

Polluting old cars will be banned from the centre of **Bulgaria's** capital Sofia from December 1, 2023, though the **ban** will only be in effect for the winter months.

A survey by **Eurostat** from 2021 showed that **Bulgaria** has the worst **air pollution** in the EU with the highest annual mean concentration of fine particles (PM2.5). Meanwhile, in winter months Sofia is among the top ten world capitals with the most **polluted** air.

The **ban** was supposed to enter into force as of December 2022, but its introduction was delayed due to lack of agreement among city **councillors**. Dnevnik news outlet reported on December 15.

It was passed at a time when driving in Sofia's city centre has become increasingly challenging, with the number of cars rising sharply in recent years.

In the rush hours, travelling by car can take significantly more time than using **public transport**. Finding a free place to park sometimes takes an hour in the centre of the capital. Moreover, **fog** and highly **polluted air** has become common for the months between November and February.

On December 15, the ban was backed by Gerb, Democratic **Bulgaria** and independent **councillor** Boris Bonev.

However, it was opposed by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the far-right Patriots for Sofia. They argued the ban was discriminatory and punishes the poorest Sofia residents, who are most likely to own old cars.

From December 2023, **old and polluting cars** will not be allowed to enter the centre of Sofia. The **ban** applies to **petrol cars** registered before 1996, and diesel cars registered before 2002.

Video cameras will scan the **eco-stickers** of cars entering the area covered by the ban and drivers who do not respect it will be fined at least €25.

According to Sofia mayor Yordanka Fandukova, around 20% of the drivers of old cars will switch to public transport, while others might buy newer cars.

In May, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruled that **Bulgaria** was systematically and persistently breaching the **air pollution** limits. The ruling came after in December 2020, **Bulgaria** was referred to court by the EU for the second time for failing to comply with a court judgement of April 5, 2017 which found that the country had breached its obligations to secure clean air to its citizens.

According to the CJEU, **Bulgaria** systematically exceeded the **sulphur dioxide** levels in the southeast of the country between 2007 and 2018, with 2010 and 2012 being the only exceptions.

Since June 11, 2010, **Bulgaria** has failed to adopt adequate measures to comply with both the hourly and the daily sulphur dioxide limits in southeastern **Bulgaria**. If **Bulgaria** does not resolve the situation, the EU can file another lawsuit.