

PRESS RELEASE 26th October 2021

Revealed: Vucic's foul plan to green-light Rio Tinto's murky Jadar mine

Loznica/Serbia 26 October 2021 - Documents released under an access to information request reveal Vucic's firm support for Rio Tinto's (RIO.L) Jadar project and highlight a calculated roadmap to greenlight the mine. A paragraph reads that "the project has political support from Serbian president - Mr. Vucic." This is relevant given Vucic's statement that "[the people will have the final say on the project.](#)" The documents also reveal that the mine site development is to start after the general elections in spring 2022.

'[Mars Sa Drine!](#)' (Rio Tinto, Get off the Drina!) is a network uniting fifteen Serbian NGOs, as well as experts and activists who support the work of 'Ne damo Jadar.' This is an association of 350 local property owners opposed to Rio Tinto's mine proposal on social, environmental, economic and heritage grounds. They also oppose the forced resettlement that the mine entails. A [petition](#) has gathered over 130,000 signatures in Serbia and an [international petition](#) has gathered 80,000 signatures. Most recently, a [protest of over 17,000 people](#) in Belgrade included over 20 groups who announced their opposition to the mine.

According to the [documents released by the EU Commission under its transparency rules](#), a detailed political roadmap has been elaborated behind closed doors. This is likely to prevent the Rio Tinto lithium proposal to become a contentious electoral subject and to clear the way for Vucic to be able green-light the mine after the general elections in 2022. According to the roadmap the exploitation permit and all other regulatory approvals (e.g. EIA) are to be granted by the end of 2021 or early 2022 and the mine site development is to start after elections in Serbia. A document reads that "the project has political support from Serbian president - Mr. Vucic " meaning that if Mr Vucic was to call for a referendum his intention is to greenlight the mine nonetheless. The papers imply his reelection as the roadmap does not foresee a risk scenario for an alternative result.

The documents also reveal that a meeting "took place in the context of Rio Tinto's CEO Jakob Stausholm visit to Belgrade ... to meet President Vucic and the Commission's intention to develop a strategic partnership in Critical raw materials and batteries with Serbia" - in absence of an EIA or any assurance showing that the strictest standards will be respected. Worse still, the EU Commission underlines its "close and positive contacts with Serbian authorities" encouraging "Rio Tinto to keep close and regular contacts with the EU Delegation in Belgrade."

Today 'Mars Sa Drine!' and 'Ne damo Jadar' sent a [letter to the EU Ambassador to Serbia](#) asking for a clarifying meeting and also alerted Thomas Waitz, member of the European Parliament, the EU's directly elected body.

"We are used to foul plans and double-play by decision-makers claiming to represent our best interest. It is unfortunate that the EU Commission's DG Grow so readily concurs with a murky lithium proposal that will undermine the energy transition, add human rights &

the environment as casualties & feed corruption. If the laws are applied then this mine will never go ahead & we will use all legal means to prove this," says Bojana Novaković, coordinator 'Mars Sa Drine'.

"Money can buy a lot of things, including TV commercials or even electoral campaigns. Disappointingly for Rio Tinto there are things that money cannot buy: our country, our roots, our homes, our heritage, our inheritance are not for sale, nor are our souls. Everything we have, we inherited from our forefathers, and it's our duty to pass it on to our grandchildren. You don't have our permission to build a mine in the Jadar valley."

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