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POST COVID-19 - WHY SHOULD KOSOVO CONSIDER A GREEN ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN?

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The spread of COVID-19 has caused an immediate global risk that has resulted in restrictive measures aimed at preventing the drastic and immediate decline of economic activities and beyond. The urgency for an almost comprehensive isolation in most countries in the world, the introduction of another "normality", the reduction of human and even commodity movements, both inside and outside the state borders, has revitalized the environment to some extent with particular emphasis on improving air quality as seen from satellite images. The change of seasons is considered another factor that has affected in addition to "isolation" in Europe. However, such a temporary situation cannot be considered as a necessary environmental change, nor can it provide security for the continuation of this improvement. Therefore, energy and climate agreements for Europe predict that by 2030 there will be a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, a 32% reduction in renewable energy funding and a 32.5% increase in efficient energy. As with pandemic situations, the impact on the environment can be seen as temporary. When the pandemic has subsided, will attention be restored to the alarming environment that threatens the environment?

The pandemic is expected to be followed by a deep economic crisis at the national and global levels. In addition to the ongoing preventive measures taken by public and health institutions, the economic recovery plan is the next step. This economic recovery plan, in addition to the economy, should also protect the environment given the alarming state of pollution before the outbreak of the crisis.

The decrease of the economic activity by COVID-19 in a developing country like Kosovo has been reflected in almost all sectors. This situation results in the closure of businesses, job losses, leading various sectors to eventual failure. However, the decrease of the economic activity in Kosovo has not been accompanied by any research that assesses the rapid and potential improvement of the environment. The biggest environmental polluters in Kosovo have been identified as the Kosovo Energy Corporation, with two power plants Kosovo A and B, Ferronikeli, industrial discharges, landfills and mining depots, transport, agriculture, small combustion plants and even small family economies. And the biggest environmental pollution in Kosovo is observed in the air. In terms of air quality, Kosovo as a small country was compared to the pollution of countries such as Beijing, Mumbai, and New Delhi, with highly developed industries. The Air Quality Index by the US Embassy in Kosovo for days was alarming for health as a result of poor air quality. While the impact analysis of COVID-19 pandemics as mentioned above emphasize that the most affected economic sectors by isolation are that of construction and that of production. What is being observed in the world through satellites is that greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced to a certain extent, and the data on air quality in Kosovo show that the air is of moderate quality, and in some countries the quality is good. Rapid data without in-depth analysis, and the clarity and smoothness of smog in places like Gjilan, where for the first time during pandemics peaks like Luboteni can be observed, are evidence that the environment has had a slight recovery as result of pandemic. This is an opportunity that should be used to preserve the environment, which for a chain effect would bring Kosovo closer to European policies in this regard. The potential can be used to turn into a real opportunity if the recovery of the economy by the government is based on a strategy that would take into account not only the economy but also the preservation of the environment.

While struggling with the pandemic, an economic recovery package, with clear objectives and criteria based on sustainable development is essential. This next package should not ignore the trends in the world and in the European Union, which while maintaining the economy will have to promote a recovery of economic sectors that are environmental friendly. The mechanisms that will be used starting from the budget of the Republic of Kosovo, funds or other instruments should be used carefully to maintain this good start in terms of a healthier environment. This program should prioritize, among other things, investments in green energy and economic facilitation for producers who reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This type of program construction would show vision, focusing on protecting the environment while also caring about the health of citizens.

Kosovo should ensure that economic recovery programs will prioritize investments that support renewable energy or assistance with business consolidation, especially in sectors with low-intensity of carbon, in order to drastically reduce emissions. Similarly, banks may be encouraged to invest less in environmental hazards and more in efforts to mitigate climate change. Kosovo has the opportunity to receive assistance from international funds and investors. As a concrete opportunity is the next round of pre-membership EU funds (IPA III), a round which will provide support for environmental protection and sustainable development. Another alternative is the European Investment Bank, which will play a key role, in coordination with the financing priorities of EBRD, the World Bank and others.

In addition, the economic recovery plan should aim to be in harmonization with the nation's legislation which already endorsed EU's climate and energy policy agreements, an act which would facilitate Kosovo's future journey as a state with the potential candidate status. Committing towards meeting the climate and energy objectives by 2030 in line with Europe's ambitions, as the other six Western Balkans countries, would make Kosovo a serious candidate. Energy and Climate Committee's fifth meeting was held for the sake of technology development, where it was emphasized that there is a link between national energy, climate plans and Europe's green agreement itself. This committee, among other things, has announced that the EU expects a serious commitment from Western Balkans countries for which it has proposed the Green Agenda.

Kosovo should consider a green economic recovery plan based on the constant risk of the environment, including risks of air pollution. A green approach by Kosovo would be a good opportunity to create sustainable economic development, including efficient energy from renewable sources. Any plan that will be designed to have an impact on the economy as much as environmental protection will have to be based on five general pillars: de-carbonization, circular economy, pollution reduction, agriculture and sustainable biodiversity. Supporting the objectives of the Agenda through legal obligations would ensure the sustainability of the economy and ecology. While COVID-19 may not have a lasting impact on the environment, this current impact should be assessed and used to our advantage by prioritizing objectives and addressing the problems that existed before this pandemic and those that will emerge after overcoming it.

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