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**H.E. Mr. Emanuele Giaufret**

*EU Ambassador to Serbia*

Delegation of the European Union to Serbia

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**by way of email:** EMANUELE.GIAUFRET@eeas.europa.eu

cc: thomas.waitz@europarl.europa.eu co-chair of the European Green Party

Gornje Nedeljice, Loznica, 26 October 2021

Dear Ambassador Giaufret,

**ref.: Opposition to Rio Tinto's lithium proposal in the Jadar Valley/ Serbia**

We are writing to you to introduce ourselves as stakeholders and hope that this will start an active dialogue regarding the most important environmental and human rights topic in Serbia: Rio Tinto's lithium proposal in the Jadar Valley.

"Ne damo Jadar," is an association of 350 local property owners opposed to mine proposal on social, environmental, economic and heritage grounds and the involuntary resettlement that it entails. "**Mars Sa Drine!**" (Rio Tinto, Get off the Drina!) is a network in support of Ne Damo Jadar. It unites over fifteen Serbian organizations, as well as experts, activists and local property owners opposed to Rio Tinto's lithium mine proposal. Our [petition](#) against the mine has gathered over 130,000 signatures. Meanwhile, an [international petition](#) has gathered 80,000 signatures. Most recently, a [protest of over 17,000 people](#) in Belgrade included over 20 groups, including many who we work with, who announced their opposition to the mine.

From documents released by DG GROW<sup>1</sup> we learned that the directorate has held meetings with Rio Tinto (RT) but never reached out or conducted meetings with any direct or indirect stakeholders; this despite the fact that opposition to the proposed mine is well mediatised in Serbia and beyond.

Worryingly, the information released reads that a meeting "took place in the context of Rio Tinto's CEO Jakob Stausholm visit to Belgrade this week to meet President Vucic and the Commission's intention to develop a strategic partnership in Critical raw materials and batteries with Serbia."

**This points to a political endorsement which is unacceptable as it is unrelated to the nature of the proposal itself including its environmental and social impact and compliance with relevant legislation. Judging from the documents, the EU is simply giving Rio Tinto a free pass to go ahead with the project.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/22mx5n4j5wrrwpb/AAA0tJbrpg8Kk8aEtrISAI9Ba?dl=0>

In your own words this project “can be an opportunity for socio economic development, but the strictest standards must be respected”<sup>2</sup> yet at the same time the EU Commission already intends to develop a strategic partnership, this in absence of any assurance showing that the strictest standards will be respected.

This is deeply worrying given that from RT’s project representation report (PPR) it is already clear that the EIA report will cover a third of the project. The PPR states that it “*refers to only one part of the entire project, more precisely to the underground exploitation project.*” Provisions of the EIA Directive cannot be avoided by splitting projects into smaller projects, and failing to take into account their cumulative environmental impact.<sup>3/4</sup>

There are concerns about the vast amount of chemicals used (1,000 tons of concentrated sulfuric acid/d) and the water used (23,300L/kg of lithium carbonate, not to mention additional amounts for borate). Chinese-controlled Rio Tinto has never extracted lithium and no company ever has mined lithium underneath fertile soil.

**Based on the documents we conclude that rather than aiding Serbians towards a dignified future with a strong rule of law, the EU is using the pre-accession moment to endorse a murky lithium proposal that will undermine the energy transition, add human rights and the environment as casualties and only feed corruption.**

Given that the insatiable drive for profit is what got us into the climate crisis in the first place, is the solution to the problem a cheap mine in the hands of a world polluter, where we replace one form of extraction with another? If we let Rio Tinto come to Europe, we are incentivising environmental degradation at the expense of looking at real solutions to the climate crisis. We are allowing corporations who are responsible for the climate crisis to act as if they are the solution.

Serbia is an official EU candidate and with a mine life of 60 years, the Jadar mine will operate when Serbia will be an EU member. It seems therefore important to ensure now that all permitting related to the proposal as well as its possible cumulative phases are in accordance with European standards and legislation. This not only with regards to the environment but also with regards to the Water Framework Directive, the Mining Waste Directive incl. SEVESO and associated conditions such as insurance etc., including proper risk and accident assessment. This to ensure the safety of the public and to clarify who will pay in case of accidents.

According to research published by Roskill, the rise in demand for lithium could see CO2 emissions rise sixfold by 2030, as it passes through the different stages of mining, production, transport and manufacture.<sup>5</sup> Yet it is not known what benefits this project will bring to the Serbian region besides pollution and the forced resettlement of hundreds of people and endangering the health of thousands. Rio Tinto is a company with a bad reputation; most recently they “accidentally” (but with a full array of permits) blew up a sacred 46,000 year old Aboriginal cave in Australia. How can we expect them to behave in Serbia?

It is not an exaggeration to state that we are dealing with a government that has no control over the implementation of its own environmental protection laws; and let alone of its obligations towards the acquis. **We are asking you for a meeting and give us assurance that the EU Commission will proactively make use of all means at its disposal to ensure that RT’s proposal meets all relevant legislation including ensuring that the EIA reports covers the entire proposal. We also want assurance that you will make sure that the legislative and institutional framework for upholding fundamental rights are firmly in place, including for citizens to be able to uphold and defend their rights in courts of law timely.**

Yours truly,

Zlatko Kokanovic  
Vice President Ne Damo Jadar

Bojana Novakovic  
Co-ordinator Mars’Sa Drine

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<sup>2</sup> “Moze da bude prilika za drustveno-ekonomski razvoj ali mora da se postuju najostri standardi” <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/drzava-i-mediji/ziofre-za-n1-sektor-telekomunikacija-kljucan-neophodni-jednaki-uslovi-za-sve/>

<sup>3</sup> Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Environmental Protection, decision number 353-02-00984 / 2020-03, dated 5.6.2020

<sup>4</sup> <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/showPdf.jsf?sessionid=C5DC2B5FA562F10AEE65605779F05FF9?text=&docid=44721&pageIndex=0&oclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=549973>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.greencarcongress.com/2020/10/20201006-roskill.html>