

Questions concerning the validity of environmental permits recently issued by the energy ministry for the main power utility PPC's lignite units, raised by the main opposition New Democracy party in parliament, could impact the power utility's ability to proceed with a bailout-required sale of lignite units.

It appears that most of the power utility's lignite units operated with temporary licenses for over a decade as final environmental approval of seven lignite-fired and two diesel-fueled power stations with an overall production capacity of 4,389 MW, along with three lignite mines, remained pending during this prolonged period.

The energy ministry eventually issued licenses fully endorsing the environmental standards of these units in September, 2017. However, almost a year earlier, in December, 2016, the Council of State, Greece's supreme administrative court, essentially rendered the terms applied for these permits as void because of the extended time period - over ten years - that had elapsed since PPC originally submitted its license applications.

The court assumed that environmental standards have changed during this period, meaning that a new study concerning the environmental footprint of PPC's lignite units would be needed.

The New Democracy party MPs, in their questions submitted to parliament, enquired how PPC's sale package of lignite units can proceed given the murky status of their environmental permits.

WWF Hellas has filed a case to the Council of State challenging the energy ministry's move to issue full environmental permits for PPC's lignite units last September. The case is scheduled to be heard on May 25.

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