

Croatia's new center-right government is backing away from plans to enlarge a coal-fired power plant in what may signal a shift toward cleaner energy.

Talks with Japan's Marubeni Corp. on the project at the Plomin plant on the northern Istrian peninsula are unlikely to go ahead, Environment Minister Slaven Dobrovic said over the weekend, Reuters reports.

"We need a new energy strategy in line with the European Union plans on boosting renewable energy and reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. Such plants don't fit in," Dobrovic (pictured) said at an energy round-table in Zagreb.

Last year the government and Marubeni agreed to begin talks on building a new 500-megawatt block at the plant for an estimated cost of 800 million euros (\$895 million).

"I don't know if there are some obligations towards Marubeni, but even if there were, it cannot be compared to the potential damage, economic and environmental, from such a plant," Dobrovic said.

The previous, center-left government strongly favored the project over protests by environmentalists, even after voters soundly voted against it in a referendum held in the area around the plant, according to Total Croatia News.

The new government, headed by Canadian-Croatian former businessman Tihomir Oreskovic, seems to be shifting away from high-carbon fuels. Most (Bridge), the upstart party which earned enough votes to join the government headed by the conservative HDZ, pushed for renewable power during the campaign, Reuters says.

Previous governments pushed ahead with plans to explore for gas and oil both onshore and off the picturesque Adriatic coast which generates most of Croatia's tourism income.

Former Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic last year said he would put the issue to a referendum.

Opponents of the drilling plans are concerned about potential damage to the fragile marine environment and the country's vital tourism industry.

Although Croatia generates two-thirds of its own electricity – more than many Balkan and East European countries – the previous government saw developing oil and gas resources as a way to help lift the country from a long recession.

source: tol.org