



Event Report

**EPPA Regional Meeting
of the Environmental Civil Society Organisations**

6 May 2020

Video live conference



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The project implemented by the Consortium
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1 Introduction

The regional consultation

The regional Regional Meeting of the Environmental Civil Society Organisations took place on 6 May 2020 via live video conference. The meeting was organized under the EPPA project work programme, activity 7.3 “Organisation of review regional meeting to discuss the first results of EPPA and the challenges remaining ahead”.

The participants came from relevant civil society organizations of the EPPA beneficiaries. The speakers represented the European Commission (DG NEAR and DG ENV), the EPPA project team and international civil society organizations. Details are available in the list of participants and in the agenda.

The presentations are available in the EPPA project website.

The project

The project EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA) in the Western Balkans and Turkey seeks to be a major driver of reform and development in environmental governance through compliance with the EU environmental acquis. The programme builds on the results of the RENA and ECRAN programmes by furthering the regional cooperation and strengthening the administrative capacities of the beneficiaries. Regional cooperation provides the framework for sharing knowledge, expertise and good practices, and for addressing common environmental problems in a more sustainable and efficient way. The overall objective of the programme is to strengthen the implementation of the EU environmental acquis in the Western Balkans and Turkey in areas relevant for addressing trans-boundary environmental issues. The purpose of the project is to assist the European Commission in providing the Secretariat of the EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA).

The project runs between February 13, 2019 and February 13, 2022 (36 months). The main beneficiaries are the Ministries of Environment of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

The activities of the EPPA are implemented through a system of Working Groups (WG) and Working Sub-Groups (WSG), coordinated by the project Secretariat and overseen by the project Steering Committee. Those working groups are:

- EU environmental policy Working Group – focuses on the latest EU environmental policy priorities and developments, as envisaged by the 7th Environmental Action Plan (EAP).
- Waste management Working Group – envisages support for the implementation of the roadmaps for improving the waste management, revision of the waste management plans, policies and waste legislation. The activities will also promote the Road Map for Resource Efficient Europe, the EU 2018 Circular Economy Package and implementation of its Action Plan.
- Water management Working Group - includes support for trans- boundary water management and protection of marine and coastal areas and participation of the candidate countries and potential candidates at EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region and EU Strategy for the Danube Region meetings. Activities will also cover subjects such as marine litter, implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Barcelona Convention and selected topics of water management for land-locked countries.
- Air quality and industrial emissions Working Group - supports the implementation of the Air Quality Directive, National Emissions Ceiling Directive, Sulphur Directive and Industrial Emissions Directive.
- Nature Working Group is composed of the following sub-groups:
 - EU Strategies Working Sub-Group (WSG) – supports the implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies in the area of nature protection and biodiversity. Activities will include support for the identification of marine protected areas and exchange of best practices to achieve and/or to maintain the good ecological status of marine waters and preserve the biodiversity. Support for the implementation of the Regulation on Invasive Alien Species and Biodiversity Strategy will also be provided.



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- Combating illegal logging and related trade Working Sub-Group (WSG) – includes support for the implementation of EU Timber Regulation and of the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan. Activities will focus on illegal logging and timber trade flows, forest management and related mechanisms to ensure legality and traceability of timber.
- Wildlife trade Working Sub-Group (WSG) – aims at the establishment of a regional wildlife trade regulation enforcement network and supports the implementation and enforcement of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Regulations.
- Crosscutting activity - compliance checks of selected national draft pieces of legislation.

The latest EU policy developments – the European Green Deal

Becoming the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050 is the greatest challenge and opportunity of our times. To achieve this, the European Commission presented the European Green Deal¹, the most ambitious package of measures that should enable European citizens and businesses to benefit from sustainable green transition. Measures accompanied with an initial roadmap of key policies range from ambitiously cutting emissions, to investing in cutting-edge research and innovation, to preserving Europe's natural environment. Supported by investments in green technologies, sustainable solutions and new businesses, the Green Deal can be a new EU growth strategy. Involvement and commitment of the public and of all stakeholders is crucial to its success. Above all, the European Green Deal sets a path for a transition that is just and socially fair. It is designed in such a way as to leave no individual or region behind in the great transformation ahead.

The policy areas covered by the EU Green Deal are climate change, clean energy, circular economy and sustainable industry, sustainable mobility, environmental-friendly food system, biodiversity, zero-pollution and a toxic-free environment.

Regional impact on the Western Balkans: the Green Agenda

The global challenges of climate change and environmental degradation require a global response, hence the EU will continue to promote and implement ambitious environmental, climate and energy policies across the globe. The EU will support its immediate neighbours so that the ecological transition for Europe can be effective. From this perspective, the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans will be the instrument that will bring the European Green Deal closer to the Western Balkan countries by proposing a new economic development model, one based on the circularity of the economy, where the pressures on the use of natural resources are significantly reduced, while recycling and reuse are the order of the day. The Green Agenda will mirror the European Green Deal focusing decarbonisation, circular economy, biodiversity preservation, and depollution. It is expected the green agenda to contribute to the sustainable development of the region and make it more attractive to investment and tourism.

2 Objectives and expected results

The meeting sought to involve the environmental civil society organizations from the EPPA beneficiaries into the ongoing policy debate about new environmental priorities arising from the European Green Deal. In particular, the meeting objectives were to:

1. Inform the participants about the European Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.
2. Inform the participants about the latest developments in the enlargement process.
3. Inform and consult the participants about the EPPA project activities (past, present, future) and discuss options for future regional cooperation.

¹ See: *Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The European Council, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions*, COM(2019) 640 from 11 December 2019, at https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/communication-european-green-deal_en (accessed January 2020).



3 Highlights from the meeting

3.1 Session 1: Introduction

Ms. Madalina Ivanica, as chairwoman, opened the meeting by greeting the participants and explaining the context in which it took place. The meeting should have first taken place in the beginning of March. However, the corona virus situation in Europe forced its rescheduling two months later and via live video conference.

Ms. Madalina Ivanica introduced the main topics for discussion and the meeting objectives. She highlighted the importance of the EU Green Deal and the upcoming Green Agenda for enlargement for the Western Balkans and Turkey. She expressed her gratitude for the written feedback the participants submitted pre-meeting on the region's status quo and challenges. That information was summarized in a report prepared by the EPPA project team. She made sure to stress that all information, including the outcomes of the present meeting, are used by the EC to inform the preparation of the annual progress reports and to inform interactions the EC has with the beneficiaries.

In the same cooperative spirit, Ms. Madalina Ivanica requested the participants to voice their opinions regarding future regional cooperation, since all beneficiaries and the EC agree on the need to strengthen it further. The CSOs experience from the ground provides valuable guidance and it simultaneously ensures the link with the public in the region. It is therefore important for CSOs to lay out their vision for the future and how the EU can support the region in light of the Green Deal.

Finally, Ms. Madalina Ivanica presented the EPPA project and what it is doing to build capacities and create networks with and within the public administration bodies of the beneficiaries. She noted that CSOs have also been participating in the project workshops and benefiting from its outcomes. Ms. Madalina Ivanica complimented the noticeable professionalization of CSOs dealing with environmental issues at local, national, and international levels. She expected the present meeting to contribute further to that professionalization by providing the experiences of European environmental CSOs, namely in how they tackle their work and how they cooperate with EU institutions.

3.2 Session 2: The European Green Deal – presentation

Ms. Madalina Ivanica presented the European Green Deal, a comprehensive effort to become the first climate-neutral continent.

She started by setting the international policy milieu, namely the 2030 Agenda for a Sustainable Future. The agenda consists of 17 goals with quantifiable targets and annual monitoring. The agenda is based on the connectivity of the goals and the recognition that the biosphere, society, and economy are interlinked. In fact, well-being and prosperity depend on healthy and resilient ecosystems. The agenda provided the foundation for the EU Green Deal. Eurostat reports on the progress achieved on a yearly basis².

² 2019 Report available in: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-books/-/KS-02-19-165>



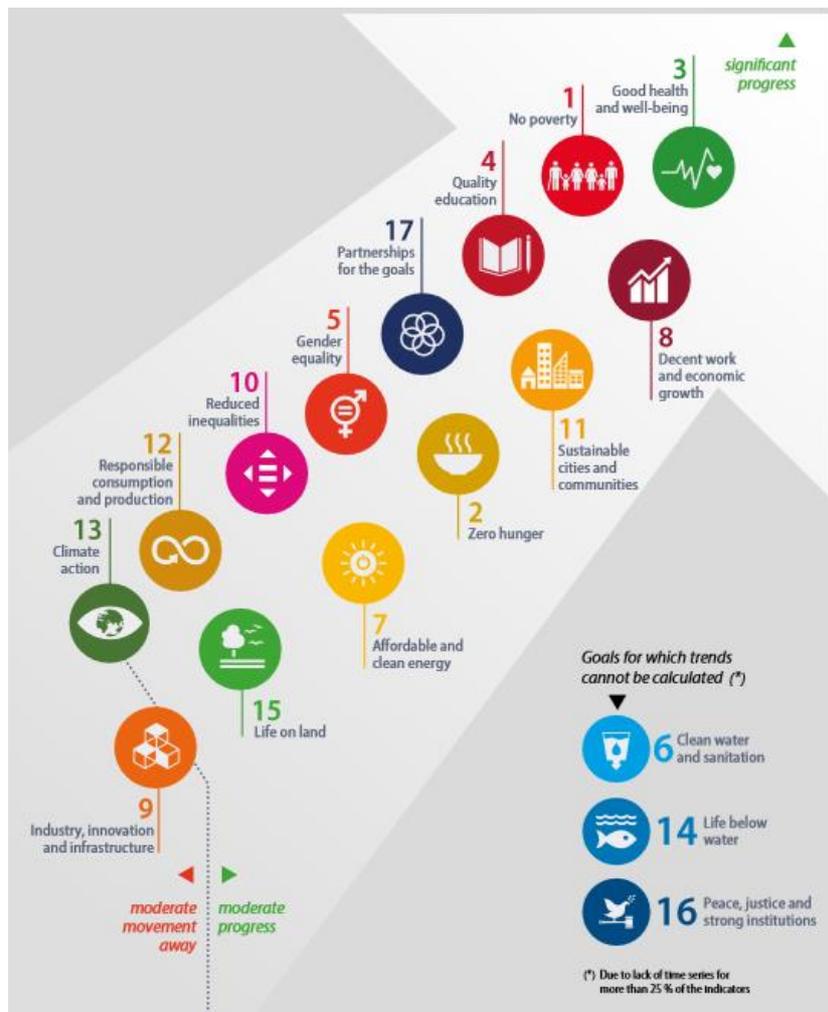


Figure 1 - EU's progress within the 2030 Agenda

Although the EU improved living conditions, that improvement came with negative impacts on the environment and on the use of natural resources. Moreover, the planetary challenges posed by climate change and other factors affect the resilience and well being of our societies. Among the top ten global risks identified in The Global Risks Report 2019 of the World Economic Forum five are environmental: extreme weather, failure to mitigate and adapt to climate change, natural disasters, man-made disasters and biodiversity loss and ecosystems collapse. At the European level, the situation is similar. The Europe's State of Environment Report 2020 (EEA) states that Europe's environment is at a tipping point.

While recognizing that progress has been made, one must also accept that it is insufficient. Europe cannot achieve the 2030 goals unless urgent action is taken in biodiversity, climate change, and overconsumption of natural resources. The Europe's State of Environment Report 2020 (EEA) calls to further action in strengthening policy implementation, developing long-term policy frameworks, establishing international leadership of Europe, fostering innovation, promoting green investment practices, ensuring a fair transition, and linking knowledge with action.

Taking into account this picture, Europe developed a vision for the next five years, and beyond, based in 6 priorities. One of them is the European Green Deal. The European Green Deal is about improving the well-being of people, making Europe climate-neutral and protecting our natural habitat. It is a new growth strategy based on a resource efficient economy. The GD emphasis areas are climate neutrality, protection of life, animals and plants by cutting pollution, development of clean products and technologies and the guarantee of a just transition. Each area will be operationalized with transformative policies, policies which emphasize linkages between sectors.



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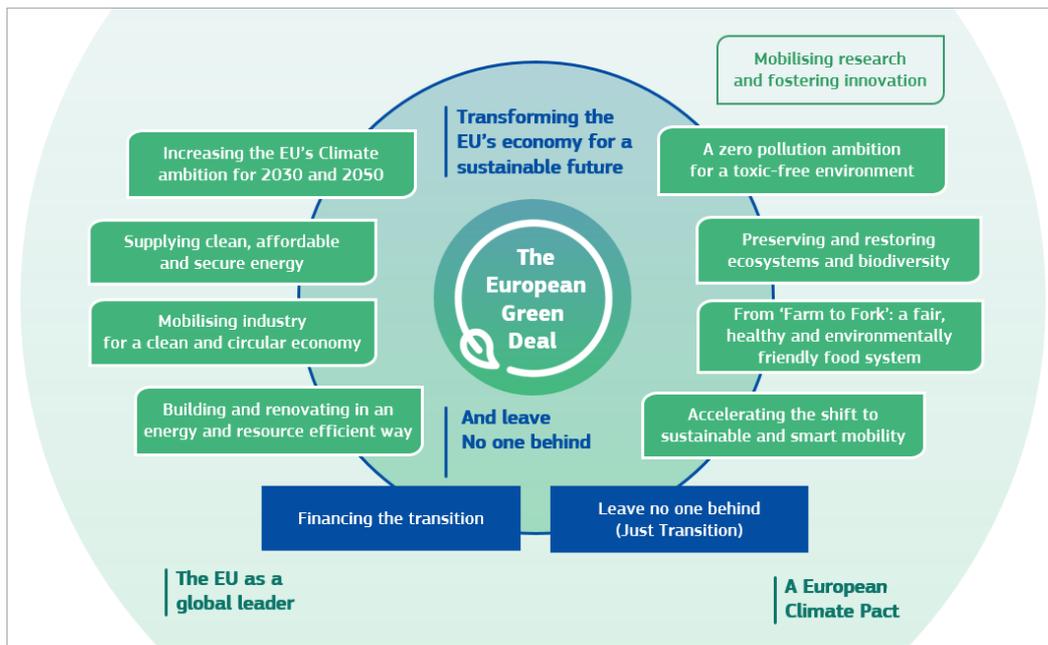


Figure 2 - The EU Green Deal

The climate neutrality by 2050 objective foresees a European climate law already adopted in March 2020, a plan to increase the EU's climate goal to at least 50% by October 2020, a review and revision of existing legislation to deliver on that ambition by June 2021, a carbon border adjustment mechanism by 2021 and a new strategy on adaptation by 2021. In addition, efforts will be made to decarbonize the energy sector, increase built environment energy efficiency, support better mobility and industry to innovate in the green economy.

A new industrial policy based on the circular economy and a circular economy action plan were adopted in March 2020 to modernize the EU economy. The action plan sets a sustainable products framework (with new product design and producer responsibility), seeks to have less waste and more value, focuses on key products value chains (plastics, electronics, construction, etc), and seeks to implement circular economy principles globally. The policy includes monitoring mechanisms.

Another area is preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity. The EU just adopted a new biodiversity strategy and it will propose concrete measures in 2021 to address the main drivers of biodiversity loss. Until the end of 2020 a new forest strategy is forecast followed by measures to support deforestation free value chains.

In terms of achieving zero pollution for a toxic free environment, the EU is planning a zero pollution action plan for air, soil and water in 2021. In addition, additional measures for large industrial installations is expected in 2021 and a chemicals strategy in 2020. The EU believes that this area does not mean an overhaul of EU legislation. The *acquis* is fit for purpose. The main weakness is implementation. Therefore, the existing legislation will be the main driver, while paying more attention to implementation, designing targets, creating monitoring tools, and cross cutting initiatives.

Finally, the Green Deal includes a Farm to Fork pillar. A strategy will be adopted in 2020 to make sure European farming produces affordable and sustainable food, that agriculture contributes to tackle climate change, that it protects the environment, preserves biodiversity and increases the share of organic farming. The Strategy will work to significantly reduce the use and risk of chemical pesticides, as well as the use of fertilisers and antibiotics. It will combat food fraud and support the development of innovative farming and fishing techniques.

In parallel, the EU plans to take global leadership based on the Green Deal policies. It wants to work with Africa on climate and environmental issues; it wants to engage with G20 countries, which are responsible for 80% of GHG emissions; it wants to set up a Green Agenda for the Western Balkans mirroring the Green Deal; it wants to establish environmental, energy and climate partnerships with Eastern and



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Southern Neighbourhood; and it wants to build green alliances with countries and regions of Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific.

3.3 Session 3: The enlargement process and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans - presentation

Ms. Guillemette Vachey gave a presentation on the latest developments of the enlargement process, the response to Covid-19 and the Green Agenda for the WB.

The recent months have seen important developments in the enlargement process. EU enlargement and the Western Balkans have been high on the EU agenda in recent months, with the adoption of the revised enlargement methodology in February, and the Council decision in March to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia.

On 23 April, the President of the European Council announced that a videoconference would be held with leaders of the Western Balkans on 6 May. This virtual event will take place this evening (“Zagreb Summit”) and focus on mutual solidarity and the short-term recovery from the pandemic. It replaces the EU-Western Balkans summit, with a different format (no MS, just HR presidency) and purpose: focus on covid-19 crisis. To feed into these discussions, on 29 April the Commission adopted the Communication on “Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery”. The Communication on the Covid response from last week also paved the way for an Economic and Investment Plan for the region, to be adopted later in the year. It aims to speed up the building of a solid and resilient economy and bring Western Balkan countries much faster, much closer to EU standards. Following the disruption of the Coronavirus pandemic, this will be an important element for the economic recovery of the region. It also presents an opportunity to make the economic recovery of the region green, based on sustainable production, cleaner technologies and a healthier environment.

Next on the enlargement agenda will be the adoption of the enlargement package in June. At the same time, the Commission will present to the Council draft negotiating frameworks for Albania and North Macedonia. On Turkey, unfortunately, accession negotiations came to a standstill but this does not mean that we will not continue working together: there is a strong interest on both sides in maintaining a partnership and environment can be among the key topics of cooperation.

The Commission is redirecting its work to answer Covid-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented global crisis. It shows how interconnected the world is today and proves that we need each other to tackle global challenges. Despite the difficult times we are facing ourselves, the EU has demonstrated that the Western Balkans can count on its help. The EC has responded quickly and immediately mobilised considerable funds (EUR 38 million) to procure much needed medical equipment, such as ventilators, testing kits and personal protective equipment. Beyond the immediate needs, the EU, together with the EIB, mobilised an EU support package of around EUR 3.3 billion to support the Western Balkans. The crisis also demonstrated that the EU treats the Western Balkans as privileged partners:

- The EU extended the EU Solidarity Fund to the Western Balkan partners that have started accession negotiations.
- It invited your governments to join the EU’s Joint Procurement Agreement for medical equipment and all of WB have signed up to it in the meantime.
- EU agencies are sharing intelligence with WB.
- The EU’s Joint Research Centre is sharing free control material that can be used to verify if COVID-19 tests are reliable.
- And most recently it proposed to exempt the Western Balkans from the export authorisation for some medical equipment (e.g. masks).

No other region has access to so much financial assistance and so many mechanisms, which are normally exclusively for EU Member States. There can be no doubt that the European Union is the region’s first partner in combating coronavirus. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront the interdependence between the EU and the Western Balkans – and within the Western Balkans. Ensuring an unobstructed flow of goods is a key challenge during this crisis. For example, it is remarkable that WB



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have managed to establish green lanes at critical border crossing points and agreed on a list of essential goods with priority for circulation. This has been a fast and efficient response to the crisis and should set the tone for future regional cooperation.

The EU also stands ready to support Turkey in its response to the COVID-19 crisis. Exchanges with Turkish partners are fruitful on this matter. First response measures financed by the EU were launched immediately after the outbreak. At current date, EUR 8.75 million have already been redeployed for the prevention and treatment of COVID cases. For example, in the week of 20 April, the Commission donated two tubes of testing material (for 40,000 tests in total) to two laboratories in Turkey. The situation of the most vulnerable members in Turkish society, including refugees, is an issue of special concern for the EU support to COVID-response in Turkey given that the country hosts the largest number of refugees and migrants in the World (4 million). Health care for refugees in Turkey has always been one of the EU's key priorities. It allocated EUR 800 million to refugee health care under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey.

The last topic of Ms. Guillemette Vachey talk was the Green Agenda and the role of civil society. As mentioned earlier, the communication also sets the scene for longer-term support in form of an Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. The full plan will be presented later this year and will include a substantial investment package for the region. The Communication on covid indeed stresses that: "The Green transition and the Digital transformation will play a central role in relaunching and modernising the economies of the Western Balkans. Investing in clean and digital technologies and capacities, together with a circular economy, will help create jobs and growth".

At this stage and given the current context, exact modalities, timing and consultation process on the Green Agenda in this new framework are still to be further defined. The Green Agenda is not new: agreed in Poznan, initiated in Podgorica, acknowledged in 2019 Enlargement communication and formally announced in Green Deal (GD) among its 50 actions. Indeed, GD can only be fully effective if the EU's immediate neighbours also takes effective action.

As for now, the EC has been working on 5 pillars, inspired by GD:

1. Decarbonisation: climate action, clean energy, smart mobility. This entails carbon reduction commitments in respect of clean and just energy transition as well as smart and sustainable mobility solutions. Energy efficiency and resilience of buildings and infrastructures play a part and harnessing the region's high potential for renewable energy.
2. Circular economy: sustainable production and consumption. An economic development model based on a circular economy striving for more resource efficiency is an opportunity for the Western Balkans to leap-frog to innovative green technologies, catering both to the local and the European markets.
3. Depollution: air, water and soil. Air quality affects the health of citizens and the economies of both the Western Balkans and the neighbouring EU Member States. Addressing pollution of natural capital is fundamental for overall sustainable development.
4. Sustainable food systems and rural areas. A sustainable food system with a neutral or positive environmental impact, with the high standards of food safety and quality will contribute to the modernisation of the agri-food sector and the access to EU market.
5. Natural capital: protection and restoration of ecosystems. The region's natural wealth has great economic potential, through sustainable tourism and responsible farming. Safeguarding ecosystems will provide services to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

What is new is the context in which it will operate: post-pandemic recovery and focus on economic perspective. Indeed, the economic recovery and the transition to a sustainable, socially just, resilient, resource efficient and climate neutral economy shall go hand in hand. Green economic recovery agenda is not driven by ideology, but by scientific evidence and economic logic. On that note, the EC counts on civil society organizations to also convey these messages to governments. The action is complementary. Any contribution on these pillars to the EC but also to the beneficiaries' authorities would be welcome. As mentioned in the Declaration of the European Economic and Social Committee (contribution to Zagreb summit): stresses that civil society has a particularly important role to play in the transition towards a



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greener and more sustainable society and that its role in shaping and implementing measures to promote a smart and intelligent, circular and low-carbon economy based on the approach of a fair transition is vital. Also any contribution to the GD initiatives in themselves would be useful. All initiatives from the GD do have an international dimension and start with an open public consultation, in which you can make your voice heard and convey specific messages from your countries. It is important not to forget that GD came on the top of the political agenda in EU thanks to mobilisation of civil society and the youth. CSOs should aim at the same action in the beneficiaries.

3.4 Session 4: Discussion - The European Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans – Views from Civil Society

This discussion session aimed to reflect on the items presented before and it sought to understand how the policy agenda can be brought to the beneficiaries.

Mr. Tanay Sidki Uyar, from KADOS (Turkey), stated that Covid-19 problems are made worst from pollution and the chronic diseases it originates. Mr. Tanay Sidki Uyar's organization is trying to make the case in Turkey for the connection between fossil fuels combustion, disease and the covid problem. However, a global solution is needed. In this context the GD is important. The world needs a global GD, where action is broken into national and local plans. Mr. Tanay Sidki Uyar is trying to pioneer this approach in Turkey. His organization is developing roadmaps for transition to renewable energy on city scale and trying to engage the communities in its design and implementation. Mr. Tanay Sidki Uyar sees this as an approach to make the GD successful.

Mr. Denis Žiško, from the Centar za ekologiju i energiju (Bosnia and Herzegovina), asked if there would be any conditionality attached to funds associated with the Green Agenda. He was particularly concerned to avoid financing the fossil fuel industries. Ms. Guillemette Vachey replied that the Green agenda is still in development process within the EC. The EC has an established political line to avoid financing fossil fuel development, but there are no concrete mechanisms at the moment. The conditionality under the green agenda will be strong.

Ms. Natasa Djereg, from CEKOR (Serbia), noted it is not possible to implement the GD and meet pollution reduction targets, climate targets, is strict conditionality is not ensured in future funds for the WB. Frequently funding still goes through to fossil fuel industries with some form of greenwashing. According to her, IFIs are skilled in repackaging subsidies to the biggest polluters. She also gave the example of the Serbian climate change strategy prepared using EU funds. She claimed that through that strategy, the Serbian Government and the electrical utility company are preparing development vectors that will increase pollution on air and water, crowd out renewables from the market and disable energy efficiency measures in the residential sector. The electric company is opening and expanding coal fields without EIA. She appealed to the EC to make sure the Serbian Government develops decarbonization scenarios to invert the tendency of relying on coal. It is essential to use the implementation of the Green Agenda to stop funding a carbon-based economy. Finally, Serbia needs to make more efforts to implement the Energy Community Treaty, including national emission reduction plans, which currently do not exist.

Mr. Denis Žiško, from the Centar za ekologiju i energiju (Bosnia and Herzegovina), complemented the previous intervention by stating the he saw some of the draft strategic documents made in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the plan is to build replacing capacity of existing coal plants. The EC should pressure for more serious approach of the authorities. Those documents are not public but should be in order to allow public discussion and to respect decarbonization principles.

Ms. Slaviša Jelisić, from LIR Evolution (Bosnia and Herzegovina) asked how the GD will approach other contentious investments like the Belt and Road initiative and how proper environmental permitting can be ensured in those projects. Greening EBRD is not sufficient. It is necessary to monitor all investments. She gave the example of the railway contract between Budapest and Belgrade which was made confidential by the Hungarian Government. There can be no environmental governance when there is a lack of transparency, no information on projections and impacts. Such projects will most likely increase emissions.



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Ms. Natasa Djereg, from CEKOR (Serbia), mentioned another Chinese supported project in Serbia for a new thermal power plant that had no public consultation, spatial plan, SEA. Such moves undermine the rule of law and the democratic process. The Green Agenda will fail if it does not address these issues.

Ms. Madalina Ivanica agreed that transparency needs to be increased, which is something that will be highlighted in the annual reports. The EC will see how to deal with these issues in accession negotiations in the future. Ms. Guillemette Vachey noted the panorama is dense with actors and interests. She recommended the CSOs to contact the respective EUDs about the particular issues raised. The EUDs are the first interlocutor for these concerns. Regarding Chinese investments, the EC is aware of the challenge, which goes beyond environmental issues. The EC is working with EAS, using diplomacy, to try to influence it. An EU-China statement is expected to come out soon. Furthermore, energy decisions are sovereign. The EC can try to influence states, but in the end the states will take the final decisions. The way forward is to keep pressing national authorities and the EUDs to bring the issues to the top of the agenda.

Ms. Natasa Djereg, from CEKOR (Serbia), restated that she does not understand how the EU is funding the Serbian climate strategy, when there is not a renewable energy-based scenario in it. She appealed to the EU to weigh in on the matter. In addition, she claimed the developer of study does not even meet the project ToR requirements. CSOs merely want a 4th scenario included, one with renewables. The EC should push for that scenario as the strategy is not still under development.

Ms. Milka Gvozdenović, from the Young Researchers of Serbia, complemented by saying the EUD in Serbia is aware of this problem and it has already called for extra steps in the Serbian strategy development.

Mr. Denis Žiško, from the Centar za ekologiju i energiju (Bosnia and Herzegovina), said a similar situation is playing out with Bosnia and Herzegovina's energy strategy. PWC, financed by British Government, developed 5 scenarios in the strategy. After first round, the 5th scenario, which was 100% renewable, disappeared from the document. He concluded that authorities are not interested in that possibility.

Ms. Guillemette Vachey informed the audience that there will be an Energy Community study looking into the deployment of renewables in the beneficiaries. For energy issues, the Energy Community is the main forum. She expects the Green Agenda to add momentum and offer support to the beneficiary authorities in this regard. She stated every small step counts and that the role of CSOs watchdogging is essential to meet decarbonization goals.

Mr. Denis Žiško, from the Centar za ekologiju i energiju (Bosnia and Herzegovina), was concerned with the potential adoption of such documents as they will provide the justification and legal basis for further investments in fossil fuel facilities. He called on the EC to mediate and coordinate the process of developing such strategies – as they are also often funded by different sources, and written by numerous consultancies, without any coordination.

Ms. Elena Nikolovska, from Eko-svest (North Macedonia), agreed that ambitious climate and energy policies will require the involvement of civil society. She also asked how the EU is foreseeing the implementation of future Green Agenda funds, by whom, and under what criteria. She was concerned with the situation in North Macedonia, where offices with no clear legal competence in the matter may end up receiving the funds, thus creating a gap for unaccountability and potential waste of funds. In North Macedonia the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning is the delegated by national law to deal with environmental protection and climate, while other funding receiving organizations might not be. According to her, this raises the question of whether it is possible to track expenditure and if there would be legal mechanisms of recourse.

Ms. Guillemette Vachey informed the participants that IPA3 will have a dedicated window for the Green Agenda and sustainable connectivity (35% of entire IPA3). The money will be attributed to projects proposed by the beneficiaries. Regarding the awarding criteria it is still too early. The national IPA coordinators will centralize the process and CSO proposals are welcome on how to design and improve it.

Ms. Madalina Ivanica concluded the session by calling to attention that the GD actions are both legislative and non-legislative. The EU will strive to put the green recovery on the table as the best option and it will follow through with green actions based on IPA funds.



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3.5 Session 5: TACSO – presentation

Ms. Tanja Hafner Ademi presented the Technical assistance to civil society organizations in the Western Balkans and Turkey facility (TACSO).

TACSO aims to develop the organizational and operational capacities of CSOs, to create an enabling environment for civil society development and to enhance the communication and visibility of CSOs. TACSO puts an emphasis on homegrown and participatory approaches, on aligning its capacity development with EU guidelines and other programmes and adding value by addressing gaps and creating synergies. TACSO approach to capacity building is summarized in the figure below.

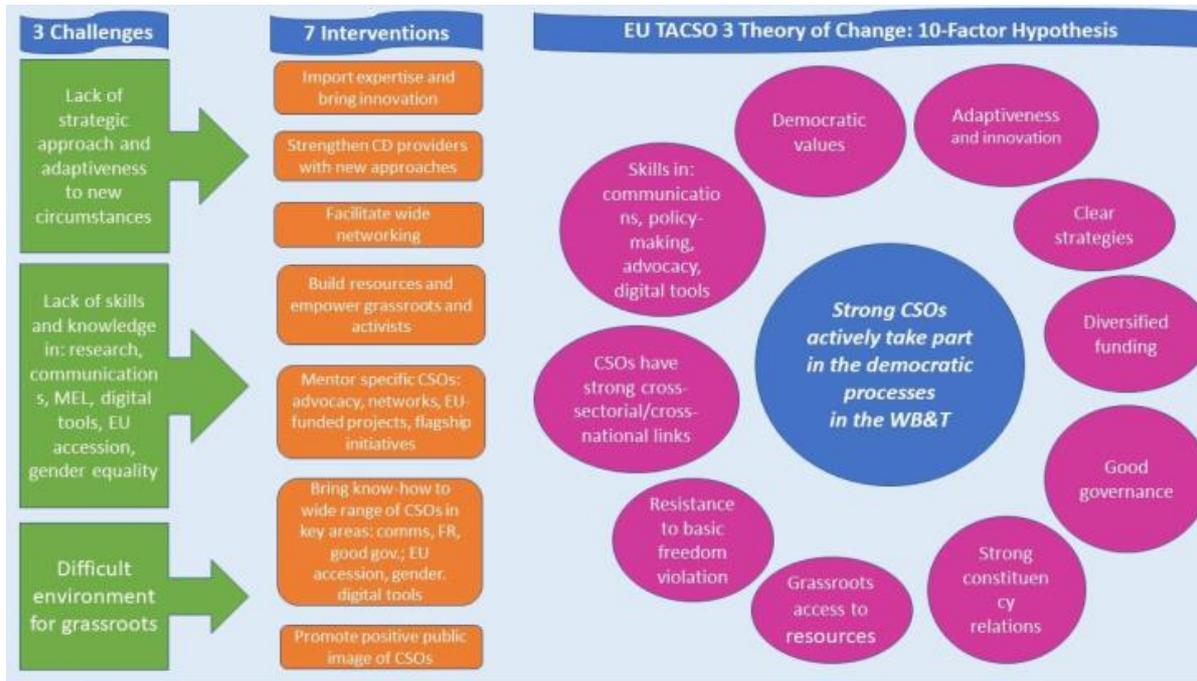


Figure 3 - TACSO approach

In order to achieve its goals, TACSO’s capacity building programme is divided in tracks. A pilot programme called “big-small exchange” that matches well developed organizations with smaller ones to create synergies and increase capacity at grassroots. Innovative approaches, where it involves specialized capacity development providers. Networking, through which it supports needs like advocacy, internal governance, among others. Diversity in fundraising, an important need for civil society, and which TACSO addresses with shared expertise. Community resilience, through which it provides to a spectrum of needs of civil society to make communities resilience and self-organized. Strategic mentoring, an advanced capacity building programme, holistic and based on hands-on experience. A basic knowledge package for NGOs. Visibility support to improve organization’s storytelling and a people to people on demand through which organizations can apply for regional or country specific exchanges in their area.

After the presentation, the audience had the chance to provide comments.

Ms. Natasa Djereg, from CEKOR (Serbia), recommended that TACSO should provide resources for legal actions. While public participation is important, CSOs also need the capacity to litigate on behalf of affected communities. In addition, she recommended future efforts also provide financing for watchdogging and creating between links to media and to the protection of human rights, which can be related to environmental offenses.

Ms. Tanja Hafner Ademi responded TACSO does not perform so much work with media, but the other points about watchdogging and the human rights approach are already areas which TACSO is aware of. Legal direct support is not a priority for TACSO, but general legal support to organizations can be provided.



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Ms. Milka Gvozdenović, from the Young Researchers of Serbia, asked about the situation regarding IPA3 planning and how will CSOs be involved. Ms. Tanja Hafner Ademi informed that TACSO prepared an IPA3 consultation report arising from a workshop in January 2020. The report was provided to DG NEAR, which is expected to formulate a response and identify the key points of importance for IPA3 design. The report provides good ideas to overcome challenges in IPA programming. Further consultations on the IPA3 will be held by the NIPACs and reported to the EC.

Ms. Guillemette Vachey confirmed the report was received and that the EC will provide an official answer.

3.6 Session 6: EPPA project – towards alignment with the European Green Deal - presentation

Mr. Mihail Dimovski presented the EPPA project and how it is contributing to the goals of the Green Deal. The project's objective is to strengthen the implementation of the EU environmental acquis in the Western Balkans and Turkey in areas relevant for addressing trans-boundary environmental issues. The project is organized in components/working groups covering EU environmental policy, water management, waste management, air quality management and nature. The project has two horizontal clusters of activities with compliance checking and the involvement of civil society.

The involvement of CSOs aims to integrate them into the overall environmental alignment efforts, to strengthen their capacities and to increase their contacts with the authorities. So far, CSOs were present in all the project technical workshops and are scheduled to continue participating.

Mr. Mihail Dimovski concluded his presentation with an explanation of the objectives of the other project components and a description of the activities undertaken and planned.

Once the floor was open to questions, Ms. Milka Gvozdenović, from the Young Researchers of Serbia, stated she sees a negative tendency from the previous projects (RENA and ECRAN). The current CSO involvement is limited to workshops, which she considers insufficient. More involvement, in the previous model, is more beneficial as it raises governments understanding of civil society and its role. This view was expressed to the EC in dedicated letters.

Mr. Mihail Dimovski replied EPPA is a smaller programme than its antecessors. EPPA was designed to strengthen regional cooperation for the adoption of the acquis and to encourage the beneficiaries to scale up their ambitions. Under the current scope, CSOs are invited to benefit from the workshops, express their views in that setting and to engage in debate with the authorities. The EPPA project has no staff exclusively assigned to the component, which is another limitation. He agreed the environment forum of the previous projects was a valuable mechanism and he believes in the role of civil society in the enlargement process. He called on the participants to offer suggestions on how to improve the participation of CSOs in the project.

Ms. Madalina Ivanica complemented Mr. Mihail Dimovski by clarifying EPPA is a smaller project, the budget being only half. Moreover, a regional project requires distribution of resources per sector and beneficiary. With the policy priorities shifting, she hopes that more resources will be available and that the next programme will come more powerful. In the current project it is not possible to go back to the previous model. However, Ms. Madalina Ivanica welcomed suggestions on how to improve the current framework and she believes the CSOs capacity to stand on their own and have a voice based on all the progress achieved. Ms. Madalina Ivanica floated the idea of potentially involving CSOs in the EU Green Week (October 2020) once the scope of the programme is defined.

Ms. Patrizia Heidegger, from the European Environmental Bureau, inquired about the workshop selection process for CSOs and how information is communicated to them. Mr. Mihail Dimovski replied that the initial screening process involved the EUDs of each beneficiary. The EUDs provided the project with information about the interested and involved CSOs according to the project sectors. For the workshops, the project invites those CSOs that have portfolio in the topic, have a stake in the accession process and come from the workshop's target beneficiaries. One hindrance is that CSOs are not eligible for TAIEX funding which limits the numbers of CSO representatives that can be involved per workshop. EPPA's remains engaged in strengthening and giving voice to the CSOs in the project topics using the tools



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available to the project, primarily workshops. Mr. Mihail Dimovski concluded by calling the participants to provide suggestions to improve the current state of CSO participation in the project.

3.7 Session 7: Shaping the future environmental priorities for the Western Balkans and Turkey

Ms. Madalina Ivanica moderated the discussion on future environmental priorities for the WB and Turkey. The discussion was guided by the four key sectors of the EU Green Deal: Air quality and industrial emissions, waste management, resource efficiency and circular economy, nature, and water management. Ms. Madalina Ivanica asked the participants what they see as priorities in the short-, medium- and long-run and how they would shape the Green Agenda for the region.

3.7.1 Air quality and industrial emissions

Mr. Denis Žiško, from the Centar za ekologiju i energiju (Bosnia and Herzegovina), stated that concrete measures are needed in transport, domestic heating, and industry. He suggested that examples should be taken from other European countries. For domestic heating he called for support, through subsidies, to improve the energy efficiency of buildings and the replacement of coal boilers. In industry, thermal coal power plants have to be phased off. In addition authorities should be compelled to implement pollution prevention measures through financing conditionalities. He added that implementation is key, instead of continuously reforming and adapting legislation. The priority should be to implement existing law and only then continue with further legislative efforts.

Ms. Natasa Djereg, from CEKOR (Serbia), asked a question on the relation of the Energy Community Treaty with Chapter 27 negotiations. In her view, beneficiaries have been taking a flexible approach with the Energy Community and that more pressure should be put on them via Chapter 27 talks. Ms. Madalina Ivanica clarified that commitments in the Energy Community are not linked to enlargement negotiations. However, both efforts go in the same direction. The Energy Community annual report is taken into consideration during subcommittee meetings and in the EC country reports.

Mr. Denis Žiško, from the Centar za ekologiju i energiju (Bosnia and Herzegovina), opined that the Energy Community should help in the adoption of the acquis. Nevertheless, he pointed to the practice of countries trying to renegotiate commitments already made in the Energy Community in accession negotiations. He suggests a more transparent support of the EC to the Energy Community to avoid such tactics.

Ms. Elena Nikolovska, from Eko-svest (North Macedonia), highlighted the importance of building energy efficiency and circular economy for air pollution. She also raised the question of waste management in North Macedonia, where the situation needs improvement (no waste selection, or only reduced to wet/dry waste separation, waste burning, illegal landfills). A law on industrial emissions is important. There is a draft law but the process is slow. The new law should reflect the IED.

Mr. Rodion Gjoka, from Co-PLAN Institute for Habitat Development (Albania), called for more projects to tackle air pollution, especially relating to LCPs and MCPs. Most of the beneficiaries have not aligned with that acquis and there is no adequate monitoring and reporting. The EnvNet project looked at the reporting and found it to be inadequate. There is also no reliable data for transport related air pollution that can inform a better transport policy and understand its contribution to air problems.

3.7.2 Waste management, resource efficiency and circular economy

Mr. Denis Žiško, from the Centar za ekologiju i energiju (Bosnia and Herzegovina), noted that separation of wet and dry waste is made to produce RDF and provide cheap fuel for thermal plants equating to poorly regulated waste incineration. RDF burning is unfortunately attractive to foreign investments and it tends to encourage waste imports and discourage recycling.

Ms. Elena Nikolovska, from Eko-svest (North Macedonia), agreed with the previous point. Cement companies see RDF as an attractive solution for GHG reduction, but there is no standardization leading to indiscriminate use of waste as RDF. Authorities, especially local authorities, should cooperate to create recycling infrastructure like some EU Member States. Mr. Denis Žiško called for EPPA waste workshops



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to target local waste practitioners as frontline policy implementors. Ms. Natasa Djereg, from CEKOR (Serbia), called attention to the situation in Serbia regarding communal waste services. It represents a strong interest in Serbia, and the Government included those services in the negotiating position without stating why or to what purpose.

Ms. Milka Gvozdenović, from the Young Researchers of Serbia, noted that medical waste is becoming a problem. There is no system to manage biohazardous waste. She called for the EC to provide support for that sector since there is no strategy or plan on how to deal with it.

Mr Rodion Gjoka, from Co-PLAN Institute for Habitat Development (Albania), raised the issue that in Albania there is not a decentralization frame through which municipalities could take the lead in waste management. The government recently allowed the construction of three incinerators for urban and industrial waste as RDF despite its waste strategy. This is having a negative impact on the process of reducing, separating and recycling waste. The public-private partnerships need waste for RDF production. In addition, the incinerators construction plans include one site for waste intake and another to store incineration remains. The incineration sludge is hazardous and poses a water contamination risk as the plants are near water bodies. It is therefore important to pay attention to the decision-making level as that is where policy is emanating from.

3.7.3 Nature

Mr. Admir Aladzuz, from the Center for Environmentally Sustainable Development (Bosnia and Herzegovina), said implementation and enforcement is a major challenge. There is a lack of human resources to ensure field enforcement. Protected areas are subject to numerous threats like wildfires, and damage to ecosystems. There is a lack of monitoring and scientific information. For instance, Bosnia and Herzegovina does not enough information about its endangered species themselves. The IUCN red list was done poorly, without fieldwork.

Mr. Goran Sekulic, from WWF Adria (Serbia), called the need to develop and integrate the NATURA2000 network, including preparing the legal framework. In general, infrastructure projects do not include biodiversity preservation measures. Integration and coordination with the WFD are also needed. Further support is needed to create biodiversity action plans and a strategy. In general, the countries need to follow and participate in global developments in biodiversity policy.

3.7.4 Water management

Ms. Milka Gvozdenović, from the Young Researchers of Serbia, showed concern for the water-nature connection, in particular the generation of hydropower. The proliferation of HPPs is showing that that energy sector does not have environmental concerns and often does to comply with legal requirements. Enforcement authorities are also not performing their role creating a lawlessness scenario.

Mr. Denis Žiško, from the Centar za ekologiju i energiju (Bosnia and Herzegovina), reinforced the importance of the problem. CSOs are working with local communities to block HPPs projects that contribute little to energy generation but cause disproportional, negative impacts. He informed the audience that his organization is advocating a moratorium on HPPs. Industrial and urban waste waters remain a problem. Not enough is being done. Any efforts to build infrastructure with international aid should make sure water treatment plants have a financing plan to make sure the plants can operate after opening.

Mr. Tanay Sidki Uyar, from KADOS (Turkey), called for more investment in renewables while raising the costs of fossil fuels by accounting for its externalities. In parallel, fund awareness raising for the EU GD, focus on the local level as change leaders and share experiences within Europe.

Mr. Denis Žiško, from the Centar za ekologiju i energiju (Bosnia and Herzegovina), called for more opportunities to interact with the EU institutions in Brussels in order to raise the value of CSO voices and push environmental concerns at the top of the enlargement agenda. A possible way forward would be to organize an EPPA meeting in Brussels to meet EC officials, and MEPs responsible for the region and the topics.



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Ms. Milka Gvozdenović concluded that resources for environmental civil society should also be mobilized at national level, for instance, within IPA3.

3.8 Session 8: Presentation – Approaching environmental issues, communicating and working with the EC

Ms. Patrizia Heidegger presented the EEB and offered opportunities for the beneficiaries CSOs to be engaged with EEB in the accession context.

EEB is a network of 150 civil society organizations from 30 European countries. The EEB tackles the most pressing environmental problems like climate and energy, nature and sustainable agriculture, industry and health, resource efficiency, sustainability and governance and global and regional policies. The EEB is structured along its General Assembly, the Board and Executive Committees, working groups and the Brussels team.

The EEB has member organizations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey. Through them it seeks to promote better environmental policies in candidate and neighbouring countries. Currently, there are projects in the Western Balkans and Turkey. The EnvNet project (regional civil society network and advocacy actor working for improving climate and environmental policy and introducing circular economy), and the Participatory River Basin Management: Water Matters project in Turkey.

EEB identified the needs of its members in the western Balkans and Turkey. They are the need for funding, expertise on EU policies for monitoring and advocacy, good practice examples, networking, and reaching out to a wider EU audience.

Ms. Patrizia Heidegger concluded by proposing potential cooperation opportunities between EEB and CSOs from the region:

- Monitoring national environmental legislation and the approximation to EU acquis and standards (watch dog role)
- Raise awareness of the shortcomings of national legislation and implementation and contribute to EU country progress report (chapter 15 and 27).
- Drafting country specific reports /studies for advocacy work with the EC and national government.
- Organisation of advocacy campaigns on key environmental issues in order to step up the pressure.
- Organisation of field trips with media and local grass-root CSOs to highlight and environmental issues and increase number of reports.
- Document and communicate interest of local communities, document environmental conflicts
- Legal action

Mr. Denis Žiško, from the Centar za ekologiju i energiju (Bosnia and Herzegovina), commented on the parallel functions of the EnvNet project and the Environment Forum under RENA and ECRAN. He suggested to insert EnvNet under the Environment Forum. He also pointed that the greatest help would be support to litigation efforts as a precondition to achieve success in environmental conflicts instead of more capacity building workshops for CSOs. Ms. Milka Gvozdenović informed the audience that Coalition 27 is already preparing shadow progress reports available in English, showing already the strong capacities of the region's CSOs.

Ms. Elena Nikolovska, from Eko-svest (North Macedonia), flagged the problem of public participation during the covid confinement. She sees major decisions being taken without public participation.

Mr. Henrik Osterblad presented The Nature Conservancy Europe Programme. Their mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. The organization has 3600 employees, 600 of which are scientists. It is present in 72 countries and it succeeded in protecting 8 million ha of land and 3000 km of rivers. TNC vision for Southeast Europe is one in which people and nature can thrive together: where nature remains preserved, while people benefit from higher living standards, clean energy and growing economic development. The region has over 30000km of pristine rivers, 113+ threatened fish



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species and over 3000 planned hydropower plants. In this context, TNC strategy for SEE is to promote renewable energy, and protecting and preserving rivers.

Mr. Henrik Osterblad then explained how TNC engages with the EU. The TNC works with the EC and the European Parliament. In the EP they work to build a political base and gather support by talking to MEPs and participating in Inter Groups and Committees. In the EC they support legislation and implementation. TNC attempts to play a complementary role providing science, methodology and resource mobilization to the EU. It also invests in forming partnerships to coordinate collective efforts and gain a common, stronger voice.

Mr. Henrik Osterblad concluded with some pointers for the coming years. He called for more renewable energy to combat climate change. The necessary investments in infrastructure should respect the need to preserve biodiversity. This is best achieved with system scale planning, also in the context of orchestrating a green recovery in the wake of covid19. Finally, regional cooperation is essential to achieve the goals of habitats and species conservation.

4 Conclusions

The CSOs called on the EC to ensure donor funds to the Western Balkans and Turkey have conditionality attached. That conditionality should prevent financing the carbon economy, especially thermal plants on coal or any derivative industry. Regarding IPA3 funds, all participants see the need to attach stringent conditionality and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the money is used fully and in the most impactful way possible. They also requested that EC takes into account feedback received via TACSO and they expect the NIPACs to conduct consultations for IPA3 programming.

CSOs requested that the enforcement of SEA and EIA provisions be fully, and transparently, applied to any investments from IFIs, EU IPA funding, but also foreign investments, for instance, the Belt and Road initiative.

Countries' energy, climate and air quality strategies should have clear options for investment in renewables other than hydro and invest in energy efficiency. There should be coordination among funders, the recipient countries, and the implementing organizations to ensure the strategies developed are coherent and coordinated.

Concrete measures are need for domestic heating (subsidies to improve energy efficiency of buildings and replacement of coal boilers), transport and industry (closure of coal plants). In parallel to strategies and measures, attention must be given to the actual implementation and enforcement as transposition progresses. In this regard monitoring and reporting of pollution must be drastically improved.

Waste management needs to be improved. Participants noted a tendency in the countries for waste to be converted into fuel via RDF that feeds the thermal plants and cement factories. The choice for incineration either directly or via RDF is rejected. One of the consequences is investment in deficient incineration plants and removal of incentives for separation and recycling. Another is toxic pollution from the incineration sludge.

The nature sector suffers from a generalized lack of capacities (financial, scientific and human) which leads to poor stewardship of existing protected areas and creates obstacles for the creation of new areas. Further attention should be given to preparing the legal framework to create, develop and integrate the Natura2000 network in the countries. Strict measures to preserve biodiversity were called for in infrastructure development projects. Hydropower is one of the most relevant of such projects. The environmental cost/energy benefit is generally negative; therefore, such projects should be suspended. Wastewater treatment remains a problem.

CSOs see public participation as an essential democratic tool to ensure the rule of law and as a way to check environmental investments that are in non-compliance with existing laws and regulations. In addition, they expressed the need for funding, or legal support, that would allow them to litigate in court against specific investments, as a last measure, when the consultation and public participation processes break down. In this regard, more watchdogging capacities and a better link to media are also necessary.



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Regarding the EPPA project, some disappointment was expressed at the current framework of involvement of CSOs. The project and the EC are open to receive suggestions to improve that situation in light of the project constraints.

Workshop outputs

The workshop's main outputs were:

- Participants informed about the European Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and Turkey.
- Participants informed about the latest developments in the enlargement process.
- Participants informed about the EPPA project activities (past, present, future).
- Identified environmental challenges, gaps, and priorities, from the civil society perspective, regarding international funding, public participation, air quality management, waste management, nature protection, and the approximation and harmonization process (transposition, implementation, and enforcement).

Endnotes

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.



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