

More than 70% of the Serbian electricity power comes from poor quality lignite. It contributes to the breaching of the Energy Community's environmental standards and prevails Serbia to align with the EU's 2030 climate targets, as well as its ambitions to become a Member State of the EU. Overexposure to sulphur dioxide causes inflammation and irritation, leading to burning of the eyes, coughing, difficulty in breathing and chest tightness. People suffering from asthma and heart and lung diseases are at particular risk. Environmental campaigners have taken legal action against Serbia's state-owned electricity company (EPS) for exposing Serbians to toxic gases six times above the legal limit - a breach of both national and international law.

The challenge, brought by Serbian NGO Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute (RERI) aims to force EPS to ensure its thermal power plants do not pollute above the legal limits.

The challenge come following repeated requests for extraordinary inspection surveillance over EPS's plants covered by the Serbian National Emission Reduction Plan (NERP)¹. Serbian thermal power plants are among Europe's biggest emitters of sulfur dioxide (SO₂) - a harmful gas released when burning coal, which contributes to the formation of acid rain and secondary particulate matters, creating a significant threat to human health and the environment. EPS' emissions are a serious public health hazard to the citizens of Serbia and the neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans and the EU.

Kostolac B thermal power plant is the largest single SO₂ polluter in Europe, which in 2018 emitted 79,113 tons of SO₂, over 25,000 tonnes higher than the total annual SO₂ limit for all twelve of Serbia's Public Electricity Company's (EPS) thermal power plants. Serbian thermal power plant Nikola Tesla is also among the top 10 SO₂ polluters in Europe.

As a party to the Energy Community Treaty, Serbia is legally obliged to reduce emissions of SO₂, nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and particular matter (PM) by applying the National Emission Reduction Plan (NERP)² as from 1 January 2018³. However, ten of EPS's thermal power plants covered by the NERP emitted 336,000 tonnes of SO₂ in 2018 and 309,500 tonnes in 2019, while the maximum NERP annual threshold was 54,000 tonnes per year.

Jovan Rajić, RERI's Lead Attorney said: "The obligation for Serbia to implement the NERP, and for EPS to comply with annual emission ceilings, was clear and undoubtful since January 2018. It would contribute to the reduction of harmful health impact to the citizens of Serbia and EU as well. This lawsuit is to secure proper implementation of the NERP and to strengthen accountability mechanisms for reduction of pollution from thermal power plants."

Complying with environmental standards will help to smooth the coal phasing out transition,



Serbia's public electric company being sued for endangering the health of citizens

which is an inevitable step for the country which has the aspiration to become a part of carbon neutral Europe. Five years after the Paris Agreement was signed, it is clear that quitting coal is a matter of climate and environmental urgency, rather than a smart policy choice.

Source: reri.org.rs