

Most Western Balkans countries rely heavily for power on coal plants, and most of the new ones being built will not meet European environmental standards, warned a report from a watchdog group.

Almost none of the new coal power plants planned in the Western Balkans will meet new, stricter European Union pollution standards, according to a new analysis by CEE Bankwatch Network, released on Tuesday.

"Of course project promoters will be reluctant to cause delays to their projects by undertaking reviews and taking measures to bring them into line with the new [standards], but failing to do so now will cost them dearly later," said Pippa Gallop, Bankwatch's research co-ordinator and author of the briefing.

"The additional costs that the new standards would entail are but the latest warning sign for governments that coal is fast becoming an unbearable liability," Gallop added.

The EU adopted its new standard, the so-called LCP BREF, on April 28 this year.

It sets out the best available techniques for controlling pollution to air, water and soil, as well as emission limits that must be reached.

Bankwatch's analysis looks at eight coal-fired units totalling 2.6 GW in capacity planned in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, plus the Stanari plant in Bosnia and Herzegovina which started commercial operations last September.

Of those eight plants, four are in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and one each in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Five of the planned units would certainly not meet the new standards, while insufficient information is available for the remaining three, according to the analysis.

The planned units that do not meet the standards are Kostolac B3 in Serbia, Tuzla 7 and Banovici in Bosnia, Pljevlja 2 in Montenegro and Oslomej in Macedonia. The ones for which there is not enough information are Kosova e Re in Kosovo and unit 1 and 2 of Ugljevik III in Bosnia.

"Stanari in Bosnia and Herzegovina is already built so it was not included in these numbers on planned plants, but indeed it does not appear to comply with the new standards based on the numbers in its environmental permit - we don't have exact information how it is performing in reality," Gallop told BIRN.

Non-compliance is a problem not only for countries seeking EU accession - as these countries would be required to adopt EU law - but also for compliance with domestic legislation, the report says.

Most governments in the Western Balkans have already adopted legislation stating that the EU's standard is to be used as the basis for permitting new coal projects, so these standards

must be applied to new plants as soon as they enter force in the EU later this year.

“Now that electricity companies in the Western Balkans are obliged to adhere to EU market rules, they must do much more to make sure their investments are financially viable and future-proof,” said Ioana Ciuta, Bankwatch Energy Coordinator.

“They can no longer just go and ask the state for money for additional funds for investment or push legal implementation deadlines ever-further into the future. They need to start looking ahead and examining whether their plans are going to land them in trouble in a few years,” she added.

Source: balkaninsight