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Interview with Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

The state of pollution is alarming

Two largest environmental problems in Serbia are waste waters and management of hard waste, says the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad.

In order to complete preparations for the accession to the European Union, Serbia must harmonize 20,000 pages of domestic legislation in the field of environmental protection.

The Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad says that the EU membership is a clear goal of the Serbian Government. According to Urstad, it is obvious that the harmonization of this legislation is the only way to reach this goal. "I do not see the way around it," says Urstad.

Politika: How long does it take for Serbia to achieve EU environmental standards?

HoM: It all depends on how much push and shove the politicians are willing to use to improve this sector. I cannot give any exact indication, but it should definitely be managed within a ten year framework, hopefully shorter.

Besides all the obligations that our country needs to fulfil in the process of EU rapprochement, what also needs to be done is harmonize legislation in the field of packaging waste management. Two laws in the field of waste management are waiting for the adoption in the Parliament. One concerns particularly the issue of recycling of waste materials like plastics.

HoM: I travel often and widely around Serbia, and it makes me sick to see how so much waste ends up in the nature, in illegal waste dumps, or at municipal dumps of a highly inferior standard.

Politika: What are the solutions in the EU countries in terms of the existing legislative models? Which model would best apply to Serbia?

HoM: Different countries have chosen different approaches. I am not a legal expert on these issues, but the point is that certain minimum standards have to be reached whether one chooses this or that approach. As I see it, standards should rather be set at the highest level in this field. It has to do with the future, after all, and what kind of environment the next generations shall have.

Asked to describe the current situation with regards to the packaging waste in Serbia, Ambassador Urstad replies shortly: Bad and sad.

He had an opportunity to go around Serbia, and his impression is that our country cannot be proud of how clean it is.

HoM: The state of hard waste pollution is alarming, and it is such a shame, since there is so much beautiful nature in Serbia. From kindergarten through the school system, environmental awareness has to be built consistently and constantly. The young then will teach the grown-ups. It must be induced from childhood on. Waste has to be segregated, and treated to the extent possible.

Municipalities must take over much greater responsibility for proper waste treatment, as well as for providing the systems for managing waste. The degree of air pollution must be dramatically reduced, particularly by cleaning the systems for burning lignite. Laws and regulations regarding water pollution must be adopted as well as severe penalties for those who break the rules, says the Ambassador, highlighting that the two largest environmental problems in Serbia today are a hard waste and waste water treatments.