

The Environment and Environmental Policies in the National Strategy for Development and Integration¹

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Abstract

In addition to the legacy of the past dictatorship of an environment with non-standardized indicators, the Albanian difficult transition especially in the first decade left the environment out of attention as the situation reached the alarm state. In Albania's path towards the society of Western democracies with sensitivity to the environment, it was mandatory to pay attention to the environmental issues and their improvement. The transition from the drafting and implementation of policies and programs for improving the environment in the advantage that the National Strategy for Development and Integration gave to the environment. The improvement of legislation with EU standards and for the environment-as a necessity for Albania's integration perspective. The National Strategy for Development and Integration a determinant of the programs and reforms, priorities and standards for the preparation of Albania for membership in NATO, and EU. The spatial planning as the instigator of the sustainable territorial development, of the rational use of land and natural resources, of the environmental protection, of the cultural heritage, of the improvement of housing conditions and socio-economic activities. Agriculture as an important sector and increase of its competitiveness, the improvement of the quality indicators, food standards and the growth of exports of the Albanian products.

Keywords: environment, integration, national strategies, transition, spatial planning, environmental standards, competitive agriculture, sustainable development.

1. Introduction

The problem of environmental pollution although there was a negligence of it in the early years of transition because the Albanians at that time were more interested in the essential food, bread and on the employment opportunity without asking who caused the pollution, but gradually with the establishment of new balances in a democratic society; the Environmental problems were becoming more and more present in the daily life. Slowly it was coming even the civic awakening and the reaction to the pollution caused by solid wastes of the illegal constructions in the buildings, blocks and residential premises, from the pollution that caused the kiosks in the heart of Tirana and other cities, from the pollution of the bars alongside Lana from the inappropriate constructions that were suffocating the inhabitants of cities; from the noise and pollution caused from the cars on the street etc.

On the one hand every passing day i was faced with the problems of pollution and on the other hand the press and electronic media that began the informings and programs for the public sensitization for environmental issues led to the moment that the environmental issues be present in the public debate.

Thus aspects of pollution, smog and noise in the cities, the urban wastes, were not only part of the everyday conversations, but even the whole range of the environmental problems were unfolded in the public debate in official, governmental, intellectual levels, in the media and in other tribunes.

Part of the debate about environmental problems became even the government and structures on its subordination, which many times were labeled from the individual and the community as the main causes of pollution and pollution favorable for corruption reasons, the labeling as causes didnt leave untouched either the seat of the minister.

With the confrontation in public debate of the environmental problems it is already understood that the Albanian society is emerging from difficult transitional stagnation, it is maturing and moving toward levels of the society of the west

¹ An overview in the years of transition, specifically in the attitudes, government projects and programs relating to the environment in the years 2007-2013

democracies and sensitive for environmental issues.

2. Projects and Strategies for Environmental Protection

The creation of the Ministry of Environment, - the mission, objectives and the integrated plan.

After the years of the difficult transition of Albania emerged the environmental pollution problems, the protection of flora and fauna, the Albanian public is becoming aware of the environmental issues and improvement of the environmental situation, urban chaos and alarming pollution indicators necessarily demanded the establishment of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Management.

In the framework of the government the Ministry EFUM aimed that through the integrated plan to particularly meet the goals that are related to the improvement of the environmental quality, forest and management and water resources protection, and the improvement of the policies in the field of fishing, the sustainable protection and management of fishing reserves in Albania.

The objectives are realized through effective use of the budgetary funds which aim the improvement of the infrastructure, the increase of the planning and managing capacities, the increase of the investments, the new plantings in forests and rehabilitation of damaged and degraded surfaces.

Ministry of EFUM, had the mission to draft and implement the policies, strategies, programs and projects which aim the continuous improvement of the environmental and its components.

The approximation of the legislation in the field of environment and environmental standards in accordance with European Union directives constitutes an important objective in the framework of the integration into the EU and NATO.

MEFUM policies were oriented towards the sustainable development of the environment and natural resources such as forests, waters, fisheries, with a view to increase the economic level and quality of life for the present and future generations.

The Ministry of EFUM, drafted several *strategic documents*:

The environment crosscutting strategy - with strategic short-term, medium term and long term objectives in the environmental field.

The strategy for the development of the sector of forests and pastures - stopping illegal logging, erosion protection, fire and degradation.

The national action plan for the protection of biodiversity - the improvement of the legal framework for the protection of the biodiversity.

The national action plan for the disposal of persistent organic pollutants - organizational, legal and administrative measures.

The strategy for wetlands - the assessment of the current situation of the surfaces with special biodiversity values, legal, study and protective measures for the wetlands in our country.

Programs of the Ministry of EFUM

- **Planning, Management and administration.** The policies of this program consist in the improvement of the working conditions, management directives, environmental policies development, increasing the efficiency of the use of the natural resources, drafting the policies and laws according to EU standards.
- **Programs for the environmental protection.** The policies of this program consist in the environmental management at the local level, the implementation of the environmental legislation, the environmental permits, the cooperation with the local government for protection from the pollution and damage, the protection of biodiversity, the protection of soil from the erosion pollution etc.
- **Forest administration** - The policies of this program consist in the good use of the forest and pasture resources by preserving the biodiversity, regeneration, vitality and their potential to fulfill the ecological, economic and social functions at the local, national and global level, for the present and the future.
- **Water administration and support for fishing.** The policies of these programs consist in the management, the preserving effects, the development of the water resources, especially in the water resources used for the population, industry, agriculture and the respect of the ecosystem and biodiversity, the development of a sustainable fishing sector with fair distribution of benefits, the sustainable management of the ecosystem and fishery development according to EU standards.

3. National Strategy for Development and Integration (2007-2013)

On 12 March 2008 the Council of Ministers at its meeting approved the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2007-2013 (NSDI).

The prime minister by introducing the strategy said that it determines the program of the reforms, the priorities and standards for preparing the country for membership in NATO and the EU. It is the basic document that defines the government's vision and priorities for 2007-2013. It synthesizes the most advanced thought of the time to address all the problems of the country in order to offer the Albanian citizens the same standards as EU members.

To prepare this document have worked over 300 Albanian experts of different fields and with dozens of international experts, who have brought the best expertise in all fields in the economic, social, education, health, science, agriculture, in the field of defense, infrastructure, culture, finance, social affairs, environment field.

The strategy consolidates the revolution and the fiscal performance of the country and 2008 objectives such as the market liberalization, privatization and digitalization.

Other important aspects in the NSDI are even the health, agriculture, social problems.

The reform in the health system and its completion are of major subject.

The social problems will have programs, projects and their financing to improve the quality of the social services.

Even the agriculture occupies an important place in this strategy.

The Prime Minister said that the National Strategy for Development and Integration fully prepares the country for integration, towards this station, where Albania is progressing inexorably.

Albania has entered a new phase of development and clear perspectives of integration in Euro-Atlantic structures.

Given its geographical location, the human capacities and natural resources, Albania has a great development potential and comparative advantages. The vicinity to the European markets and the favorable climate conditions are positive factors for the agricultural sector. Being part of the trans-national corridors of transport make Albania an important factor in the development of regional trade. Albania is also an attractive tourist destination because of its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage.

The transition period was characterized among other things by the phenomenon of mass migration as a result of the difficult economic and social situation of the country. The consolidation of the democratic state and functioning of the market economy encouraged the social development and created the conditions for the revival of the Albanian society and private initiative.

The non-implementation of the law creates an obstacle to the functioning of the society and opens the way to the development of informality. In 15 years the informality in Albania is presented in multiform: arbitrary occupation of land, chaotic illegal constructions, trading activities and unregistered services, tax evasion etc.

NSDI pays attention to the road network. Along the national roads and corridors, 6,000 km of rural roads will be rehabilitated up to 2013.

The development of an energy system that meets the requirements for low-cost energy and minimum impact on the environment. According to the principles of market, the opening and liberalization of domestic electricity market and integration of the energy system in the Regional and European market of the electricity.

Water supply and sewage will be developed according to EU standards, to increase the standard of living, environmental conservation and sustainable development of the economy. By 2013 the benefit of the services by the population will be:

Water supply 95%; sewage 83%, treatment of the used water 45%.

The environment will be protected from pollution and degradation, using fuels that meet European standards, there will be performed mandatory tests for the gases emissions, the construction of 5 regional landfills and the completion of project files for all hotspots.

In a longer term - the implementation of the national system to monitor the air quality according to European standards, the construction of sanitary landfills for the disposal of the wastes at local level; the closure of the existing landfills of urban solid wastes and the rehabilitation of the contaminated terrain in all the identified hotspots.

In 2013 it was aimed that the air quality in Tirana and in the major cities meets the European Union standards.

4. Spatial Planning, Urban, Regional, Rural and Agriculture Development

The National Strategy for Development and Integration aims to prevent the unequal development, in order that it doesn't become an obstacle to the general economic development. The new legal framework will serve as the starting point of

spatial planning, which will focus on the development of the regulatory plans with participation, to treat in a coherent manner the problems of those areas that have witnessed the highest levels of growth in Europe in recent years.

With the regional and rural development the strategy proposes new implementing policies and structures which prepare the administration for the efficient use of the finances in the next 7 years. In the rural areas, the policies are driven by the need to ensure the existence of the offered services, which support the economic activity and promote the economic diversification. The dependence of many rural areas on tourism is expected to be increased and this requires an integrated approach to ensure sustainability, including here even the perseverance and protection of cultural and historical heritage.

The spatial planning policy promotes and supports the sustainable territorial development, the rational use of land and natural resources, the environmental and cultural heritage protection, the appropriate living conditions, economic and social activity.

Informality is one of the main challenges with which the territorial and spatial development is faced, their important challenges are:

The demographic movements and rapid urbanization; were followed with the absence of urban planning, regulatory plans, without infrastructure and environmental destruction.

The unclear division of the competencies between the central and local level. Many management functions of the urban areas were gradually passed to the local power, but they did not have the resources necessary to the effectiveness of these functions.

High corruption in the administration.

Low level of professional capacities in the field of planning.

Spatial planning has the strategic advantages:

The strengthening of the institutions and coordination mechanisms; the "horizontal" cooperation between the authorities responsible for the sectoral and spatial policies; the "vertical" cooperation between the central and local level in order to guarantee an efficient structure of spatial planning and management.

The restructure of the legal framework of the territorial planning to respond better to the challenges of the rapid economic and social development of Albania.

Drafting the uniform instruments of the development control, regulation of the use and the land subdivision, the public land reservation.

Simplifying process of construction permits of development and construction in a simple administrative act.

Public participation and the active engagement of all the interested people, communities, citizens at a local level in the decision making and the active commitment of all the concerned asse, communities, citizens at local level in the decision making of the spatial planning for transparency.

Strengthen control over the territory to ensure development in accordance with the laws.

The regulatory plans will be adopted by the communal or municipal councils, with financial and technical support for the preparation of the regulatory plans for several cities.

The legal framework will ensure that the new constructions comply with regulatory plans.

In the area of housing, the policies will reach the poorest groups in the most effective and fruitful way.

5. Regional Development

Albania has significant differences and regional disparities, thus it is needed a integrated, coherent regional policy for the reduction of deepening of the regional development disparities.

It was required a balanced and sustainable development of the country's regions, in particular of mountainous and remote areas:

The National Program Regional Development served to strengthen the capacity of districts that will facilitate the formation of a unique system of management and planning and it will bring new elements in the regional policy.

The support of disadvantaged areas to enable them to contribute to the sustainable development of the national competition will be done through the Program for the Development of Disadvantaged Areas.

The creation of an efficient management framework of the regional development, a unified legal framework and an institutional coordinated infrastructure for the regional policy - through the Law on Regional Development and the bylaws and insurance of the necessary institutional framework to coordinate the administration and the effective management of the regional policy at all levels.

Rural development

It required a real contribution to the equal rural development in all the regions of the country, to steadily improve the quality of life in these areas and to reduce the poverty of the population in these regions.

The level of living in the rural areas was much lower than in urban areas, the low per capita income, high morbidity, inadequate medical service, limited education and few public services. The highest poverty was in the population engaged in agriculture.

Poverty reduction is closely related to increase of agricultural production, farm modernization and diversification of activities that generate income in rural areas, agro-processing, handicrafts and trade services.

In the rural areas the potentials are sufficient, the natural and the favorable geographical conditions, agricultural tradition etc.

The Rural Development Strategy has the following advantages:

The development of the local institutional capacities of the management of rural development programs.

It increases the competitiveness of the agricultural and agro-processing sector.

It improves the quality of life and promotes the diversity of the activities and creates new jobs.

It protects and improves the environment through the sustainable management of the natural resources in the rural areas.

The rural development strategy offered an agreement on a national level, in accordance with the government policy for drafting and implementing the rural development operational programs prepared according to the needs of the regions. In 2008-2009 it was prepared a rural development operational program, which contained 9 policies in 4 shafts.

1. The competitiveness of agriculture, agribusiness and forestry includes:
 - The modernization and restructure of agriculture through modernization of agricultural land and support for farmers;
 - The increase of the added values and the production and processing quality, by supporting farmers;
 - The sustainable and fruitful management of forests;
 - The increase of the level of practical skills and employment, the support of the active farmers of the rural community.
2. Improvement of quality of life in the rural areas and promotion of the diversity of the rural economy includes:
 - The creation of jobs in the rural areas through diversification of farms and the potential growth for business, small and family businesses.
 - The improvement of the development of villages, local roads, water supply and sewages and preservation of the rural heritage.
3. Environmental protection and preservation of the landscape, includes:
 - The development of the agricultural methods compatible with the preservation of the environment, of the landscape in the less favored areas, the compensation for products in the mountainous areas for the land maintenance and the cultural landscape.
 - The preservation of the agricultural tradition and genetic potential with controlled products and prevention of land degradation.
4. The participation in the rural development of the initiators of the EU to support the rural communities (LEADER) according to the experience of the Albanian Fund for the Agency Development for the development of the mountainous areas.

6. Agriculture

The high productivity and competitiveness of the agricultural and agro-processing sector in domestic and international market is necessary, through the reduction of the cost of the increase of quality, safety and nutritional standards. The agricultural sector suffers from the fragmentation of land owned by and smallness of the farm, the low level of organization of the farmers, the underdeveloped trading infrastructure and the relative lack of market information, the possibility for exporting the agricultural products and agro-foods is very limited, low standards of food safety.

The standards that should be improved include a broad area including the production, marketing, safety certification of the quality of products and services, the processing of-control inspection services.

Governmental policies for agriculture aimed:

- The increase of financial support for farms, agricultural and agro-processing businesses such as fruit trees, vines, vegetables, livestock, processing of fruits, grape, tin, milk, meat.
- The improvement of the packaging of the processed agricultural products by increasing the efficiency of the

existing wholesale markets, establishing new markets, support for the collection points - standardization - packaging, improved trade information for farmers.

- The improvement of the management, irrigation and drainage of the agricultural land, originally the rehabilitation of 120,000 hectares of irrigation canals and the transfer of management to the water associations, deepening of the riverbeds, systemization of the mountainous streams; the increasing of the role of the local units for irrigation drainage management.
- With long term sustainability of the irrigation management, drainage and land protection, to irrigate 360.000 ha me 3500-5000 m³/hectares.
- The increase of the level and technological qualities, of the information and knowledge of farmers and agro-processing through the institutional strengthening, training and obtaining experiences at home and abroad. The promotion of the act-agreement with farmers, the preparation of informative materials and technological packages for the main varieties and breeds.

7. Conclusions

The public confrontation with the environmental problems shows that the Albanian society is emerging from difficult transitional stagnation, it is maturing and it is moving towards the levels of society of the western democracies and sensitive to the environmental issues.

The establishment of the Ministry of Environment was a necessity with the aggravated environmental situation; so the government through it aimed the application of the integrated plan to particularly fulfill the goals related to the improvement of the environmental quality, the forest protection and management of water resources, and the improvement of policies in the field of fisheries, the protection and the sustainable management of fishing resources in Albania.

The approximation of the legislation in the field of environment and environmental standards in accordance with the European Union directives was an important objective in the framework of the process of integration into the EU and NATO.

Albania entered a new phase of development with clear integration perspectives into the Euro-Atlantic structures.

The National Strategy for Development and Integration prepared the country fully for integration, towards this station, where Albania is progressing inexorably.

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