

## **The Construction Boost and the Impacts on the Environment**

Protracted environmental problems in our country gained a new dimension after the “Annan Plan”. The fact that a settlement could not be reached after the Plan prompted a very rapid concretion process, in other words construction boost in the northern part of Cyprus.

When we look at the planning system in north Cyprus, we see that the planning is trying to be done by “directives”. However, the directives are temporary instruments used for urgent measures in planning. In a well-arranged planning system the directives should be complemented by the municipal plans as soon as possible. Today, there is only one comprehensive municipal plan which is for Nicosia. In Kyrenia, Tatlısu, Akdeniz, Korucam (Kormatiki), Boğaz (Boghaz) and Karpaz, planning is trying to be done with the directives whereas there aren't any planning instruments at all in Famagusta and İskele (Trigomo).

Consequently, construction boost is causing a lot of environmental problems in north Cyprus where planning is extremely weak. As it was mentioned before, the construction activities, which have increased greatly after the “Annan Plan”, are fitting with the sustainable development principles. In areas where there are no well established infrastructures, the natural resources like underground waters, sea and soil are threatened by the rapid growing construction sector. In addition to all, permissions given for tourism investments on forests and public lands are exacerbating the current situation even more.

The “Physical Country Plan” which should have been prepared for years ago, is yet to be prepared. Although, the Council of Ministers has decided to establish a Committee towards this aim, the Committee yet to initiate any serious work. The municipal plan, that will create the details of the physical plan, has only been prepared for one region. This plan is still discussed by various sectors.

Under these circumstances, where there is no any planning, the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) Reports carry a very important role. The ideal EIA Reports put forward the impacts of the specific projects under different classes and with various sizes during the project planning stage. These impact assessments are not only environmental but also economical and social, confiding with the sustainable development principles.

These reports help to the decision makers during the decision making process. Unfortunately, this instrument is also not used effectively in our country whereas the current reports are not at the satisfactory at all. The experts preparing these reports should be provided with continuous training on this subject. In addition, the experts should also be provided with some specific criteria and templates to be able to prepare the EIA Reports. Without any doubt, it is a reality that these EIA Reports should be evaluated more seriously and in detail. It is ironic that at the same time while various initiatives are being undertaken on these issues, changes are being made to the EIA Law to open the way for the construction sector.

One of the negative effects of the rapid and unplanned concretion is on our water resources. There are still no sewage systems in the big cities. Despite that there is a sewage system in the most parts of Nicosia; there are no sewage systems in Famagusta and Güzelyurt (Morfou) at all. On the other hand there is a small sewage system operating in some parts of Kyrenia. The water purification plant in Kyrenia for the sewage system however, can not be operated efficiently and the collected waste-water has been dumped into the sea without any treatment. The ventilation pool of this purification plant has collapsed and created a big environmental

disaster last month. The plant mentioned is currently being repaired which is an opportunity to decrease the possibility of environmental problems in the future. The Guzelyurt (Morfo) aquifer is the one which provides water to the big cities like Guzelyurt (Morfo), Famagusta and Nicosia. The non-existence of any sewage system in Guzelyurt (Morfo) carries the risk of polluting the aquifer which is one of the biggest underground water resource of our country. As a result, concretion without any infrastructure is affecting our underground waters and our sea waters. Our scarce water resources are losing their quality and quantity because of the increasing over consumption. As an indirect effect, the discharge of the water collected from septic tanks and absorbing wells to the landfills and streambeds, causes another alarming environmental problem.

Garbages, called solid waste, are another environmental problem caused rapid concretion. Today, the local governments do not collect household wastes in an ideal way and the unplanned concretion during the removal process exacerbates these problems even further. There are regular waste storing areas in north Cyprus. However, there are 72 landfills with various sizes. In the less populated places and towns, garbage and wastes are stored in random empty lands haphazardly. The most obvious example is the Bafra region.

In addition to these problems, the increased production in the stone quarries is causing even more environmental problems related with the stone quarry sector. On the other hand, this situation has accelerated the use of terrace-system within the quarries.

Without forgetting the fact that this world is a heritage borrowed from the next generations, living in a greener, healthier and cleaner world the next generations' right and protection of their rights is our main mission and responsibility.