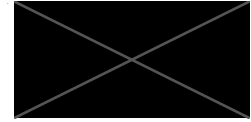




Bojana Novaković



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To
Roula Khalaf, Editor and
Letters Editor
Financial Times
By email only: letters.editor@ft.com

17 June 2024

Subject: Collective response from Serbian civil society and experts and scientists regarding The Financial Times article “Serbia set to give green light to RT lithium mine.”

Your article ‘Serbia set to give green light to Rio Tinto lithium mine’ shows that when it comes to money, the EU and political leaders are willing to turn a blind eye to the will of the people by collaborating with an illiberal leader. It is no secret that Serbian President Vučić holds power by intimidation and vote rigging, and is tied to organized crime and corruption.

When you write that following municipal elections, the government “believes the coast is clear to proceed with [Rio Tinto’s] project’ **you acknowledge that Vučić and the EU play a geopolitical game that requires forcing a murky mine down the throats of hundreds of thousands of Serbians who don’t want it.**

Rio Tinto’s mine proposal has no legal basis in Serbia, no permits and no legitimate environmental studies. These were canceled by decree in 2022¹ after public opposition saw over a hundred thousand people in the streets.² **President Vucić can not give a green light to this project because that is outside the legal jurisdiction of his presidency. Nevertheless, he has announced to international media, and not to us in Serbia, that political leaders are coming to**

¹ Annulment of Jadar Spatial plan and Jadar Working Group
<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/z84n2q2d3mnttpr2fqdc7/AGhS8c7Fhj7SJVUDoCGCnd8?rlkey=sak4a3pa84l0y1y1r1212wkp&dl=0>

Cancellation of EIA

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/59vcocofl1mdgk5nh65po/ADmzlvimsnxPcO1fd_vmdxw?rlkey=mesmskrklavqk4tbmpddq3jv9&dl=0

²<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/05/rio-tinto-lithium-mine-thousands-of-protesters-block-roads-across-serbia>

Belgrade next month. For what? A formal announcement for a project with no legal basis or permit? I hope the EU does not participate in the occupation of the Jadar Valley.

Mark Twain famously said that "A mine is a hole in the ground owned by a liar" and this holds true today. If "green" mining existed, then there would be no need for costly PR exercises like the privately funded and executed "Environmental study," with zero legal legitimacy, that Rio Tinto published in Serbia last week. When EU lawmakers are willing to court an illiberal leader and accept PR stunts from multinational mining corporations rather than listen to hundreds of thousands of people on the streets, this only makes those in Serbia question the European project, which after the most recent elections, it seems the whole of Europe is questioning. I hope we do not come to remember EU leaders as betraying the very values that made some of us believe that joining the Union would mean dignity and a strong rule of law.

We in Serbia are not a geopolitical chess pawn; the periphery to be sacrificed so that Brussels, Berlin, and Paris can promote lifestyles well above the global average energy spending while constantly weakening their climate targets. We are a proud hospitable people, so if EU delegates come next month, they are welcome to some ajvar and Rakija. But our lithium will stay in the fertile soil that feeds us.

If there is one thing that we can thank Rio Tinto for, it is that it has united us with environmentally conscious people from all over Europe and beyond. With petitions and letters against this project and the CRMR yielding over half a million signatories from over 35 countries,³ Europe needs to wake up to the fact that we, the people, are taking matters into our own hands. The corporate occupation of our most fertile land is a non-starter, and we will protect this land with all the means we have at our disposal.

Sincerely,

- **Prof. dr Bogdan Šolaja, Serbian Academy of Sciences**
- **Bojana Novaković, coordinator, Marš sa Drine collective**
- **Prof. dr Ljiljana Tomović, Faculty of Biology, University of Belgrade**
- **Prof. dr Ivanka Popović, vice president - Board of the European Association at Belgrade University**

Prof. dr Branimir Grgur, University of Belgrade,

³ Serbian petition against Rio Tinto:

<https://peticije.kreni-promeni.org/petitions/stop-rudniku-litijuma-rio-tinto-mars-sa-drine>

European Petition against Rio Tinto:

<https://action.wemove.eu/sign/2023-03-stop-rio-tinto-EN/>

European Petition against CRMR:

<https://action.wemove.eu/sign/2023-10-eu-parliament-stop-selling-out-people-and-nature-to-mining-EN>

Open letter from hundreds of local groups and scientists against CRMR:

<https://miningwatch.ro/en/peste-100-de-organizatii-si-peste-100-de-experti-si-academicieni-din-30-de-tari-au-trimis-o-scrisoare-deschisa-presedintei-comisiei-europene-ursula-von-der-leyen-prin-care-cer-retrager-ea-actului-pri/>

Prof. dr Dragana Đorđević, faculty of Chemistry and Metallurgy
Prof. dr Ratko Ristić, faculty of Forestry and Pro-rector, Belgrade University
Dr. Dragoslav Janković
Ivan Nikolić, NGO Marš sa Drine
NGO Eko Surdulica
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Prof. dr Zoran Radovanović, University of Belgrade
Prof. dr Slobodan, Vukosavić Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences
Dr. Zorka Vukmirović, advisor at the Institute of Physics, Belgrade
Prof. dr Nenad M. Kostić
Dr Jagos Raicevic
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Vladimir Božić, NGO Ne dam Nu dau
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