

Climate Strategy – An Opportunity for a Clean Start

Jasminka Oliverić Young, co-founder, RES Foundation

It is unrealistic to expect that several public servants have superhuman abilities and capacities to every now and then, deliver visionary documents which should guide us in a completely new direction in a completely novel way. Including stakeholders in the process of public policy development is a key tool for enhancing transparency, quality and effectiveness of policies.

The global agreement on climate change, the Paris Agreement, came into force last week, after being ratified by 55 countries, responsible for 55 percent of global emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG). The Paris Agreement reflects a global consensus on the need to limit temperature rise to below 2°C. To achieve this, everyone concurs, by 2050, we need to lower our GHG emissions between 40 and 70 percent compared to 2010, and lower it down to zero, by 2100. This is an EU requirement as well, to whose strategic framework we need to adjust to as well. *EU Roadmap for Moving to a Competitive Low-carbon Economy in 2050* contains ambitious climate and energy related goals (reducing emissions by 90 percent compared to 1990). All of these goals are in the essence of the Paris Agreement.

In this framework, phasing out fossil fuels comes as an obvious solution. This development paradigm is also being promoted by other most powerful global economies, USA and China, which, by jointly announcing the ratification of the Agreement on the G20 Summit, sent a message to the investors – the most dynamic growth will be happening in the low-carbon sectors. Serbia should make low-carbon economic development a priority in order to be more attractive for investment, more competitive in the market of the future, and in order to stop suffocating in its own smoke. For now, we have pledged to reduce emissions by 9,8 percent, which, due to the methodology used to make the calculations, is in fact an increase in emissions, and we are planning to increase emissions from fossil fuels. Luckily for us, the Paris Agreement, which Serbia signed as well, came to force at the time when Serbia started a process of making a new *National Climate Change Strategy*, which could become a platform for a dynamic, innovative and healthy development. This process should offer a new development paradigm, and serve as a platform for investing in sustainable low-carbon economy, development of sustainable agriculture, efficient and sustainable exploitation of natural resources and energy, reforestation, an energy transition towards renewables and reducing pollution. In such way, at the same time, we show would show our commitment to EU's ambitious goals and readiness to implement the Agreement, for the benefit of Serbia's citizens.

However, the process of devising a strategy of all strategies, which will serve as a platform for development and investment, has to be, both in terms of essence and process, a different than the strategic papers developed thus far, and deflect from the notable short-sightedness, most visible in the *Energy Sector Development Strategy*¹, based on exploitation of fossil fuels, with no consideration

¹ Orig. *Strategija razvoja energetskeg sektora*.

for alternatives, at a time when the whole world is renouncing them, China included. No one knows the exact number of strategies tackling various issues, adopted by the Government of Serbia since 2000. After visiting the webpages of the Government, the General Secretariat or the National Assembly it becomes apparent that establishing the exact number of valid and expired strategies would be a real research achievement. In an attempt to do so, I quickly realise that it is a three digit number, we're talking about. Upon going through a pile of yellow folders I come to a number of 106, for the period up to 2012, in addition to those adopted in the meantime, and I reach a conclusion that we have more than 150 strategies. They come in all shapes and sizes, although when reading their titles I wonder what the difference between them is. Some are "national" strategies such as the *National Strategy of Economic Development*², *National Sustainable Development Strategy*³, and *National Strategy for Using Natural Resources and Goods*⁴. Some are "ordinary" strategies such as the *Regional Development Strategy*⁵, *Forestry Development Strategy*⁶, and *Energy Sector Development Strategy*⁷. Some have an action plan, some don't, some have expired and have no successor, some have expired and have a successor. One can count on the fingers of both hands, those which come with some sort of an estimation of implementation and success. All in all – a colourful bunch! You are probably already dizzy, I know I am. During all this digging, I encountered a statement made by the former minister of state administration and local self government, dating back to 2014, which states that Serbia has more than 160, non-harmonised strategies, which gives us an ultimate quantitative and qualitative assessment of the strategic framework in Serbia – excessively large number of non-harmonised strategies. One might say all this strategising seems like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

I am wondering, and I shall probably never find out, because proceedings are nowhere to be found, what is it that these strategies are not harmonised with: with development trends of the modern world and the European Union, with one another, with the interests of stakeholders? But, the story does not come to a close here. Based on years of experience in making, implementing and studying public policies, I know that all interested and non-interested parties have steam coming out of their ears, when a new strategy, popularly called dead letter, is mentioned, all written by several public servants entrusted with this unpleasant task. I sense that responsibility for the current state lies exactly in the way strategies are developed in Serbia, with no transparency of the process and no public participation.

How do we ensure that the Climate Change Strategy is not yet another dead letter, collecting dust in public servants' drawers? To start with, we could learn from experiences of others. For the purposes of a project, I have analysed the process of making *EU 2030 Climate and Energy Policy Framework*. The agreement reached in the European Council, was preceded by a one and half years long process of consultations between member states and numerous stakeholders with often conflicting interests. The process is part of a standard procedure when the European Commission is

² Orig. *Nacionalna strategija privrednog razvoja*.

³ Orig. *Nacionalna strategija održivog razvoja*

⁴ Orig. *Nacionalna strategija održivog korišćenja prirodnih resursa i dobara*.

⁵ Orig. *Strategija regionalnog razvoja*.

⁶ Orig. *Strategija razvoja šumarstva*.

⁷ Orig. *Strategija razvoja energetike*.

initiating and developing policies. The Commission has received more than 550 opinions from different actors, industrial associations, energy-intensive and not-so-intensive companies, energy companies, NGOs, citizens and trade unions. The process is extensively documented and the proceedings are still available. Opinions, also publically available, were grouped and considered in focus groups, roundtables and conferences.

It is unrealistic to expect that several public servants have superhuman abilities and capacities to every now and then, deliver visionary documents which should guide us in a completely new direction in a completely novel way. Including stakeholders in the process of public policy development is a key tool for enhancing transparency, quality and effectiveness of policies. In this way, strategies are informed with expert knowledge and wide participation gives legitimacy to the goals which are attainable. It is quite the opposite to bring communication down to formal consultations when an already prepared policy proposal is offered for commenting. Public consultations as two-way exchanges imply an active engagement of institutions in gathering inputs from interested parties. This could be done by publishing a call for evidence, as it is done in Great Britain, or it could grow into a continuous dialogue, like in the Netherlands. One step further would be to directly engage stakeholders in policy development and implementation. Direct participation ensures consensus and ownership over policy as well as strong commitment to implementation.

The process of writing the Climate Strategy, I see as a way out of a hopeless situation. It is an excellent opportunity to produce an umbrella development strategy which will give guidance towards low-carbon development in all sectors. This strategy could move forward the energy sector, agriculture, forestry, building industry, tourism, and it could enable us to breathe cleaner air, and be healthier. In Serbia the demand for this does exist. The way the process was started may prove to be an important step forward compared to the previously mentioned practice. The Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection, in charge of it, has in advance, notified the interested parties of starting the process, and promised that the Strategy will be science-based, and rely on sound analysis and ambitious alternative scenarios which are to be developed. The Climate Change Division sent out a call for inputs and a conference has been organised in which interested parties could declare their expectations of the Strategy. The Ministry then invited stakeholders to participate in the working group directly, and on multiple occasions a call for concrete proposals was issued. This is a step in the right direction. The Ministry could, alone or in partnership, receive inputs via their webpage, which would be publically available. Stakeholders should send their ideas on low-carbon development, circular economy, creating a dynamic market for renewables, and should call for energy transition, reducing air pollution, better public health and reforestation. Working with them, we've heard that is what many of them wish.

National, regional and local public bodies, public, private, and civic sector, professional associations, academia, and citizens – it's our move!