



**To:**  
**Commissioner Johannes Hahn**  
**European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations European Commission**  
**B-1049 Brussels**

**Cc:**  
**Commissioner Karmenu Vella,**  
**Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries**  
**European Commission**

**Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete**  
**Climate Action & Energy**  
**European Commission**

Brussels, 27 February 2018

RE: Climate and air quality issues in the Western Balkan countries

Dear Commissioner Hahn,

Ahead of your visit to the countries of the Western Balkan in the next days, I am contacting you on behalf of the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), a leading European non-profit alliance working for better health through a healthier environment. We would like to bring to your attention some important air quality issues for the region, which we consider crucial for the accession talks and which we hope you will raise in your exchanges with Western Balkan policy-makers.

HEAL and our health partners in the Western Balkan countries have been increasingly concerned about the poor air quality in the region, and the resulting unacceptably high health impacts to the population in the Western Balkans and beyond. We think there is an urgent need for Western Balkan policy-makers to make clean air a priority, and to especially initiate measures in the climate and energy field that will bring benefits for air quality and our health, and have recently sent a letter and HEAL position on this to all [health ministers of the region](#).

Alarmingly, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the [second highest mortality rate](#) from air pollution in the world, only exceeded by North Korea. Air pollution in the country eats up over [21.5 per cent of Bosnia and Herzegovina's GDP](#) through reduced productivity and health costs it causes.

The demand for clean air now is brought forward by many health professionals and citizens across the region: on 26 February 2018, local doctors in Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and HEAL launched the [Unmask My City](#) campaign to draw attention to the immense problem of air pollution in the region and demand urgent action from decision-makers.

A key contributor to poor air quality in Tuzla is the nearby thermal coal plant, which is the [9th largest polluter](#) in Europe. The estimated health costs caused by the Tuzla Plant alone amount to [between 196 to 566 million EUR](#) – for people in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in the wider European Region as air pollution knows no borders.



While the Western Balkan countries are on the path towards joining the European Union before 2030, unfortunately their climate and energy policies - which ultimately are also health choices - are moving in the opposite direction, away from the necessary transformation towards a low-carbon economy and society.

HEAL is concerned that the continued reliance on coal power will not only undercut the necessary climate mitigation efforts, but also cause significant health impacts and costs to the countries in the region and the whole of the EU.

As of 1 January 2018, the Western Balkan countries need to start reducing their emissions for large combustion plants<sup>1</sup> and align national laws and rules with EU ones. This process is stemming from the Energy Community rules, which require coal plants currently operating in the Western Balkans to cut their emissions gradually from 2018 until the end of 2027<sup>2</sup>.

We urge you to raise the question of compliance of the power plants to Energy Community rules during your upcoming visit and to stress the importance of immediate action.

It is both in the EU's interest and responsibility to ensure that these potentially future member states fully comply with existing law and start taking action against climate, for clean air and their citizens' health immediately.

In view of the public interest of this matter we intend to make this letter publicly available.

We thank you for your consideration and remain at your disposal for any further questions,

Anne Stauffer

Director for Strategy and Campaigns

---

<sup>1</sup> combustion installations with a rated thermal input exceeding 50 MW, for which the original construction licence or, in absence of such a procedure, the original operation licence was granted before 1 July 1992

<sup>2</sup> These rules are as a matter of fact not even in line with the latest EU rules for large combustion plants - the so-called LCP "BREF" that entered force in the EU in August 2017" but are instead more lax