

## Bulgaria's Nek focused on Chaira hydro plant recovery – CEO

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*Bulgarian state-owned power producer Nek is working actively on the restoration of the 864 MW Chaira hydro plant following an accident last March, CEO Martin Georgiev told Montel on Monday.*

The technical failure of one of the turbines led to the complete closure of this largest hydropower plant in south-east Europe last May.

Its owner Nek has since requested a number of independent technical analyses that would strive to identify the cause of the accident and prevent similar failures in the future.

"We are currently looking for a technical solution to allow us to renovate the plant, while we gradually resume operations and improve the efficiency of the equipment," said Georgiev.

Two different inspections so far point to a lack of sufficient static strength of the affected turbine's structure.

Nek is now awaiting the results of a third and final technical analysis before it proceeds with the actual renovation process.

The utility aims to have the hydro plant at least partially running by the end of the year. This is, however, subject to the findings of the last inspection, as well as the total cost of the renovation process that is yet to be calculated.

### Capacity expansion

Despite these technical woes, the utility still intends to complete its plan to expand Chaira's pumped storage by connecting the current reservoir to the still unconstructed Yadenitsa dam.

In January this year, Nek received the green light from the regional development and public works ministry for construction of the dam.

"The Yadenitsa project will play a key role in ensuring the energy stability of the country as it will allow Chaira to keep the electric system running in case of technical failures elsewhere," noted Georgiev.

The utility is separately looking at alternative ways to expand its production portfolio, such as through solar plants and wind farms. There is no clarity around specific projects as of yet.

This diversification is becoming even more of a priority for Nek now that a dry winter resulted in a 32% year-on-year decline in hydropower production in Bulgaria for the first two months of the year. Last year, drought caused a 31% drop in the country's hydro output.

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