

**SUBJECT TITLE: REQUESTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
A SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY AND PUBLIC POLICY REFORM**

To whom it may concern,

concerned about the challenges posed by the current epidemiological situation caused by the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), and in order to speed up the recovery and progress of our society, we hereby address you as a team of professionals and citizens primarily engaged in environmental protection with the intention to draw attention to the necessary measures and changes in the areas of our activities.

Our vision is of a just society that acts responsibly in accordance with nature and our work over the past 20 years has been supported through cooperation with numerous international networks and environmental organizations.

As Center for Environment is a non-profit and non-partisan association that advocates changes within the society by influencing relevant policies and public awareness of the environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina and internationally, we find it extremely important for our organisation to communicate with you our recommendations and demands for a faster and more sustainable recovery and mitigation of the consequences caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic from the aspect of environmental protection. We are sending this letter together with other organizations from BiH with which we cooperate through the Eko-BiH network.

We believe this situation gives humanity an opportunity to evaluate how our past and current actions have led to a destructive exploitation of the planet's limited resources. It is necessary to learn lessons from this crisis that will prepare us for the upcoming challenges, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity and fertile soil, reduction of water supplies, etc. The future of this country must rely on an economy that will be more fair and less destructive for the planet and our communities.

In solidarity with the society and nature affected by the pandemic, we present our recommendations and requirements as follows:

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT, URBAN MOBILITY AND PUBLIC SPACES

When it comes to the development of traffic infrastructure and transport models, road motor traffic development has traditionally been highly prioritised in BiH. While developed countries turn to development and modernization of railway traffic for the transport of goods and passengers, we are still planning a network of economically unfeasible highways for which we are unjustifiably indebted. Although only the Vc highway is partially profitable, it is unreasonable to rush towards the construction of an unnecessary network of highways that will soon have no one to use it, due to the high degree of migration, which is at least partly, a result of the bad decision making. Although we understand the need to modernize the road network, we believe that there is an urgent need to enter into the implementation of modernization and construction of a well thought-out railway infrastructure, which would connect the cities of BiH with each other, as well as BiH with neighboring countries, and thusly the whole continent.

Cities must step forward in terms of developing urban mobility to make transportation more efficient and sustainable, so that over time the car can be “kicked out” of urban areas, so a system of public transport, urban bicycles, pedestrian zones without motor vehicles, as well as cycling infrastructure could be developed. Governments must encourage cities and municipalities to develop sustainable urban mobility plans and subsidize purchase of bicycles and electric bicycles for their citizens. There is an urgent need to give more space to non-motorized traffic in urban areas in order to maintain the psycho-physical health of the population, which would reduce the pressure on the health system, the economy, and public space, while increasing the quality of life of citizens.

Some of the urgent measures that will enable faster recovery from this specific crisis, but also, lay the foundation for the improvement of non-motorized traffic in the coming period are:

- widening of sidewalks - if the pedestrian paths are too narrow (and further narrowed by numerous waste bins and/or terraces of cafes), it is necessary to expand them to a part of the road surface with special markings on them;
- establishment of bicycle lanes on multi-lane roads (“Pop Up Bike Lanes” as already established in Budapest and Berlin, for example) that enable safer movement and encourage new cyclists to find safe routes through the city;
- relocation of bicycle traffic to roads in streets too narrow for separated traffic (the presence of a larger number of cyclists on the road should be emphasized by additional signalization and speed limits for cars) and turning insufficiently wide streets into one-way in accordance with analysis and scientifically based urban mobility planning;
- establishment of streets for bicycles and pedestrian traffic or calm traffic zones: conversion of selected roads into zones with significantly reduced motorized traffic; Temporary traffic calming also helps relieve parks from the pressure of large numbers of people by providing them alternative spaces for outdoors recreation and socializing, and allows them to move without the risk of infection;
- speed reduction in most residential and non-transit streets to 30km/h and 50km/h in the rest of the city;
- introduction/expansion of networks of stations of bike-sharing systems;
- expansion of bicycle parking networks in all locations of public importance, but also in streets with a larger number of residential units and private business facilities;
- spatial planning in accordance with the principles of sustainable development, instead of complying with investor requirements.

Public spaces in urban and peri-urban areas, whether they are parks and green areas, urban gardens or nearby forests, should be preserved from urbanization and occupation of space, which would allow citizens to use these spaces more actively to improve their health. Preservation of public and green areas is crucial, not only of the psychophysical health of the population, but also because of the practical reduction of negative impacts brought upon by the climate crisis, air pollution, floods and torrents, and other extreme phenomena such as the pandemic itself.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

In order to create a stable, financially sound as well as a clean energy system in BiH, an energy transition is unavoidable. Such a transition would mean parting ways with fossil fuels such as coal, but safeguarding our rivers and other natural resources. Additionally, we are obliged by several international treaties, including our European Union accession, to significantly lower our GHG emissions. It is for these reasons that an intensive decarbonisation of the energy sector and a shift to renewables, has to be a question of utmost priority for our stakeholders in the upcoming decade.

A series of researches and papers shows that such an energy transition is the most economically feasible and rewarding scenario for BiH as well as other countries, especially if it is done sooner rather than later. The current electrical energy system imposes a huge burden for both budgets of the state and its citizens' who are partly financing dirty projects, which are harming both their environment and their quality of life.

In order to create a reliable, accessible, clean and sustainable energy and economic system, we suggest:

- A gradual and well planned termination of subsidies which use public budgets and citizens' money which is awarded to the coal sector, as well as termination of ungrounded state/entity warranties for energy projects which are not in line with a long-term decarbonisation plan and BiHs international obligations;
- A complete stop to new coal thermal power plants and blocks, with simultaneous turnaround towards energy efficiency and renewables;
- A transparent and participative revision, adaptation and implementation of an energy strategy which entails a scenario of complete decarbonisation of the energy system by 2050. the latest, with a strong focus on wind and solar energy, smart grids, citizens energy and energy storage;
- Reform of incentive policies for all hydro energy units in BiH;
- Introduction of a moratorium on all new hydro energy projects, until a revised energy strategy is adapted, throughout the entire territory of BiH;
- To put a stop to signing of new concession contracts for water resource exploitation in the energy sector, while terminating existing ones where obligations spanning from the concession contract have not been met;
- A detailed economic analysis of the profitability of the coal mines, which would determine all direct and indirect costs of coal production, accumulated losses and debts of the mine, as well as a plan for care and retraining of miners;
- Creation of a Fund for a just energy transition, and divestment from harmful energy projects, in accordance with a detailed strategy made in a transparent manner, for a gradual socio-economic transformation, which will enable the creation of long-term green jobs and help vulnerable local communities in creating and developing alternative economic activities;
- Strong promotion and support of the process of democratization and decentralization of energy production by enabling and developing civic energy initiatives: such as self-production, collective self-production and energy cooperatives, and through the introduction of legal changes that will make this possible throughout the country, as well as providing financial assistance to citizens for the implementation of civil energy projects, including direct incentives (from the RES fee) and tax relief.

We believe that in the current policy of hidden and direct subsidies to harmful energy projects, significant funds are allocated that can be redirected to where they are currently most needed. These funds are unjustifiably failing to be used in ensuring a fair energy transition of our society, which should in the future legitimately and completely soberly participate in the creation and implementation of public policies that have or may have an impact on the environment.

BIODIVERSITY AND PROTECTED AREAS

The coronavirus pandemic has shown us the importance of nature, green spaces, forests and other ecosystems. In this new reality human population turned to nature in search of security and peace. It is important to work on preserving biodiversity since only by preserving the natural balance can we prevent phenomena similar to the spread of the harmful coronavirus. At the same time, nature offers solutions to problems of modern society such as extreme droughts, diseases and many others to which we become more exposed with each new extinct species and ecosystem destroyed.

The emergence of a new coronavirus, which have had a wild species as a host, has shown that due to the destruction of wild species and habitat disturbance, we have led some microorganisms to find a new host (in the case of human coronavirus) which can ultimately result in epidemics, pandemics and other negative effects on the health of humans and other species. We want our society to take a lead in biodiversity conservation because the wealth of species that inhabits the space of our country deserves to be recognised as our greatest wealth. To achieve greater resilience to future threats, we must aim to:

- conservation and improvement of natural habitats and biodiversity through systematic support to research and nature protection accompanied by development of funds that would enable these activities;
- ensuring ecological connectivity of ecosystems and habitats through development of ecological networks, and integrating the principles of biodiversity conservation into spatial planning and infrastructure development;
- responsible attitude towards natural resources, which are often seen only as a resource for exploitation (rivers, forests). It is important to preserve our forests, waters and wild rivers as well as all other ecosystems;
- support for multifunctional forest management because the production function of forests is only one segment of the set of functions that our forests provide us with. The protective and social role of forests should not be neglected because they provide services of immeasurable values for our society, such as oxygen production, water filtration, soil conservation, biodiversity and many others;
- more protected areas and clear and protocol-based conservation, management of protected areas, species and specific habitats;
- stronger institutional and financial support for the management of existing protected areas, in order to ensure their primary function - nature protection;
- developing a system of monitoring and effective penalty for poaching, poisoning and abuse of wild animals, illegal logging, man-made fires and other activities that act to a detriment of biodiversity;
- harmonization of B&H legislation with EU directives and in compliance with international agreements in the field of biodiversity protection;
- harmonization of legislation related to the field of biodiversity and harmonization at all levels of government and with other sectoral legislation in order to more effectively protect biodiversity.

We want our society to recognize the importance of preserving ecosystems - which are basic for the survival of our and other species. Importance of nature we have recognized so many times in crises, natural disasters or after permanent loss of certain natural resources.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Modern agriculture is considered as one of the biggest polluters of the environment, and the current crisis caused by the pandemic has clearly shown how important it is to turn to sustainable food production in local communities, strengthening the competitiveness of domestic producers and reduce dependence on imports. The message of science is clear: we urgently need to switch to nature-friendly agriculture if we want long-term food security, biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation. In order to produce sufficient quantities of quality and healthy food, while preserving natural resources, it is necessary to invest in:

- introduction of new and increase of existing subsidies for the establishment and certification of organic agricultural production, with mandatory education of agricultural producers;
- provide subsidies for labeling of domestic products that do not contain genetically modified organisms (GMOs);
- launch a program of regular monitoring of the glyphosate use and its presence in human food, animal feed and environment, with special emphasis on water bodies;
- support for small family farms in the form of partial funds return for investments in organic agricultural production;
- support for the strategy "From farm to fork" as a condition for EU integration and the way of production of safe food with maximum preservation of the environment;
- support for the development of rural tourism;
- support for the creation of green gardens with the aim of food production in urban areas;
- support for branding of products with eco-label and geographical origin;
- linking agricultural production and food industry through contracting the purchase of domestic agricultural products;
- improving energy efficiency in agriculture.

In addition to air pollution that kills over 3300 citizens of BiH every year, the coronavirus pandemic has already taken numerous lives, which is its biggest and heaviest impact on our society. It is still unclear how the economy will develop and what is the time frame for its recovery, what kind of expertise is necessary to achieve it, and many other issues that weigh on every citizen. In this destabilized and uncertain situation for the citizens, the legal pillar of our society is partially shaken and it takes time for it to start fully functioning again through all its mechanisms, which is the basic essence of its existence. We must not continue the bad practice that makes the democratic system significantly weakened.

Through our work, we are improving the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in BiH, which is an international agreement that establishes environmental rights as a reliable basis for involving citizens in environmental policies and confirms our obligations to future generations, through all three pillars. Through this activity we strive to improve public participation in decision making, and therefore insist on:

- more transparent processes and better public participation in decision-making;
- timely public access;
- free access to information;
- faster and fairer access to justice, ie shorter-term processes before the judiciary when it comes to environmental protection court processes;
- more diligent work of inspections, strict punishment of polluters and cooperation of institutions with citizens.

Additionally, it is important to have a constructive dialogue with the civil sector, which possesses knowledge and experience in the field of environmental protection, and can contribute to the strengthening and joint dissemination of good practices and experience across European countries. Civil society organizations have over time selflessly offered their experiences and knowledge with the aim of preserving natural resources that must not be brought to the brink of destruction by human activity. We emphasize that a much more significant investment in the future of our country is a must, especially in education and science. Only highly educated and professionally evolved staff can create modern, relevant and long-term economically and environmentally sustainable branches of the economy.

Due to the disturbed environment and all of the above, we demand an urgent meeting from you in order to find solutions to the challenges ahead.

We expect that this letter will encourage you to accept the necessary changes dictated by the challenging times we are in, and that you will adopt our demands. In order to overcome the current crisis as easy as possible, we kindly greet you and emphasize that we are ready for a constructive discussion and dialogue to encourage a sustainable recovery of our society.

This letter was supported and signed by the following organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- Udruženje građana Ekološki pokret "Eko Maglaj" Maglaj
- WWF Adria
- Udruga "Dinarica" Mostar
- LIR Evolucija, Banja Luka
- Ekološko udruženje Eko Put, Bijeljina
- NVO "EKO-Leonardo", Priboj
- Udruženje za očuvanje prirodne sredine i razvoj turizma "EkoTUR" Stolac
- Ornitološko društvo "Naše ptice"
- Ekološko - humanitarna udruga "Gotuša", Fojnica
- Prijatelji prirode EKO ELEMENT Bugojno
- Eko forum Zenica
- Centar za ekologiju i energiju, Tuzla
- Ekološko društvo Bistro, Kruščica
- Centar za krš i speleologiju, Sarajevo
- Green team Novi Grad
- Udruženje "Resursni Aarhus centar u BiH"
- Udruženje građana Planina, Teslić
- Udruženje građana EKO CENTAR Čajniče
- UG "SANUS" Prijedor
- Udruženje Crvena, Sarajevo
- Planinarsko-ekološko udruženje Korak, Zvornik
- Savjet za zelenu gradnju Sarajevo
- Centar Dr. Stjepan Bolkey, Olovo
- Udruženje građana "Za Doljanku" Jablanica
- "Ekoturistički centar Zelenika" Bratunac
- Mikološko udruženje MycoBH Sarajevo

With respect,

President

Nataša Crnković

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