

Sulfur dioxide emitted by EPS power plants (Electric Power Industry of Serbia) is spreading over a large area, so it affects people and nature not only in Serbia. Sulfur dioxide is a harmful gas produced by burning coal, and contributes to the formation of acid rain and suspended particles (PM) and poses a serious danger to human health and the environment. Inhalation of CO₂ can cause severe irritation of the nose and throat, cough and difficulty breathing. Exposure to higher concentrations of gas can also cause fluid retention in the lungs and chronic diseases such as asthma.

Serbian thermal power plants are among the largest European sulfur dioxide (SO₂) generators, and represent a health and economic risk for the entire old continent, announced the portal META, the information channel of the European Environment Bureau (EEB).

Data models show that in 2016, more than half of the premature deaths caused by emissions from Balkan power plants were registered in the EU. Although the surrounding countries were most exposed, with 380 deaths in Romania and 370 in Italy, the consequences were felt even in Germany, France and Spain. Chronic pollution from toxic coal substances spreading from the Western Balkans has also affected European productivity, with more than 3,047 hospitalizations and more than 1.6 million lost working days in the EU and the Western Balkans. In the EU itself, there are 1,418 hospitalizations and over 600,000 working days. The META portal reminds that Serbia, as part of the Energy Community (EC), which the EU established to build an integrated pan-European energy market with its neighbors, has a legal obligation to reduce emissions from its thermal power plants below the level defined by the National Emission Reduction Plan (NERP). By the end of 2027, that plan should harmonize emissions from obsolete Serbian thermal power plants with the standards set in the EU Directive on Industrial Emissions. However, even a few years after the NERP came into force, Serbia has not taken steps to bring its harmful emissions into line with the plan. In 2018, ten EPS thermal power plants emitted 336,000, and in 2019 309,500 tons of SO₂ - six times more than the projected annual NERP limit of 54,000 tons. Only the Kostolac and Nikola Tesla (TENT) thermal power plants, which are part of EPS, emitted more CO₂ than all the thermal power plants in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France and Poland combined. Serbia's difficulties in adhering to the limits set by the NERP are directly related to Belgrade's accession negotiations with the EU, as the standards prescribed by Union laws are far stricter. In addition, Serbia's high dependence on coal, and more than 70% of its electricity is produced using low-quality lignite, is hampering the country's efforts to align with the EU's 2030 climate targets. At the end of January, 26 members of the European Parliament warned of cross-border environmental damage caused

by Serbian projects in the field of heavy industry, which are financed by China. The deputies called on the European Commission to draw the attention of the Serbian authorities to respect their national legislation and EU rules, to which they are obliged by the accession process. The coordinator of the campaign for coal and mining in the EEB, Ricardo Nigro, warned that “air pollution knows no borders and that toxic fumes from Serbian thermal power plants are also a European problem.”

The European Environment Bureau is the largest network of environmental NGOs in Europe. Established in 1974, it currently brings together more than 160 organizations from over 35 countries and acts on behalf of about 30 million individual members and supporters. Source: euractiv.rs