

The Belgrade High Court has ruled in favor of Serbian non-governmental organization Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute (RERI) and ordered state-owned power utility EPS to reduce sulfur-dioxide emissions at its coal-fired thermal power plants due to dangers they pose to the population's health.

The statement from RERI said that the court has determined that the initiation of the court procedure was the only remaining legal instrument toward preventing the further jeopardizing of people's health and the living environment. The lawsuit against EPS was filed in January 2021.

Since January 2018, EPS has been obligated to reduce the emissions of sulfur-dioxide from their facilities, in line with the National Emission Reduction Plan (NERP), which Serbia obliged itself to by ratifying the Energy Community Treaty. However, in 2018 and 2019 alone, coal-fired TPPs Nikola Tesla and Kostolac issued six times more sulfur-dioxide than allowed, and the excessive emissions continued in the ensuing years as well.

RERI Program Director Mirko Popovic said that the aim of the lawsuit was to protect the citizens' health, which has been jeopardized due to years of EPS violating local and international regulations. This is also confirmed by the fact that, in reaching its decision, the court was also guided by the European Convention on Human Rights and ordered EPS to harmonize its activities with the regulations, so as not to jeopardize people's lives and health. RERI expects EPS to comply with the decision and implement the necessary measures so that it would reduce the future emissions of sulfur dioxide to the maximum allowed values.

According to a report by CEE Bankwatch Network, in 2021, Western Balkan coal-fired thermal power plants flagrantly breached air pollution legislation under the Energy Community Treaty for the fourth year in a row, emitting five times as much sulfur dioxide and 1.8 times as much particulate matter as allowed.

The entry into force of new legal standards on 1 January 2018 should have brought reductions in air pollution. But the report shows that in 2021, particulate emissions from coal-fired plants included in the National Emissions Reduction Plans (NERPs) of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia increased compared to previous years, while sulfur dioxide emissions only decreased slightly.