



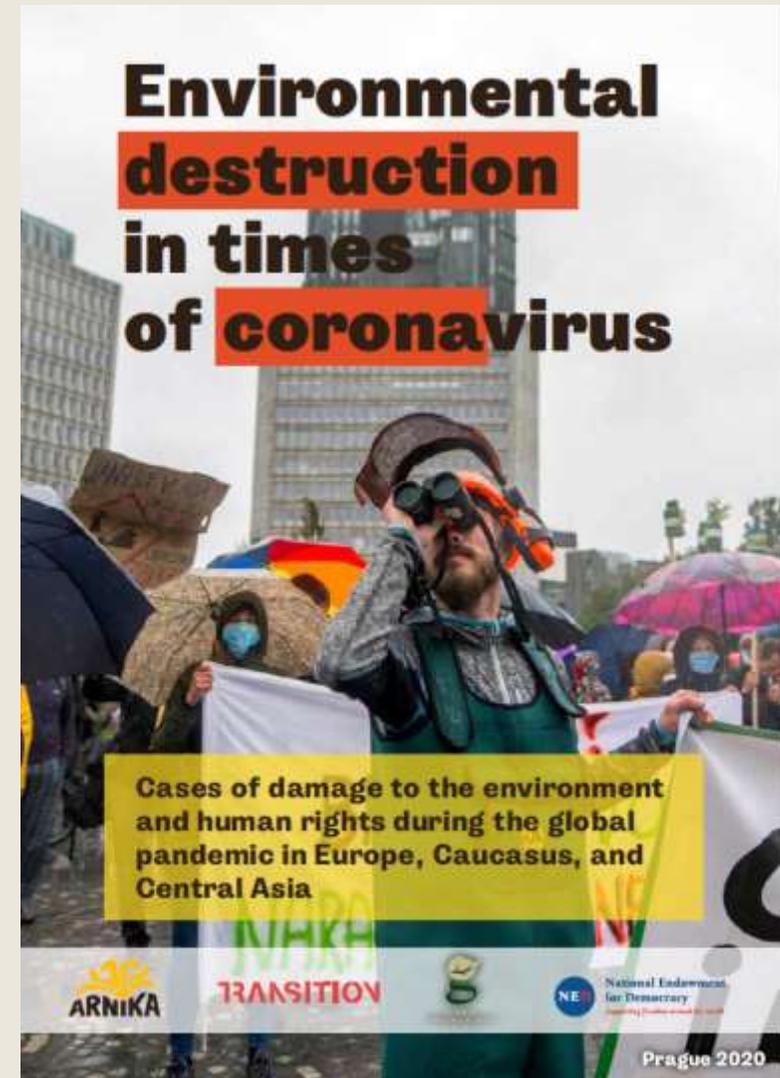
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Environmental destruction in times of coronavirus



At the time of the pandemic a growing number of states in Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia have ceased to respect democratic institutions or even started to openly attack them. And there are a considerable number of states with democratic regimes amongst them.

The pandemic laid bare how deep-rooted the view of civic participation as an obstacle and difficulty is in many countries.



Arnika has collected 15 cases of damage to the environment and human rights in the period from March to October 2020.

Along with state run by illegitimate government such as Belarus, EU member states, such as Czech Republic or Slovenia, also appear on the list.

Violation of many international conventions such as the Aarhus Convention or Ramsar Convention and European legislation such as the Habitats Directive, Birds Directive, EIA Directive, or Water Framework Directive, or violations of national legislation have been reported.



Acceleration in changes in legislation and policies with an impact on the environment and citizens' rights

- **Armenia:** restriction of provision of environmental information
- **Czech Republic:** hasty preparation of the new Building Act that weakens the opportunities of the public to participate in decision making
- **Greece:** newly adopted law weakens environmental legislation
- **Hungary:** government decrees restricting environmental rights
- **Slovenia:** changes in the national legislation that significantly limiting the space for civil society organizations to participate in decision making
- **Ukraine:** non-implementation of EIA procedures

Out of sight of civil society

- **Belarus:** prohibition of protests and persecuting activists for exercising their environmental rights
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** illegal construction of hydro-power plants
- **Bulgaria:** intensified discharge of untreated industrial wastewater
- **Croatia, Czech republic:** issuance of fast permits for controversial projects
- **Moldova:** increase in illegal logging
- **Ukraine:** illegal operation of a thermal power plant at full capacity

Conclusions and recommendations

- Cases of violation can be found in whole UNECE region
- Although the worst pandemic has passed, some of the cases continue and we can face the consequences for a long time
- We have been hearing that non-governmental organizations are unelected pressure groups; this view deepens at times such as the COVID-19 pandemic
- Traditional industries such as automobile, manufacturers and airlines speak openly against the policies and measures on environmental protection and climate change using as argument the need to tackle the upcoming economic crisis, which is starting as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Not all stories have a bad ending – e.g. thanks to the pandemic a discussion about how to use virtual tools and lead virtual public hearings has been opened
- **During the times when the traditional tools of civic society are weakened and public attention directed elsewhere the role of non-governmental organisation is crucial to monitor and watchdog damage to the environment and human rights.**

Thank you for your attention!



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