

Montenegro and other Balkan countries invest “significant investment” in building environmentally harmful thermal power plants because they want to sell cheaper electricity to the European Union, at a time when the Union is looking for new electricity suppliers in order to reduce its dependence on Russian gas.

EU officials are apparently reluctant to use the energy negotiations and laws in the area of trade in order to force these countries to apply standards aimed at reducing air pollution, despite the risks that rush could have on climate change and the EU’s enlargement policy, as well as finance and people health in the Balkans.

Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo and Ukraine plan to build power plants with total capacity of 14.82 GW, many of which will be in addition to existing capacity, according to a study of Partnership change, ordered by the NGO CEE Bankwatch.

These countries are members of the Energy Community, which is mainly funded by EU to contribute to the integration of these markets with the EU after the Balkan wars. Reforms of the Community agreement will be proposed at a meeting in June in Vienna, in order to be adopted by October.

However, fighters for environment protection claim that the European Commission has a little appetite to take advantage of these negotiations to increase the standards relating to the environment and air pollution.

“The Commission should consider the possible actions of the EU. It would, however, continue to require some analysis to find out how such measures ‘interfere’ with the objectives of our policy and international obligations”, said a Commission source.

The Energy Community Treaty “in principle” does not allow restrictions on imports, the source said, but membership “means” that states must abide by the same rules for the environment protection.

The new thermal power plants in Serbia, Montenegro and Ukraine are not sufficiently advanced to reduce emissions of toxic air contaminants such as sulfur dioxide, warns NGO Center for European Reform (CER).

The application of technologies that aim to reduce the sulfur dioxide emissions is legally binding in the EU.

Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine “substantially” increase the coal use, CER warns.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), deaths as a consequence of air pollution cost Montenegro 14.5 percent of its GDP, while in Serbia the percentage is higher – 33.5 and 26.5 in Ukraine.