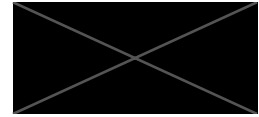




Bojana Novakovic



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His Excellency Mr. Daniel Emery  
Ambassador of Australia to Serbia  
8th Floor, Vladimira Popovica 38-40, New Belgrade  
by email only: [Belgrade.Embassy@dfat.gov.au](mailto:Belgrade.Embassy@dfat.gov.au)

**Subject: Expression of Disappointment and Concern Regarding Today's Meeting**

Your Excellency,

I am writing as an Australian and Serbian citizen to express my disappointment regarding your scheduled attendance at the "Mineral Resources in Serbia" conference starting today, due to the fact that civil society, local representatives and landowners affected by existing or potential mining in Serbia have not been invited to participate.

This meeting remains untransparent, if not deceptive, for its selective inclusion of stakeholders (who are unknown to those of us actively campaigning against Australian mining companies) while excluding prominent local groups throughout Serbia. These groups include not just ours, but also local members of Savez Ekoloških Organizacija Srbije (SEOS), Borani se Pitaju, Ne Dam Ne Dau Majdanpek and groups from Novi Sad, Čačak, Zrenjanin and Homoljske Planine to name a few. This is not just a failure of participatory outreach but also looks like a selective engagement of civil society groups who have been invited to the event in order to organize a favorable outcome. This amounts to not taking social and ecological issues seriously, while shaping participation in the ways suitable for the image of the conference.

Furthermore, the forum will be engaging in dialogue about so-called "green" mining, while it is the greenest parts of Serbia that stand to be significantly degraded if not destroyed by these "green" mines from Australian companies, among others.

Civil society and local landowners in Serbia play a vital role in fostering transparency, accountability, and the overall well-being of our nation. In many democratic societies, including Australia, the active involvement of civil society is seen as a cornerstone of a healthy and vibrant democracy. It disappoints me that you have agreed to attend a meeting without a single representative of local opposition to projects like Rio Tinto's Jadar or Balkan Mining and Minerals exploration drilling.

The voice of local people is especially important to bilateral relations between our countries. Unfortunately this event will only add to already existing tensions between civil society in Serbia and the Australian companies interested in its nature and resources. You are participating in stoking tensions and conflict.

Rio Tinto has mistreated the people of the Jadar Valley from the get go by implicitly threatening expropriation in land acquisition pamphlets, trespassing with geologists onto private lands and orchestrating social divisions within communities.<sup>1</sup> The CEO of another Australian company, Balkan Mining and Minerals, Mr. Ross Cotton called Serbia a city, put that claim on his company's home page, attacked women online when he was confronted about it and never bothered to take it down or apologize.<sup>2</sup> Australian companies have acted with little-to-no respect in Serbia as they organized the grabbing of local livelihoods.

As an Australian citizen, who has spoken out against this unacceptable behavior, and whose work in this space has been tracked by the Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs in Australia, it disappoints and concerns me greatly that you will be attending this meeting. I hope you will consider either not attending, or asking for members of the local groups listed above to be invited.

Sincerely,



Bojana Novakovic, on behalf of  
Marš sa Drine  
Serbia

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<sup>1</sup> Rio Tinto "Suggestions for land acquisition in the Area of Brezjak" (Translated from Serbian). October 2020. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/sp4rxdxk00u3sma/Predlog%20za%20otkup.pdf?dl=0>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/hanv4lpior16oml1x2ioz/HSBC.pdf?rlkey=k04plvkwegb53m6nbn3xog52t&dl=0>