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POVERTY IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL THREAT AND A CHALLENGE

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Abstract: It affects the environment, causes new and aggravates the old environmental issues. Sustainable growth, new green plan, green economy and similar environmental/social projects in practice show that they are intended for rich, industrially developed countries. Rich, post-industrial societies, with the neoliberal concept of development in which profit is the drive and the goal, impoverish a large number of countries and turn huge areas of the planet Earth into environmentally threatened areas. This paper addresses the problem of poverty in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a limiting factor for a consistent environmental policy. Most people in the country are faced with existential problems, and new businessmen-tycoons, as the bearers of economic prosperity, all that does not leave too much room for long-term solutions of accumulated problems concerning environmental protection. For this particular reason, BiH political elite should promote a new economic trend in which neoliberal concept would be replaced by the economy for the common good.

Key words: *poverty, environmental protection, sustainable development, environmental awareness, economy for the common good.*

INTRODUCTION

Everyday environmental threats humankind is facing are getting new forms, intensity, and scale. Leaving a wide range of consequences that will affect the present and the future generations. Environmental slogan warning us that we only borrowed the Planet Earth from our offspring's is obviously not incorporated into the awareness of environmentally unfriendly decisions makers and the perpetrators of environmentally unfriendly behavior, which is why the eastern wisdom quoted by Franz Radermacher in his book „Balance or Destruction“ will become more and more important in the future period. It says; „Where the problems grows, solutions grows too“. To simplify this: the scope of environmental issues, transformed into the environmental crisis of the humankind, requires solutions that will steer Rademacher's dilemma about „balance and destruction“ in a positive direction which means to survival of the humankind. Otherwise, in the worst possible scenario written by the man, we are looking at destruction with obvious consequences.

As much as the phrase „survival of the humankind“ seems like a dark prognosis, it is clear that on the global, regional and local level, with top quality instruments, we must solve all the environmental issues in the shortest possible time.

Accelerated technology development makes the humanity face new issues every year and dilemmas related to our relationship towards the nature and the environment. Having perfected the exploitation procedures and having disrupted the relations not only in the natural environment but also in terms of social relations, in man's relation to the environment, people managed not only to establish a selfish rule over the nature, but to endanger their own survival as well. Unfortunately, spectacular human achievements have not been followed by rational measures of environmental protection. Disrupted natural balance had its own response that serves as a warning for the human civilization. In the last decade, from famine to thirst and from tsunami to floods, the nature has warned the humans about the consequences of human action by mass casualties and material damage.

It is clear that the interest of the rich, who enforce the cruel conditions of profit making, fight wars, compete in technological prestige, all for the purpose of dominance and generating wealth, created a new, divided world. The gap between the rich and the poor is getting bigger and the level of poverty has been to the existential minimum. New technologies have not reduced the number of those who are dying of hunger or thirst and the information that over one billion of people are using water that is below the hygienic minimum is met with indifference on the global level. New, global world is earning the aura of being inhuman and the risky society at the same time. Ulrich Beck defines it as environmentally critical, but at the same time democratic because everyone in it is threatened. Both, the polluters and those who only suffer the consequences. This fact gives hope that the growth of the problem will eventually create opportunities for its solutions.

We are witnessing, that the horrors the humankind is facing get different places on the agenda for solving problems. Life simply imposes them. Discussions and summits on global warming have been overshadowed by terrorist attacks, the opening of new war zones, negotiations about nuclear potential, attempts at convincing militant societies to give up producing nuclear weapons... Poverty is not on the priority list, even though in contemporary social relations it is both the cause and the consequence.

Regarding the phenomenon of persuasion on the global level it is enough to be reminded of the Kyoto protocol which, with the United Nations framework convention, has the goal to reduce the emission of carbon dioxide and other fumes which cause the greenhouse effect. Even though any inhabitant of the Planet Earth with average education knows that we are facing temperature increase with incomprehensible consequences, starting from the shortage of drinking water and famine, it is clear that political decision makers, first of all the representatives of the most powerful economies, have been deferring for years the ratification of the Kyoto protocol which, at one moment, for American representatives, "meant putting a straitjacket on the American economy".

Such relationship and similar reactions will, in the future, add new challenges to the existing range of environmental issues, while some old-new issues wrapped in sustainable growth, green economy, new environmental deals and similar will be put ad acta, or at best, will be reheated and served in

doses in accordance with political and economic needs. Phenomenon of hunger and shortage of drinking water, as an existential minimum, that millions of people on the Planet Earth are faced with, will in the future period open many questions: „From water to freedom“. This fact holds a global threat, starting from local and regional wars, to clashes between largest military and economic giants, and it also creates fertile soil for the recruiting of terrorists, which will mean new challenges for politics, economy and safety.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is officially no poverty as the cause of existential threat, even though we are the leading country in Europe in this category, in a negative way. Poverty, along with other global environmental issues; from global warming, mines, chemical and other agents, poisoned soil, terrorism etc. plays a large part in environmental threats and presents a kind of a challenge which is related to environmental protection.

POVERTY AS A PERMANENT BIH CATEGORY

Within SFRY, Bosnia and Herzegovina belonged in the category of „inherited overall underdevelopment" republics, lagging behind the Yugoslavian average by 15 percent and by 46 percent compared to the global average. Thanks to major investments in energy and industry, pre-war BiH started developing and the industry became a dominant sector, with around 60 percent share in GDP, but due to war destruction, this once developing country within SFRY became an extremely poor country.

The causes of poverty, besides war destruction, include slow postwar economic reforms, unemployment, violation of human rights, inadequate social welfare system, quality of education, corruption and inability to influence the institutions of the system.

"The war caused direct material harm, causing heavy damage to housing, production and infrastructure facilities, broke trading connections, stopped reforms etc. Estimated damages between 50 and 70 billion US Dollars, of which around 15 to 20 billion in industrial facilities.¹

If these damages include the consequences of unrealized GDP from 1992 to 2000, experts estimate that the total war damage in Bosnia and Herzegovina exceeds 100 billion USDollars. Compared to the pre-war debt of the socialist Yugoslavia, which was around 22 billion Dollars for a country with the population of 23 million, with relatively developed industry, rich natural resources and educated workforce, the social context of BiH society is the one with poverty as a dominant category.

After the civil war in BiH, with the help of international donations, the level of economic activities has been elevated to one third of the pre-war, with a prominent change of economic structure at the expense of industry. Industrial zones in BiH towns shows that there are no industrial activities going on there, which greatly reduces the pressure on the environment, but it increases unemployment rate and social standard of citizens. The problem is even larger due to the fact that the ownership transformation process has not finished yet,

¹ Bosnia and Herzegovina: Poverty Assessment, World Bank, Report no. 25343-BiH, 2005, p. 49.

i.e. the process of transition is still ongoing, which aggravates the process of industrial revitalization and its structuring for sustainable economic development.

"Export has been reduced from pre-war two billion USDollars to around 500 million, while import has increased from 1.7 billion to 2.8 billion of USDollars. Before the war, industry and public sector had around 1 million employees and around 330 thousand unemployed. After the war, the total number of workers has decreased to around 650 thousand and the number of unemployed has increased to 420 thousand, while the population decreased by one third".²

Previous understanding of poverty³ „as shortage of income for the purchase of the minimum package of goods and services“ is inapplicable in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, poverty is used to describe „a situation in which people cannot meet their basic needs for a dignified life“. In that sense, poverty manifests as shortage of income and means sufficiency to secure sustainable existence and the consequence of this is: hunger, undernourishment and health risk of population, limited education or no access to education, increased death rate and illness, homelessness and poor housing facilities and increase of xenophobia, as a result of insecure social environment accompanied by crime, discrimination and isolation. Can we speak of the quality of life in BiH as „meeting general needs and achieving happiness“⁴ or „meeting general needs as a condition for the overall feeling of happiness“⁵, that is the consumption of goods and services that meet certain needs. In any case, no; as poverty and the quality of life are diametrically opposite categories. If by the quality of life assessing, we start from a socio-ecological position, where an important indicator of the quality of life is the status of the environment, then BiH status can rightly be assessed as not fulfilling the basic conditions for decent life.

Everyday practice shows that there is a direct link between poverty and the degradation of environment, which in Bosnia and Herzegovina manifests through uncontrolled and excessive exploitation of natural resources, whereby around 10 thousand acres of agricultural land are being lost every year. Difficult situation is being aggravated by great migration of rural population into cities, as well as by the fact that 60 to 70 percent of BiH population lives on the verge of existence. Of course, this number should not be taken for granted, because in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as it is the case in other fields as well, different types of research, with different and often entirely opposite methodologies, have been conducted. In any case, expanding the criteria in defining poverty, as well as ensuring their multidimensionality, enables us to think about it as a status characterized by permanent or chronic deprivation of resources, capabilities, choices, security and power required for

² BiH Action Plan for Environmental Protection (NEAP)

³ "Siromaštvo je oskudica sredstava, prijeko potrebnih za život", Hrvatski enciklopedijski rječnik, EPH d.o.o. Zagreb and Novi Liber d.o.o. Zagreb 2004. p. 348.

⁴ Mec Call, S Quality of Life, Social Indicators Reserarch 2. 1975, p. 235

⁵ Milbrath, W.L : Indicateurs de la qualite de l'environnement, Rapports et documents de science sociales N.38. UNESCO, 1979.

adequate life standards and for exercising other citizen, economic, political, cultural and social rights.

It is known that there are two types of poverty; absolute and relative. In determining the relative line of poverty, basic approach is to establish how it is possible to compare the standard of one category of population with another one within the same society. It is usually based on a certain percentage of average income or spending in a given country. This method has certain advantages, first of all it is easily determined and it automatically moves with the increase of life standards, but it also has its weaknesses. It is not convenient for tracking changes over time because the increase of standards in a country can mean the increase of standards in all categories of population, while the relative status of the poor does not change or it even gets worse “.⁶

Given the limited availability of data, researchers in BiH are usually opting for the absolute poverty line as the most suitable instrument for poverty definition and monitoring. The absolute poverty line is determined by the value of consumption needed by each individual regardless of time and place in which he lives. Also, research includes the line of extreme poverty or food poverty line which is determined by the value of the food packages containing a minimum of necessary calories, as well as the general poverty line, which means that the individual has other needs besides food for survival. Such needs are housing, clothing, transportation, education, culture, etc.

Previous surveys conducted in BiH by different organizations and institutions have shown that in this country there are no groups whose standard is close to or below the extreme poverty line, although this cannot be said about individual citizens. On the other hand, it was determined that the standard of about 19.5 per cent of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina is below the general poverty line. Interestingly, the number of the poor is higher in rural areas, and it is the largest in the mixed local communities.⁷ As many as 30 percent of the population are just above the general poverty line, which in times of economic turbulence makes them extremely vulnerable.

Research conducted by UNDP⁸ and BiH authorities for the purpose of early warning systems also supports the level and the incidence of poverty as well as the increase in the number of the poor. A significant factor or phenomenon that adversely affects the BIH society is the so-called "subjective poverty" in which a large number of citizens ranked themselves in the category of the poor. In addition to the hardship of everyday life, such perception is the result of comparison with the pre-war period and standards in that time, as well as of the memory of full employment and a purchasing power larger than the supply of goods in the shops. The sense of powerlessness amongst the poor citizens is accompanied by uncertainty, bleak outlook and the loss of all hope that the situation will change in the Bosnian context, which presents a latent

⁶ Bosnia and Herzegovina: Poverty Assessment, World Bank, Report no. 25343-BiH

⁷ Mixed communities, according to some researchers, assume multiethnic population

⁸ United Nations Development Program

danger from religious and other forms of radicalization or other forms of "association" of socially vulnerable population.

According to research, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the poorest country emerging out of the SFRY whose residents are deprived on all key aspects of the standards from food to housing, health needs to literacy, from "water to freedom". The situation is even more alarming when you consider that the current consumption has actually been artificial, and that the purchasing power of citizens has been boosted by the money from various international grants or loans which are getting cut; that the industry is ruined, agriculture is abandoned and import lobbies are destroying little of remaining production. In such a context, reports within the Early Warning System and Reports on Human Development will continue to be full of dark and gloomy figures, which, due to incomplete and imprecise statistical data in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have been considered preliminary for almost two decades. However, no matter how preliminary and incomplete, a World Bank research has shown that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in terms of education, 27 percent of the population are poor, and 16 percent of the population suffers because of poverty in terms of health. These two data are dominant in the analysis of the influence of BiH citizens in the creation and implementation of environmental policy. About 22 percent of the working age population is poor and over 30 percent is poor in terms of housing conditions, while over 72 percent of adults in BiH are poor in at least one of the aspects.⁹

Among the most vulnerable categories are children, elderly and disabled, displaced persons, unemployed, low-income people, pensioners with low pensions and family with no employed members. It is interesting that in Bosnia and Herzegovina the ethnic dimension of poverty is emphasized and the poorest citizens within entities and cantons are mainly members of ethnic minorities. There is also gender discrimination because women are poorer than men, and there is a host of other characteristics of which more will be said.

LIMITING FACTOR FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

"Before the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina there were about 50 thousand socially vulnerable people. The war has destroyed the existential basis for 600,000 people, of whom about 400 thousands of working age. The industry does not have the capacity, and the authorities do not have the resources to provide the necessary funds for the increased needs of the socially vulnerable population."¹⁰As already said, at a time when there was a global discussion about the new vision of the world and when strategic documents were made in the field of environmental protection, Bosnia and Herzegovina was in the midst of a terrible civil war with all the elements of religious conflict. After the war, post-Dayton BiH has been formally functioning as a single state, while in reality there is insufficient inter-entity cooperation with

⁹ According to international standards, poverty means spending less than 4,30 American dollars per person per day and it is expressed in the percentage of the total population of a country which has daily expenditure of less than 4,30 American dollars

¹⁰ BiH Report for World Summit on Sustainable Development Rio+10 Johannesburg, 2002.

the philosophy and political practices that do not contribute resolving conflicts, coexistence and reconciliation. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a divided society in many aspects and it is therefore difficult to create a consistent strategic framework for recovery and development that would rescue the country from general poverty, and provide the citizens with basic conditions for life worthy of man. This raises a basic question; whether to first address the economic problems in the country and then pay attention to the preservation of the environment, or is it possible to align these two processes, and address both problems simultaneously? In any case, it is clear that the causes of poverty and the causes of environmental degradation are usually common and often operate on the principle of communicating vessels.

For example, irrational and excessive consumption of resources in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the pre-war, wartime and post-war period in BiH affected the weakening of economic power, but at the same time contributed to the pollution of the environment and an overall decline of living standards.¹¹ Namely, the desire to try to pull the country out of economic disaster and overcome poverty, in defining the goals of BiH often prioritized growth rather than quality, treating environmental protection as a marginal issue. The causes of this situation certainly include the absence of a clearly defined policy and development strategy, as well as weak institutional capacity in designing and implementing development and environmental policy in all segments of BiH society. One should certainly add the underdevelopment of civil society and insufficient influence of citizens and professional organizations and institutions in the design of environmental policy, the lack of economic and other measures to stimulate or discourage environmentally unfriendly behavior and preventive actions, lack of qualified personnel and educational programs as well as low level of environmental knowledge among citizens and representatives of government and the absence of programs to develop environmental awareness and raise it to a satisfactory level. In the event that these preconditions are met in BiH society, it is possible to provide the ground for the basic protection of the environment which again may affect the economic development. This certainly includes energy savings, recycling of waste, limiting air pollution, water and soil, and a number of other measures that contribute to the sustainable development, and long-term environmental protection. In any case, it will be difficult for BiH to break the vicious circle without the international help. Especially because sustainable development is often a privilege of developed rather than poor societies "and the prevention of distortion of average living standards for future generations cannot be achieved until poverty is directly eradicated, because poverty and environmental degradation go hand in hand ... The total damage to the environment can be divided into three parts: the number of people, consumption per capita and the damage done per unit of consumption."¹²

¹¹ In SFRY, the central republic, BiH, was an energy hub from which resources were taken or there was basic production in the so-called dirty industry. Similar trend continued after the war because foreign investors mostly invested in energy, i.e. thermal plants and basic industry, whereby not enough attention has been paid to sustainable development.

¹² Goodstein S. Eban, *Ekonomija okoliša*, Mate, Zagreb 2003, p. 558.

The fact is that BiH has a natural basis and technical potential for solving environmental problems and with poverty along them, but the social, economic and market potential is extremely small. In doing so, one should bear in mind that the BiH society has gone through three transitional periods, of which the most prominent is war in which "initial accumulation of wealth was done in the blood and sweat of its own people".¹³ During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina the middle class disappeared, most of the population was impoverished¹⁴ and, according to some estimates, the capital is concentrated in the hands of about five percent of the population. The new "owners" of Bosnia and Herzegovina have become war profiteers and tycoons of the "new philosophy of life" with little room for ecology.

CONCLUSION

Bosnia and Herzegovina belongs to the region of Europe where extremely negative consequences of climate change are expected to affect human health, economic development and availability of natural resources, which is why we need to be interested in solving global environmental issues. This year in Paris, representatives of world nations will sign a universal, legally bounding Agreement on climate which should go into effect in 2020 and replace Kyoto agreement. It is greatly hoped that funds will be raised for the budget of the Fund for Climate, global fund for helping poor countries to get ready for the effects of climate changes. The world has come to believe that societies, countries and economies are becoming more endangered by the consequences of natural and social catastrophes, which are again, the consequence of philosophy and practices of liberal capitalism. Hence the warning of scientists and representatives of social movements that it is necessary to move ahead, from summits and symbolic signing of protocols, to specific actions that address the fundamental functioning of the capitalistic system based on neoliberal doctrine.

„Economy for the common good “ initiated by Austrian economist Christian Felber boils down to a «utopic» idea that any company that contributes to common good, which includes a wide range of environmental protection measures as well as reducing inhuman wage differences, becomes entitled to tax relief, cheaper loans, priority in getting jobs, public bids, etc. Also Felber's followers believe that when we produce enough goods there is no need of creating additional surpluses which automatically leads to saving natural and other resources and thus changes the way of thinking that created consumers' society. This new economic philosophy is gaining more and more followers.

No matter how alternative economic thinking seems idealistic and powerless in the face of liberal logic that has grown deep roots in Bosnia and

¹³ Reljić Slobodan, Pejičić Zoran, Soldo Lidija; A kad se dim razide, NIN, Belgrade, 26. March 1992.

¹⁴ Broj izuzetno siromašnih u BiH mogao bi premašiti 650 hiljada od ukupno 3,84 miliona stanovnika. Zbog ekonomske stagnacije i izostanka ključnih reformi svaki šesti stanovnik bi mogao zapasti u izrazito siromaštvo. Prognoze ekonomista BiH, Nezavisne novine 16.2. 2012. p. 19.

Herzegovina as well, it is clear that the economy is the key to solving all our existential and environmental challenges.

Especially as we are identified as vulnerable area in terms of climate change and we are faced with almost all the environmental problems faced by the European Union and the neighboring countries. We are a leading country in Europe, but only as the poorest one.

Unfortunately, last year's floods showed to the most of the inhabitants of the region (the republics of former Yugoslavia) the vulnerability of current environmental protection measures and the importance of regional cooperation and cooperation with the European Union as a way for the elimination of poverty. At the same time, we should not forget the European funds as well as the fact that we cannot solve the problem of poverty by ourselves. Therefore, it is the most important to raise awareness among citizens, especially among political decision-makers, as an integral part of a broad social concept of environmental protection, which could in the long term alleviate if not eliminate part of the environmental threats we face.

SIROMAŠTVO U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI KAO EKOLOŠKA PRIJETNJA I IZAZOV

Doc dr sci Zoran Pejičić

Apstrakt: Siromaštvo negativno utiče na životnu sredinu i po principu spojenih posuda izaziva nove i produbljuje stare ekološke probleme. Održivi razvoj, novi zeleni plan, zelena ekonomija i slični ekološko-socijalni projekti u praksi su pokazali da su namijenjeni bogatim, industrijski razvijenim zemljama. Tim prije što bogata, postindustrijska društva, neoliberalnim konceptom razvoja u kome je profit pokretač i cilj, osiromašuju veliki broj zemalja a ogromna područja planete Zemlje pretvaraju u ekološki izrazito ugrožena područja. U radu se bavimo problemom siromaštva u Bosni i Hercegovini kao limitirajućeg faktora konzistentne ekološke politike. Egzistencijalni problemi sa kojima je suočen najveći broj stanovnika ove zemlje na jednoj i novokomponovani bizismeni-tajkuni, kao nosioci ekonomskog „prosperiteta“, ne ostavljaju previše prostora za dugoročno rješavanje nagomilanih problema zaštite životne sredine. Upravo zbog toga bi bosansko-hercegovačke političke elite trebale da podstiču novi ekonomski trend u kome bi neoliberalni koncept zamijenila ekonomija opšteg dobra.

Ključne riječi: siromaštvo, ekologija, održivi razvoj, ekološka svijest, ekonomija opsteg dobra.

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