

Illegal works in the surface mine Centralno polje in Gacko must be stopped, until a detailed assessment of damage and compensation for long-term coal exploitation without an environmental permit is carried out in this mine, is the request of the Complaint sent by the Environmental Center to the Energy Community Secretariat.

The complaint, backed by the international organization Bankwatch, also calls for an amendment to the Environmental Protection Act, which is currently in the process of being revised, to include effective, proportionate and effective penalties for this type of violation. "This is a serious and long-lasting violation of environmental legislation, and we expect the violators, ie the Gacko Mine and Thermal Power Plant (RiTE), to at least pay an adequate fine, proportional to the damage caused and to stop destroying the environment and the Gacko municipality," said Majda Ibrakovic, assistant in the program Energy and Climate Change at the Center for the Environment.

He adds that the inspection, after reporting this case, ordered the company RiTE Gacko minimal penalties and measures to eliminate the shortcomings, and that the Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and Ecology did not react even after several alarming letters.

The Center states that, although the works on exploitation in the Central Field began in 2017, RiTE Gacko only in January 2018 received a Decision from the Ministry on the obligation to conduct an environmental impact assessment, which is a special procedure and prerequisite for obtaining environmental permits.

However, the situation became clear only after the Draft Environmental Impact Study for the Central Field in Gacko was made public in May this year, which was available for public comment over the past two months.

"The situation in Gacko nullifies any sense of environmental impact assessment. At this time, there is no way to determine the initial state on the basis of which the environmental impact will later be measured and assessed. Likewise, a meaningful public hearing is prevented, as the damage has already been done. Today's complaint was filed with the hope that the Energy Community Secretariat will encourage the RS authorities to suspend work and implement all necessary procedures to protect the citizens of Gacko," said Ioana Ciuta, Energy Coordinator in the CEE Bankwatch network.

The fact that RiTE Gacko has been illegally exploiting coal for so long, with the prescribed minimum penalties, very well illustrates how the protection of the environment and the health of citizens is treated by the competent authorities in BiH, according to a statement from the Center for the Environment.

The Center expects the Secretariat to react urgently to this case and thus put additional

pressure on the institutions that need to carry out procedures in accordance with the
Energy Community Treaty.

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