

SURVEY

on biodiversity v. energy and extractive projects



Name of country: **Montenegro**

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- 1. Is there a conflict between biodiversity conservation and energy and extractive industries in your country? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples of investments that demonstrate this conflict.**

Yes, there is. Below are the biggest cases:

The first example:

There is a thermal power plant in Pljevlja, a city in the north of Montenegro, which caused Pljevlja being one of the most polluted cities in Europe. The thermal power plant has over thirty years old technology. It uses coal from Pljevlja for electricity production. There is a mining company in the city.

At the end of the last year, the thermal power plant spent the allowed number of working hours out of 20,000 hours, which is approved by the European Energy Community. Since then, it has worked violating the approval of the European Energy Community.

The ecological reconstruction of the Pljevlja Thermal Power Plant has been delayed for a year (a contract was signed, but the reconstruction has not begun yet). The Chinese company DEC International, which got the job, is supposed to make the main project, but the works are delayed. It is not known when the works could start. Also, there is no guarantee that the European standards about permissible emissions of harmful gases will be met.

The civil sector points out that the ecological reconstruction is in vain.

Earlier, the Montenegrin authorities announced that the Pljevlja Thermal Power Plant will be operational till 2050, although a shorter deadline is indicated from the European Union. Montenegro is a candidate for membership in the European Union. In the meantime, the new Government of Montenegro has estimated that the Thermal Power Plant could operate till 2030.

A particular problem is that the Thermal Power Plant provides a third of the country's electricity. It also provides employment in Pljevlja, together with the mining company. Citizens are afraid of losing their jobs. The Government of Montenegro is not currently offering a green agenda plan for Pljevlja.

It is important to know that there is a coal and zinc mine in Pljevlja, which has a huge impact on the environment, i.e., the environment near the mine is completely poisoned, and the locals are moving out of that area.

The second example:

The State Electrical Power Company has announced the construction of a hydroelectric power plant on the Komarnica River that runs through a rare natural gem - the Nevidio Canyon, which is a tourist attraction. The economic viability of the investment and, whether it will have the smallest impact on the natural environment, is not confirmed by the project.

The civil activists point out that the area has not been explored and it is not known which plant and animal species will be destroyed by the construction of the hydroelectric power plant. They believe that the potential investment would have a huge impact on that valuable area and the Komarnica River.

The third example:

Oil and gas exploration has been in progress on a part of Montenegrin coast for several years. The result of the research on potential sites is expected at the beginning of next year.

Montenegro is the country that generates the largest amount of income from tourism. Civil activists and part of the public believe that oil and gas production would affect the decline of tourism and the arrival of tourists in the country. Also, the impact on the marine and underwater world, where the works have been performed, is not known. A huge potential impact on the sea world, in the case of oil or gas production, is being estimated. Also, Montenegro as a state does not have the capacity to provide emergency management, in the case of oil hazards or gas production.

2. Is there a public attention towards the said conflicts? Is there public media coverage of the said conflicts? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples of investments that demonstrate this conflict.

There is public attention regarding the said conflicts. The media also reports about the biggest cases. However, it should be noted that Montenegrin society is very poor (the country is eroded by corruption, nepotism and illegality, one party ruled in the past 30 years, and the result is a very small number of rich and huge number of poor people), so citizens are more focused on how to provide their living and are less familiar with environmental issues.

At the same time, the question is how much reliable and timely information on environmental conflicts reach citizens. Also, the citizens of Montenegro are not sufficiently aware of the importance of environmental protection and these issues are always less important than the need for employment. For example, citizens have high hopes that oil or gas will be found in the Montenegrin submarine, because they think that it will bring wealth to all citizens. However, they are not aware of the number of conflicts in the area it can cause and that Montenegro, as a state, has almost no capacity to manage such conflicts.

It should be pointed out that the media mostly cover the biggest cases, but the initiative mostly does not come from them, but from decision makers, civil activists, interested citizens ...

3. Are there active civil society organizations working for the protection of biodiversity in your country? Do they implement actions against energy and extractive industry projects that are in conflict with biodiversity conservation? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples.

There are NGOs working for the protection of biodiversity and action is being taken against projects in energetics and oil and gas exploration. Thanks to the civil sector, a lot of information about harmful effects and potential illegalities has been made public. However, in previous years, decision-makers

and government officials largely ignored the demands of civil society activists and the remarks they submitted and presented about large investment projects with huge environmental impacts.

Several NGOs are intensively dealing with the issue of the Pljevlja Thermal Power Plant. Several NGOs pointed to the potential impact of building a hydro power plant on the Komarnica River. A number of NGOs and civil society activists point to the potential dangers due to a possible oil and gas exploitation project in the country.

4. What would these active NGOs need in order to improve their work against energy and extractive industry projects that are in conflict with biodiversity conservation? What kind of support (e.g., funding, networking, training, joint actions, joint legal cases, scientific support in analysing environmental assessment reports, etc.) would these NGOs require for their work?

First of all, funding and projects, which will be largely based on strong promotional campaigns, are needed, so that messages about the impact on the environment and the need to protect living space reach the great number of citizens.

Specific expertise and experience from the neighbouring countries and Europe are needed, in order to help the Montenegrin civil sector in applying good examples from comparative practice, but also to strengthen their role before domestic authorities and decision makers.

For the same reason, as well as gaining additional knowledge and experience, possible common legal cases and networking are also important.

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