

The European Commission (EC) has decided to file a lawsuit against Bulgaria for exceeding the sulfur dioxide standards in the Galabovo region. The problem with high levels of sulfur dioxide in Bulgaria has existed for a long time, mainly in connection with the use of coal with high sulfur content from some thermal power plants.

Since 2007, Bulgaria, as a member state of the EU, has been obliged to meet and comply with its air quality norms. Due to the noncompliance with the requirements for sulfur dioxide levels in 2009, the EC started a punitive procedure against our country, at which time the problem areas were three - Pernik, Galabovo and Dimitrovgrad.

As a result of the measures undertaken by the state and by the owners of large combustion plants (LCPs), in recent years there has been a significant reduction in total emissions of harmful substances and, in particular, of sulfur dioxide from 715 358 to 48 567 tonnes compared to 2007. Galabovo is the only municipality in which there are still problems with meeting the European requirements for sulfur oxide content in the atmospheric air.

The main reason for the problems with the achievement of the sulfur dioxide standards in the town of Galabovo is the historically legalized concentration of four LCPs located on a small area in the Maritza East Coal Basin. This, in addition to generating relatively large amounts of sulfur dioxide, makes it difficult both to determine the specific cause of each individual episode of pollution and the extent to which each plant affects air quality in Galabovo.

It should be emphasized that the Maritza East basins, according to the data from their automatic measurement systems, comply with the requirements of the European legislation and the norms set in their complex permits. The plants have a significant contribution to the total electricity produced in the country (between 45 and 60% depending on the season).

Regardless of the above mentioned problems and in view of achieving the necessary air quality by the Ministry of Environment and Water, actions have been taken to reduce the levels of sulfur dioxide in the ambient air in Galabovo. The Government's Program is based on Measure 572: Improvement / Upgrading of the already existing Early Warning System

(EWS) to predict over-pollution of the ground atmosphere with sulfur dioxide in the Stara Zagora region, which will be able to predict possible exceedances of standards and to offer emission reductions from each power plant in the Maritsa East energy basin.

A project “Improvement / Upgrading of the already existing Early Warning System (EWS) for forecasting over-pollution of the ground atmosphere with sulfur dioxide in the Stara Zagora region” has been developed for implementing the measure, which proposes options for reducing emissions from each TPP. The National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology, the operators of the four Maritsa East basins, the National Electricity Company and the Electricity System Operator are actively involved in the project. The measure has been implemented and the Early Warning System has been put into operation since 26 March 2019.

As a result of the measures taken this year, there has been a significant decrease in the number of exceedances of the hourly sulfur dioxide standards registered in Galabovo. Since the beginning of the year, they have been only 19. For information - over the same period in 2018, the average hourly rate exceeded 46.

This EC decision seeks to establish the infringement by the Court of Justice of the European Union without imposing financial sanctions against Bulgaria.

In addition to Bulgaria, yesterday the EC has decided to file a case before the European Court of Justice and against Spain, but for the systematic violation of Union law on nitrogen dioxide limits. The Commission has taken action in the field of air quality against Croatia, Poland, Romania and Greece. In May 2018, due to the lack of air quality standards, the EC sent six more countries - France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania and the UK - to the court.

Source: novinite. com

## The EC Will Sue Bulgaria for the Dirty Air around Galabovo