

Albanians are protesting against proposed plans to burn some 600 tonnes of oil per day on two floating power plants in one of the country's most sought-after tourist regions, surrounded by protected areas.

A floating TEC terminal arrived in Vlora at the tip of the Albanian Riviera on Sunday. It will be joined by a second and they will burn oil to generate some 15% of the country's energy needs, although those opposing the plan say it will only generate 5%.

The two ships have been leased for two years by the Albanian Electricity Corporation (KEHS) for a total of \$46 million, not including the cost of the oil.

But citizens are unhappy and say it poses a significant risk to tourism, their health, and the environment.

"We are committed to reacting to something that is happening today, but that could have dangerous consequences for the entire bay of Vlora in the next 30 years. The protest will continue in the coming days. The matter is very serious. This ship has incorporated two platforms that will be installed at the triport, the fishermen's port. Two super giant platforms will burn 600 tons of heavy oil daily. This is a disaster," said protestor Lavdosh Ferruni.

He added that the amount of oil burned will generate pollution equivalent to 100,000 cars travelling 100km a day.

"Not only an environmental disaster but also an economic one, especially for tourism. A tourism cannot coexist with the oil industry, with super emissions. It is a monster generator," he added.

Environmentalist Niko Dumani added, "Through air and water pollution, it creates concern for the lives of people near Vlora, Narta and Zverneci, it affects all flora and fauna of the marine environment because it circulates hot water up to 200,000 tons per day, which raise temperatures or marine water above 14 degrees endangering marine life."

The generation plant will be located at the fishing port in the Bay of Vlora and will be connected to the Vlora TEC substation, which is part of the national energy network.

TEC Vlora, with a capacity of 97 MW, was built in October 2011. The project envisaged the construction of a combined-cycle power station powered by distilled petroleum on a six-hectare site located approximately six kilometres north of Vlora, close to an offshore oil storage terminal.

The plant is also designed to work with natural gas, and several deals have been signed for this purpose. However, to date, the TEC has not generated any power.

The oil-burning vessels will be situated in the bay, which is popular with tourists, and nearby the Karaburun Peninsula, a protected area. It also sits downstream from the Divjake-

Karavasta National Park with its pristine lagoons, home to rare birds and pelicans and flamingoes.

Activist Artes Ferruni said the ships are coming from Bangladesh are at least 30 years old and have not been operated for the last two.

“It is an extremely damaging technology, no country in Europe has chosen this technology”, she said.

But the Energy Ministry said that the ships, with a joint capacity of 110 MWh, are equipped with a World Bank certificate in terms of environmental pollution.

“They meet all the conditions according to the WB criteria,” Energy Minister Belinda Balluku said.

Activists have warned their protests will continue until their concerns are heard.