

Sulfur dioxide is a harmful gas that is released by burning coal, which contributes to the formation of PM particles and acid rain, and poses a significant threat to human health and the human environment. When inhaled, it can cause serious irritation of the nose and throat, cough and difficulty breathing. Exposure to high concentrations of this gas can lead to a life-threatening accumulation of fluid in the lungs, as well as asthma.

Thermal power plants in Serbia have been emitting huge amounts of poisonous gases into the atmosphere for decades, which has led to hundreds of premature deaths in the Western Balkans, but also in the EU. Now, they are finally in court, thanks to the campaign of the Regulatory Institute for Renewable Energy and the Environment (RERI), which filed a lawsuit against Elektroprivreda Srbije (EPS) in the Higher Court in Belgrade on January 26, for endangering the health of citizens emission of sulfur dioxide from thermal power plants "Nikola Tesla" (TENT) and "Kostolac". European officials warn that the issue of pollution is not only a Serbian matter, but also the EU itself, and that non-compliance with regulations in this area could jeopardize Serbia's further path to the EU.

The power plants, managed by Elektroprivreda Srbije (EPS), emit six times more harmful gases than prescribed by both domestic and international legislation, it was announced on META, the news channel of the European Environment Office. It is pointed out that Serbian thermal power plants are among the largest European emitters of sulfur dioxide, which represents a great danger to public health and the environment.

Pollution from Serbia travels far

It is pointed out that the emission of sulfur dioxide from EPS's thermal power plants travels far and affects people and nature not only in Serbia, but also beyond. According to the Europe Without Coal campaign, more than half of the premature deaths, caused by the emission of thermal power plants in the Western Balkans in 2016, occurred in the EU. And although the most endangered countries are neighbors or relatively close to Serbia - 380 of these premature deaths were in Romania, and 370 in Italy - the negative impact of pollution was felt even in Germany, France and Spain. Pollution from thermal power plants in the Western Balkans also affects European productivity, with an estimated 3,047 hospital admissions and more than 1.16 million lost working days in the EU and the Western Balkans in 2016. In the EU alone, there were 1,418 hospital admissions and 600,000 lost working days in 2016, all as a result of exposure to pollution.

As part of the Energy Community, an international organization that brings together EU countries and their neighbors to create an integrated pan-European energy market, Serbia has been asked to reduce emissions from its thermal power plants below legal limits set by

the National Pollution Reduction Plan. The goal of that plan is to bring harmful emissions from Serbian thermal power plants to the levels prescribed by the EU Directive for industrial emissions by the end of 2027.

Serbia is not doing anything to reduce pollution

However, even if the National Pollution Reduction Plan came into force last year, Serbia has done nothing about it, according to the META analysis. In 2018 and 2019, ten EPS thermal power plants emitted 336,000 and 309,500 tons of sulfur dioxide, respectively, which is six times more than the annual limit of the National Plan, which amounts to 54,000 tons. Only Kostolac and Nikola Tesla alone emitted more sulfur dioxide than Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France and Poland combined.

“Serbia’s obligation to implement the National Plan, and EPS to respect the emission limits on an annual level, is clear and indisputable from January 2018. It will also contribute to reducing the harmful impact of pollution on the health of Serbian citizens and the EU.” The goal of our lawsuit is to ensure the appropriate implementation of the National Plan and to strengthen the mechanisms of responsibility for reducing pollution from thermal power plants, “RERI lawyer Jovan Rajic told META.

More than 70 percent of electricity in Serbia comes from thermal power plants

Serbia’s difficulties in implementing the National Pollution Reduction Plan also affect the country’s EU accession talks, which have further tightened environmental limits. A big problem is that Serbia relies heavily on coal in the production of electricity, ie more than 70 percent of electricity from Serbia comes from lignite, which is of poor quality. All this complicates the efforts for Serbia to harmonize with the EU environmental standards by 2030, the analysis estimates. Last week, 26 members of the European Parliament warned of cross-border environmental damage caused by heavy industry factories in Serbia, which are managed by Chinese companies. MEPs have called on the European Commission to remind the Serbian government to respect national legislation, as well as European legislation, if it intends to continue the accession process.

“Air pollution knows no borders, and toxic substances coming from Serbian thermal power plants are a European issue. “As this year’s chairman of the Energy Community and as a candidate country for joining the EU, Serbia must ensure compliance with regulations, and keep EPS responsible,” said Ricardo Nigro from the European Environment Office.

Source: rs.n1info.com

Serbian air pollution from thermal power plants affects the whole Europe