

The Bulgarian government is to ask Brussels for an exemption from new pollution laws on the grounds that it will not be able to afford the costs of upgrading its coal power fleet. The European Commission plans to introduce measures to curb pollution from large thermal power plants throughout the EU but Sofia says the new laws will threaten its energy security and competitiveness.

Bulgaria's coal-fired power plants produce about 40 percent of the country's electricity. A special commission of EU member states is expected to approve higher curbs on sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions at the end of April and introduce limits on mercury emissions from combustion plants with thermal input of over 50 MW.

"The planned levels ... will be unbearable for Bulgaria's coal-fired plants," the energy ministry said in a statement on Monday. "Initial calculations show that an investment of over 1 billion leva (\$556 million) in total will be needed to meet the new environmental norms."

Bulgaria plans to ask the commission to allow lower levels of expectation for its plants and the European Commission has indicated some extent of wriggle room for the Balkan nation. Iris Petsa, commission press officer for the environment told Power Engineering International, "EU rules do not require the closure of Bulgarian plants. Where costs would be disproportionate compared to environmental benefits, the Bulgarian authorities have a possibility to use derogation, whilst respecting environmental safeguards set-out in the directive."

"In these specific limited circumstances Member State competent authorities are able to grant derogations to individual plants where this is justified on the basis of the criteria set in the Directive."

Petsa also outlined the rationale behind the restrictions being increasingly imposed on Europe's thermal power fleet. Air pollution is the prime environmental cause of premature deaths in the EU, about 400 000 every year, she said.

"Large combustion plants are one of its main sources, in particular as regards emissions of sulphur dioxide and mercury. Reducing their pollutant emissions is crucial to improve air quality in Bulgaria and the health of Bulgarian people."

Under the Industrial Emissions Directive, operators of Large Combustion Plants need to apply the best available techniques (BAT) that are environmentally performing, economically viable and technically proven.

"The Industrial Emissions Directive, adopted by the European Parliament and Member States at the Council in 2010, creates clear obligation for all plants, including large combustion plants, to operate using Best Available Techniques and to be issued with a permit setting emission limits in line with the use of Best Available Techniques. This requirement is established in EU law and there is no possibility to 'be excluded' from it. Permits must be established on a case-by-case basis."

Source: Power engineering int