

The compost plant in Karnobat - investment intention or illegal production

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One of the most modern compost plants in the Balkan Peninsula will be built in Karnobat. The investment will amount to 10 million leva and part of it, as has recently become common practice, will be co-financed through European projects. At present there is talk of a new investment proposal, but the background of the plant is not free of unpleasant “odours”.

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The construction of a poultry manure plant 1 km away from Karnobat, which will also have a modern installation for compost production, has been provoking the strong discontent of the local population and the municipality for more than a year. In a letter to the Ministry of Environment and Water, the municipal leadership insists that the project be stopped, because its implementation

threatens the air quality and the health of the population in the region. For its part, the investor “Agrochance Commerce” already holds a permit from the Regional Environmental Inspectorate in Burgas and claims that the new facility for the production of organic fertilizer will be fully compliant with European legislation and will provide employment for approximately 40 people from the town. The organic fertilizer to be produced at the plant in Karnobat will consist of 55% straw, 5% wood chips and 40% poultry manure supplied by broiler farms. “The new production will be environmentally friendly, it will not pollute the air, there will be slight odours, but only at a distance of up to 500 metres,” claims the consultant of the investing company, Todor Karastoyanov, quoted by the BNR.

At present, a new notification (of 18 November 2015) for an investment proposal for the construction of a “Composting Installation” has been submitted to the municipality of Karnobat, which will be financed under Measure 4.2 of the Rural Development Programme “Investments in processing/marketing of agricultural products”. In fact, the investor is replacing the already controversial “Processing operation for the utilization of fresh manure and its conversion into organic fertilizer”, for which last year the RIEW – Burgas terminated the procedure and this led to parliamentary intervention by two state institutions, with a new designation. At ministerial level it was established that the improvised compost plant in Karnobat from 2015 was illegal. The dispute between the municipality and the investor continues, even after the elections for mayor of Karnobat.

Investment proposal or illegal production – 2015

Even before clothing their investment proposal in European legislation and promises of state-of-the-art technologies of global scale, the investors from “Agrochance Commerce” are confronted with the discontent of the residents of Karnobat. The behaviour of the town has its logical explanation. In April 2015, Karnobat woke up under the intrusive smell of animal manure, and at the end of July, in issue 27 of the regional newspaper “Karnobatski Glas”, the official opinion of Mayor Georgi Dimitrov was published, in which he refused to support the innovative project for automated compost production. Two weeks earlier, the first notification from “Agrochance Commerce” to the mayor had been submitted to the Registry of Karnobat Municipality. It announces the company’s intentions to carry out a production activity including a processing operation for the utilization (recycling) of fresh poultry manure and its conversion into organic fertilizer, within a property located in the farmyard of the former State Agricultural Holding, which is currently owned by the company’s manager. The document states that the utilization will be carried out through high-temperature treatment in a drum-type dryer. But in practice a production process had been underway for several months, because the entire town was enveloped by the unpleasant smell of poultry manure. Karnobat Municipality does not support the investment proposal of “Agrochance Commerce” and submits its opinion to the RIEW in accordance with the provisions of the Ordinance on the conditions and procedures for environmental impact assessment. The administration points out that the notification from the investors to the Municipality lacks data describing the main processes, capacity, ownership of the site, proximity to

residential or protected areas, waste and wastewater expected to be generated. The position of Mayor Georgi Dimitrov is categorical: “I do not support the investment proposal because it creates inconvenience for the citizens and poses a risk to health.”

Following numerous signals from citizens, on 27 July 2015, on the initiative of the Regional Inspectorate, a joint inspection of the enterprise was carried out by experts from the RIEW, representatives of the Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior – Burgas and the RHI – Burgas. The inspection found that the installation for the utilization of fresh poultry manure was operating at full capacity. On the basis of the findings, the experts imposed a coercive administrative measure – suspension of production. An act was drawn up for the manager and a monetary fine was imposed.

This information was confirmed during parliamentary control on 11 September 2015, when a reply was given to the question raised by MP Stefan Kenov regarding the case, addressed to the Minister of Environment Ivelina Vasileva and the Regional Development Minister Lilyana Pavlova.

Whether the history of the Karnobat compost plant is strewn with false signals from dissatisfied residents and the mayor, “who are building up political capital”, as noted by Mincho Grozdev, manager of “Agrochance Commerce”, in one of the issues of the newspaper “Karnobatski Glas”, or whether the state institutions have this time managed to prevent illegal production will be shown by the implementation of the new investment proposal of the agro company. One thing is clear: good intentions do not always coincide with correct and lawful decisions.

Agrochance Commerce Ltd. Karnobat

The scope of activity of the company registered in Karnobat, Burgas Region, is the production and wholesale trade of cereal crops – wheat, sunflower and barley. It is also engaged in milling, and in the production and export of fresh fruit – apples, peaches, cherries, nectarines and sour cherries.

The sheds of the former State Agricultural Holding now belong to the private company “Agrochance Commerce” Ltd. The company is owned by the local grain producer Mincho Grozdev, who is considered to be one of the wealthiest businessmen in the region. He cultivates nearly 115,000 decares of land, for which large quantities of fertilizer are used. In 2015 he decided to expand his activity by focusing on the processing of poultry manure. The company’s intention is to use a composting installation to produce pure organic fertilizer to nourish its own annual and permanent crops.