

Civil society and energy – why are CSOs on the margins?

Last month the electricity distribution company in private ownership - EVN Macedonia and the Ministry of Economy started new joint platform for energy efficiency (EE) called “Consider and save (Размисли и заштеди)”. The purpose of this platform is through concrete activities to raise awareness about the need to change habits concerning rational use of energy. Also, within the platform special focus will be put on greater use of EE in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The main activities through which these two entities will promote the greater usage of EE will be done through a special educational program called “Energy alphabet”, which will be broadcasted in Macedonian and Albanian. The educational program will contain several topics dealing with electricity and EE. Also, within this platform there will be workshops for the media, SMEs and students, which will be held by experts from the Ministry of Economy, EVN Macedonia and independent experts working in energy. The workshops will have an educational character similar to the program, and will also give practical advices to SMEs for greater application of the EE measures in their business processes. Also the two partners will hold debates on how to find financing for energy efficiency projects and how to access capital for these kinds of measures.

Any initiative that includes promotion of spending less energy or spending energy more economically is for praise. Moreover, it is high time for the state to start seriously working on promoting sustainable energy demand as the prices keep rising and the reforms needed before the opening of the energy markets in 2015 are still underway. However, there are several issues that must be pointed out and considered in this climate and those are: 1) the non-involvement of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in this platform and generally in the reforms of the energy sector and 2) the fact that SMEs and citizens are put in the same group. SMEs have very different needs when it comes to lowering energy consumption than citizens in their homes. These campaigns should target separately the needs of each group. Putting them together might have

the adverse effect on at least one group if not the both. **Therefore a more focused action plan on how the educational activities will be conducted should be drafted by the Ministry and EVN.**

Why are CSOs excluded from more substantial debates?

Coming back to the 1st point in the previous paragraph: there is a feeling that in Macedonia exists an undergoing trend that CSOs or the majority of them dealing with energy are not very prominent in the developments regarding the rising of the energy prices; the new initiatives for EE measures or the changes in the energy laws and bylaws. From personal experience, Analytica has been trying in the past few months to reach the Ministry of Economy regarding the new amendments on the Law on energy which deal with some heavy fines for the municipalities (link in Macedonian

http://analyticamk.org/images/stories/files/briefs/12048_policybrief.pdf). Apart from publishing the document, sending a press release, Analytica sent comments to the unique national electronic registry for laws and other regulations where each institution has the obligation to publish the act they propose to be adopted by the Parliament for comments. Up until the publishing of this commentary there has been no response by the Ministry to Analytica’s suggestions.

Another issue was the lack of debate regarding the recently adopted Regional Energy Strategy by the Energy Community, which will affect the development of the energy sector in the entire region. In the open letter addressed to the Minister of Economy, Analytica together with its partners from the regional SEA Change consortium asked for **the Regional Energy Strategy of the Energy Community to be subjected to a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and a budgetary allocation for this comprehensive process to be ring-fenced by the ECTS** (http://analyticamk.org/images/stories/files/open_letter.pdf). The Strategy was adopted, however there was no response, even a negative one, to the open letter. The list goes further, thus raising the question why there is no established official communication line between the Ministry and the civil society with all its groups and movements (civil actions, environmental groups, think tanks etc.)? What are the reasons behind this: is it the limited capacity of the organizations themselves to deal with complicated issues such as laws and strategies and action plans, is it the limited

capacity of the civil servants on top of their daily work to deal with all the demands from the CSOs, or is it the lack of will and understanding of what an open dialogue between the state and its subjects mean?

Additionally, the level of cooperation between the civil society and the private sector in the energy area is also highly unsatisfactory. As the citizens’ discontent grows further, one might ask the question why EVN does not cooperate more with the civil society especially after the latest protests. It is essential in time of crucial reforms for all the sectors to work together in drawing the best solutions for the citizens, the state and the business sector. However the experience shows that in the energy sector in Macedonia, mostly it is the state together with the big energy companies that work jointly on the reforms which are after that presented to the consumers. Once more, the link between these two parties is evidently missing.

At the end, the commentary will just quote the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, which Macedonia adopted therefore making it obligatory to implement its requirements. Among else this convention provides for: the right to participate in environmental decision-making. Arrangements are to be made by public authorities to enable the public affected and environmental non-governmental organisations to comment on, for example, proposals for projects affecting the environment, or plans and programmes relating to the environment, these comments to be taken into due account in decision-making, and information to be provided on the final decisions and the reasons for it (“**public participation in environmental decision-making**”); the right to review procedures to challenge public decisions that have been made without respecting the two aforementioned rights or environmental law in general (“**access to justice**”) (<http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/documents/cep43e.pdf>). We leave it up to the officials to prove whether these rights belong to the Macedonian civil society or not.

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