

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been waiting for the desulphurization plant for an eternity, if we take into account the rapid changes in environmental protection policy, and the tightening of measures and legal emission standards for major polluters. According to the released pollutants, more precisely sulfur dioxide, the Ugljevik thermal power plant is positioned on the first place of the most polluted thermal power plants in the Balkans in 2019. Apart from the released sulfur dioxide, RITE Ugljevik is a pioneer in something else – 310 meters high chimney – the highest facility in BiH that emits all these harmful particles across the borders of our country.

In October 2020, the management of the Ugljevik Mine and Thermal Power Plant (RITE), together with Japanese associates and representatives of institutions, officially launched one of the largest investments in environmental protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a desulphurization plant worth 190 million KM, for which Bosnia and Herzegovina has been waiting for a total of 12 years. However, the multiple “opening” and pompous announcement of this project in the media after the allegedly solved technical problems, still turn out to be incorrect. The same management then forgot to mention that the plant still does not have a use permit and that it will require a certain period of obtaining. This means that the population of Ugljevik, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entire region continues to be poisoned by harmful emissions, primarily sulfur dioxide, and apparently – at least until the end of this year. The desulphurization project was financed by loans from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) signed in 2009, however, the works on the installation of the equipment started only in 2017. The plant was put into trial operation in 2019, and last year there were major problems with the electrostatic precipitator, which is a prerequisite for desulphurization, and the exhaust gases were not even close to the expected results. At the same time, the functional guarantees for the operation of the plant were therefore called into question.

The health models used in the HEAL study project 635 premature deaths a year and an estimated economic loss of up to 1.45 billion euros a year – incredible figures that are the same today or perhaps even higher, given that the desulphurization plant is still out of order. The situation is similar in neighboring Serbia, where delays in desulphurisation works (from 2011 to the planned 2022) at this thermal power plant also unnecessarily prolong the negative impact of the plant on human health.

Drastic reduction of sulfur dioxide emissions through the construction of a desulphurization plant is one of the basic preconditions for the continuation of RITE Ugljevik, since the National Emission Reduction Plan (NERP) adopted by BiH in 2016 envisages the so-called “Ceiling” for the discharge of sulfur dioxide below 15 000 tons per year. In 2019 alone, RITE

Ugljevik emitted 88,000 tons of sulfur dioxide, which released 10 times more of this harmful gas from this thermal power plant alone. The plan clearly states that thermal power plants that are not ready to drastically reduce their emissions have the option of reducing the number of operating hours and / or shutdowns. The Secretariat of the Energy Community recently issued a warning to the countries of the Western Balkans which in this way - "keeping" their thermal power plants, deviate from the National Emission Reduction Plan (NERP) due to their non-compliance. What this means for criminal countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, is still uncertain.

What is quite certain is that nowadays it no longer makes sense to spend public money on projects for purification of dirty technologies, considering that it is a legal obligation of polluters. These are projects that require huge financial expenditures, not only in terms of investment, but also require large funds for maintenance - and here in the Balkans they do not yet bring effective results in reducing emissions. An example is RiTE Ugljevik, which recently demanded an increase in the price of electricity, which provoked fierce reactions from the public - the public is asking the question: who should pay the price of the destroyed environment and health? On the other hand, the public should be aware that coal (expensive and unsustainable) is an energy source of the past, currently supported by citizens' money, just because the government has not been able to provide cleaner energy alternatives for its citizens, which are currently cheaper and more affordable than and when!

Source: czzs.org