

Recommendations on the measures to be implemented in environmental protection and energy sectors

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Environmental protection

The unplanned and hasty reforms carried out over the past few years in environmental protection and natural resources' use sectors have caused serious harm to both the environment and the Georgian population. During years the country had no policy for environmental protection, as well as for sustainable use of natural resources; the mechanisms for pollution prevention were abolished; management of natural resources was narrowed down to licensing out of natural resources and this function was being transferred from one institution to another. As a result, the balance between nature conservation and consumption of natural resources was finally distorted. The legislation has significantly distanced from universally recognized principles of sustainable development, as well as the EU legislation.

Establishment of the institutional framework for environmental protection and management of natural resources without clarifying the latter's essence, understanding the problems emerging as a result of hasty reforms, studying the needs (legal framework, technical or human resources) and public participation, is still very problematic. The sector faces complex challenges, therefore, we believe that to make an optimal decision it is expedient to set up a commission, which, based on the best international practices and the country's needs, will develop an optimal model for reformation of the sector.

Some urgent measures to help to strengthen environmental governance, as well as to support fulfillment of the relevant EU requirements are outlined below:

1. It is necessary to build capacity of the Ministry of Environment Protection in terms of its empowering as well as providing it with necessary technical, financial and human resources; establishment of effective environmental enforcement mechanisms, including the re-establishment and strengthening the capacities of the Inspectorate for Environmental Protection;

2. It is essential to revise and/or develop relevant water, air, soil, waste legislation as well as to strengthen the existing environmental management tools and introduce new ones (including economic instruments);
3. Development and improvement of the legal framework regulating the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) system; this should at least include harmonization of Georgian legislation with the requirements of multilateral international agreements (the Aarhus Convention; the Convention on Biological Diversity; the Bern Convention) as well as the EU Directive 85/337/EEC;
4. Improvement of the procedures for public access to information and early and effective participation in the decision making processes at various levels;
5. Immediate abolition of those statutory acts adopted during last year, which legalized the possibility of concluding an agreement with a law offender in exchange of pecuniary compensation thus recognizing the legality of an illegal action, as well as of commercial extraction of the protected Red-listed species, hunting in the protected areas, etc.;
6. Cancellation of those acts issued by the Georgian Government and the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of Georgia ahead of the parliamentary elections, which, as a part of government's attempts to gain more votes, removed the mechanisms restricting illegal felling;
7. To ensure conservation and wise use of Georgian forests, it is essential to stop large-scale exploitation of timber resources and promote sustainable forestry, forest protection and restoration, and sustainable use of non-timber resources. Furthermore, a status of protected areas shall be granted to at least 15 percent of Georgian forests. For successful implementation of the above mentioned policy it is crucial to immediately carry out strategic zoning of the entire forest fund of Georgia – into protected, protective and other forests. A part of Georgian forests, which will be categorized as protected and protective forests, should be granted a status of protected areas; before the formal establishment of protected areas, these territories should be designated as “reserve protected areas” by the Georgian parliament. As far as other forests are concerned, they can be used under lease, licensing or other forms of utilization; it is also possible to restore the forms of traditional forest use (private, community, church forests);
8. To ensure the protection and sustainable development of ecosystems, it is important to take efficient steps to establish a uniform network of protected areas. This includes the capacity building of already existing protected areas, their modernization and expansion, as well as the establishment of new protected areas in various regions rich in biodiversity, such as Zemo and Kvemo Svaneti, mountainous Samegrelo, Racha, Lechkhumi and Pshav-Khevsureti.
9. Assessment of the efficiency of reforms implemented over the past few years in the mineral resources sector and establishment of a framework for management of mineral resources. Before such framework is established, it is urgent to introduce legal safeguards for environmental and social protection during utilization of mineral resources (exploration, extraction, enrichment, refining).
10. The new government should revise and amend the Second National Environmental Action Program approved in 2012 in line with its program, as well as accelerate the process of renewal of the biodiversity strategy and action plan.

Energy sector

Despite certain positive changes over the past years, the sustainability of energy system is still problematic in Georgia. Among the key problems we can distinguish the safety of supplies; integration of environmental standards both in the process of energy generation and consumption; also development of competitive systems with the purpose of supplying power to consumers at moderate prices. Today Georgia is completely dependent on imported organic fuel that increases the risk of economic and political dependence of the country, whereas the parameter of energy intensity exceeds the parameters of EU member states. To settle the problems existing in the sector it is essential to implement the following immediate measures:

1. To start preparing of the country's aggregate energy balance reflecting supply of all types of energy carriers (electricity, natural gas, liquid gas, carbon products, coal, firewood etc.) and energy consumption of different economic sectors and the population. This will enable definition of the energy policy and strategic energy plans;
2. To immediately start preparing of the legislative package, including the financial action plan on renewable energy and energy efficiency with the participation of experts and the public;
3. To develop with broad public involvement the national strategy of development of Georgian energy sector; The strategy should include all realistic alternatives (including small hydro systems, wind and solar energy, biomass), in order to select the smoothest, most optimal option for Georgia's nature and its population, as it is recommended by the World Commission on Dams;
4. Simultaneously, to announce a moratorium on the construction of those planned large hydro power plants, which envisage flooding of thousands of hectares of land and resettlement of local communities;
5. To revise the agreements and memorandums concluded by the previous authorities with investors in energy sector, taking into account the country's environmental, economic and public interests;
6. To start working over a new energy policy, which will be in compliance with the EU Energy Policy – 2020;
7. To attract investments for rehabilitation of small hydro power plants and construction of decentralized renewable energy sources.