

A consortium of Italy's Eni and Russia's Novatek plans on March 25 to start exploratory oil and gas drilling offshore from Montenegro under a concession contract signed in 2016. Environmental activists in Montenegro protested against oil exploration off the country's coast, urging the government to stop such projects and prevent potential damage to nature. Natasa Kovacevic, from the NGO Green Home, called on the Podgorica government to scrap the contract, warning that oil exploration could be disastrous for country's ecology and for the all important tourism industry.

"Montenegro has no capacity to monitor and control oil exploration. Even it's just test exploration in this phase, in future there will be oil platforms on our seashore," Kovacevic told the daily *Pobjeda*.

"It could have a large impact on nature and on tourism, because no one goes on vacation where there are oil platforms," she said.

"The government should terminate the contract. The potential damage to nature is far greater than the cost of terminating the contract," she added.

Montenegro currently produces no oil but initial data has indicated it might have the resources to cover its oil and gas needs. On March 12, officials announced that the first exploratory drilling would last up to six months at a site located 14 nautical miles offshore.

The Minister of Capital Investments, Mladen Bojanic, said his ministry would activate the energy projects that the former government started, which they assessed as good.

Bojanic said Montenegro could have significant benefits from oil exploration, as it will mean that the Montenegrin economy does not rely only on tourism.

The ministry urged environmental organisations and civic activists to join a dialogue, stressing that it aims to enforce strict environmental standards on this project.

"Our ministry will never stand for economic projects that are detrimental to the environment. The economy and ecology must go together, and the development of the economy will help protect the environment and vice versa," the ministry posted on Twitter.

In September 2016, Montenegro signed a contract with Italy's Eni and Russia's Novatek, awarding them a 30-year concession for oil and gas exploration in the Adriatic Sea.

The contract for four blocks covering 1,228 square kilometers was awarded in line with a 2014 tender, which initially covered a larger area of 3,000 square kilometers. Each of the partners has a 50-per-cent interest in the exploration licenses.

Eni and Novatek completed 3D seismic surveys at the end of 2018 and the collected data was processed the following year. Last year, geomechanical testing of soil was completed in order to determine the properties of the seabed.

Source: [balkaninsight.com](http://balkaninsight.com)

## Activists oppose oil drillings off the coast of Montenegro