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Illegal Landfills in Greece...Do They Belong to The Past?

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Key points

The brief aims at present the gravity of the situation of illicit landfills in the region of Peloponnese in southern Greece. Actually, Greece maintains the worst profile in the matter of illicit dumping regarding the EU member-states. Among all the regions of Greece, Peloponnese has paid enormous fines over the last years for not respecting the European laws in the matter of garbage and at the same time the cost to close all Peloponnese's landfills is lower than the fines it has to pay. The resolution could be characterized as a "revolution" against the lawlessness, the indifference and the lack of powerful institutions capable of intervening to deal with the situation from scratch. So, a solid policy should be based on:

- The cyclical economy and the recycling, in order to promote a good quality of life
- The composting of organic waste, which could be used as a solid product for moisturizing the soil
- The Biogas production as a modern technology, which is ideal for the encountering of garbage's problem

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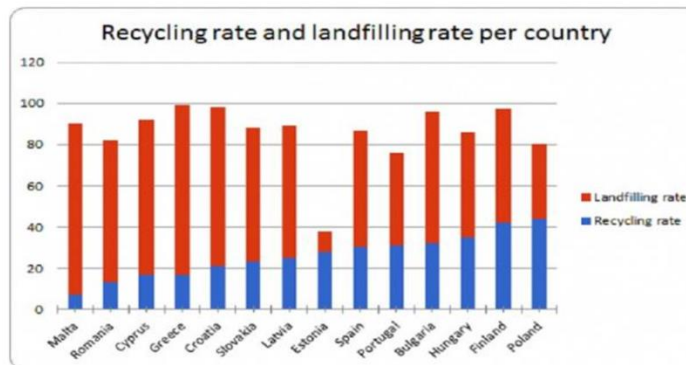
Introduction

The outcome of illegal dumping is, undoubtedly, deleterious for the health, the economic development and the environment, too. The level of violation of the European Law is an indicator of social disorganization within the communities, lack of powerful institutions able to intervene to resolve this issue and lack of public awareness.

This brief emphasizes the possible resolution measures that should be taken by the Greek Ministry of Environment & Energy in order to eliminate the problem radically in the Peloponnese region and ensure a viable life for every Greek European citizen. Thus, it is crucial to tackle this problem because Greece has the most cases of infringement of the Community environmental legislation, because of them it has paid more than 100 million euros from 2014 to date.

Situation in Greece

In the field of solid waste management, a framework has been promulgated at national and regional level in order to deal with the problem of illegal landfills. Nevertheless, at the present time, landfills constitute the primary reason that Greece has to pay enormous fines, due to the fact that there are still 57 open all over the country or in the status of “rehabilitation”. Also, another challenge is the high percentage of household waste which ends in landfills (81% vs. 31%, which is the EU average) and only 16% is recycled (27% in the EU), while the target for recycling is to reach 50% by 2020. As a result, Greece has displayed the third worst performance among the EU members since Eurostat data show that the country produces 5,354,000 tons of waste (2016) and at the same time 4,415,000 tons end up in landfills contrary to 730,000 tons which are recycled. Actually, according to the Greek law 4496/2017, concerning the waste materials and the Principe of zero waste, municipalities must implement the reuse at burial’s expense, encountering in that way the illegal management of hazardous waste, notwithstanding the continuity of the contravention that take place incessantly.



Source: Ecnomia

Illicit dumping in Peloponnese

In the region of Peloponnese the handling of illegal landfills is of pivotal importance, since according to data from the Directorate-General for Environment -the department of European Commission-, 16 landfills that had closed and had restored are again in use, on account of an alternative that could be deemed as sufficient. For instance, from 2015 till today Greece has paid € 51.24 million in the case of illegal landfills, of which €15.08 million concerns the Peloponnesian Region. More specifically, these dumps exist in Arcadia in the municipality of Vytina, Tropea, Tegea, Leonidio, and in Korinthia, Agioi Theodoroi, Gargaliani, Filiatra, Aristomenous, Ithomis, Petalidi, Andani, Trifylia and Messina.

Penalties in EUR for illegal dumping	2015	2016	2017	2018 (A' sem.)
Peloponnese	8.000.000	3.960.000	2.080.000	1.040.000



According to Court of Justice of the European Union (C-378/13), the fines of each municipality will be withheld from their funding and the Hellenic Republic has to pay the fine to the account "EU's own resources". This means that the fine encumbers the national resources and the Greek taxpayers, too. On 2 December 2014, when the trial took place, there were 70 illegal landfills in operation and 223 in situation of rehabilitation. The conviction concerned mainly the management of the landfill site in Kiato, which serves the prefecture of Corinthia and Argolida, as well as the municipalities of Tripolis and Kynourias.

The Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Home Affairs have repeatedly threatened to fine these actions, implementing an environmental policy based on “Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on waste” , despite the poor economic situation of the municipalities and, of course, the political cost of the reactions.

Based on these facts, the Greek national authorities have to pay fines in the European Institutions every six months; 80,000€ for each active dump and 40,000€ for every inactive, unrecognized or re-operated landfill.

The project of resolution concerns the recycling and energy employment of waste in the region. For a period of 25 years from now on, a private company “TERNA-ENERGY” had assumed the management of the situation in collaboration with the public sector, but without any positive result until now, given the fact that some municipalities still choosing a different way: they leave the rubbish at different districts at times, degrading the ecosystem.

Recommendations

A solid policy would be deemed necessary if not obligatory, in order to come up against with the problem of illegal landfills in Peloponnese.

First of all, every European citizen in this region should adopt a mentality which respects the environment, promoting a good quality of life. Recycling is a good example, given the fact that the volume of waste could be downscaled and Greece could avoid the inflicted fines that will be scheduled by 2020 in the EU if it does not recycle. The municipalities should not anymore bury their waste, but legislate in favor of paper and glass collection recycling organic, food and trimmings. Moreover, the best recycling plan will be in the interest of citizens reducing municipal fees that require the management of landfills. Referring to the benefits of the cyclical economy, the re-use could boost employment and possibly thousands new jobs could be created through the implementation of the national strategic plan for the cyclical economy in the horizon of 2020.



Secondly, it's true that the materials, that end up in landfills, create sewage that is very damaging to the subsoil, as well as they augment emissions of gaseous pollutants. Undoubtedly, landfills contaminate the soil, the water and the air, since uncontrolled disposal of waste may release hazardous chemicals in the environment with serious health risks, for instance the electrical waste, according to the Directive 2002/96/EC of the EU and simultaneously precious materials contained in waste are lost. Contributing to a beneficial environmental footprint, the municipalities of Peloponnese had better aim at the composting of organic waste at 40%, without losing the recoverable resources. Composting involves the collection of biodegradable waste such as food and trees, creating a solid product which when is placed in the soil; it gives it the nutrients maintaining its moisture, too.

Last but not least, a modern technology, which is ideal for the encountering of garbage's problem, is the Biogas production. It is known that household rubbish consists of recyclable materials such as plastics and the biomass, which, by means of this advanced process of energy, could be exploited resourcefully. Biogas is produced by heating it between 38 to 42 degrees Celsius, consisted of methane, about 60%, and of carbon dioxide and other gases. Furthermore, methane and carbon dioxide do not harm the ecosystem and they can be used in order to produce electricity. In that way the region of Peloponnese could "exploit" biogas technology, such as a fertilizer in both liquid and solid form. For instance, nowadays approximately 8,000 biogas plants are operating in Central Europe, taking advantage of the household sewage at a low cost process.



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