

Despite earlier predictions, even without new thermal power plants, Bulgaria will remain an important player in the electricity market of Southeast Europe.

Bulgaria is expected to retain the capacities for electricity production until at least 2020th, with annual consumption growth to the end of the decade to 1.5 percent. This means that the country will maintain export potential and continue to play a leading role in the regional energy market.

More than 6 TWh per year are available for export from Bulgaria by 2020th. That is half of the amount exported in 2011th but it is still a very good result. According to the forecast of the Bulgarian transmission system operator ESO, the existing plants will be able to produce 50.5 TWh per year, while the consumption will reach 43.1 TWh. Taking into account the earlier ESO predictions, domestic consumption is usually overestimated, so the Bulgarian export could be even greater.

This means that South East Europe continues to be flooded with relatively cheap Bulgarian and Romanian electricity in the foreseeable future. For the purpose of Bulgaria, this forecast seems that plans for new power plants are superfluous.

It is planned to close the thermal power plant Varna (with capacity of 1240 MW) during 2015th, as well as small units in TPP Rousse. By the end of the decade, at least 300 MW of coal-fired capacity will also be put out of operation. Closure of these units was used as a justification for new projects, such as the nuclear power plant Belene, which is now in the process of international arbitration in a dispute between NEK and Russia's Rosatom, after the unilateral Bulgaria withdrawal from the project in 2012th.

It is interesting that in the new prediction, compared with a forecast of 2010th, ESO provides greater production of 10 million MWh, although new power plants are not planned.

Probably ESO took into account the serious growth of renewable energy sources, whose share in the electricity production, including large hydropower plants, amounts 20 percent.