

## **Citizens facing environmental challenges in Balkan Countries**

### **Abstract**

Obligation to care for the environment is proscribed by the national constitutions and laws in the Balkans. International organizations like the Council of Europe (the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities) have started the process of strategic thinking and planning how to help cities increase their resilience to meet the challenges of the fast deteriorating environment. Moreover, although the right to clean and healthy environment has not been envisaged in the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights has already pronounced itself in a number of cases connected with the environmental protection. At the universal level, the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) foresees effective public participation, and access to information and justice for environment-friendly urban and spatial planning. Despite the norms and institutions that strive to protect the environment, it is no secret that pollution and climate change claim thousands of lives every year.

The author examines preparedness of the citizens and environmental NGOs in Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia to challenge government decisions, which impose high external costs in urban areas. The following indicators will be used in the research: compatibility of national legislation with international standards, dynamism of the NGOs (e.g., projects, contribution to policy-making, legal aid), citizens' response to environmental problems and environmental lawsuits brought to competent bodies. The research methods encompass legal and comparative analyses of international instruments, laws and court cases, desk research and structured interviews with stakeholders.

The results will show that NGOs and citizens in the Balkans are not sufficiently empowered to provide effective contribution to environmental security in urban areas. Recommendations will be offered on how to enhance legal infrastructure, boost advocacy and provide adequate legal remedies to prevent and deter environmental damage in urban areas.

**Key words:** environmental protection, Aarhus Convention, environmental information, legal remedies, resilient cities, NGOs.

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