

CSO Save Bedechka  
Stara Zagora  
Bulgaria

30 June, 2017

Lidl Stiftung & Co. KG

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Nearly two weeks ago there was a municipal referendum in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria to decide the fate of the Bedechka Park. 85% of the citizens who voted (nearly 20,000 voters) wanted the park to be preserved in its full scale. The park strolls at more than 40 ha along the lush banks of the Bedechka River – some may call it a tiny stream but for the area of Stara Zagora, it is the only natural source of fresh water in the semi-arid subtropical climate of the lowland of the Southern Balkans.

In the beginning of 1960s in order to take efficient measures against the constant flooding of the terraces of the Bedechka River and to create more green space for the needs of the quickly expanding urban area, the local authorities launched the Bedechka Park on the vegetable gardens in the city surroundings. While the land owners were compensated according to the prices and regulations of that time, in 1960s and 1970s, the population participated actively in the creation of the new park by payroll taxation, voluntary labour, corporate responsibility campaigns, etc. additional to the significant investment from the municipal budget. A dam was built to control the flooding and 2 reservoirs created to be used for recreation, park alleys, lightning, 2 stadiums, 2 restaurants, a fitness centre, a youth cultural centre, a hotel, 2 public mansions for recreation, etc. In 1980s, the local government started the construction of entertainment railway as a transport connection to another park up the hill but because of the political changes and economic crisis, the project was not finalized.

During the period of transition and especially after 2007, following a series of contradictive non-transparent and even illegal decisions of the Municipal Council, the park was seriously endangered of being built-up. Under the false pretence that the park never existed, some of the owners of the agricultural land before 1960 managed to claim back ownership, and prepared to build-up the area.

In 2016, the municipality of Stara Zagora decided to act accordingly with its citizens will and to save the park with its abundance of 50-60-year old trees and meadows, as well as its famous 680-years old *Platanus orientalis* tree and numerous wild fauna. The Municipal council with enormous majority voted to preserve the park. The local referendum on 18 June, 2017 confirmed 85% support for the park vs construction. The Mayor, in collaboration with the Prime minister and the Council of ministers, developed a clear roadmap for negotiation with and compensation of the owners of land in order preserve the green area in their boundaries as they were stated in the referendum question.

However, there are issues with the southern areas of the park where there are quite a few big properties. These are mostly green fields, so we are currently asking everyone involved to get these properties turned into a green zone, possibly with sports and recreational status. Currently the official land-use plan of the park is being renegotiated by the Mayor and Municipal Council, thereby allowing every involved organisation to declare its awareness of the citizens' will and well-being.

It has come to our attention, based on information from Bulgarian media, that your company owns land within the borders of the park in question. Moreover, there are numerous valuable and filed trees in this land and it serves as a green connection with another park nearby, as well as a long lasting tradition of pedestrian communication between the residential district Samara and the centre of the city. Right now opportunities are open to the LIDL Company to show that it meets the needs of the citizens of Stara Zagora by offering its products, as well as offering these citizens green environment, clean air, and healthy future for their children.

Accordingly, we urge you to re-evaluate the profit from the land that you own in the park as compared to the positive message that you will be sending to hundreds of thousands citizens of Stara Zagora and millions of consumers across Bulgaria. Your positive action in this direction will enhance your corporate responsibility as a company operating in Bulgaria, especially during the period you run your largest corporate responsibility campaign in Bulgaria - You and LIDL for Better Life!

With the above in view, we shall count on your goodwill and cooperation!

Please, do not hesitate to contact us for any additional information that might be needed!

Yours sincerely,

Zhivka Alexandrova  
Chair

