment of the detailed spatial plan for the area of the multi-purpose reservoir on the Komarnica river], Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, 2019.

3   Rubinić, B., Sackl, P. & Gramatikov, M. (2019): Conserving of wild birds in Montenegro. The first inventory of potential Special Protection Areas in Montenegro. AAM Consulting. Budapest xiii +328 pp.

4   Lakušić, R., Dizdarević, M., Grčić, P., Pavlović, B. and Redžić, S. Flora i vegetacija viših biljaka i fauna Symphyla, Pauropoda i Mollusca u refugijano-reliktnim ekosistemima kanjona rijeke Tare, Pive, Komarnice, Lima i Drine [The flora and vegetation of higher plants and fauna Symphyla, Pauropoda and Mollusca in refuge-relict ecosystems of the Tara, Piva, Komarnica, Lim and Drina river canyons]. the Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts, Glasnik odjeljenja prirodnih nauka [The Natural Sciences Department Gazette], 7, 1989.

If one in five households in Montenegro were to install a 20 m² solar (roof) panel, they would produce as much electricity as the Komarnica hydropower plant is expected to produce. Besides being cheaper, such investments have an incomparably smaller environmental impact. This clearly indicates that Montenegro should rely on several sources (types) of energy production.

produced by the Pljevlja coal plant. What additionally points to a lack of economic rationale for this project is the fact that the planned power plant will be able to produce a maximum of half the energy that is currently lost in the power grid.

The most worrying fact is that there are fissures, that is, crevasses in the immediate vicinity of the planned dam, which, according to geologists, have no hydrological solution under the current conditions.[5]

Regardless of these facts, the Montenegrin electric company, EPCG, is determined to implement this project despite having considered no alternative solutions. On the other hand, in Montenegro there are two wind farms that together produce 50% more energy than the planned Komarnica hydropower plant, and whose construction cost about 50 million euros less than the Komarnica plant is expected to.

A simple calculation leads to the conclusion that if one in five households in Montenegro were to install a 20 m² solar (roof) panel, they would produce as much electricity as the Komarnica hydropower plant is expected to produce. Besides being cheaper, such investments have an incomparably smaller environmental impact. This clearly indicates that Montenegro

should rely on several sources (types) of energy production, i.e. have an energy mix.

Large reservoirs contribute to unfair distribution of resources, increasing the gap between the poor and the rich. Economic growth usually happens at the expense of the poorest. Those in control use all or most of the water potential. A similar thing happened in the municipality of Plužine with the construction of the Piva power plant, where citizens have been divided in socio-economic terms into those who are employed in the power plant and those who are unemployed and depend exclusively on their agricultural land.

Therefore, in addition to improving renewable energy sources, Montenegro should strive to reduce consumption, reduce grid losses and increase energy efficiency. At the same time, rural development and sustainable tourism need to be strengthened. For example, on the Rogue River (USA), fishing, hiking and various kinds of tours generate about $30 million in profits, including $15.4 million in personal incomes for 445 full-time and part-time employees. It is difficult to compare, but hypothetically, according to this model, the Komarnica river would yield at least 4 million in profits per year. Agriculture, together with rural tourism and preserved nature, is the pillar of local community development.

5   Minutes of the LXXXIV session of the Committee for tourism, agriculture, ecology and spatial planning of the 26th Parliament of Montenegro, held on 23 June 2020.

energy cooperatives – a new-old form of organization for a democratic and fair energy sector in Serbia

Predrag Momčilović

Have you ever wondered where the electricity you use in your home comes from and how it is generated? If you live in Serbia, the best chances are that the electricity you consume comes from large thermal power plants that use poor quality coal. However, the fact that we currently receive energy from dirty sources does not necessarily mean that the future is exclusively grey from smog and pollution. The future of the energy sector can be much brighter and cleaner if citizens organize and engage in energy production from sustainable and renewable sources. Energy cooperatives could play an important role in a fair energy transition but also in the democratization of the energy sector as well as society as a whole.

Times of crisis also require crisis measures, thus in the last few years the concept of taking part in cooperatives has become more and more relevant. Unfortunately, when it comes to cooperatives, decision-makers in Serbia almost exclusively recognize agricultural cooperatives, and investment in this type of cooperatives is not even close to sufficient. There is no mention of other types of cooperatives such as: housing, energy, social, labour, ethical banks, etc. Not only are there no incentives for organizing in these types of cooperatives, but bureaucratization makes this type of association more difficult.

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Serbia's energy sector: between hierarchy, obsolescence and pollution

The Serbian energy sector is based on the exploitation of lignite in the Kolubara and Kostolac basins. According to available data[1] for 2018, 65.37% of primary energy produced comes from coal. 9.52% of energy is obtained from crude oil, and 3.93% of total energy is produced from natural gas. Collectively, this represents 78.82% of the primary energy produced from fossil fuels.

The energy produced from fossil fuels, and above all from coal, is not renewable, and with each ton of coal burned, there is less and less of this resource. In addition, this type of energy production significantly contributes to the emission of greenhouse gases, mostly CO_2, and also contributes to environmental pollution and damage to public health.

Almost 99% of the coal used in Serbia is of a type called lignite, or in other words brown coal of the lowest quality. Lignite is low to medium calorific value coal, which is why it is suitable fuel practically only for thermal power plants. It is extracted by surface mining and burned in thermal power plants that are built in the immediate proximity of the mines because the unprofitability of longer transport means that it is not traded on a global level. In addition to the low calorific value, lignite is also characterized by a large amount of moisture, which sometimes exceeds 60%, with a large amount of ash that remains after combustion, all of which means that it has relatively small thermal power. In the European Union, 40% of coal-fired power plants use lignite, in Turkey that number goes up to 52%, while in Serbia and other countries in the region (BH, Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro) it is the only fuel that is used.[2] In 2016, a total of sixteen coal power plants in the region emitted more sulphur dioxide than all 250 European coal power plants combined.

The costs of using coal are numerous, from health and environmental to financial and social. Every year, the number of people suffering from respiratory problems and other diseases related to the use of

coal increases, while the mortality rate is rising. Surface exploitation of coal leaves devastated landscapes, while pollution from thermal power plants negatively affects the quality of air, soil, and water. Despite the construction and announcements of new facilities, the number of jobs in the industry is constantly decreasing, and this trend will continue in the future. Remediation of all these consequences requires large amounts of money to be spent on medical treatment, mitigation of catastrophic environmental and social consequences.

Crude oil and natural gas, which make up the rest of Serbia's fossil energy mix, are so-called imported goods, and their availability and price depend a lot on international relations, which are changing faster and faster, so relying on these resources is a game of chance.

Just over 20% of primary energy production in Serbia is from renewable energy sources, mostly hydropower (9.69%), followed by firewood and wood chips (11.08%). Hydropower mainly comes from large hydropower plants built during the socialist era, while small hydropower plants make up a very small percentage of the energy produced and contribute to great social and natural degradation. On the other hand, the use of wood in energy production is much more a reflection of poverty than green tendencies. This is supported by the fact that only 18% of the total biomass is used in heating plants, and only a small share is converted into pellets and other energy-intensive and efficient fuels. Most of the wood is burned in the individual furnaces of those households that are not able to afford sustainable heating sources.

Finally, in 2018, only 0.13% of energy was obtained from wind and only 0.1% from the sun. These two sources, although currently marginal, represent a great potential for the energy transition. Producing energy from sun and wind would reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, improve the quality of air, reduce soil degradation and the costs of treating all the diseases caused by the use of fossil fuels. Nevertheless, switching to renewable sources without implementing measures that would ensure that the energy transition is fair and democratic is not enough. Here, too, cooperatives are entering the scene in our country, a little-forgotten model of association that carries great potential for social change.

1 Statistical Calendar of the Republic of Serbia, 2021, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade
2 Lignite coal – health effects and recommendations from the health sectors, HEAL Briefing.

cooperatives in Serbia: a new-old model for new and old problems

If you type the word cooperative in an internet search engine in Serbia, you will get a handful of news about what is happening in the popular reality show called Zadruga, the Serbian word for cooperative, who fought with whom, and who gossiped about whom. If you scroll down, after the reality news, you will come across job ads for youth cooperatives. These youth cooperatives are advertised as a new model of flexible employment that brings great savings to employers. You may also come across information that a model of the Belgrade Waterfront project is in the former building of the Belgrade Cooperative. None of the things you will come across in your search will be an example of a cooperative organization. It will take many page downs before you are likely to come across an article that describes the basic principles of organization and ways of functioning of a cooperative.

what exactly is a cooperative?

Despite the fact that the word cooperative has lost almost any meaning in our country, the concept of cooperatives is still relevant today. Since they were formed in the second half of the 19th century, cooperatives have served as a mechanism for uniting the underdogs, in order to at least slightly improve their chances in the world of the free market, where capital dominates. In addition to uniting for the common good, the basic principles of cooperatives promote the values of voluntarism, democracy, solidarity, equality, good governance, education, care for the community, and a newly-added value – environmental sustainability.

The very term cooperatives refers to a type of organizational structure and can be applied to different sectors and levels of an organization. Three main types of cooperatives that can be singled out are: producers' cooperatives (originally developed in Italy and France), consumers' cooperatives (originally developed in the UK), and credit cooperatives (originally developed in Germany).

Throughout history, until today, cooperatives have been seen as a mechanism for organizing, in order to reduce the exploitation of workers and peasants. The first modern cooperative on the territory of today's Serbia was founded in Bački Petrovac in 1846 as an agricultural credit cooperative. In the period of early modernity, the Balkan countries also knew the institution of a family cooperative: a socio-economic communal organization based on kinship with fairly democratic management mechanisms and forms of joint ownership.[3] Cooperatives emerged as the last line of defence against usurers, who were oppressing impoverished peasants during a period of great inequality at the turn of the 20th century.

After the Second World War and the People's Liberation Struggle, cooperatives in Yugoslavia functioned on the principles dictated by the imperative of building a socialist state. During this period, the cooperative functioned on almost completely non-market principles; soon after the end of the war, a cooperative was opened in almost every village. During this period, the cooperative press and communication were significantly improved, and the newspaper Zadruga was published weekly, along with several other weekly and monthly newspapers that covered the affairs of the cooperatives.

After the breakup of the SFRY and the transition from socialism to capitalism, a difficult period began for cooperatives in this region. During the 1990s and 2000s, many cooperatives were closed down under the pretext of unprofitability. Cooperatives have been characterized as an outdated concept that is a legacy of socialism, which needs to disappear as soon as possible.

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3 Tomašević, T. et. al. (2018) Commons in the South East Europe. Zagreb: IPE

where is the cooperative organization today?

Today, over 180,000 cooperatives operate in Europe, with over 140 million members and 4.7 million workers.[4] Despite the great disparities between these cooperatives, almost all of them respect the basic cooperative principles, which distinguishes them from joint stock companies and classic companies. The essential difference is that cooperatives have members and not shareholders and that members have the right and obligation to participate in the work of the cooperative, with the principle one person one vote, and where profits are jointly controlled. The Cooperatives Europe survey indicates that cooperatives have proven to be far more resilient to the effects of the economic crisis than traditional companies, so in the post-crisis years of 2009 and 2010 they employed almost a third more people than a decade earlier.

Can cooperatives be a tool that will help Serbia overcome underdevelopment and reduce high unemployment, a consequence of numerous privatizations? Times of crisis also require crisis measures, thus in the last few years the concept of taking part in cooperatives has become more and more relevant. Unfortunately, when it comes to cooperatives, decision-makers in Serbia almost exclusively recognize agricultural cooperatives, and investment in this type of cooperatives is not even close to sufficient. There is no mention of other types of cooperatives such as: housing, energy, social, labour, ethical banks, etc. Not only are there no incentives for organizing in these types of cooperatives, but bureaucratization makes this type of association more difficult.

energy cooperatives

The capitalist system is fundamentally based on the exploitation of nature and the use of large quantities of fossil fuels. Even though in the beginning it was even more economically viable to use renewable energy sources, the owners of capital opted for the centralization brought by fossil fuels.[5] It was centralization and control over resources that played a big role when the decisions to use first coal and then oil were made. The use of fossil fuels enabled the relocation of production to cities where there was a surplus of labour in search of work, thus significantly reducing wages, accompanied by the deterioration of the environment due to the burning of coal.

In addition to their enormous energy potential, renewable energy sources open up space for decentralization of production, energy independence and equal distribution of energy ownership. Renewable energy sources are ideal for cooperatives. By decentralizing production, it is possible to open space for more people to decide together. The initial capital required to open an energy cooperative based on solar or wind energy is significantly less than the capital required to build a thermal power plant. Renewable energy sources pollute the environment much less than energy based on burning fossil fuels. Pollution is further reduced when renewable energy sources are controlled by a local cooperative that takes care of the well-being of the local community.

4   Carmen Quintana Cocalina and Cooperatives Europes team, The power of cooperation

5   Malm A., (2018) Fossil Capital, Fraktura Zagreb

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At a European level, energy cooperatives have become commonplace. Within the REScoop network of energy cooperatives based on renewable energy sources, there are about 1,900 member cooperatives, which count about 1,250,000 members.

At the regional level, there are several energy cooperatives. An interesting example is the Green Energy Cooperative (ZEZ),[6] which in collaboration with local communities organizes crowdfunding campaigns for projects to build solar power plants. Citizens' interest in investing in such projects is usually many times higher than the planned capacity of the power plant, although there is a limit on how much each individual can invest.

The Elektropionir[7] cooperative operates in Serbia. This energy cooperative, which currently has 14 members, is currently working on launching a pioneering prosumer solar power plant, training prosumers, preparing the ground for a power plant on the rooftop of a residential building, and advocating for giving households and energy cooperatives a better position in the legislative framework.

In order for something like this to come to life in Serbia, only a small encouragement is needed in the form of institutional support, above all, it is necessary to reduce the bureaucracy needed for the functioning of energy cooperatives. The adoption of the Decree on the criteria, conditions and manner of calculation of receivables and liabilities between customers-producers and suppliers should have significantly relieved the household as well as the housing community to produce and sell energy.

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6   https://www.zez.coop/

7   https://elektropionir.rs/

While the corporate economy is based on maximizing owner dividends and maximizing corporate profits, cooperatives' primary goal is to meet the needs and maximize service to their members and the community. If cooperatives operate unprofitably, there is no need for constant economic growth, expansion and accumulation of capital, as is the case with corporations.

cooperative for a sustainable society

Cooperatives remain an emancipatory tool that can help us to achieve a sustainable society that meets the needs of people, in harmony with nature and limited capacities of the environment. Sustainable green energy cooperatives based on democratic control over renewable energy sources are slowly emerging in the region. Due to the lack of jobs and poor working conditions, the cooperative turns out to be an alternative to an economy based on foreign direct investments, guided exclusively by the logic of profit.

While the corporate economy is based on maximizing owner dividends and maximizing corporate profits, cooperatives' primary goal is to meet the needs and maximize service to their members and the community. If cooperatives operate unprofitably, there is no need for constant economic growth, expansion and accumulation of capital, as is the case with corporations.

Directly democratic management structure leaves room for all members of the cooperative to make decisions. In the best case, the cooperative structure would unite consumers, producers, workers and other cooperative members, guided by the logic of mutual solidarity and assistance to meet the needs. The great advantage of the non-hierarchical democratic structure of cooperatives is that it encourages learning, exchange and experimentation, for the sake of achieving and preserving the common good. The local character of cooperatives would reduce the time and resources needed to produce and transport products and encourage the use of local goods.

It seems that time has come for cooperatives to regain their place in public consciousness as a way of organizing to make the system more egalitarian and sustainable.

just (another) transition?
the limitations and opportunities
of just ecological transition on the
European semi-periphery

Vedran Horvat

Since both the radicality and hope around the concept of 'sustainable development' have eroded and disappeared, if not fully capitulated, in recent years we have learned about new ideas (or at least old ideas, but new buzzwords), that originate from current debates, theoretical or political disputes and conflicts. The pluralist kaleidoscope of this new language embraces concepts of degrowth, the commons, climate justice, ecological transformation, ecological modernization, just transition; often with competing or colliding hegemonial aspirations to deliver 'one-size-fits-all' solutions (never admitted to). Yet, each of those adds new nuances of radical democracy or environmental justice to our comprehension of the current crisis. Indeed, these transformative narratives are supposed to be vibrant and mobilizing ideas instrumental in defining the framework and goals of collective political action for solving the climate crisis, where no one should be left behind. Still, if they fail to deliver, disappointments will be bitter and long-lasting. And future generations will not have as much patience to deal with this ignominious legacy. That is why we need to take them seriously and demand more from them. More than such ideas are offering now.

just transition – one of the pathways or the end station itself?

The concept of "just transition" has been introduced as an overarching framework to guide our transformation into green societies in a socially just and equitable way. With the development of this concept, labour unions and climate movements are bringing to the fore the need for systemic transformation. Just transition entails fundamental changes, not only in key production and consumption systems such as energy, transport, agriculture, and food but also infrastructure, societal values, and politics. Moreover, it emphasises the need for a global shift towards a humane and fair economic system, with healthy ecosystems, healthcare, public service, education, and culture at its heart.[1]

Already for more than a decade, trade unions as the main protagonists of "just transition" have been describing just transition as a "tool for a fast and fair shift to a low carbon and climate resilient society"[2]. They are demanding that "national plans on climate change … include just transition measures with a centrality of decent work and quality jobs. The sectoral and economic transformation we face is on a scale and within a time frame faster than any in human history. There is a real potential for stranded workers and stranded communities. Transparent planning that includes just transition measures will prevent fear,

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1 https://gef.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/GEF_just-transition-paper-EN-Final.pdf (cf: Heyen, Menzemer, Wolff, Bezneea & Williams, 2020).
2 https://www.ituc-csi.org/what-s-just-transition

opposition and inter-community and generational conflict. People need to see a future that allows them to understand that, notwithstanding the threats, there is both security and opportunity."[3]

As if the climate crisis were not a sufficiently difficult issue to address, 'just transition' ambitions make the goals even more difficult to reach. Ensuring decent jobs, improving social security, providing equal opportunities and reducing inequalities; all these ambitions are now coupled with the goal of reducing global warming to under 1.5° Celsius and keeping economic activities within the ecological limits and at a low level of carbon intensity. With just transition, the terrain of coping with the complexity of climate change is intertwined with the demand to reduce social inequalities and insecurity of jobs that depend on fossil fuels or other extractive industries. The bar of expectation is, we can see, moved significantly upwards.

With soaring rates of poverty and inequality worldwide, just transition will mean nothing without a fundamental reassessment of the global economic rationale and unjustifiable neoliberal and neo-colonial regulations. It is crucial that we debate and plan for a more profound transition, one "that could transform the economic and political structures that reproduce and exacerbate inequalities and power asymmetries. Such a radical transition requires a redefinition of economic prosperity and social well-being. At its heart will be the creation of employment that promotes labour rights and improves working conditions while also encompassing gender and racial equality, democratic participation and social justice"[4]. Again, with such high ambitions it is important to prevent risks of not being able to deliver any of the promises.

Just transition is often presented as one of the perspectives on how the ecological transition needs to be conducted, with a strong focus on the needs and interests of the workers, their working conditions, social

protection and the labour issue as such. Being ‹framed› as a transition, it requires time, which is conflicted with the urgency – and emergency – of the climate crisis. Ecologists often opt for urgency, workers for incremental transition. But also, if we were to aim to transcend this detrimental conflict between nature and labour, the transition can be interpreted as the final destination itself, as the ultimate completion of the task and transformation of a certain industry into an economic activity that operates within the ecological limits. That is to be seen.

> For the moment, just transition is just a bit of nice environmentalist jargon that landed in the region. It lacks protagonists strong enough to create conditions for gaining social and political power. It also lacks concrete scenarios for specific industries to be transformed or adapted in the specific time framework. These two are preconditions for just transition to be more than a vague concept, and more than just another transition.

contradictions such as time, growth...

Indeed, debating and planning is important, but so is implementing these measures. After the failure of COP 26 in Glasgow, only "immediate, drastic, unprecedented, annual emission cuts at the source"[5] can count as sufficient action to solve the climate crisis.

This is by no means an easy task. The climate emergency, which requires immediate and deep systemic measures, is placed in the same box as the need to ensure gradual transition for workers in affected industries so they aren't left behind. Since the 1970's and the Club of Rome, humanity has been warned that growth cannot be infinite and that the planet has boundaries; therefore, any action to limit 'business as usual' cannot afford to be merely quick; it has to be immediate! Half a century was sufficient for research and planning.

3 https://www.oecd.org/environment/cc/g20-climate/collapsecontents/Just-Transition-Centre-report-just-transition.pdf

4 United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) (2018). Mapping Just Transition(s) to a Low-Carbon World. Geneva: UNRISD. https://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentunid=9B3F4F10301092C7C12583530035C2A5&parentdoctype=book&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/9B3F4F10301092C7C12583530035C2A5/$file/Report---JTRC-2018.pdf

5 Greta Thunberg's statement after the conclusion of COP 26, 14 November 2021.

While politically we can agree that the green transition has to be fair and equal, at the same time this temporal contradiction is a difficult factor to handle within the very project of 'just transition'. Transition needs time, it is incremental, it requires adaptation. Transition is celebrating the process dimension, while climate urgency does not allow this luxury, the luxury of celebrating the process. The time for process has gone, now it's time to act. This tension requires to be resolved if the protagonists of just transition aim to prove that it is more than a vague buzzword in the linguistic universe of climate change.

Another tension, not less sensitive, is growth. Our economies and industries need to operate within the 1.5° Celsius framework. That means that companies and economies will not be able to continue to grow as they have so far. They will need to re-calibrate their successes to other values and measurements, thus abandoning growth curves as the benchmark of their success. As their productivism will be impacted, so will the consumption patterns, which will have to be significantly downscaled. Operating within ecological limits and under 1.5° Celsius, we also need to consume less. So far, consumption has been held as equivalent to wellbeing and prosperity, as was growth.

Just until recently 'the protagonists of just transition' were still claiming that "just transition towards a low carbon economy is possible, and can make climate action a driver for sustainable economic growth".[66] That is why the protagonists of just transition, primarily trade unions, are facing a huge challenge – how to integrate degrowth and reduced consumption in their balances of just transition. Just transition indeed can offer a different trajectory for many industries and economies, which will be exposed to severe reductions of their CO_2 emissions.

just transition on the European semi-periphery

However, such scenarios have not yet even been elaborated at the EU level, in schemes like the European Green Deal, that still suffer from the lack of recognition of 'growth' as the elephant in the room, or 'just transition' as one of the most important perspectives compatible with European Green Deal objectives. Mere reduction of the European Green Deal to policy-driven techno-optimism and re-direction of financial flows to clean(er) energy is still not delivering anything substantial on social inequalities, social protection or decent jobs.

On the other hand, on the European semi-periphery, particularly in Eastern or South-Eastern Europe, the notion of 'transition' tends to be irritating. First and foremost, it triggers the memories of the failures of the 30 year long 'transition' to market economy and democracy, witnessing in parallel severe financial crisis, austerity measures and downfall of the European democratic development with the ascent of the far right, the comeback of authoritarianism and further shrinking of democratic space. This transition was supposed to bring back the 'golden days' of prosperity and peace, but did not. Secondly, in this part of Europe, where climate change is not taken seriously enough by decision makers, where coal or nuclear phase-outs are constantly postponed and where the overall industrial sector has been devastated, the notion of the just transition does not resonate with the idea of hope. This has to change if we are to take just transition seriously.

What is the specific context in which just transition lands? First of all, it arrives in the context of a society which is completely hypnotized by the idea of growth, indefinite growth which will "bring us closer to wellbeing and prosperity". In many cases, trade unions share this perspective, without major doubts. Secondly, most of the few industries that have managed to survive, are fossil-fuel-intense industries. On the other hand, industries or sectors where a major shift could be made toward decarbonization (like modernizing the railways) are often at risk of privatization or 'captured' by clientelistic or political party networks. In

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6   https://www.ituc-csi.org/what-s-just-transition

these cases, public resources are heavily abused or misused to serve other interests, and therefore there is no real political power behind advocacy for change.

Just transition in this part of Europe predominantly would be related to the energy sector, where it would include transition to renewable energy, whether publicly or citizen-owned. It would imply huge investments into public infrastructure – in energy, water, transport and waste – and increased civic control over these governance regimes, thus ensuring the prioritization of workers' rights and social protection. Last but not least, economic industrial activities would need to be planned and executed within the 1.5° Celsius limits. Workers engaged in fossil fuel or other carbon-intense industries would have to be supported, particularly in regions and municipalities that predominantly depend on this industry. Also, business and new initiatives that aim to be based on low carbon or zero carbon intensity would have to be supported too, as supplementary employers for some of the workers.

For the moment, just transition is just a bit of nice environmentalist jargon that landed in the region. It lacks protagonists strong enough to create conditions for gaining social and political power. It also lacks concrete scenarios for specific industries to be transformed or adapted in the specific time framework. These two are preconditions for just transition to be more than a vague concept, and more than just another transition.

And we all lack time…

Another tension, not less sensitive, is growth. Our economies and industries need to operate within the 1.5° Celsius framework. That means that companies and economies will not be able to continue to grow as they have so far. They will need to re-calibrate their successes to other values and measurements, thus abandoning growth curves as the benchmark of their success. As their productivism will be impacted, so will the consumption patterns, which will have to be significantly downscaled. Operating within ecological limits and under 1.5° Celsius, we also need to consume less. So far, consumption has been held as equivalent to wellbeing and prosperity, as was growth.

populism and ecology
on the possibility of ecology becoming a politically relevant topic

Mariglen Demiri

These initiatives are only part of the protest culture, which primarily represented the great dissatisfaction in terms of the quality of life, but also in terms of the principles of governing the state. The dialectic of those principles has resulted in greater civic engagement towards the formation of the citizens' own consciousness when it comes to articulating dissatisfaction.

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The following text is an attempt to conceptually separate, as well as synthesize, the notions of populism and ecology in the context of Macedonian politics and society. The fact that in recent years we have been facing a crisis of representation in formal political institutions, including the Parliament, opens up space and creates a need for such alternative conceptual deliberations. What was inherited from the former government remains ignored and marginalized, thus stimulating the need to deal with it.

This analysis aims to point out possible scenarios in which populism is inextricable from political culture. These are scenarios that would reject regressive elements and integrate progressive and emancipatory ones. Here, the notion of politics is immanently related to Chantal Mouffe's notion of the "political" and the so-called participatory democracy. These two elements provide a transition phase towards emancipatory politics. On such a platform, ecology can be incorporated in terms of language, mobilization and the sphere of action in political movements.

This analysis understands the existing political-institutional structure of the state as a fusion of political bureaucracy and economic oligarchy. The former pass laws and enforce them for the latter, while the latter finance the former. In this regard, not only the well-being of the political and economic system but also that of the ecological system and the social culture towards the whole environment is ignored with the same attitude of exploitative unscrupulousness.

After the 2016 US election and the victory of Donald Trump, Nancy Fraser published an analysis in which she hinted at the end of the so-called "progressive neoliberalism" as a mix of truncated ideals of emancipation and lethal forms of financialization (Fraser 2017). This so-called mix heralded the era of Trump, as well as of other populist forms of creating political fronts. In the following analysis, we will also consider the right-wing tendencies of populist mobilization as antitheses of the left-wing emancipatory populist model. One of the key components in that panorama is the ecology, which necessarily needs to impose itself as an important part of the populist strategy of political mobilization and an option for a society in which it would be regarded as an unavoidable element.

populism

The colloquial use of populism in politics carries the qualities of a method of seduction, which politicians direct towards citizens/voters in the form of political promises and, more often than not, economic and social conveniences. The frequent characterization of political behaviour as populist solely because of some social transfers in the political domain sends populism in the direction of the definition that will be put forward below. Hence, populism often bears the mark of a negative phenomenon that undermines democratic standards in liberal democracy, understood through consensual practices and the motto "we will strike a deal".

This text considers populism as a necessary and subversive method of political communication and mobilization. If we take the views of contemporary proponents of populist thought such as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau as our starting point, we can freely define it as a discursive strategy for constructing a political relationship between "We" and "They", or between "Us" and "Them", i.e. us and our enemies who rule (Laclau 2017).

Populism, in that sense, is not an ideology, nor does it present substantive characteristics in relation to politics and ideology. It is a way of creating policy. This policy can vary and take different ideological forms, from the far left to the far right, but the formal construction is built on the anti-establishment and anti-elitist language of confrontation and rejection of consensus.

Although different authors like to think of this way of creating a political relationship through a liberal representative democracy, the basis for this creation of political confrontation through the subjective foundations of us-the-oppressed and you-the-oppressors is the street, i.e. the occupation of radical policies and movements. It presupposes that parliamentary democracy has dipped its toes into a repetition of crisis, as a dead end from the motive of creating everyday life.

This everyday life is also a discursive, i.e. linguistic and conscious reference that pulls the citizen into a passive political commitment. The citizen remains a follower of a political drama, in which they don't participate speculatively, with ideas for transformation, but only as energy storage that should supply and maintain it. Hence, the post-democratic declensions and the so-called crisis of representative democracy pave the way for the new approaches to politics and democracy (Crouch 2004). In this direction, sovereignty, as an instance of political rhetoric and an ontological position from which the canon of liberal democracy derives, is destroyed and fragmented, in an ontology of a boring and alienated political practice.

Thus, populism and its initiatives are a resistant social phenomenon aimed at suppressing the dense composition of the ruling elements. At the same time, they

affect and educate the imagination and the will in direct political action through the filters of different political relations and tropes. With this, the diluted and alienated sovereignty goes back to where it leaked from and was diluted, to the citizens. Hence the obsession with populist speech as an integral strategic position to represent the so-called abolished sovereignty of the nations.

the rise of the populist right

After the signing of the agreements with Greece and Bulgaria, what little anti-elitist energy that held up the structure of the opposition during that period of "shaking up" the political system as corrupt and kidnapped (captured state) disappeared. Although in the period between 2014 and 2016, the public debate through the protest movements "I Protest" (Протестирам) and "Colorful Revolution" (Шарена Револуција) was preoccupied with the institutional crisis and the crisis of representative democracy, there was still a partial thread that dealt with the segment of the economic alienation of the citizens. The leading narrative was that the state apparatus is in the hands of politicians who trample on all democratic principles at the expense of governance and economic growth. This "enrichment" is defined as a way of oligarchic manipulation, without any clear ideological markers of a capitalist and neoliberal paradigmatic connection.

The institutional barricade is still present. One of the reasons is the institutional and administrative authoritarianism and the hope for a promising solution without examining the surrounding and accompanying elements that have been politically and ideologically "enriched". Today, the inhabitants of the cities that organized the initiatives for clean air or demanded solutions for the ecological problems are still struggling with polluted air, polluted rivers and lakes, waste and lack of provided solutions, the opening of mines with catastrophic consequences and the institutional vortex in which the civic initiatives for their closure can be found, all the way to the climate crisis and the global warming that has not yet targeted the citizens of our country, but we are starting to feel the consequences in different ways.

The main creative dimension of the populist teaching is in fact the creation of the term "people", which has the sacred feature of being the bearer of sovereignty. The creation that carries the above-mentioned inspiration served only to corrupt the idea of the people and ran with the hare and the hounds. The attitude of the other political parties is similar – contenders for a populist strategy of establishing a new hegemony in order to suppress the existing language code. Fortunately or not, this has been quite unsuccessful, because they embed themselves in the tradition of the stories that have created the mythological bourgeois plot about the creation of the world, the state, the nation and sovereignty (as an understanding of democracy).

This explains the failure behind the attempt of the so-called Left party to become a bearer of change through the populist speech of mobilization with an emancipatory instinct, as opposed to simply awakening the frustrated and accumulated broken subjectivity due to the objective impressions on him/her as an unfulfilled historical promise. This is also what differentiates the authoritarian from the anti-authoritarian ambitions of the populist creative characteristic.

Thus, in recent years, after the agreements with Greece and Bulgaria, a "people" was created in Macedonia, that although "craving" for a new linguistic and political articulation of the political, could still find a basis for conflict in the issues belonging to the identity corpus of problems. This includes the nation and all its features. The appearance of this "people" is the appearance of a nation whose sovereignty comes from belonging to the ethnic group, which over the years has enjoyed the monopoly over the state through constitutional guarantees and privileges. This people is "adorned" with ethnic features and the equivalence between the ethnic, the political and the national.

The task that the right-wing populist strategy accepts and implements is quite clear, and above all understandable, but unjustifiable. The strength and presence of the nation-state and the national element, especially in the post-Yugoslav societies that are suffocating from a restless nationalism that goes through constant dramas and upheavals, and represents the Archimedean viewpoint of existence, is difficult to bypass. If we were to add to all this the historical

implications and passages on the hopes applied in the political sphere, and model the political, then the national reference is important, mobilizing, collective and historical. However, the opportunism of this approach cannot be excused, as it does not move the focus towards the stripping of the establishment together with all its rhetoric, attitude, history and imagination.

In this regard, the affects that remain as signals in the memory structure of the citizen's ideas exalt images and emotions, project hopes and ways of struggle. That fight, in recent years, has been a fight for the name, for Goce Delchev, for the identity, for the statehood as a monoethnic and monolithic category of organization, for the language and other symbols and characteristics of the nation. Many initiatives that have been active in the last ten years have fallen into this trap. Some of them were incorporated into the consensual political relationship. As representatives of non-governmental organizations and other informal bodies, they were involved in the creation of policies and laws, the basis of which is neoliberal in an economic and quasi-democratic in a political sense. The rest of them, accepting the role of the opposition, grafted onto political debates, adopting the above-mentioned scheme of political communication. In fact, until 2017, what was once considered the "people", as in those oppressed by the state and institutions and impoverished by the oligarchs who with state aid enjoy the privilege of building, employing and exploiting, is now the ethnic people whose state and its symbols have been taken away by internal and external enemies.

In both cases, the platform for cultivating general discontent through the expansion of democratic demands and democratic culture has been rejected. In the former, this happened as a result of the acceptance of partial commitments and the adoption of the quasi-reform motive with a dose of naivety and political lack of ideas. In the latter, it was a result of the strictly ethnic component, whose antagonism towards other ethnic elements as the Other in the society makes it undemocratic but also nonproductive and opportunistic.

ecology and the protests in Macedonia

In the last ten years, the protest culture in Macedonia has been modified from year to year; at times, the capacity for organizing protests improved, at others, it deteriorated. Although the protests over the years addressed specific issues and societal problems, behind that type of reasoning during all these years lay distrust in the state and the creation of resistance, driven by the flawed elements of representative democracy. In fact, all these years, the atmosphere of the dysfunction of the Parliament and the institutions of the state has been nurtured. The voters were played by the politicians, who in the run-up to the elections filled the space with elements of various confrontational chants, mostly with a nationalist and clash dimension, yet were in the end united by the element of "finding consensus" and joining a coalition. In this way, the Macedonian establishment functioned for years and decades, and this rhetoric became a relevant element of correspondence in the mapping of political criticism. Namely, the establishment says one thing before the elections and another after the elections once it is time for them to rule, at which point the legality tramples on the legitimacy of topics considered uninteresting in order to maintain the peace.

Although it seems that the political objections fuelled by various initiatives (wiretapps, poverty, arrests of journalists, the creation of the term "regime", etc.) were the main inspiration for the protests in the country, there still remains a domain that has been largely ignored, all kinds of attempts having been made to keep it separate from political relations. I am talking about ecology. Many protest initiatives in the last ten years have stemmed from various environmental issues. These initiatives had local and regional characteristics and were organized by the local population around the cities in the country.

These initiatives' grievances primarily concerned the lack of diligence of the local government in recognizing the problems, and then to their (lack of) solutions. Some initiatives also aimed higher, namely at the central government, the Parliament and the President of the country. This was the link between these movements and their objections to the authorities through the

principle of direct democracy. In this way, the crisis of representative democracy as such was addressed, as practised in the institutions of the state under the pretext that the institutions are primarily devoid of political relevance, decision-making and mobility. Only the administrative properties have been left to the institutions. On the other hand, democratic debate and mobilization took place in the streets, squares and micro-venues. This revitalized the urban morphology, giving it a sense of activity and vigour.

Protests of this kind were organized in Bitola under the "Bitola demands clean air" initiative, with several mass protests. The inhabitants of Bitola demanded that the municipality, but also the other levels of authority (the Parliament, the Government and the President of the country) take measures to deal with this disaster, which, according to the initiators, has deadly implications for the inhabitants of Bitola. Some of the protagonists' requirements have been met (measuring stations), but others such as filters for the smokestacks of the REK-Bitola thermal power plant were not, despite the fact that from 2017 onwards, both the Council and the post of mayor are held by individuals who were part of the opposition when the protests took place, some of whom actively participated in the protests (Milosheski 2014).

There were also protests in Tetovo regarding two problems related to ecology and the environment, the air pollution and the fires on the Tetovo landfill. Particularly significant in terms of mobilization and political diligence were the air pollution protests and their request for the state to order the Jugohrom factory to install filters (Samardziev 2014).

There were also protests in southeastern Macedonia, in cities such as Valandovo, Strumica, Gevgelija, etc, with organized resistance by the locals. In that region, concessions on several hundred hectares were awarded to "Sardich MC" and "Euromax", local companies created through foreign direct investment, both guided exclusively by market interests. In general, the destruction of the environment for the sake of profit, in the form of "leeching" of gold, silver and copper, was rejected out of hand by the citizens.

The activities did not consist only of protests but of other avenues provided by the system such as a referendum, participation in parliamentary debates and participation in local elections as well. In fact, a representative of the "Salvation for Valandovo" movement won the local elections in 2017 and became the mayor of the Municipality of Valandovo. Several times these organizations have announced their victory, and several times the institutional solution has been delayed in its path through the judiciary and remains unclear to this day. After the termination of the contract by the Government of Macedonia, the case was transferred to the Administrative Court (MKD 2019).

These initiatives are only part of the protest culture, which primarily represented the great dissatisfaction in terms of the quality of life, but also in terms of the principles of governing the state. The dialectic of those principles has resulted in greater civic engagement towards the formation of the citizens' own consciousness when it comes to articulating dissatisfaction. These protests were mainly held in the period between 2014 and 2016, but they exalted the protest culture that constantly created initiatives and organized reactions, initiatives and protests revolving around a variety of issues (from ecology, economics and justice, to education and urbanism).

This culture, although quite conspicuous and playful, has "pulled in its horns" somewhat over the last 2-3 years, although many of the problems that have been triggers for the emergence of these initiatives are still present, and similarly intense as they had been in the past. This is largely due to the participants' expectation of some kind of a proactiveness on the part of the political protagonists, the decision-making and implementing hierarchy.

What can be concluded from these experiences of the society is that the institutional obstructions are still present, one of the reasons being the institutional and administrative authoritarianism and the hope for a promising solution without examining the surrounding and accompanying elements that have been politically and ideologically "burdened". Today, we can say that the inhabitants of the cities that organized the initiatives for clean air or demanded solutions for the ecological problems are still struggling with polluted air, polluted rivers and lakes, waste and other unresolved issues, the opening of mines with catastrophic consequences and the institutional vortex in which the civic initiatives for their closure can be found,

all the way to the climate crisis and the global warming that has not yet affected the citizens of our country, but we are starting to feel the consequences in different ways.

the future of ecology in Macedonia?

One of the main questions posed by this analysis is: *Can ecology become politically relevant and if yes, then what are the ways in which we could achieve that?* This includes the question of What is the term for politics and democracy that we are going to choose. As previously explained, the method of the populist approach to creating political entities that will shape democratic diversity and the agonistic variant of participation through the notion of conflict is a method that seems close to our tradition of protest culture. This method also revolves around a global refrain of having had enough with the establishment and the way politics is treated, not just the implementation of the public will through institutional channels.

Although this may sound familiar, ecology (science of the home, the association with the world as my home, hence nature and all its properties) comes very close to economics (with its meaning of organizing the home); both terms are derived from the same word, the Ancient Greek word οἶκος, meaning home or dwelling. Associating one with a discipline that is linked to the home consequently links the home to the world, hence making it a universal component rich in many different perspectives, seemingly sufficient for a rigid and insufficiently explained relationship. Science of the home as an ecology, becomes economy as well, which in turn is a kind of discipline of the home that organizes the home and distributes its goods. In this regard, ecology has the function of protecting and promoting the interests of the home. Interests that do not consist only of human activities and culture, as many of them have a separate existence and ontological reality, which, in an aggressive relationship with man and human culture, the organic (and inorganic) world, reacts in the way we are witnessing. Namely, the climate crisis and global warming. The clash of ecology and economy does not mean rejecting one and accepting the other, but a need to redefine both, separately and in proportion.

Capitalist states treat ecology through neoliberal concepts and interests, offering a range of palliative strategies and solutions. These solutions neither reach the core of the problem, whose roots are deeper than it seems, nor do they contemplate the problem from the perspective of possible solutions. The profit-seeking economic interests of the free market transform the views and range of solutions within the same structure of values and political interventions. Market fundamentalism and profit logic also commodify the ways of finding solutions concerning the climate crisis, hampering quite a large amount of energy ready to deal with the causes, and not the consequences of this phenomenon. On the other hand, the peripheral capitalist provinces remain colonized by the hunger for profit and the political impotence of the political elites that parasitize the perfect Eastern European "oligarchy-bureaucracy" model.

Meanwhile, the exploitation of nature and the environment continues at the same pace as the agony of a society smothered by waste. Modern societies have turned into waste societies where the overproduction of objects that classify as garbage brings society, man, the state and the world to a consumer paradox and environmental intolerance. To own something, you must produce and consume, at the expense of free time and free life. This is where the clash is born and acquires its logical reality.

Furthermore, the second but equally important part are the negative externalities and the endangerment of the so-called commons. Here, the production and uncalculated effects on water, i.e. clean drinking water, on green areas and clean air, fertile soil, etc. contaminate the potential future of the Anthropocene. Many eco-democratic initiatives in the world, including Macedonia, move along this line. The (non)installation of filters on the smokestacks of "Jugohrom" and REK-Bitola, the soil and river contamination, pose a serious threat to the environment and biodiversity, whose implications make their way into society, the quality of life of people in it and the potential social interference.

Until now, the political left has generally claimed that the free market creates a bewildering hierarchical relationship between the extremely rich and the poor, employers and employees, masters and slaves, and that the collective principle through its political and legal mechanisms will at least do something to reduce the plunder, abolish the oppression and alienation and bring back man's dignity with all his virtues and flaws. As much as this notion reaffirms humanism (which in the past has been attacked for imposing unrealistic human fantasies), the attack on the exploitation of workers can also be applied to capitalism's exploitation of the environment. If a profit-oriented free-market economy, whose externalities (benefits) uncontrollably destroy the basic needs of the living world (air, water and land), cultivates such a superior attitude towards the environment and does not deal with redistribution, but only reproduction, then it becomes a double problem for man as part of society and for man as part of nature (the world).

Although it has become repetitive, the phrase that capitalism destroys not only man but also the Earth corresponds now more than ever to the situation on the ground. The growth of production also presages the increase in waste, and thus strategies for dealing with it – strategies that modern societies currently lack. Although so far, the exploitative attitude towards workers and workers' lives, especially in Third World countries, i.e. the global South and the phenomenon of cheap labour, has been a very persistent motive of anti-capitalist and anti-colonial rhetoric against the destructive attitude of Western democracies towards these countries, treating them as a reservoir of human bodies and human strength. Now, with the development of the climate crisis, it can be seen that Western societies, which enjoy a fairly comfortable relationship with social peace, are facing a decadent historical episode. The disintegration of those societies, not only ethically but ecologically as well, is a variant of their living status.

Therefore, what equates ecology and "class" as a political category on a qualitatively equivalent political level is the effects that one has on the other. Workers, the socially excluded poor and the marginalized, whose status of exclusion mainly stems from the socio-economic nature of exclusion, experience climate disasters in a much more serious and critical way. Hence, the protection of the environment means not only the protection

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Workers, the socially excluded poor and the marginalized, whose status of exclusion mainly stems from the socio-economic nature of exclusion, experience climate disasters in a much more serious and critical way. Hence, the protection of the environment means not only the protection of nature and its possible consequences on people but also the protection of the way we see ourselves in relation to the established culture of production and consumption. If this is how we get an insight into the social reality we participate in, then the tool for change will necessarily lead us to the political domain and political activity.

of nature and its possible effects on people but also the protection of the way we see ourselves in relation to the established culture of production and consumption. If this is how we get an insight into the social reality we participate in, then the tool for change will necessarily lead us to the political domain and political activity. This will allow us to easily map out our instances and the instances of the "enemy". Then we can easily create our own political allies who will see their own political existence through the humanized ways of production that will dislodge the Anthropocene from its current trajectory of "trampling everything on its way" – both people and the world.

the options for Macedonia

In this moment of pandemic crisis, the political scene has seen the rise of entities that accept populism as a method and strategy and introduce it in a crucial position. These options isolate and reject the emancipatory dimension as a mode of communication and building a resistant trajectory. Appetites for mobilization lead to the substantialization of the ethnic political identity paradigm. In the short-term, we can also anticipate the success of this populist strategy, presented above. This method does not accept the traditionally left-wing categorical analytical basis of the class, hence the danger of falling into a paradoxically non-emancipatory dilemma. Although the main opiate of rising against enemies stems from a motorical motivation, still the notion of "who are we" is defined in the variant of right-wing populist categories through the perspective of protecting the very structure that causes structural, and thus political, economic and environmental repressions.

For the last twenty years, a number of theorists have promoted green policies as crucial for modern liberal-democratic societies. What is important in this regard is to emphasize that the green transformation does not only entail innovation in a conceptual and paradigmatic sense. It is also a necessity that political platforms and political relations should play an obstructive coda in order to prolong the ecological catastrophe in sight. Hence, what might seem like a possible response to right-wing populism in the Macedonian context is precisely the environmental category as a (new) universal political

category of oppression. The substitution of "class", which can be made with this green transformation, is a viable and promising option.

Mouffe's recently published text points in this direction (Mouffe 2020). She analyses the possibility for a left populist paradigm through the integration of ecology. She calls this approach radical democracy, a possibility to unify the remaining "hidden" antagonisms, not just that of the workers and the bourgeoisie. The climate crisis is a corridor with many other doors, some open, some closed.

The strategy of environmental initiatives and associations in Macedonia should extend in this direction. Environmental issues and problems are often kept at a distance from political contexts. Ecology as a universal domain affects everyone, and the political actors of any government should start from here. Namely, the ruling elites are the ones who distance the ecological domain from the political one, giving it a supranatural dimension and thus freeing themselves from responsibility. That responsibility envisages confronting the economic elites and the oligarchy, which in fact view the environment, i.e. the living world, from a similar distance as they view the workers in their companies. Both the workers and the environment are deprived of their status as entities to which certain rights pertain. People (as workers) can organize and protest, while nature acts through the climate crisis. The cries of this fusion in our country, which have been heard and muffled for years, will slowly get an even more organized and more virulent attack.

What seems promising in the near future is the people-led Green Deal, which opens a new door in activism and provides an opportunity for a new collaboration between environmentalists and political activists from all generations and regions of Macedonia (JD Farrugia, Simona Getova 2020). Apart from the open calls for participation with offers and views, this initiative has the opportunity to add a political and economic colour to the logic of dealing with the environmental crisis and all crises of this nature. An important component of this initiative is that it places the (circular) economy among the most important elements for the strategic organization of this agreement. What remains is public communication and the potential for mobilization that need to be

developed, along with the emancipatory link of information transfer and knowledge technology. The current hegemonic communication and epistemological paradigm, in which ecology and politics have intervened, has taken place through the concept and practice of what is financially viable and cost-effective. In that direction, it is necessary to make a shift in this relationship based on solidarity and inclusion, both in the direction of a new hegemonic organization of society and culture and in the practical and activist perspective.

In this way, we can dilute the ethnic and ethno-nationalist populist link and create a new mobilizing perspective, harnessed in the solid agonistic arena of the political, as the core of politics and democracy.

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the anti-environmentalism of capitalism as the dominant system of contemporary production of social life

Vladimir Lay

introductory remarks

The character and environmental impact of modern capitalism means it is destructive to the global environment, both in the short run and in the long run. The stubborn insistence on continuing the broad-based practice of fossil-fuel-driven economy (coal, oil, gas) has been increasing the planet Earth's temperatures from decade to decade, bringing along with it many future potential chain-reactions of ills and harms to the biosphere / ecosphere of the modern world.

What makes the globally-dominant ruling socio-economic system called capitalism an essentially anti-environmental, anti-environmental system of production of social life, and why? The answer is: what is at work here is a capitalist orientation towards secure, fossil energy sources-based work and profit at all costs, but also towards sluggishness and thrift when it comes to pro-environmental innovative developmental solutions and investments in industry, transport, agriculture, construction and everyday life.

Innovative knowledge and practice based on natural fundaments (the energy of water, wind energy, sun energy, tidal energy etc.) that do not pollute the Earth's atmosphere with greenhouse gasses are here, but they are still under-represented. Either way, in Jean-Marc Jancovici's words, the slide may be slow, but the main aim is to ***"free economics from carbon"***.[1]

Permanently securing the health of our common home requires a new mode of thinking, innovative knowledge, new political decisions and activities, new investments in pro-environmental social and technological solutions. This new approach and mode already exist in the imagination and practices of conduct and action among a relatively small, innovation-oriented number of people, state and regional administrations and companies, but they are still very far from widespread.

Our common home, our house, the planet called Earth, increasingly suffers environmentally from such a mode of human activity. The contemporary capitalist economy no longer efficiently governs our common home. It is systematically, if still not sufficiently tangibly then nevertheless "successfully", destroying it.[2]

A path and a need are opening ahead of us for a new fundamental approach and model, system, a way of managing planet Earth, the planetary environment, our common home. There is no doubt that this kind of management must be characterised by care for the society in its entirety *(societas* in Latin), for the "living world" overall; that is, it must be social, socialised.

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[1] An engineer by profession, Jean-Marc Jancovici is the head of The Shift Project think-tank. More on https://jancovici.com/en/

[2] In 2014, the Canadian author Naomi Klein has published *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate;* the book has been available in Croatian since 2015, published by v.b.z. studio, Zagreb.

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Old-fashioned private business, uninterested in the environmental, cannot be the "champion" of change in a globally pro-environmental direction. Doubtlessly, it cannot be successful if it is going to be just as narrowly profiteering / capitalist as it has ever been, or in a perhaps slightly modified way.

A new model and approach to producing a radically pro-environmental overall social life of the human race on planet Earth must increasingly guide itself by the common good, and be subordinate to the additional goal of producing a healthy environmental future. Another way to put it could be thus: it must be "socialist", but certainly not in the historically survived, uniform, statist-authoritarian way.

Permanently securing the health of our common home requires a new mode of thinking, innovative knowledge, new political decisions and activities, new investments in pro-environmental social and technological solutions. This new approach and mode already exist in the imagination and practices of conduct and action among a relatively small, innovation-oriented number of people, state and regional administrations and companies, but they are still very far from widespread.

1. the ancient semantic link between the concepts of "environment" and "ecology", and the concept of "the economy"

Both today and since ancient times, economy and ecology have shared a close conceptual link. These two words' semantics in ancient Greece already speaks to this. Let us remind ourselves of the meaning of the concepts, "oikos, oikos logos, oikonomia".[3]

Thus, the translated concepts can be described in a little more detail as: oikos = our common home, house; oikos logos = the science of our common home, house; oikonomia = the management of our common home, house.

Therefore, the root of these two concepts is "oikos", the environment as our home, our common house. Hence, these two concepts have been closely related since ancient times. Today, in an age of different social structures and technology of living,

these two concepts have cleaved apart, and people nowadays regard them as concepts and activities that are different in meaning, even opposite.

Today, their inner contemporary substances and features mean that "economy" and "ecology" no longer go hand in hand, either semantically or practically. Although it has gained in prestige and people's interest in it has grown, ecology still lacks decisive social and political power. Carbon economy is stronger, it is "the boss" in this situation.

2. the ways and methods the health of the global environment on planet Earth is destroyed[4]

A short list of these ways and methods would be as follows:

- climate change: planetary and local consequences – floods, wildfires, threats to people's health and a number of other consequences;
- in transportation, a pronounced domination of internal combustion engines, contributing to the accumulation of greenhouse gasses in the Earth's atmosphere and the rise in the negative effects of this source creating the "greenhouse" effect;
- the devastation, destruction and impoverishment of the planetary biosphere: widespread logging and shrinking of green areas around the world;
- endangerment of habitats and extinction of living species on land and at sea;
- pollution of waterways and seas / depletion and pollution of natural water sources around the planet;
- systematic pollution of the air that we breath in numerous urban and industrial locations around the planet;
- permanent pollution of the soil necessary to produce food and maintain normal living conditions;
- increase in diseases resulting from the polluted environment.

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3   In (ancient) Greek: oikos = house, home; oikos logos = "home reason", meaning more broadly = science of the house, the home; oikonomia = economics.

4   Numerical data, as a document and an argument in the article, will not be cited here due to space limitations. The data is available on the Internet.

Without an increase in, and repetition of, "slaps" to the health, comfort and survival of humans, their behaviour as it is today will not significantly change. Someone who repeatedly gets "walloped" wishes that they no longer would. Second: the feeling and struggle for socio-environmental justice might also forcefully "feed" the energy of change towards a pro-environmental re-ordering of life on planet Earth. Basically, justice and fairness are crucial to the "green transition". This transition aims for the rights to security, health, and the protection of our environment. These rights are indeed originally collective human rights, that is, the rights of all living beings.

The most devious form of aggression against the planet Earth, our common house, comes from the process of climate change caused by the accumulation of greenhouse gasses in our atmosphere. The "greenhouse effect" is working non-stop, average temperatures have been gradually rising decade in decade out, and there is no sign that this dangerous trend might change.

Experts in ecology and meteorology claim that we cannot allow ourselves any further increases in the greenhouse effect and in CO_2 emissions. The last threshold, the balanced level of CO_2 of 380 parts per million, was crossed back in 2004. In 2021, right now – the concentration of carbon dioxide has reached 417 ppm!

In its 6th report, published in August this year, 2021, the UN's International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that, absent reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, the average global temperature will increase by 1.5 degrees Celsius relatively quickly.

The celebrated Paris Climate Agreement, adopted in 2015 after the organisation put in a great deal of effort, envisaged a series of measures and actions to be taken by countries in the world today that are meant to keep warming below two degrees Celsius, while striving to limit the temperature rise to 1.5 degrees

Today, only 6 years later, it is clear that countries around the world failed to do so. They have proven capable of understanding, agreeing and promising, but not fulfilling the promise by initiating new practices, technologies and practical interests and goals for the business world, for profits. Hence, the levels of carbon dioxide being released into the Earth's atmosphere has been systematically, gradually yet persistently, rising in the production, industry, service, transport and habitation systems of the majority of the countries of the world.

Incidentally, a new science has emerged to address the overall global situation – collapsology! This concept and approach has been advocated by several authors, whose shared basic point is the claim about the " future global collapse".[5] Today we are "visited" by the ever more frequent individual environmental calamities. When their number multiplies and they combine into "clusters of trouble", we are talking about collapse, about the "breakdown in the system" of organising survival the way it had functioned so far.

Our personal impression is that such dramatic notions like "collapse" and similar draw attention, but for most "normal" people, especially non-experts, professional thinking beings do not bring hope, and hence neither the will to change (one's own) behaviour. Resignation, an attitude that "nothing can be done", will be the more frequent form of reaction to such terms.

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5   On collapsology, see initially Pablo Servigne. Disappointed with the basic principles of conventional ecology, Servigne is the most prominent member of the young generation of thinkers, scholars and activists calling themselves – not without irony – collapsologists. His first book, co-authored by Raphaël Stevens, *How Everything Can Collapse: A Manual for our Times* (*Comment tout peut s'effondrer: petit manuel de collapsologie à l'usage des générations présentes*), a bestseller published in 2015, puts forward a diagnosis of our "thermal-industrial" civilisation and a prognosis of its imminent collapse.

3. changing today's fundamentally capitalist concept of producing planetary social life towards a mode of such production that is highly aware – societally, socially and environmentally

Capitalism with a "carbon economy" is destroying the environment. The erstwhile practices of maintaining healthy environmental living conditions are largely fruitless. There are local bright examples of transition to non-fossil energy and economy, but these still do not suffice for a "revolution".

There are a myriad of theories and stories, books and articles about sustainable development, beginning with the classic – "Our Common Future", released in 1987, initially under the title, "The Brundtland Report".[6]

Furthermore, stories and writing about "de-growth" are a 21st century intellectual novelty, reading material for intellectuals that does not produce substantial change in practice and in the behaviour of people and social and production systems.

The climate deal signed in 2015 and the agreement between the signatory states to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have not been realised. They have stimulated reflection and dialogue, but that has been the extent of their achievements.

More or less everything has boiled down to words. And actions – where are they, when will they follow?! A change in behaviour is gradually becoming necessary to bare survival.

Key question: who, how, when and where will more forcefully push the modern "fossil-oriented" capitalism towards change? For how long will naked financial profit and harmful penny-pinching on "non-fossil" innovations will rule and dominate today's world on this planet Earth? A new kind of action is needed, a new *praxis*, not a mountain of new words, however smart.

Who can lead such a new kind of action, at least theoretically? For one, these could be smart states focussed on pro-environmental development and future production; educated, capable and ambitious public administrations with a new kind of strong constitutional powers. Here, we understand those who govern a country, and a set of policies pursued by a country, as the force that organises a society's life in a new, pro-environmental way, in a new era of economy wholly freed from carbon.

What may not be allowed to go missing is support from the interested and aware citizens, a socially progressively organised Citizenry. In passing, let us remind that it is the citizens who elect political officials, the people who can become and be the "leaders" of this gradual yet great pro-environmental shift.

If these actors, public administrations and the citizenry, are not going to be the subjects of developmental transformation in an emphatically pro-environmental direction – who is?! Aliens, if they exist, have not yet put their name in the hat.

6   *Our Common Future*, 1987, Oxford Press, U.K. and UN.

concluding remarks

The environmental health of both the planetary and the various local environments will continue to deteriorate for a certain number of years, if not decades. The "green transition" has progressed both as a value, an attitude and practice. Today, the environmental awareness of societies and states, of those in power and citizens, is still on average insufficient for more significant change at the global level, while relatively many examples have already accumulated of local changes towards "greening development".

The threats to the environmental bases of life caused by fundamentally capitalist practices will increase to dramatic, but also instructive levels. But there is hope. The human race has shown many times that it is not stupid, that it is able to change the circumstances and modes of its social life for the better.

We can observe two fundamental, purely human, socio-psychological motivators of change towards pro-environmental behaviour by individuals, groups, societies, and ultimately the global system, over the years and decades to come.

The first is: it seems to us that without an increase in, and repetition of, "slaps" to the health, comfort and survival of humans, their behaviour as it is today will not significantly change. Someone who repeatedly gets "walloped" wishes that they no longer would.

The second is: the feeling and struggle for socio-environmental justice might also forcefully "feed" the energy of change towards a pro-environmental re-ordering of life on planet Earth. Basically, justice and fairness are crucial to the "green transition". This transition aims for the rights to security, health, and the protection of our environment. These rights are indeed originally collective human rights, that is, the rights of all living beings.

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In about ten years, around 2031, we shall write a sequel to this article. In this article, at this moment, in August 2021, we have exhausted this topic. ▮▮

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