

That air pollution knows no borders is evidenced by the Balkan coal-fired power plants because they threaten the health and safety of the European population due to increased emissions of harmful substances, it was said at the panel as part of the celebration of European Green Week. Thermal power plants in Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo and BiH pose a health and economic threat to EU stability because they are a major source of rapidly spreading pollution across Europe, say representatives of leading European environmental organizations and centers.

Vlatka Matkovic, health and energy advisor at the Association for Health and the Environment (HEAL), said that “air pollution knows no borders”.

“Polluted air from the Western Balkans first spreads to neighboring countries, but over time it reaches all European Union countries,” Matkovic said.

She backed it up with a 2016 survey that showed that that year “16 coal-fired power plants in the Western Balkans emitted the same amount of sulfur dioxide (SO₂) as 250 such plants in the EU”.

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Peter Vajda, an expert with the Energy Community for the Environment, emphasized that obsolescence is one of the main causes of the harmful effects of thermal power plants.

“Thermal power plants in the Western Balkans were built several decades ago and that is why those countries do not respect the air quality standards that the Union expects,” said Vajda.

Commenting on the results of an analysis by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Commission that air pollution from thermal power plants in the Western Balkans causes about 4,000 premature deaths and about 8,000 cases of bronchitis in children each year, speakers agreed that achieving better air quality in the area must be priority of future European policies.

According to Claudio Belis of the European Commission’s Joint Research Center, there are many legal instruments to address the problem of low air quality that have remained “only on paper”.

The actual implementation of clean air legislation is a key condition for achieving the zero pollution target for the non-toxic environment set out by the European Commission in its European Green Plan.

Decarbonisation, the prevention of air, water and soil pollution, the circular economy, agricultural development and biodiversity protection are fundamental areas of European

green policies that have entered into force in the Western Balkans, but are still not effective enough, the speakers agreed.

Last year, the European Commission presented an economic and investment plan for the countries of the Western Balkans, which envisages up to nine billion euros in aid to the region for the multi-year period 2021-2027.

The plan aims to boost the region's long-term recovery, accelerate the green and digital transition and foster co-operation with the European Union.

It envisions initiatives to invest in the region's major road and rail links, renewable energy sources and the coal transition, renovate public and private buildings to increase energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, waste and wastewater management infrastructure, and introduce broadband infrastructure.

Due to the growing need to reduce emissions and interest in nature protection, the European Union organized a virtual Green Week this week, the largest event in the field of green policies with numerous panels and consultations.

Citizens thus have the opportunity to participate in discussions and debates on ecology and health, biodiversity and ecosystems, production and consumption, and guidelines for achieving green change inside and outside the EU.

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