

## **You will not mine here**

### *Community organisations and NGOs to contest strategic status designation EU mining 'boom' faces long legal battle*

25th March, 2025 - Earlier today the European Commission released the first round of raw materials projects designated as strategic under the Critical Raw Material Act (CRMA). Announced were 47 proposals in the EU member states. Despite the projects' designated role towards Europe's resource independence and re-industrialization, a significant number of extraction projects have since long been contested by environmentalists and residents alike. In reaction to today's decision, several NGOs and community associations from Romania, Germany, Spain, and Portugal said they will be challenging the European Commission's strategic status designation. Contested strategic projects include major lithium projects such as Mina do Barroso (SAV) and Mina do Romano in Portugal, Mina Doade and Mina Las Navas in Spain, and the Rovina gold-copper project in Romania (ESM).

*"The Rovina gold-copper open cast mine will destroy pristine nature and displace communities and the Commission's designation legitimizes a project deemed illegal by courts in Romania. This is destruction, not development, and we will fight until the end. Unlike investors or governments, we have time and determination,"* states Roxana Pencea-Bradatan from MiningWatch Romania.

Amidst tightening geopolitical pressure, the EU's CRMA strives to unlock mineral partnerships with third countries and also domestic mining of metals needed for the energy transition. To achieve at least 10% of domestic production of critical minerals by 2030, strategic projects are green-lighted for overriding public interest, fast-tracked permitting and access to private and public investment. Since the drafting of the CRMA in 2023, environmental campaigners and affected communities underlined the incompatibility of the act with existing European environmental regulations such as the Habitats Directive, the Water Framework Directive and the Birds directive.

*"In our mountain region at the German-Czech border, two different companies intend to mine the same ore body from two sides. The cumulative impact of these two large mines on protected sites and on adjacent villages and towns is not being considered. From our region's past we know that the larger the mines the greater the harm. We will not allow this again,"* explains Anja Weber, a local from Bärenstein, where British investor Zinnwald Lithium Plc wants to develop a processing plant and mining waste deposit.

*"The extraction of cheap raw materials for the automotive industry in Germany and elsewhere jeopardises our way of life. We, who live from sustainable livestock farming and depend on clean rivers and green pastures, would only experience disadvantages. The proposal is far from a Just Transition - mining in Portugal does not abide by the rules and the authorities do nothing. The four planned open-cast mines and tailings sites are neither environmentally nor socially acceptable. We will therefore formally ask the EU Commission to review its decision,"* explains Nelson Gomes from the citizens' initiative in Covas do Barroso. In the north of Portugal, the initiative is opposing the plans of British investor Savannah Resources.

*“In Spain, modern mining has generated so much destruction and pollution and with it injustice, crime, corruption and suffering. The CRMA will multiply this. Strategic project status is an attempt to give legitimacy to illegal and destructive projects, while communities are undermined and turned into ‘public enemies’ by the Commission’s narrative of securitization of raw materials,”* argues Joám Evans, from the Iberian Mining Observatory, a civil society watchdog for the mining industry. Spain is the EU country in which most extractive projects have been designated as “strategic”, with 6 projects in total, including several mines with a long history of environmental non-compliance, such as the Las Cruces copper mine in Seville (fined with over 6 million euros since 2014) or the La Parrilla tungsten mine in Cáceres (that had its licence revoked in 2022).

Community groups have also criticized the Commission’s decision to withhold the list of European “strategic” projects outside of the EU, designations that have been considered undue interference in other country’s sovereign affairs and an expression of neocolonialism. Among potential projects outside of the EU is the Jadar lithium mine in Serbia. *“Rio Tinto has shown disregard for the rule of law in Serbia. People in Serbia expected that by becoming an EU candidate, EU institutions would help strengthen the rule of law, not support a dictator who gives free passes to environmental destruction so as to line his own pockets. Europe is a union of people and together with my German, Romanian, Spanish and Portuguese colleagues, we will be taking action together. Just as we know that you would never accept to be evicted for greed and corruption, we know that you would never want this to happen to any of us,”* states Bojana Novaković from Marš sa Drine in Jadar/ Serbia.

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