

A British diplomat has come under fire for celebrating Europe's newest coal plant, in spite of UK government efforts to phase-out coal on home turf.

Environmental campaigners have called it "incomprehensible" that Britain's deputy ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Matthew Lawson, yesterday attended the inauguration of TPP Stanari, a 300MW lignite-fired power plant in the northern town of Stanari.

The UK is planning to phase out its own coal plants by 2025 and has also committed to cutting off virtually all finance for overseas coal power plants.

"It is quite incomprehensible why the UK Ambassador is sullyng the UK's reputation by lending political support to a lignite project in Bosnia and Herzegovina," Pippa Gallop of environmental and financial campaign group CEE Bankwatch told DeSmog UK.

Lignite - or "brown coal" - is the 'dirtiest' form of coal. It creates the highest CO2 emissions per ton when burned, one-third more than hard coal and three times as much as natural gas.

The Stanari coal plant is operated by the Serbian-run, but UK-registered energy trading and investment firm EFT which in 2008 won a 30-year concession to build the plant, as well as expanding an adjacent coal mine, costing a total €560m. The plant, which is the Balkans first privately-funded power plant, has also received €350m in financing from the China Development Bank.

The British embassy in Sarejevo denies that Lawson's attendance was inappropriate, saying it acknowledged the scale of investment by EFT.

But Igor Kalaba, Energy and Climate Change Program Coordinator at Bosnian environmental non-profit Centre for the Environment, said that open support for Stanari was "against the best interests" of the country.

He said: "Our coal is mostly lignite - climate killer number one. On the other hand, we have huge unused potentials in renewables - plenty of wind and sun, as well as funding opportunities."

The coal plant, which has an average lifespan of around 40-45 years, will also make life harder for BiH if it joins the EU as it plans to, say campaigners. Both CEE Bankwatch and the Centre for Environment have called out the plant for failing to comply with current EU legislation.

TPP Stanari was designed to be in line with the old Large Combustion Plants Directive (LCPD), not with the Industrial Emissions Directive which superseded the LCPD on 1 January 2016.

Lawson's colleague Edward Ferguson, British ambassador to the country, has previously

been criticised by the environmental groups for his public praise of the coal plant in Bosnia. In May last year Ferguson said the “magnificent thermal power plant” was “one of the most strategic investment projects in arguably the most important sector in all of Bosnia and Herzegovina”.

Guy Shrubsole, Friends of the Earth campaigner, said: “British diplomats cutting the ribbon on dirty new coal plants, when the Government has committed to phasing out UK coal, sends terrible mixed messages about our stance on climate change. The UK should distance itself from coal at home and abroad.”

A spokesperson for the British embassy in Sarejevo said: “The Deputy Head of Mission [attended] the inauguration of the Stanari power plant in recognition of the scale of the investment by EFT, a UK-registered company, and its positive impact on the local economy in Stanari.

“The British Embassy actively encourages BiH to comply with EU environmental and energy policy. UK companies are well-positioned to help BiH to deliver reductions in greenhouse gas emissions through innovative clean coal technologies”.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office declined to comment.

source: desmog.uk