

Aarhus Center North Macedonia



History and geography

- x Established 2018 in Skopje as part of the EU funded project “Building capacities of environmental CSOs to increase democratic processes in Macedonia”
- x The Aarhus center is part of MKM CSO
- x The Aarhus center established an Aarhus network of CSOs in NMK
- x Established the Friends of Aarhus network
- x MoU and close cooperation with the OSCE mission in NMK
- x Cooperation with MOEPP



What we do?

- X Monitoring of the activities of local administration on the subject of Aarhus Convention
- X Monitoring of 176 official web pages of local and national authorities
- X Preparation of national report of the implementation of the Aarhus Convention
- X Preparation of shadow report on the implementation of Chapter 27 of the EU accession process
- X Regular communication with CSOs on matters of public participation and access to information
- X Support CSOs and Citizens on matters concerning Environment



How we operate?



The Aarhus center is designed as a service center where CSO and citizens can get support, knowledge, information and guidelines about environmental legislation, processes, procedures and their rights concerning the Aarhus convention.





The never-ending story of the Ilovica mines in the southeast part
of the country.
Started in 2004, not finished yet...



- The American-Bulgarian company Phelps Dodge Vardar, from 2004 to 2012, examined the soil above the Strumica villages of Ilovica and Shtuka. It was a "junior mining" company, which only explored, and left the mining to the large corporation "Euromax Resources", which would invest between 400 and 500 million dollars in Ilovica, from where gold will be exploited for the next three decades. According to the facts published by the company in February 2013, there should be 119 tons of gold and 791,000 tons of copper at the site.
- The company "Phelps Dodge Vardar", in October 2010 asked the Ministry of Environment not to publish the entire Environmental Impact Assessment Study. Instead of the document, the Ministry published only the non-technical summary on its website. The non-technical summary states that the company considered two alternatives for treating the mineral resources. Option number one provided for the preparation of the concentrate by flotation, while the second alternative provided for leaching with cyanide solutions.
- The Ministry of Environment informs the public that at the request of "Phelps Dodge Vardar" they have published only a non-technical summary and cannot publish the entire study.
- The explanation from the Environment Agency is that they will not publish the study to protect confidential data in the full text.

This is the first time that the Ministry of the Environment publishes only a technical summary of a project that is subject to an environmental impact assessment. This is the first time that an investor has requested that only the summary be published.

- "Euromax Resources" claims that it presented the environmental study in its entirety to local residents, and, at the same time, it is fully available in the company's information center, which is open every working day from 9 am to 5 pm in the village of Ilovica.
- For the authorities and for the company, it is quite enough that a public hearing was held in the village of Ilovica. It was held in November 2011. The information that there will be a debate was published in two newspapers "Večer" and "Koha", and the public hearing was attended by representatives from the Ministry and the company, between 50 and 60 interested citizens, the mayor of Bosilovo Municipality and his associates.
- The residents who attended the presentation were promised that the mine would not harm the villages. (cross my heart)
- After the public hearing, the technical committee of the Ministry of Environment proposed to Minister Abdulhakim Ademi to approve the "Ilovica" project.
- Enormous pressure of the public, the experts and CSOs started on the government and the ministry
- Protests and legal processes from 2015 till 2019!
- 2019 decision of the government that the investor had a legal omission and can't build the mine
- 2019-now court battle – and going in circles

What we have experienced:

- ✓ Destroying the credibility of local experts and professionals – Public degradation and pressure to individuals
- ✓ Expensive lawyers and law firms sending letters to people, experts, professors, CSO members, demanding public apologies for their statements concerning the topic
- ✓ Placing Out of context statements of public officials
- ✓ Aggressive social media campaigns
- ✓ Using local famous people to talk well about the business
- ✓ Build local infrastructure or some things of importance for the community – new sewage system, public playground, park
- ✓ Use the influence of religious communities and priests to promote the project
- ✓ Providing “free” agriculture tools for the citizens
- ✓ Excellent storytelling about the future
- ✓ inexhaustible financial resources
- ✓ Buying media time



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- ✓ Using legal loops
 - ✓ Avoiding legislation by providing vague info on the processes
 - ✓ Construction works are defined as minor renovations – Then the complete procedure described in the law on environment is avoided.
 - ✓ Not informing the ministry of Physical planning on the intentions – Direct communication with the government and local authorities

The Guide for broken system:

- ✓ No knowledge on environmental legislation
- ✓ No implementation of environmental legislation
- ✓ No monitoring of implementation of processes
- ✓ No capacities for environmental management
- ✓ No monitoring of nature



The story of identical documents and public procurement for two different protected areas- How we stopped the process.



It all started with one document that ended in wrong hands (our hands)

The Tender dossier – identical tender dossiers for 2 municipalities!

Government decision to finance Dojran and Resen municipalities to support actions

The local administration: The government told us, we just do what they say!

Politics? Is the party higher than the state?



WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MUD?



- We got all our buddies on board
- We knew the law - Only legal arguments!
- We involved the Aarhus center from the start
- We engaged the CSOs network, the Aarhus network
- Wrote, wrote, wrote letters
- Demanded answers and explanation
- We practiced our rights, according to the Aarhus convention
- We addressed the right institutions (multi-tiered approach):

..the mayor, the prime minister, the State secretary for environment, the State Commission for prevention of corruption, the Minister of environment...



THE AFTERMATH

We wanted to save the mud; we ended up saving 2 lakes!




- The tender procedures are canceled for both lakes
- We helped them get out of the mud
- We didn't throw tantrums, we offered a solution and got **WWTP to save Dojran Lake**
- **But, we keep all 4 eyes open** (Macedonian proverb)



A circular arrangement of sharpened colored pencils on a dark blue background. The pencils are of various colors including red, purple, blue, teal, green, yellow, and orange. They are all sharpened and point towards the center of the frame.

Conclusion and what we learned

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- ✓ Know your subject and basic facts! Check the facts, Double check, Triple Check and then ask your colleague to check once again!
 - ✓ Check all the information you receive!
 - ✓ Find a way to inform all stakeholders about the situation, processes and procedures in an understandable manner – Provide explanation for technical and legal terms
 - ✓ Know the Law
 - ✓ Know the procedures
 - ✓ Fight with legal arguments and facts – Direct your issues and question to the institutions not social media! (Use social media to inform, not to attack!)
 - ✓ Do not ASSUME! ASSUME will make and ASS of U and ME!
 - ✓ Always follow the money!
 - ✓ Know thy enemy!
 - ✓ Be patient! Time is of an essence!
 - ✓ Be Focused – Know your goal!
 - ✓ **An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind**
 - ✓ Join forces with others!
 - ✓ Provide legal support for the people involved
 - ✓ If possible, create fund for fines and legal processes (it's a safe net for all the involved)
 - ✓ Don't create panic and overproportioned constructs about things and situations
 - ✓ Talk to people, listen to them, be there for them
 - ✓ Do not get involved into political parties' daily propaganda! Don't get involved in politics but be political!
 - ✓ Find a common ground to talk, learn their language
 - ✓ Stay Vigilante and monitor the situation – Do not get lost in your small victory!
 - ✓ EDUCATE, EDUCATE, EDUCATE!



“THE NEEDS OF THE
MANY OUTWEIGH THE
NEEDS OF THE FEW”



Thank you for your patience

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