

The Electric Power Industry of Serbia (EPS) does not have enough coal or a plan for long-term electricity production that would avoid its shortages, says Zvezdan Kalmar from the non-governmental organization Center for Environment and Sustainable Development (CEKOR). In his opinion, Serbia should first of all “turn to the development of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources”.

The CEKOR representative believes that Serbia should consider closing thermal power plants and developing new projects such as the Djerdap 3 and Bistrica hydroelectric power plants, as well as hydroelectric power plants that would be built on the Drina and Ibar rivers. According to him, the main reason is the pollution that causes coal combustion, when, as he estimates, there is not enough.

Kalmar reminded that EPS has invested a lot of money in opening new coal mines in Vreoci, where, as he claims, there is not enough coal. As one of the proofs for that, he cites the collapse that happened in EPS a few weeks ago when it snowed, and with it the electric power system of Serbia.

“There is actually no coal there, someone in power was researching the coal deposit at the time and they discovered 570 million tons of coal under Vreoci, which is enough for 20 years,” says Kalmar.

According to him, the resettlement of about 100 households from Vreoci cost the state budget between 150 and 200 million euros. He notes that the documents on that are not yet available to the public and calls on the authorities to finally publish them.

Kalmar emphasizes that the money could have been used to improve energy efficiency in Serbia. He adds that a new field G, which has very little coal, is now being dug in the Kolubara Mining Basin.

The representative of CEKOR also reminds that 10 years ago, Serbia took a loan and bought a machine for mixing quality and worse coal. He notes that the role of that homogenization machine is precisely the prevention of the emergency situation in EPS, as well as that 150 million euros were paid.

He has already called the “famous” burning of mud in the thermal power plants in Obrenovac a crime, because, as he estimates, those responsible should be fired and their work licenses revoked.

Kalmar believes that the construction of a desulphurization plant in EPS’s thermal power plants is too expensive and an unprofitable investment of 800 million euros. As reasons for such an attitude, he cites, among other things, the larger amount of electricity required by these plants, their expensive maintenance (150 million), the increase in ash dumps, the opening of new coal mines (Veliki Crljeni, Drmno, Burovo).

One of the important reasons why EPS needs to think about closing down thermal power plants is, as CO₂ emissions add, due to which the European Union will start charging a special tax. He says that the price of electricity in that case will be such that EPS will not be

able to operate liquidly:

“I absolutely think that it is not necessary to enter into this, but to think about closing the thermal power plants by 2035,” Kalmar said.

In his opinion, Serbia could direct one billion euros of investments to energy efficiency, because it has committed itself to the goals set by the EU, which is complete decarbonisation by 2050.

He emphasizes that the construction of nuclear power plants in Serbia is not profitable because it takes a long time, requires huge investments, educated people that Serbia does not have and cannot train overnight. He cited the example of Finland, which has been building its new nuclear power plant for two decades, because its strong regulatory institutions did not allow the slightest omissions during the works.

“Djerdap 3 must be an absolute priority for Serbia, it will have about 2.5 gigawatts of installed power capacity, that is the total fleet of thermal power plants in Serbia. There is also a reversible hydroelectric power plant Bistrica, because when there is no wind, peak, reserve energy is needed,” added the CEKOR representative.

He also reminded that most of EPS’s plants, but also some mines, operate without the necessary permits, as well as that the company Rio Tinto, which wants to extract lithium in Serbia, only uses the mechanisms established for EPS.

He reiterated that the price of electricity cannot be a social category, and that citizens should be helped to insulate their houses, install solar panels and provide other ways to heat. According to him, the energy policy must be based on renewable energy sources, Nova Ekonomija reports.