

Remediation Of Environmental Problems In Albania



The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has strengthened capacities in the Western Balkans countries to tackle the environmental problems through removal of pollution or contaminants from the high priority regions. Dealing with the environmental issues of the region would help progress in gaining accession in the European Union. Some of the environmental remediation are carried out through hotspot projects.

Early this year, Sanja Bojanic, Regional Programme Manager for the biggest UNDP regional programme in South Eastern Europe, had emphasized the importance of \$15 million Regional Environmental Hot Spots Programme. According to Bojanic, the programme is aimed to promote regional cooperation in the Western Balkans; to improve living conditions of communities around targeted environmental hot spots through active clean-up; and to ensure control of existing pollution and prevent similar environmental mistakes in the future. Bojanic said in a statement, "I would like to emphasize that this Regional Programme is unique in having a rare blend of concrete clean-up operations (that is, physical works) combined with a so-called soft component focused on educating people, building an understanding of how people can influence the decision-making processes that affect their health, well being and economic opportunities."

Bajza hotspot project in Albania deals with pollution and promotes sound environmental policies. The UNDP is working along with the Albanian Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration to clean up and rehabilitation of hot spots in Bajza railway station near Shkodra (Skadar) Lake, the largest lake on the Balkan Peninsula. The officials are engaged in talks to remove the expired pesticides

and industrial chemicals that were stored near the lake area. Bajza is the last railway station in Albania, where it borders with Montenegro. The chemical stockpile poses a significant threat to the valuable ecologic system (Skadar lake) shared between Montenegro and Albania, according to UNDP.

During 1991-1992, the German company Schmidt-Cretan had exported and stored in Bajza 480 tons of hazardous chemicals including toxaphene and phenyl mercury acetate, both the chemicals had been banned in the EU since 1983. But the export was halted after the company realized that the chemicals were banned. "Complaints were made, and the German authorities agreed to take the load back, which they did," according to Western Balkans Environment Programme (WBEP) website. "However, in the interim local Albanians had emptied some of the drums in order to use them for household purposes."

WBEP has speculated that some of the drums were emptied directly on the ground, causing the dispersal of the contents towards the Shkodra Lake. Over the years, the locals have reported that many cattle have died after drinking water from the lake, while a significant number of dead fish were reported in the late in 1993. "Although there are no proven records that this can be linked with incidents that took place at Bajza railway station," WBEP says. Implementing efficient environmental policies are prerequisites for sustainable economic development in the country. These environmental regulations should meet the EU environmental standards. The central and local governments in Albania can use Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to further enhance their capacities to impose the regulations.