



Bridging the gap between the needs, capacities and opportunities: Green CIVIL's research and recommendations

Green agenda, environmental issues and sustainable development are a significant part of political programs and part of the PR of the institutions at the state and local level. In recent years, the focus of the general public, media, civil society, and even academia has been on reviving topics related to green issues, their understanding and promotion.

The "Green Forum" project of Green CIVIL (an organizational unit of CIVIL – Center for Freedom) provided a platform for debate on key green issues. The project identified a large number of positive and negative socio-political factors regarding the country's green future.

The project included a large number of experts on green issues, politicians, decision-makers and professionals from the ranks of civil society organizations and the media. At the same time, CIVIL's team worked on systemizing previous experiences and research, taking into consideration the presentations of the participants at Green CIVIL's panel discussions as well. The experienced analysts within the organization formulated recommendations also based on the continuous monitoring and analyses of the current conditions related to green issues, including also comparative analyses with world trends.

I. CAPACITY OF THE STATE AND INSTITUTIONS TO CREATE AND IMPLEMENT A GREEN AGENDA

One of the key questions to which the project tried to give an answer is: **Do the state and institutions have the capacity to create and implement a green agenda?**

Based on Green CIVIL's research, several points and recommendations can be drawn.

1. Legislation in harmony with the EU

Efforts must be strengthened for adopting legislation in harmony with EU legislation. This means overall and regular cooperation and exchange with the European institutions that will be invited to help in creating legal solutions appropriate to Macedonian conditions and situation in the area of green agendas.

The involvement of civil society as well must not be forgotten, particularly organizations that have experience with monitoring and analysis of policies, and understanding of green values as well.

2. Development strategy with clear and achievable goals

A strong recommendation of Green CIVIL and of the project participants is to work more consistently on creating and implementing a development strategy and strategies, which in the medium and long term will have completely clear and achievable goals, from which realistic action plans will emerge.

Independent experts and organizations that have experience in creating strategies for policies and practices in a wider social and political context, but also with a focus on green issues, can help in this area.

3. Overcoming the culture of impunity and anti-corruption

Steps for overcoming the culture of impunity must be taken urgently. This implies also fight against corruption, as well as strengthening the transparency and accountability of the institutions.

In this context, some of the actions could consist of strengthening the institutions, but also introducing the practice of engaging, among other things, communal wardens, who will cooperate closely with the police. At the same time, efforts must be made to strengthen the courts in the direction of resolving environmental crime faster and in a consistent manner.

4. More investments in the green agenda

The state has to allocate higher budgets for financing the activities and projects that are part of the green agenda, as well as campaigns for strengthening public awareness and changing policies and practices at the local and central level.

5. Strengthening human resources

In terms of human resources, a chronic shortage has been identified of environmental inspectors and experts in certain areas of the green agenda.

The institutions should work on strengthening human resources or retraining of the existing capacities.

6. Education of the public

The state, local self-government and international donors should pay more attention to strengthening public awareness and education of the citizens. Green CIVIL recommends establishment of a special fund for projects in this area, as well as reform efforts in the educational process for creating habits and views that are in line with green values and the green agenda of the country and of the EU.

II. HOW REALISTIC IS THE GREEN AGENDA?

Understanding the green agenda in North Macedonia, its perception and putting it in the context of the everyday social and political life varies. It depends also on the hierarchical arrangement of the state and the institutions.

The government is inclined towards the economic aspect and sustainability, while the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning towards the priority areas.

1. Harmonizing the green agenda with the real conditions and opportunities



In the research, Green CIVIL came to a conclusion that the Green Agenda is not in line with the real opportunities of the institutions, and even less with the budgetary opportunities. This contributes to a discrepancy between the agendas and project ideas and with what is actually implemented.

The institutions are faced with a great challenge in implementing the legislation and the projects anticipated with the green agenda. This is due to a series of objective reasons (economic and military crisis, lack of finances, etc.), but also subjective reasons (lack of human resources, inconsistency and low quality of implementation of activities, etc.).

Among other things, more experts need to be engaged in this area in the creation of strategies and policies, as well as work on amending and harmonizing the laws. This will contribute towards solving part of the key green issues that affect citizens on a daily basis. But harmonizing the Green Agenda with the real opportunities and capacities should be a priority.

2. Participation of civil society

Participation of civil society, both in the world and in North Macedonia, is a key resource for the country in implementing the Green Agenda.

Civil society associations, on the other hand, through education and projects, focused on specific areas of the Green Agenda, are trying to contribute to elementary issues, such as air pollution, soil pollution, green infrastructure, environmental protection and so on. Their approach to the green agenda is in the direction of perceiving the green idea as another policy tool.

3. Involving the media in informing the public about green issues

A recommendation of Green CIVIL is greater involvement of the media in informing the public about green issues. The media, in that direction, do not show interest, nor do they have enough knowledge about what the green agenda is, what the benefits are, (in)dependence of the European issue. They receive information from decision-makers or civil environmental associations through announcements or press conferences that inform about certain successes and failures in certain segments of green topics.

Investigative journalism shows interest, but the motivation sometimes depends on the transparency of the institutions and how current the topic is. Most of the stories have a political context. The most common motive for investigating are awarding journalism courses with specific topics, which cover one segment of green issues. Such is the example with the competition of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia, where the focus is on dealing with air pollution and possible solutions.

Recommendations

Experiencing the Green Agenda as a real need, part of the everyday social and political context in which the citizens of North Macedonia live, for Green CIVIL is possible if there is investment in:

1. Education on strengthening public awareness

Green CIVIL's research within the framework of the many years of experience in informing, advocating and promoting green values, shows that public awareness is created by the daily political turmoil that tends to promote European values and democracy, on the one hand, and nationalism, disinformation and anti-Western agendas, on the other hand, in constant conflict, which does not leave enough space for the citizens to create a critical review of the priority green issues.

Green CIVIL recommends strong engagement of the state in education on and promotion of green values, continuous communication and greater openness to the public, objective informing both on the successes and the challenges faced in the implementation of projects and activities covered by the Green Agenda.

In that direction, civil associations have an even greater responsibility, especially those organizations whose primary goal are the areas of the Green Agenda. Openness to the public using all the tools at their disposal, as well as mutual cooperation will contribute to creating public awareness, but also primary education of the citizens.

2. Greater media space for green topics

In that context, the communication between the competent institutions and decision-makers and the media plays a significant role. The media space should leave room for an educational approach to green issues, information that is put out there should always be checked, debate shows, reporting and contributions on green topics should be an integral part of the daily editorial policy.

3. Transparency of the institutions

The recommendation of Green CIVIL is that the institutions work on their openness to the public, to respond to the requests for information of a public character, to be available for the media and the wider public.

III. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES AND SYSTEMATIC KNOWLEDGE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE GREEN AGENDA

1. Competencies

The government, relevant ministries, Parliament, as well as institutions at the local level have a wide range of competencies, but also a big difference in expertise and human resources. The communication, cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experience depends on the political differences, financial resources, and, above all, on the will of the decision-makers at the central and local level.

2. Challenges

The implementation of the green agenda in certain areas is failing also due to non-functioning legal solutions, as well as having greater competencies at the local level and less financial and human

resources. When it comes to capital investments, according to the research of Green CIVIL, primarily through European funds, the state or competent institutions are forced to take away the competencies of the local authorities.

3. Harmonization with EU directives

In regards to the laws and having knowledge, the assessment is positive also through the screening process as part of the EU accession negotiations. What is lacking is implementation of projects and enforcement of laws.

Recommendations

According to the research of Green CIVIL, it can be concluded that the Government in the past five/six years has been working in several priority areas of the green agenda. The energy crisis as a result of the war in Ukraine has contributed to the acceleration of the process of using renewable energy sources, but in order to continue with an accelerated pace in other areas as well, Green CIVIL recommends:

1. Strengthening the institutional capacities

An assessment and analysis is necessary as to which areas of the Green Agenda the state has least expertise and professionalism within the framework of the institutions and for this to be complemented with experts or persons who will receive appropriate education and knowledge for a respective area. If assessed as so, to use external cooperation as well, as well as EU resources.

2. Cooperation between relevant ministries

The Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning is the bearer of the responsibilities related to environmental protection. However, the work of the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning depends also on cooperation with other ministries that have competencies in the areas of economy, transport, justice, state agencies and inspectorates. Therefore, that cooperation should be strengthened, and the procedures related to financial resources, infrastructure, legal solutions and law enforcement should be in time frames that will not dispute and slow down the work of the Government and the Ministry of Environment.

3. Strengthening the capacities of public communal enterprises

One of the key problems, as a consequence of the economic crisis that emerged in the post-Covid period, but also the impact of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, has led the communal enterprises to exhaustion of financial and human resources. Although they are under the competence of the municipalities, still, usually the debt towards the state is huge and is something for which an analysis is being conducted to overcome the problem. The communal services that citizens pay for are at the same price, energy and other costs have increased. Green CIVIL's recommendation is that the state, through the sets of anti-crises measures, helps them in settling their debts and further strengthening of the capacities for timely and quality maintenance of the public space.

4. Institutional cooperation at the local and central level

One of the problems for implementation of capital projects within the framework of the Green Agenda is the greater competencies that municipalities have through decentralization. Green CIVIL recommends, so that the state does not take away the competencies, for them to ask for help on their own initiative and cooperate with the institutions at the central level, so that the processes are not hindered. In that mutual cooperation, to find a way how to educate and engage environmental inspectors, the lack of which is especially noticeable in smaller municipalities.

IV. POLITICAL CONSENSUS

As a response to the question of whether there is political consensus around green issues in the country, the following two conclusions can be made:

- **There is, it is the only thing about which everyone agrees on**
- **There is, but declaratively, the green agenda as a top priority depends on the current political situation**

The positive and negative context of the conclusion that there is a political consensus stems from the daily political division in the struggle of the government to break through the narrative explications of the opposition that is constantly trying to undermine the democratic and European commitments of the country.

Recommendations:

In that direction, Green CIVIL recommends that the green agenda be a top priority, free from the political aspirations for power and supremacy of certain political parties. By placing the green agenda at the top of political and party agendas and mutual cooperation, the following recommendations are achievable:

- 1. Sustainable development is possible if a balance is created between the economic, social and environmental aspect**

If the green future of the country is set as a primary goal, then the political consensus will contribute to development that will improve the economic, social, educational standard of the citizens.

- 1. The focus should always be the citizens**

If the focus is on the citizens and they are the primary interest of the political parties, then there is no room for negotiation or playing with their future.

- 2. Creating conditions for a better life**

By joint engagement in all areas of the green agenda, to contribute to the health and standard of living of all.

V. ABUSE OF GREEN ISSUES

The most common reasons for abuse of green issues are corruption, promises in the context of elections, abuse of power, blocking laws in parliament, party dependence, changing strategies and laws depending on which party is in power, playing with the trust of citizens.

Recommendations

The recommendations of Green CIVIL are a result of the many years of experience in monitoring political processes in the country and the organization's commitments in the fight for human rights and freedoms, against corruption, disinformation and fake news, in monitoring election processes, as well as integration processes.

1. Honest and realistic promises to the citizens

In the context of the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in 2024, Green CIVIL recommends that election programs include activities from green issues that are realistically feasible and which realization is possible during the mandate that will be given to them. Honesty in their public addresses will contribute also to increasing trust among citizens.

2. Determining priorities financially sustainable and with sufficient capacity in human resources

Determining realistic budgeting and estimating funds that would come in through foreign investments and European funds, without making promises that are not realistic and feasible and thus abusing the green agendas for political points.

3. Overcoming the abuse of the terminology related to the green agenda for daily political purposes

VI. PROSPECTS OF KEY GREEN ISSUES IN THE COUNTRY IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS

Waste management and the use of renewable energy sources are key areas where prospectively there can be progress, but are also on the list of priorities. No less important are air pollution and environmental protection. However, according to the conclusions of Green CIVIL, the biggest investment should be made in the educational system and education of the young generations, from which the green transition and green future of the country depends.

The general conclusion is that we are lagging behind in many processes, precisely due to the lack of political will, interest or understanding of certain problems related to green issues. Due to these reasons, EU integration will speed up the processes, but will also contribute to sustainable development, stability, and in that direction, security of the state as well. In that context, EU integration for the green agenda is listed as a priority for North Macedonia.



Priorities

With this project, Green CIVIL also determines the priorities in which various stakeholders and decision-making entities should strengthen their capacities, and align their plans with the real opportunities, but also with EU standards.

- **Energy transformation to renewable sources**
- **Energy efficiency**
- **Regulation of waste**
- **Agriculture**
- **Strategy for climate action**
- **Air, soil and water pollution**
- **Railway infrastructure / public transport**
- **Application of circular economy**

The “Green Forum” project was implemented in the September – November 2023 period, with the support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

CIVIL, as an organization that includes Green CIVIL, and at the same also as a member of regional initiatives, including the LogEx circular economy network, continues with its commitments and active contribution to green issues in the country, the region and the world.

Edit by **Biljana Jordanovska**

Translation: **Natasha Cvetkovska**