

**First Green Balkan Summer Camp**

# "Energy Transition and Mega-Projects in the Balkans"

Ierissos, Halkidiki, Greece  
**12 - 19 July 2015**



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of the Green Institute, Greece, European Green Party  
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# 1<sup>st</sup> Green Balkan Summer Camp

## Energy Transition and Mega-Projects in the Balkans

Over the summer, the **Green Institute, Greece [GIG]** with the financial contribution of the **Green European Foundation [GEF]** and the **European Green Party [EGP]** organized the "*1st Green Balkan Summer Camp: Energy Transition and Mega-Projects in the Balkans*". The Summer Camp took place in the town of Ierissos in Halkidiki, Greece from the 12th to the 19th of July 2015.

The town of Ierissos (ancient *Akanthos*) is the oldest and largest village of the Municipality of Aristotelis, which is an area of natural beauty with a number of archeological sites. The Municipality was named after the philosopher Aristotle who was born in *ancient Stagira*. In our days, this area is the site of gold mining operations by Hellenic Gold - a subsidiary of Canadian firm Eldorado Gold. This project has deeply divided the local communities of the Halkidiki peninsula. It is a hotly contested issue since the gold extraction has met high resistance from locals over the past three years<sup>1</sup>.

The aims of the *Green Balkan Summer Camp* were to highlight the Energy Transition and Mega-Projects, that is, energy policy (nuclear projects, gas pipelines, oil extraction, mining of lignite), alternative trends in renewable energy sources and pharaonic projects in the Balkans, i.e. gold mining, dam construction, construction of third bridge and canal in the Bosphorus. Furthermore, additional aims included: enhancing networking and the exchange of good practices

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<sup>1</sup> [http://antigoldgr.org/en/?CSRF\\_TOKEN=eada8ddae14c26ce04a4f2d48eb2a4dbc83634a1](http://antigoldgr.org/en/?CSRF_TOKEN=eada8ddae14c26ce04a4f2d48eb2a4dbc83634a1)

among Greens in the Balkans, helping participants expand their knowledge, highlighting the role of local movements and that of citizens and sensitizing public opinion.

The project involved 20 participants and speakers in total, all active in Green Parties and the Green Movement in the Balkans (Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, and representatives from GEF and the EGP). Participants from other Balkan countries (Montenegro and Croatia) were also expected, but due to force majeure they did not manage to attend.

It should be noted that the Summer Camp took place during a crucial period when political and economic developments in Greece led to the imposition of "capital controls", an unprecedented measure which included severe restrictions on withdrawals from ATMs as well as transfers through the banking system. In fact, bank transfers from within the country to accounts abroad were suspended entirely. Despite the practical difficulties and the prevailing uncertainty, the Project was implemented with great success thanks to the combined efforts of the organizing committee of GIG, the technical and financial support of GEF and EGP, and the solidarity and ingenuity of those who participated and embraced the event.

During the Summer Camp, participants stayed at the Municipal Camp "Axtada", situated near a "blue flag" beach<sup>2</sup> and at nearby hotels. The workshops were held at the Cultural Center "3D Theater" in Ierissos, a fully equipped, air-conditioned venue.

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<sup>2</sup> In order to receive a Blue Flag eco-label, a beach must not only be found to have an excellent quality of bathing water, it must also comply with several criteria concerning cleanliness, environmental management and organisation, environmental education and information, visitor safety and services, as well as protection of nature, the coast and the coastal area.



*Municipal Camp "Axtada"  
in the town of Ierissos*

An introductory meeting was held in the Municipal Camping on the first day of the Summer Camp, on the evening of 11<sup>th</sup> of July. The organisers welcomed the participants and presented the aims, the programme and practical issues related to the Summer Camp. The floor was also given to the participants who briefly presented themselves and their expectations from the event.

The second day was dedicated to "Global Energy and Climate" and started with a presentation from *Tasos Krommydas*, president of the GIG. *Tasos* focused on the supreme challenges of climate change, stressing that climate change and development projects are interconnected. During his presentation, he talked about the responses to climate change (adaptation and mitigation) and the associated natural and socioeconomic risks in the Mediterranean region and the Balkans.



*Arrival day*

He went on to present some necessary options and actions in order to reduce climate change impacts, namely redefining energy consumption needs, leaving fossil fuel deposits in the ground and avoiding any further investment to that end, redirection of subsidies for the fossil fuel industry to energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy innovation, consideration of climate change on all policy levels. In addition, he highlighted the importance of citizens' actions, for example installing solar panels at home, referring to the concept of the '*prosumer*' as energy producer and consumer alike. He further stressed the need to support organizations such as energy social cooperatives and practices such as crowdfunding for renewable systems, small green investments etc. Finally he mentioned that one cannot talk about sustainability without addressing climate change, or about the energy system without evaluating the competitiveness of other options such as renewable sources.

A vivid discussion among the participants took place after the presentation and was followed by the presentation of the energy situation and climate policies in Serbia by *Predrag Momcilovic*. He explained that Serbia is 70% energy dependent on brown coal mining while only 21% comes from renewables -mostly from old big hydro power plants- this percentage expected to reach 28% by 2020. In Serbia there are no wind power plants, although there is potential in this sector. Also there is very limited production of solar energy, primarily for domestic uses like heating water and not for the production of electricity. The energy production in Serbia will continue to be dependent on coal mining; there are even new agreements with China to open new mines. In the future, importing coal from abroad could raise the cost of electricity that for the time being is quite low -in comparison with other EU countries- due to state subsidies. The energy market is not liberalized, although following recent legislation reforms it is moving in this direction. Despite efforts to adopt a platform for renewables and intensify respective research especially for wind power plants, state intentions in this regard are not driven by the perceived benefits of renewable energy, but rather reflect compliance with EU rules. *Predrag* also mentioned that for some years now the impact of climate change is quite obvious in Serbia too, offering the example of the big floods in 2014, which resulted in the loss of many human lives.

The presentations and discussion of the energy situation and climate change in the Balkans was followed by a working group on climate and energy issues organised by *Vesna Jusup*, facilitator and representative from EGP. Participants were first divided into their national groups to discuss the main issues of the topics raised above in

their national context. They then presented the results of their team on a flip chart, so that the differences and similarities in respective fields could be demonstrated.

Topics discussed during the climate change group working session included adaptation and mitigation at the regional and national level, education and mobilisation of citizens, climate change awareness in schools, climate change as a driver for other systems, like waste and water management, deforestation, the food dependence, the carbon budget, health risks and externalised costs of climate change. Policy actions proposed for the above challenges consisted of the need for more education and awareness, adoption of regional policies, increase of public pressure, the need to establish the climate



as a transversal policy, the development of Balkan climate adaptation strategies, etc. Some of the comments taking into consideration the above parameters at both national and regional levels focused on the need for more theoretical education and exchange of information among Greens,

and of multi-party trainings on the above mechanisms with the involvement of citizens active on the above mentioned issues.

Regarding energy, some of the topics that were discussed among the participants were energy independence, renewable potentials and strategies, the decentralisation and liberalisation of

energy systems, the foreign capital in the Balkan energy sector, divestment funds and waste management. Some of the proposed actions accordingly were the development of new energy models, a map of transborder polluters, the comparative analysis of INDCS, the analyses of countries' international conventional responsibilities and discussion and development of new consumption patterns.



The energy issue was further discussed during the third day of the Summer Camp. *Michalis Tremopoulos*, member of the Ecologists Greens in Greece and former MEP, gave his outlook on the energy policies at the European and regional level. He started his presentation by mentioning the latest achievements and demands on energy policies of the Greens in the European Parliament. Then, he referred to the Green solutions for the complex crisis affecting both the economy and the environment, which requires changes in policies and a transformation towards a New Green Deal. For example, shifts could be applied to the consumption patterns in order to reduce the pressure on incomes and the environment, and on the prevailing tendency for short product life cycles which leads to waste. It is also important to reassess train and maritime transportation and to avoid the long distance transfer of products when these can be offered by local producers.





The green slogan should be that the most expensive choice is to continue acting and behaving the way we currently do, that is to follow the “business as usual” model. As the financial crisis is affecting the most vulnerable groups of people, it is of great importance to propose new welfare models and sustainable solutions that do not use more natural resources than nature can provide. Alternative Green proposals include investing in civil society and energy (solar roofs, social enterprises, incentives for voluntary relocation to the countryside and the creation of agricultural farms instead of subsidising people to consume petrol, to promote the insulation of houses and energy sustainability etc). Last but not least, the production of energy cannot and should not be based on nuclear power. Common anti-nuclear actions in the Balkans should be continued, and be extended to the field of the big pipelines transporting fossil fuels. Michalis Tremopoulos rounded up his presentation by highlighting again the importance to change energy and consumption models and support alternative and ecological proposals for a more sustainable future.

Afterwards, *Maria Peteinaki* and *Vesna Jusup* from the EGP presented the *Climate Campaign* whose target is to create an emotional connection with people ahead of the upcoming COP21 in Paris in order to motivate the public and achieve critical mass during the summit. *Maria Peteinaki* gave a brief account of the national tendencies prevailing in the COP21 and encouraged participants to pressure their member parties to issue specific national targets and adopt inclusive climate campaigning to meet them. Further to that, *Vesna Jusup* presented some technical information on the concept of the campaign. As mentioned above, the main idea of the campaign was to be positive and to show that there is no plan B or alternative or any other political or mathematical choice other than to 'fall in love with the earth and nature'. She explained the two phases of the campaign, the second one focusing on the upcoming event in Paris, and described how this Campaign pattern could be adapted to different contexts according to specific national targets. She also claimed that this Campaign is a big experiment for the media and it is eagerly expected in view of the potential contribution of twitter. She concluded her presentation by giving useful information on the Campaign Platform.



In the afternoon participants visited the women's social cooperative at Ierissos. This cooperative came about following the initiative of three women -long time unemployed due to the financial crisis- to establish a local production of home-made sweets and food using local products and domestic supplies (fruits, vegetables etc), and help the local economy.



During their visit at the cooperative, participants were informed about the initiative and were shown how to create fresh local greek pasta. The women provided catering during lunch breaks throughout the Summer Camp.



Informal discussions on the topics of the workshop, apart from the main presentations and workshops held in the Cultural Center, also took place outdoors during free time and over dinner.



*Informal discussions and lunch break outdoors*

The fourth day of the event was dedicated to a field trip visit to the Skouries area. Local activists accompanied the participants of the summer camp and explained the history of the gold mining area, the current situation, the negative environmental impacts of the Mega Project and the local resistance against it. The specific project constitutes a financial, environmental and human rights scandal. It is a case of a very small company buying a very large parcel of land at a very low price with the assistance of the Greek state, which was condemned by the European courts. In terms of the environment, there is a huge destruction of the old-growth forest and underground waters, and significant atmospheric pollution because of the huge amount of dust generated out of the several tonnes of dynamite per day, which will be used at the construction site. Human rights violations also come into the picture when the police invaded many locals' houses and tens of men were asked to provide their DNA samples without their consent.



*Field trip visit to Skouries area*

On the fifth day *Dimitris Chrisoulis* and *Maria Kadoglou*, local activists, gave us further information and feedback on the Mega Project of gold mining. Following their presentation, participants from Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria and Serbia presented similar cases in their countries, explaining how Mega Projects mainly serve the financial interests of big multinationals, offer a limited contribution to local economies and usually result in harmful environmental and social impacts to the local communities. *Alekos Georgopoulos* from Greece presented the work of George Blionis on Hydropower Projects in Greece. *Ahmet Asici Atil* from Turkey provided a critical approach on the Mega Projects in Istanbul focusing on the construction of the city's third airport and third bridge over Bosphorus. Afterwards, *Boris Sandov* presented the case study of "Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline" and nuclear Mega-Projects in Bulgaria, while referring also to some examples of planned gas pipelines and dam projects. Finally he presented information on the gold mining project in Bulgaria.

Then, *Kadja Pavlovic* talked about the controversial “Waterfront Project in Belgrade” supported by the Abu Dhabi development company Eagle Hills.

An interesting theme stressed during this session -apart from the often negative social, environmental and economic impacts and disparities of Mega Projects- was the relation between these large scale projects and the notion of national identity and increased national esteem that is cultivated in order to foster support at the local level. The issues of alternatives and local resistance were also discussed, as local people often react and oppose these Mega developments.



*Mega Projects day in the Balkans*

This topic was further developed the following morning, on the sixth day of the Summer Camp by *Beatrice White*, Project Manager of the Green European Journal [GEJ]. Her presentation, entitled “Connecting the struggles - Green media and movements” was based

on the 11th edition of GEJ and focused on a participatory discussion of tools for media reporting on campaigns and green movements, highlighting protest case-studies in Europe and the Balkan region. Following this, *Thanasis Makris*, from GIG and Ecologists Greens in Greece, organised a workshop on sustainability in order for this and other related concepts to be examined by the participants. A fruitful discussion took place which deepened everyone's understanding of the concept; through critical thinking participants were able to consider the political priorities that result from it.

The afternoon workshop was dedicated to the Green Balkan Network [GBN] aiming to discuss its structural development, encourage the participation and activities of its members and examine future actions and relations and cooperation with other actors. At the beginning, *Vesna Jusup* presented in detail using visual means the structure and aims of the GBN, and further to that *Ahmet Atil Asici* - a coordinator of the Network along with *Olga Kikou*, gave a personal account of the challenges and achievements from his experience in this position. He also made some proposals for the future, including the need to continue the publication of GBN Newsletter, to announce an open call for new coordinators and to establish a yearly activity such as the current Summer Camp/ Seminar to be organised every time in a different member country. Other participants also gave some fruitful ideas for the main requirements and targeting of future actions. A number of very interesting proposals came out of the group discussion. It was stressed that the GBN should focus on education, in cooperation and with the support of GEF, political foundations and civil society actors. Its political representation should be also enhanced in the frame of the EGP Committee and the B2B. Networking between

members should be strengthened in parallel with the Network's consolidation and political regional representation in the Balkans.

The GBN Newsletter should also be updated, by including inputs from other actors like national parties, MEPs on their work on the Balkans, updates from EP on Balkan issues and the work done locally, reviews on Green work done by NGOs and other actors, topic analyses with Regional Focus, green opportunities (in GEF, EGP, etc), structural party work stories (local boards, external communication, political profile). There was also a proposal to create a facebook group in order to facilitate and enhance member's communication and sharing of information. The Balkan Network could also cooperate with the Balkan Antinuclear Coalition [BAN], the Balkan Ecology Security Network and the Green Watch Dog.

Last but not least, it was mentioned that the yearly GBN's event could be organised in selected locations where local people could be supported in their struggles (as was the case during the first Summer Camp in the town of Ierissos). For that reason it is important to be well informed about the most appropriate place in advance. Finally, a balanced line should be kept between the budget and the participation.

The seventh and last day of the event started up with a local demonstration against the Gold Mining Project in Skouries. Participants joined the event and visited the area again with local people and activists demonstrating against extraction.

Afterwards, *Ioana Banach*, Project Manager from GEF, delivered the last presentation of the Summer Camp. Based on GEF's Campaign



Handbook, authored by Green Party campaigners and activists from a range of countries across Europe, her interactive session titled “Green Voices: campaigning tools and strategies” explored successful political campaigning, using COP21 as a case study. It was a very vivid and useful presentation that inspired participants for future actions.



Following this last session, participants made a brief evaluation and expressed their feelings about the Summer Camp. Most of them gave very positive feedback on the event. From a technical standpoint, they were very satisfied with the organization, the food, the available free time and the facilities of the Summer Camp, although the location of the Camping was really very noisy, especially during the night. As far as the context and the agenda of the event were concerned, participants were satisfied with the program, the topics and the field trips organized for them. It turned out that most of them learnt a lot from the various topics discussed during the workshops and from the

local case study of gold mining in Skouries, through the field visit and personal interaction with local activists. They realized that there are still a lot more issues to be learnt about the Greens in the Balkans and still a lot more things to be done under the umbrella of the GBN. This was one of the most important lessons of this Summer Camp, pointedly rounded up by *Vesna Jusup*: "It is useful to know what is still to be learnt". Participants came closer during these days and discussed, exchanged information and ideas, expressed their political and personal perspectives, were inspired to continue and further develop the Green Balkan Network.

The project ended up that night with a local festival at "Nea Roda", a village close to Ierissos. Participants enjoyed live folk music and dances from around Greece and beyond and immersed themselves in the traditional Greek spirit and festive atmosphere.

