

## **Grants are not enough. Air polluters must bear the responsibility and the State must start to solve the problem quickly.**

### **Non-Governmental Organizations' Commentary on a dialogue between Czech Republic and European Commission about excessive air pollution.**

Thursday 8th November 2018

People in the Czech Republic have the right to fresh air but this right is being violated and it is necessary to take effective measures. Representatives of the European Commission, Czech government, industry and Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGO) all agree on that. There is a „Clean Air Dialogue” taking place in Prague today and yesterday. Representatives of Czech Republic and European Commission together with experts discuss the possible solutions of our excessive air pollution, which is breaching Czech domestic law as well as European law [1]. More information about Czech environment can be found in NGO's information sheet [2].

NGOs welcome this debate and concern of the ministries and their effort to solve the problem. They consider many positive steps that have been done so far, but they are in principal lacking clear promise to quickly adapt effective solution:

The dialogue was finished by a public debate at the Office of the Commission representation in Czech Republic, where the EU Commissioner for the Environment Karmenu Vella commented on the problem, as well as the Minister of the Environment, Richard Brabec, Deputies from the Ministry of the Environment, Transport and Industry, Deputy Mayor of the city of Brno Martin Ander and the Programme Manager of HNUTÍ DUHA Jiří Koželouh. There is still closed meeting of the government representatives and Commission on the agenda. Then there also will be a press conference with EU Commissioner K. Velly and Deputy Prime Minister R. Brabec.

**Karmenu Vella**, the EU Commissioner of the Environment said at today's debate: *„Each day, 1 000 people prematurely die because of air pollution in the EU. The pollution damages plants, animals or farm production. You have a lot on your plate. We need faster action. States – including the Czech Republic – are delayed with achieving goals related to air quality. What are we going to say to people? Each year in which we do not meet the desirable limits, we basically kill 400 000 people. “*

**Richard Brabec**, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, said:  
*„We should focus on the biggest problems with the air and we should take action which would be the most effective. There is a need for revolution in household-heating, which has already begun. We need a new energy conception. Drop in the coal consumption could have been faster, but we need to convince the public.“*

Deputy Minister of the Industry **René Neděla** noted that:  
*„If there is a coal burning it has to be done with the highest effectiveness.“*

**Martin Hájek**, Manager of the heat-station Association warned us that:  
*„If the coal is not taxed enough for local hearths, heat-systems are not going to be competitive and they will crash. They provide for 3,5 million people.“*

NGO's promote effective solutions for reducing the pollution from the coal boilers, stoves and power stations as well as from the transport and industrial production. Solutions may be found in **raising the coal energy taxes**, continuing and reforming the **kettle grants** in a way that even the poorer families could reach them. Also, **fulfilment of the approved limits for coal power stations without exceptions and non-extension of mining at the Bílina quarry**, where the problematic coal for local heat-stations comes from. It is necessary to **quit or relocate the operation of the industrial plants** that do not have any link to the extraction of the raw materials or other production and their location has rather negative influence on the health and the environment.

It is crucial to provide and approve regulations for cases of smog situations and to support the **development of a sustainable means of transport** on the city level. It is needed to amend the law for **establishing low-emission areas and to preferentially prepare and approve areas in the cities, where the traffic pollution is the worst**. It must be ensured that the **transit traffic is diverted from the inhabited areas** and that **there are toll gates for trucks on the roads of all classes**. It would also be helpful to establish all-around, real-time **information system concerning the impaired environment for the public**. Many of these arrangements must be thought out conceptually and integrated into must be integrated into environment-improving programmes and the national emission-reduction plan so they shall be binding and enforceable.

**Jiří Koželouh**, the Programme Manager of Hnutí DUHA, said:

*“EU commissioner Karmenu Vella and **the Czech Deputy Minister Richard Brabec** agreed that reducing pollution from coal boilers and stoves is absolute necessity. Industry and environmental organisations acknowledge that we cannot move forward without higher energy taxes for coal. Higher tax would motivate to leave the coal and the income from the taxes would help people to do so. Now it is Czech government's turn to uphold the raise of taxes. The government has been beating about the bush when it comes to this necessary step. The government also has not addressed whether they will assert closure of an old and useless power stations and will force*

*the remaining ones to meet the limits for polluting or the power stations will again get an exception.”*

**Petra Andrášik, lawyer Frank Bold, said:**

*“Introduced proposals of the Czech party for reducing environmental pollution are at this moment neither supported nor connected to existing programmes for improvement of the environment, which supposed to be the main tool of effective reduction of the pollution. On top of that, it was found that the update of the programmes will not take place in the mid 2019, but at the end of that year. The programmes will only have another year in effect by that time. If the implementation of the measures is going to be postponed like that, Czech Republic will most probably have to face the Court of Justice.”*

**Hana Chalupská from the Dejchej Brno Initiative said:**

*“Czech initiatives are not able to convince government on local, regional or national level of how big the problem with air pollution is for Czech **quarters**. It is just right that EU representative reminds our government of its responsibility for health of the citizens. Delays and wariness in implementation of the measures for improving the situation is mirrored in health and lives of people. We wish the government to find the courage to make quick and strong steps towards change. These steps will cost us more and more each day.”*

**Daniel Vondrouš, Director of Zelený kruh, said:**

*“pollutants released within the legal limits cause tremendous damage on life, health, forests or buildings. However, the Czech government still insists that taxpayers pay for such damage instead of polluters. Polluters than are not motivated to change their destructive behaviour. This unfair approach prevents the improvement of the unbearable state of the air.”*

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**Notes for editors:**

[2] EU Commissioner did not come by accident. The Czech Republic shows some of the highest concentrations of PM10 and PM2,5 in the EU. In the Czech Republic, both daily and annual concentrations of PM10 are exceeded even on background measuring stations (not directly exposed to specific sources - such as transport). This is unique within the EU. The inhabitants of the Czech Republic are also on the fifth place in the PM2,5 exposure intensity, which fundamentally affects their health. Just because of dust pollution, 5 700 people died prematurely in 2017 in the Czech Republic [2], the total number of premature deaths due to polluted air is 11,000 a year. The Czech Republic also has the fourth highest concentration of poisonous ground-level ozone in the EU.

The Czech Republic has long exceeded the emission limits for the most important pollutants and is therefore under increased supervision by the European Commission. The Commission leads a proceeding against Czech Republic called "infringement". The procedure is held because of the long-exceeded emission limits of particulate matter PM10 fraction (microscopic dust up to 10 micrometres), which is at the stage of the reasoned opinion, and due to the long-exceeded limits of NOx; there is still a procedure in the first phase of the so-called formal notice.

If the Czech Republic does not reduce dust pollution or does not prove that it is taking all the necessary steps for the reduction in the shortest possible time, there may be a complaint filed by the Commission associated with high financial penalties. In similar cases, Bulgaria and Poland have already lost their case before the Court of Justice.

[2] Pollution of the air in the Czech Republic

condition – solution – sources – health – law – economics – contacts

Information sheet for the media before Clean Air Dialogue (7.–8. 11. 2018)

[http://www.hnutiduha.cz/sites/default/files/publikace/2018/11/znecistení\\_ovzduší\\_cr\\_podklad\\_cad\\_2018.pdf](http://www.hnutiduha.cz/sites/default/files/publikace/2018/11/znecistení_ovzduší_cr_podklad_cad_2018.pdf)

[3]

[http://www.hnutiduha.cz/sites/default/files/publikace/2018/11/ofenziva\\_proti\\_neviditel\\_nemu\\_zabijakovi\\_0.pdf](http://www.hnutiduha.cz/sites/default/files/publikace/2018/11/ofenziva_proti_neviditel_nemu_zabijakovi_0.pdf)

