

REAL DEAL country profile

Serbia



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RESHAPING CITIZENS'
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1

Overview

Starting from 2000, Serbia has been classified as a semi-consolidated democracy, reverting to a hybrid regime in 2019. Since 2020 the regime has been undergoing an accelerating process of autocratisation.

Due to the unresolved status of the predecessor state, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in the UN at the time of the adoption of the Aarhus Convention, the country did not participate in the development of the convention. However, the Federal Ministry for Development, Science and the Environment started the process of adopting the convention. On 31 July 2009 the Republic of Serbia ratified the Aarhus Convention (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia no. 38/09 "International Treaties"), thus becoming the 43rd Party to the Convention. In this section, the following abbreviations are used.

LAP - Law on General Administrative Procedure

LSA - Law on State Administration

SEPA - Environmental Protection Agency of the Republic of Serbia

SIA - Strategic Impact Assessment

In 2004 a first set of environmental laws were adopted. Some were subsequently amended:

LEIA - Law on Environmental Impact Assessment (Official Gazette RS no. 72/09)

LEP - Law on Environmental Protection (Official Gazette RS no. 135/04, 36/09)

LIPPC - Law on Integrated Pollution Prevention Control (Official Gazette RS no. 135/04)

LSEA - Law on Strategic Assessment of the Environment (Official Gazette RS no. 135/04, 88/10)

In 2009 and 2010 a second set of environmental legislation was passed:

LPAIRNS - Law on Protection against Ionising Radiation and on Nuclear Safety Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09

LPANIR - Law on Protection against Non-Ionising Radiation Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09

LCh - Law on Chemicals Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09



LBP - Law on Biocidal Products Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09

LEIA(am) - Law on Amendments to the Law on Environmental Impact Assessment Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09

APL - Air Protection Law Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09

NPL - Nature Protection Law Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09

LPANE - Law on Protection Against Noise in Environment Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09

LSUFR - Law on Sustainable Use of Fish Reserves Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09

LWM - Law on Waste Management Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09

LPPW - Law on Packaging and Packaging Waste Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09

LEP(am) - Law on Amendments to the Law on Environmental Protection Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/09

WL - Water Law Official Gazette of RS, No. 30/10

Despite a variety of amendments (such as in 2016 to define “environmental information” in the LEP and between 2018-2022 to improve participation) the state of the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in Serbia is highly deficient. NGOs raised concerns especially regarding the lack of sound environmental impact analysis and public consultations in the construction sector (e.g. Belgrade Urban Plan) and regarding hydro-power plants.

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2

2.1

Dimensions of environmental governance

Transparency (access to information)

Practical solutions for access to information (contact points, established practices and procedures, metadata registers and instructions) often do not exist. There is a lack of information available on the Internet. It is especially pronounced at the local level. Therefore, it takes more time to obtain information, and thus it makes the procedure for providing information more expensive for those who possess it (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2022 *'Strategija za primenu konvencije o dostupnosti informacija, učešću javnosti u donošenju odluka i pravu na pravnu zaštitu u pitanjima životne sredine – Arhuska Konvencija za period 2023 – 2032 godina'*).

Official Data on the Environment

The Environmental Protection Agency of the Republic of Serbia (SEPA) has made good progress in the area of information dissemination (so called "Priority Data Flows") by increasing data flows to European Environment Agency from 17% in 2004 to 75% in 2010 and then up to 100% in 2019 and 89% in 2020. However, there is a lack of compliance between different institutions with regard to the information they collect and hold. This is not only due to the vague division of competencies between institutions, but also due to the absence of by-laws defining the flow of information (Government of the Republic of Serbia. 2022).

The data on 'emission' and 'pollution inventory' are only partially in accordance with requirements of EU directives. This has an effect on what kind of information is collected and made accessible to the public. Inconsistent legal regulations are the reason for the limitation of own pollutant monitoring. It is necessary to improve the legal regulations related to the monitoring of soil and water conditions.



Regular publication of a national report on the state of environment is elaborated in the Law on Environmental Protection (Articles 76 and 77). In accordance with this Law, the SEPA must publish a national report on an annual basis. The latest report was published for 2020. Some environmental data is also published regularly (monthly, quarterly, annually) by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. All reports are available online.

Metaregister

In accordance with Article 74 of the LEP, the SEPA shall establish and maintain an information system that will “procure formation, classification, maintenance, presentation and distribution for numerical, descriptive and spatial databases on quality of the environmental media, monitoring of the status and protection of the environment, legal, administrative and organisational and strategic measures, scientific-technical information about planning measures of prevention and exchange of information with other information systems, etc.” The SEPA is also an institution responsible for establishing the Environmental Pollution Sources Register, which is in principle harmonised with PRTR Protocol and E-PRTR Regulation.

The Serbian Eco-Register contains information in the possession of the competent ministries and other state institutions, municipal and city administrations for the environment, protected natural assets and managers, business entities and non-governmental organisations. Ekoregistar is set up as a subdomain of the website of the Environmental Protection Agency at the following address: <http://www.ekoregistar.sepa.gov.rs>. In the course of 2013, the project for the improvement and updating of the Eco-Register was implemented. In the period from 2013 to 2021, the Eco-Register is updated once a year (Government RS 2022).

NGOs highlighted that “information provided by public authorities is not available in a visible and practical way to the general public in the RS”. The information is not always updated, numerous local governments and the economy do not submit data, the quality of the information presented is questionable and very often presented in a way that is difficult for citizens to understand. It has been stated that it is very often difficult to find information on the websites of state administration bodies, that is, the search requires a good knowledge of terms and processes in order to follow the schedule on the site.



Public Concerned

Aarhus definitions of 'public' and 'public concerned' are transposed into some environmental laws in the Republic of Serbia, but not into all. There is no correct definition that is applied consistently, throughout the legal system (Government RS 2022). 'Public concerned' is defined only in four environmental laws (LEP, LEIA, LSEA and LIPPC), but not mentioned in the other. Article 74 of the Constitution which regulates the right to information about the state of the environment uses the word 'everyone' (svako). The Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance (Article 5) also uses the word 'everyone' and does not contain specification on a distinction between 'public' and 'public concerned'.

Environmental Information

In 2016, the Law on the Environment was amended to contain the term 'environmental information' (Government RS 2022). However, the term 'document' is frequently used instead of information, which greatly narrows interpretation of the right of access to information, as the former refers only to physical documents and published material (Government RS 2022, op cit).

In the same year, an exception to access to information, defined as 'official secret' which had until then existed without a legal foundation, was added by adopting amendments to the Decree on office operations of state administration bodies (Official Gazette RS 80/92, 45/2016). The category 'official secret' does not exist in the Law on Data Protection. Therefore, these amendments contradict the constitutional principle of hierarchy of general legal acts. These changes limit public access to information related to the EU accession process and bilateral screenings. (Belgrade Open School (BOŠ), 2017. '*Komentar Beogradske Otvorene Škole na Treći Izveštaj o Sprovođenju Arhuske Konvencije*'). These changes accelerate deficiencies, which have already been observed in the previous period, in the public access to progress reports regarding the environment.

Laws related to the environment are regularly posted on the website of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia, the Provincial Institute for Nature Conservation, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Aarhus Centres and others. All legal acts are published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia. However, information on law enforcement, policies, and international agreements concerning environmental protection is not often available to the public. In particular, the lack of information on the progress of implementation is notable. Equally, details related to the implementation of projects and programmes and reports on the progress in the implementation of undertaken commitments are very rarely available (Government RS 2022).



Threat and Emissions

The term 'information relating to endangering or protecting the environment' was established in the legal system of the Republic of Serbia by amendments to the Law on Environmental Protection 2016 in Article 3, item 33d. The amendment stipulates that information relating to the threat or protection of the environment is information about a sudden danger caused by human activity or a consequence of natural phenomena, including information on environmental emissions. The Law on Environmental Protection, Law on Air Protection and Food Safety Law and Law on The Environmental Protection Act, the Air Protection Act, the Food Safety Act and the Chemicals Act define a system for alerting and communicating information in case of environmental and human health hazards, but most laws do not contain definitions of the threat thresholds (Government RS 2022).

The right of access to information is either not clearly defined or not mentioned at all in many environmental laws.

Requests for Access

The right of access to information is either not clearly defined or not mentioned at all in many environmental laws, for example, in the Law on Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Law on the Protection and Sustainable Use of Fish Stocks. Particularly, legal definitions of persons or entities with the right to request information are not consistent.

Some stipulations of the existing legislation in the Republic of Serbia are actually stricter than those of the Aarhus Convention. According to the Law on Free Access to Information, information must be made available more quickly, persons requesting information should be informed about the refusal to disclose information promptly, and information must be provided free of charge to journalists, human rights associations, and all persons requesting information regarding threats to public health and/or the environment. However, there is non-compliance with prescribed deadlines on the part of administrative bodies regarding responses to requests for information.



Exceptions to the exercise of the right of access to information and the criteria for rejecting requests for disclosure of information are rather vague. The interpretation of these provisions in national legislation is somewhat arbitrary; for example, public authorities seem to be left free to decide what exactly is meant by access to data that would “significantly complicate the realization of justified economic interests” (Law on Access to Information of Public Importance, Article 9). The government frequently rejects requests for the documentation of Environmental Impact Assessments referring to copy rights of subcontractors and consultants that prepared these reports.

Ombudsperson for Data Protection

In case a request to access to information is denied, the cause can be brought to the Ombudsperson for Information of Public Importance and for Personal Data Protection (Ombudsperson). According to the data from the Ombudsperson’s report for 2015, there has been an increase in the number of complaints regarding information related to environmental protection and animal protection. In case the Ombudsperson rejects the appeal, there is a possibility of starting a lawsuit and initiating an administrative dispute before the competent court against the decision of the Ombudsperson.

2.2

Participation

With the adoption of various regulations from 2018 until today, the legal framework has been significantly improved. Procedures for public participation have been developed during the preparation of plans and programmes in the field of environmental protection. Although the procedures have been refined, there has not been a significant improvement in the practice of public participation because the procedures are mostly not applied.

In July 2019, the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government adopted a general rulebook on good practice guidelines for public participation in the preparation of draft laws and other regulations and acts with the aim of improving public participation in the preparation of draft laws and other regulations and acts. In December 2021, the Government of Serbia adopted the Decree on public participation in the development of plans and programmes in the field of environmental protection. It established procedures for public participation in the preparation of planning documents for which the procedure of public participation is carried out in accordance with the law governing strategic environmental impact assessment (air quality, waste management plans, action plan for noise protection, protection of water from pollution). The procedures for public participation in the decision-making process



Environmental Impact Assessment

have also been improved through the Law on Planning System (2018) and amendments to the Law on State Administration (amendments from 2018). The implementation of these laws, however, is unsatisfactory.

The Republic of Serbia has developed a set of procedures for public participation, primarily via the Law on Environmental Protection (2004), LEIA (2004), LSEA (2004), and LIPPC (2004). These new laws provide a legal framework for public participation. Public participation in EIA procedures has not been developed because of a lack of criteria establishing the meaning of 'association' which makes it difficult to know what the registration obligations of organisations are under the Serbian law.

LSEA and LEIA are not aligned with applicable directives at the EU level regarding the deadlines for conducting public consultation. Informing the public electronically is not regulated by the LSEA and LEIA. In practice the Ministry of Environmental Protection has established the practice of informing the public through the website, and a number of local self-governments publish call on their website. The practice is uneven and non-binding. Relevant amendments to the LSEA and LEIA have been prepared but not adopted yet (Government RS 2022). Moreover, authorities undermine participation in reviewing important documents that can have significant impacts on the environment and on a large number of people, for example, by opening them for public inspection during the holidays. In practice, it is often the case that the public gets involved too late to ensure effective public participation when all options are still open. A large number of plans that have been approved do not consider alternative solutions or do not consider zero option where the public has the opportunity to comment on whether the proposed activity should take place at all (Government RS 2022).

Implementation of the provision for public participation in the LEIA, LSEA and LIPPC is not possible without support of other sectoral laws. In the areas of waste management, water management, energy, and other areas for which the strategic impact assessment is carried out, there is no public participation procedure in giving consent to the strategic impact assessment report. In the area of spatial planning public participation is regulated by the Rulebook on the content, manner, and procedure of drafting spatial and urban planning documents (2019). But this Rulebook is not aligned with the provisions of the Aarhus Convention. Article 62 The Rulebook contains a limited definition of the public (objections during public consultation are submitted by interested legal and natural persons).

The Law on Planning and Construction establishes the obligation to prepare a strategic impact assessment for spatial plans, but not for



urban plans. However, in practice, strategic impact assessment is also carried out for individual urban plans if the criteria established by the LSEA are met. This practice is not uniform. Public participation in the process of drafting a report on strategic assessment for spatial and urban plans is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Rulebook on the content and method of drafting spatial and urban planning documents (2019). In practice, problems arise because the stage of public presentation of the plan and the report on the SIA is often skipped during public inspection. This step is equated with the public session of the planning commission. Holding public hearings on by-laws is still a rarity rather than an established practice. This was especially concerning in the case of the public discussion of the General Regulation Plan of Belgrade in 2022 where a significant part of the planning scope was completely omitted and not considered.

The LEIA contains a list of projects for which impact assessment is mandatory and a list of projects for which environmental impact assessment may be required ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 114/08). The lists of activities are not fully aligned with EU regulations and the list from the Aarhus Convention as a large number of projects lacks criteria on how to decide on the need to prepare an environmental impact assessment study.

The LSEA (Article 5) stipulates that strategic assessment is carried out for plans, programmes, foundations, and studies (hereinafter referred to as plans) in the field of spatial and urban planning, land use, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, hunting, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna. This does not mean that a strategic impact assessment report is prepared for each plan or programme from the mentioned areas, but that each plan is necessarily subject to a decision-making procedure on the preparation of a strategic impact assessment. The public is excluded from this decision. Publishing the decision in the Official Gazette does not fully meet the requirements of transparency set by the Convention.

Procedures for public participation have been developed during the preparation of plans and programmes in the field of environmental protection.



2.3

Access to Justice

The Government Strategy for the Implementation of the Aarhus Convention 2023 – 2032 concluded that it is “highly unlikely that a proper system of access to justice will be established in a national system of environmental law without accurate and harmonised definitions of ‘public’, ‘public concerned’ and ‘environmental information’, and other relevant definitions”. Many elements of access to justice are insufficiently studied (Government of RS 2022).

Requests regarding procedures that challenge the actions or omissions of natural persons or public authorities, in violation of the provisions of their national legislation which regulates the field of the environment (administrative procedures and review procedures before the court), do not exist as far as environmental laws are concerned. Also, in many cases procedures are missing or not sufficiently regulated. For example, if the Ombudsperson finds an appeal to a rejection of a request to access to information justified, the procedure for punishing negligent behaviour of the public official is insufficiently regulated.

There are no administrative procedures in the case of industrial accidents, nor in the case of elimination or prevention of damage to the environment, although anyone can submit a request for compensation for ordinary damage. Criminal offenses against the environment are defined in Chapter XXIV of the Criminal Code.

Minimum standards regarding procedures, decisions and legal remedies related to the right to legal protection (appropriate and effective legal remedies, honesty, fairness, timeliness, etc.) are not regulated in environmental laws but exists in other laws. There is no analysis of the costs in procedures for exercising the right to legal protection. In 2018 adoption of the Law on Free Legal Aid (“Official Gazette of the RS”, No. 87/18), the implementation of which began on October 1, 2019, regulates free legal aid for citizens as its beneficiaries and the ways of obtaining and providing it.

Possibilities for exercising the right to legal protection are insufficiently present in the Law on Nature Protection (regarding the advice of users of protected areas) and in the Law on Environmental Protection (regarding protection against chemical accidents and liability against the risk of harm or damage to the environment).

Article 44 of the Law on General Administrative Procedure (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 18/16 and 95/18) (LAP) adopted in 2018 stipulates that a party to the procedure is a natural or legal person whose administrative matter is the subject of the administrative procedure and any other natural or legal person whose rights, obligations or legal interests may be affected by the outcome of the administrative procedure. A party in administrative proceedings



can be an authority, organisation, settlement, group of persons and others who are not legal entities, under the conditions that a natural or legal person can be a party, or when it is determined by law. Representatives of collective interests and representatives of broader interests of the public, who are organised in accordance with the regulations, may have the status of a party in administrative proceedings if the outcome of the administrative proceedings may affect the interests they represent. With the aforementioned provision, which regulates who can be a party to the proceedings and which includes representatives of collective interests and wider interests of the public, the LAP is fully compliant with the requirements of the Aarhus Convention.

Access to courts

In the implementation of the third pillar of the Aarhus Convention, which is the right to legal protection, the obstacle is the absence of “a system of automated case management in all courts, e.g., free access to data from the case, as well as an overview of developments while preserving the privacy of the parties in the proceedings” (4th National Report). In the courts, there are no departments specialised in environmental protection cases. The training of judges and prosecutors for dealing with environmental protection cases is insufficient. Associations very rarely initiate legal proceedings due to lack of funds and fear that the process will threaten their survival.

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2.4

Compliance assurance, accountability, and effectiveness

In the Republic of Serbia, there is no special law regulating the implementation of the Aarhus Convention, nor is there a legal basis that provides the necessary conditions for compliance with the requirements of the convention (Kurtović, R, 2013. *'Arhuska Konvencija u Pravnom Sistemu Republike Srbije'*. Univerzitetska misao, no. 12 (2): 142–53; Government RS 2022).

There are no performance or quality standards in the field of public participation, which is why public participation is often only formal. Application of Article 6.8 is particularly problematic in the process of creating spatial and urban plans, where the commission for plans and expert control retain the discretionary right to reject public objections. Decision-makers rarely see public participation at any level as a key element for making good and legitimate decisions, and environmental capacities are particularly small at the local level. There is also a lack of evaluation of the impact of associations made by decision-makers.

It is necessary to better study the results of public participation in the decision-making process, but preliminary assessments indicate shortcomings. Written explanations of how public comments are taken into account are rarely applied, and there is no feedback. When implementing this provision of the Convention, especially at the local level, it was observed that the authorities, when deciding, only formally state that they have taken into account the opinions of the public, but in fact they do not express themselves to the submitted opinions or explain the reasons for taking a specific decision as a whole.

There is a general lack of available information on measuring Serbia's performance in the areas of effectiveness and efficiency. Serbia's process aiming at eventual EU membership has focused more on technical transposition and harmonisation of legislative acts than on problems of implementation.

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3

Institutional context

The Environmental Protection Agency (an institutional structure established within the Ministry of Environment, Mining and Spatial Planning) is the main responsible institution for maintaining the national environmental information system. It was established in 2004. The Environmental Protection Agency is not an independent institution. The status of the agency is regulated in accordance with the Law on Environmental Protection.

Record keeping is also defined by all other laws analysed here, as well as in the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, the Constitution, etc. Information flow and reporting is regulated in many cases, but not often in a satisfactory way. There is a lack of coordination between different institutions in terms of the information they collect and hold in their possession; this is due not only to murky divisions of responsibility between institutions, but also to a lack of bylaws defining data flows.

Key institutions, such as the Environmental Protection Agency and Institute for Nature Conservation, have clearly defined points of contact. Many institutions, especially within the local government and public and private enterprises, lack clearly defined points of contact (Government RS 2022).

A particular problem is the lack of capacity, both in terms of knowledge and expertise and in terms of the number of employees. In some local self-governments, only one person is engaged in environmental protection, who often has several papers in his jurisdiction. This prevents employees of the administrative bodies from implementing appropriate public participation procedures. A matter of particular concern is the small number of persons assigned to impact assessment and integrated pollution prevention and control in the competent ministry (Government RS 2022). The capacities of competent authorities for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention are insufficient. "Technical problems of obtaining information upon request" were observed, considering that it is often about information for which the storage period has expired, which stands for - it has been destroyed. In the implementation of the second pillar of the Aarhus Convention, which is education of the public in making decisions about special activities, the inadequate institutional and other capacities of the Ministry and competent local self-government bodies represent a major obstacle.



The main national institution for the control of free access to information is the Ombudsperson for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection whose authority is established through the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance. The Ombudsperson is responsible for monitoring the compliance of public authorities with obligations stipulated by this law. The adoption of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance expands the powers of the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection. The number of complaints to the Commissioner concerning the Ministry of Environmental Protection continues to increase every year.

There are five Aarhus Centres in Serbia: New Belgrade, Subotica, Kragujevac, Novi Sad, South and East Serbia.

4

Role of Civil Society

In 2014, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environmental Protection founded the National Council for Climate Change. The National Council for Climate Change consists of representatives of the executive branch, academic institutions, individual cities, and the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities – an association of towns and municipalities in Serbia. During its establishment, civil society organisations were not invited to the Council. At the end of 2016, an invitation to appoint a representative for participation in the Council was sent to Coalition 27, which is an informal coalition of associations that monitors the process of negotiations of the Republic of Serbia with the EU (BOŠ Comments, 2017).

In this three-year period, the Environmental Protection Committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia has created space for public participation in its work through various mechanisms. Through the Green Chair mechanism, representatives of civil society organisations were given a seat at committee meetings, where representatives of civil society organisations had the opportunity to ask questions to the Members of Parliament and public authorities, participate in discussions and make their proposals. The Committee also facilitated public participation in the legislative process through the organisation of public hearings (BOŠ Comments, 2017).



On 11 June 2015, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Intended National Determined Contribution (INDC), thus fulfilling its obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). During the preparation of the INDC, the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection did not involve the public but informed about the drafting of this document and the ambitions of the Republic of Serbia in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Unlike the process of drafting the INDC, the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection provided the public with an insight into the Draft of the First Biennial Updated Report according to the UNFCCC and took into account some of the association's comments. The first biennial updated report was submitted to the UNFCCC in March 2016.

In the last few years, at least two thematic networks have been formed: Natura 2000 resource centre of Serbia and the BELLS movement. Within the framework of the Environmental Forum, three associations from Serbia were transparently selected as representative associations for the coordination of dialogue in the field of protection.

Coalition 27 is an informal network of associations that advocates and encourages public participation in the process of accession negotiations of the Republic of Serbia with the European Union. The network proposes solutions that will contribute to the protection and improvement of the environment and the quality of life of citizens. Every year since 2014, Coalition 27 prepares and publishes shadow reports in which it presents its conclusions on the progress of reforms in the field of environmental protection, foreseen by the negotiation Chapter 27 in the process of accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union.

Green Chair represents a network of over 60 non-governmental organisations dealing with the issue of environmental protection. The mission of the Green Chair is to improve communication with the legislative branch of government through an established mechanism, the only one of its kind, and to influence the improvement of legislative proposals in the field of the environment.

The Coalition for Freedom of Access to Information (*Koalicija za slobodu pristupa informacijama*) is a coalition of non-governmental organisations that was created in the process of public advocacy for the adoption of the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance.

In the budget of the Republic of Serbia, funds are allocated for financial support of projects implemented by associations (non-governmental organisations). Each year, funds for the associations' projects are planned in the budget of the Ministry of Education and Culture for these purposes. According to the public competition



Helpful resources

- eConsultation online portal
<https://ekonsultacije.gov.rs/>
- <https://riverwatch.eu/en/balkanrivers/news/complaint-against-serbia-submitted-energy-community>
- <https://cpe.org.rs/vesti/makisko-polje-najvece-vo-doizvoriste-u-beogradu-je-u-opasnosti/>

for co-financing projects of associations and other civil society organisations in the field of environmental protection, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry co-finances projects within the framework. Some of the projects refer to the Aarhus Convention (Government RS 20220).

The level of knowledge and skills of associations dealing with the environment required to participate in decision-making is very low. Support (mainly financial, but also operational) for the development of the capacities of associations needed for their participation in decision-making and cooperation with neighbouring countries and other associations is small or non-existent (Government RS 2022). Besides the civil society sphere, Serbia is home to five OSCE Aarhus Centres.

When it comes to the legal framework for the activities of associations, it is important to note that the National Strategy for creating an enabling environment for the development of civil society has not yet been adopted, despite the fact that the public debate on the Proposal of the Strategy ended on 14 August 2015. In addition to the public debate on the Proposal of the Strategy, the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Government of the Republic of Serbia conducted wider consultations on the Draft Strategy through its official website. The Strategy does not mention the role of civil society organisations in environmental protection and sustainable development. Representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection were not involved in the work of the expert and project group for drafting the Strategy. The report on the conducted public debate on the Strategy Proposal does not provide enough information to be able to conclude whether there have been comments from authorities, organisations, and associations regarding the respect of the role of civil society in environmental protection. (BOŠ Comments, 2017).

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