

**Even the most ardent opponents of coal-fired power generation recognize that thermal power plants are of the utmost importance and there is no alternative, at least so far, for the stability of the energy system. All this has prompted the government to announce that it will fight for the maximum extension of the work of the Bulgarian coal-fired power plants.**

Future without carbon emissions - this is the goal of the European Commission for the start of the next decade supported in principle by the majority of European citizens for whom it is important to contribute for protecting the environment. The Green Deal proposed by the European Commission to the national governments aims to ensure clean future by 2050. We still don't know what the price would be but one thing is clear that it will be higher than we can imagine.

In Bulgaria, the Green Deal provoked strong opposition, as its eventual adoption would mean the closing down of coal-fired power plants in the country, which is expected to have a huge negative impact on the economy. Currently, coal-fired power plants in the Maritsa basin alone provide 40% of Bulgaria's electricity. During the winter months, this number increases to 60%. These are base capacities, and are practically the 'backbone' of the Bulgarian energy, and because of their maneuverability and technical characteristics they are most suitable for maintaining the load and balance of our electricity system.

### **The energy heart of the country**

A few hundred kilometers away from the political debate epicenter, the Green Deal is perceived from a completely different angle in Stara Zagora. For the people of the region, coal-fired power plants are their daily life, they are a symbol of prosperity and potential for future development. Tens of thousands connect their families' livelihoods and well-being to the TPPs and their sustainable operation. ContourGlobal Maritsa East 3 TPP is managed by a foreign investor. It has been modernized and meets the highest EU environmental requirements. Working there is a great career opportunity for hundreds of young engineers from the region. The mark it leaves in the daily life of the people in the town of Galabovo and the surrounding settlements is visible.

### **ContourGlobal Maritsa East 3 TPP**

In 2011, the modernized Maritsa East 3 TPP is acquired by the international investor ContourGlobal from the Italian Enel. As a result of the large-scale project for rehabilitation and modernization, the power plant becomes the first TPP in Southeastern Europe to meet

the highest environmental requirements and meets 10% of the electricity needs of Bulgaria. Since then, ContourGlobal Maritsa East 3 TPP has surpassed its primary role and has become a professional “haven” for generations of Bulgarians.

### **The past comes to life**

Last year Gennadi Zhambov, External Installations Unit operator at ContourGlobal Maritsa East 3 TPP lead through the power plant’s front gate his father Raicho to show him the changes that occurred at this place of work in a few decades after his retirement. Gennadi admits that his father was extremely excited about what he saw; the big difference between today’s modern TPP and the one he remembers from the black and white photos. This reunion is a friendly smile of destiny to a family that has connected its life path with electricity for half a century.

### **It all started back in the 70s**

Maritsa East 3 TPPs is put in operation in 1978 with only one energy unit. The construction of the present-day power plant had begun 10 years earlier.

This is also the time of the first connection of the Gennadi Zhambov’s family with the coal-fired power plant. My grandmother and grandfather were part of the construction of the complex, and for three generations now my family has been connected to the power plant, he says.

Gennadi’s father – Raicho Zhambov, starts work at the power plant immediately after its inauguration. The year is 1976. My father worked at the substation of the power plant. An interesting fact, he started work at the power plant two years before the first director of the TPP was appointed. In those days the practice was to hire the workers first so that the complex can function and only after that appoint the director. Gennadi’s first memories of the plant date since then: Daddy took me to the substation where he worked many times and showed me the grids. I asked him what the wires were for, and he explained to me. I must have been 1st grade at the time, Gennadi recalls with a smile.

In the coming years, his mother, Zhelyazka, starts work at the power plant as does his uncle. She is assigned to the Coal Supply department. There is almost no relative of his who is not connected somehow with the operation of the TPP. The choice of the youngest member of the family seems predetermined – in 1991 Gennadi enters the power plant. And so, the Dzhambov family has been part of the power plant for more than three decades. Gennadi is an operator of external facilities and is responsible for the generator, transformer and electrical parts.

We energy workers are like the military. Discipline is key for our line of work. This is not just a company that generates power; this is a capacity of significance for our national security. Working at the power plant, we do it with the clear awareness that we work for the well-being of the state and Bulgarian citizens. Frankly, I don't see how the electricity system will exist without us and without the Maritsa East complex at all, Gennadi shares his opinion.

In recent years, the power plant itself has undergone significant technological transformation. More than BGN 1 billion has been invested in the modernization of the existing facilities and the construction of new FGDs, which purify over 96% of the Sulphur dioxide released during the lignite coal combustion process. The new image of the TPP also imposes very high workplace safety standards.

It took us some time to adapt, but now everything is all right. Our profession faces many challenges on a daily basis - seriousness of work requires perfectionism in terms of safety measures. We follow strict security protocols; it is our responsibility to prevent accidents and to date we are doing great. There is a very serious employers safety policy in force. On the other hand, we also have a serious commitment to the new recruits. They are the future of energy and we have a responsibility to train them well. They learn at different speeds, but they are all motivated and with a positive attitude, says Dzhambov.

Many of the employees at ContourGlobal Maritsa East 3 TPP can share similar family stories to those of Gennadi - they have parents who were part of the power plant or continue to work at the plant. Very often sons work together with their fathers on the same shift, and fathers train their sons. Nearly 500 people work at the power plant, and power generation is a profession of regional importance.

When Gennadi took his father to the power plant, Grandpa Raicho was accompanied by his granddaughter, Ralitsa, Gennadi's 8-year-old daughter. The proud dad and grandfather don't know what the future holds for her, but hardly anyone would be surprised if she chooses to continue the family tradition. The most important thing at present is the sense of fulfilling a mission - to generate and supply electricity. And this is something that the energy worker families at the power plant have mastered perfectly.

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