

Europe is crying out for lithium. In the name of clean energy, the EU is promoting the lithium industry, funding, for example, a project by the *European Institute of Innovation and Technology*. That's the way it is all over the world, but I'm staying in the neighborhood here. "Clean" energy of lithium batteries, enthusiasm for the progress of electric vehicles, today's inevitable communication tools - computers, tablets, smartphones, in short, the magic of keyboards, as opposed to dirty and devastating technology of extracting lithium from the ground. Who will "win" - electric cars and magic keyboards or local environmental activists, who oppose the toxic exploitation of lithium? I have no doubt, unfortunately. *Pure* lithium enthusiasm will win.

That is why today it makes sense to focus on two topics: the so-called relocation of lithium mines in Europe and why (exactly) Rio Tinto in Serbia.

The main lithium resources in Europe are in Serbia (Jadar), Portugal, Spain, Finland and Austria. Smaller deposits are concentrated in France, in the valley of the Upper Rhine in Germany, in Cornwall in the southwest of England. Exploitation is planned or started by various mining companies. In Finland, it is *Keliber*, a company based in that country and with a plan to extract about 30% of reserves from the Rapasaari mine by 2024. In Portugal, the London-based *Savannah Resources* Corporation, which describes itself as the "lithium leader of Europe", plans to suck 175,000 tons of lithium from the Barroso deposit in northern Portugal. The Portuguese Minister of Ecology, however, suspended another project, in Montoalegre, which is being carried out by the company *LucoRecursos*, due to the unreliability of the company. In Germany, the preparatory work is being carried out by *Vulcan Energy Resources*, an EU affiliate company. In Cornwall, this work is done by *Cornish Lithium* and *Geothermal Engineering*, an English company. Rio Tinto fell to Serbia. According to the Rio Tinto website, Serbia is the only country in Europe where this company has a project for a lithium mine.

According to the Forbes report from August 2020, more electric vehicles are sold in Europe than in China. It is estimated that by 2030, Europe's needs for lithium will be twice as high as today's needs worldwide. At the moment, the European production of lithium hydroxide for batteries is zero, and 80 percent of the material is imported from China. The European Green Agenda is supposedly the biggest project of the European Commission, whose goal is to make Europe a climate-neutral, harmless continent by 2050. The code for that was found in lithium, the production of lithium batteries, electric vehicles and the strengthening of keyboard communication. That is why he enthusiastically advocates, mainly on the websites of companies that would open lithium mines, lithium self-sustainability of Europe and pan-European action for relocation of lithium mines, *which actually means that Europe must get*

*closer to Asia in terms of exploitation of this rare raw material.*

However, the lithium enthusiasm of European bureaucrats and the companies that support them did not meet with a response from European citizens, which would at least approximately exude enthusiasm. On the contrary.

Portugal is the country with the highest estimated lithium reserves in Europe. Citizens living in lithium sites have been resisting the opening of the mine for years. The already issued concession for the mine in Montalegre “will be annulled due to lack of professionalism”, the Portuguese Minister of Ecology announced at the end of April this year. The lack of professionalism is that *LucoRecursos* has submitted an incomplete study on the impact of mines on the environment. The Minister promised that the issued concession would be permanently annulled. The company’s reaction was cold: *it will be a great lawsuit*. The disputed project covers 825 hectares near a nature reserve, not far from the city. Prior to the minister’s announcement, the citizens offered strong resistance, explaining it by the future destruction of fertile land with a traditional way of cultivation, a serious threat to the source of drinking water, since most of the inhabitants of northern Portugal are supplied from there. Although the project has been suspended, local activists find the very idea of opening a lithium mine in the area shocking. The protests against the opening of the mine attracted the attention of all the citizens of Portugal, but the government did not pay attention to that for a while, it signed the contract, without even hearing the remarks of the activists and the local population. The company that was supposed to open the mine did not understand anything, it claimed that there was misinformation, and that *it was easier for people to believe that things would go wrong*. Apparently, this is the already adopted matrix of the lithium Bermuda triangle. The revolt of the affected citizens – the hypocritical silence of the authorities and the semi-secret signing of the contract – a mocking misunderstanding of the company. By the way, the Portuguese government has not given up on another, smaller project, which is being implemented by a somewhat more serious company.

The province of Extremadura in Spain was unlucky. Lithium reserves have been discovered in the middle of a protected nature park near the town of Cáceras, actually below.

*Technologia Extremena Del Litio* Group has a plan to build a surface mine and produce lithium hydroxide for batteries there. The nearest inhabited areas are less than a kilometer away from the site of the planned mine. Less than three kilometers away is the old town, on the *UNESCO* World Heritage List. It would probably be the only mine in the world in the immediate vicinity of a city of over 100,000 inhabitants. The area it would cover is an important European habitat for many bird species. It is richly forested. When a study on the impact of the mine on the environment was published on the website of the city of Cáceras,

which was made by the company that intends to open the mine, environmental activists demanded that the then mayor, otherwise a conservative, remove it. The mayor did not support this study, among other things, because it did not explain how the natural environment will be restored when 25 years of mine exploitation have passed. The residents of Cáceres initially believed that the European Commission was their ally, especially since Ursula von der Layen presented the EU Strategy for Biodiversity until 2030. But in the meantime, they learned new circumstances. In March 2020, the announcement of the Sydney Stock Exchange was published, stating that the EU was participating in the project in Cáceres. Not directly, but through the *European Institute of Innovation and Technology*, which is one of the EU agencies. Eco-activists then addressed the European Parliament with a request to stop the abuse of European institutions by a private company. The European Commissioner for Institutional Relations in the EU, a Slovak politician, addressed the public with a speech about “difficult truths”. In order to ensure the supply of strategic raw materials to Europe, there must be mines on its territory, but under the condition of the usual bureaucratic phrase – to *apply the highest environmental and social standards of protection*. After that, it turned out that the EU does not support the right of veto of local communities to build a lithium mine. Resistance from the community and activists continued. The current mayor, although a leftist, has the same attitude about the lithium mine as the previous conservative mayor – he actively opposes it. At this moment, the permit for the construction of the mine has not been issued yet, and the regional administration is in charge of it. According to the regional spatial plan, this protected area cannot be used for industrial purposes. But the company is confident that the mine will open.

These two examples are important because the citizens in Europe have so far offered the most organized resistance in the affected places.

In some places there is no resistance at all, e.g. he is not in Cornwall. But projects there have not yet come a long way.

This deadlock in which the EU finds itself – on the one hand, the green agenda, energy replacement, biodiversity, on the other, the dirty and devastating effect of the lithium mine on all that greenery – shows too many human limitations, that is. the predominance of practical politics over everyday bare life and health, and the habits of communities.

Indeed, does opposing the opening of a lithium mine mean opposing the inevitable progress that will overwhelm weak local communities? No, I believe not. Lithium and lithium batteries are not progress in themselves. Electric cars and renewable energy sources are not always as green as they seem. The production of raw materials such as lithium regularly destroys land, air, water, health and life of people, animals, plants, biodiversity as a value in

itself. Lithium is mainly exploited in Australia and Latin America, and most lithium batteries are produced in China. Exploitation and production destroy the environment as much as the use of fossil fuels. Cobalt is necessary for the stabilization of lithium batteries, and the richest reserves are in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Children in slave conditions also work in cobalt mines there. In China, according to investigative journalists, there are labor camps in which Uighur Muslims, in addition to meager wages, produce solar panels *for clean and renewable energy*. The by-product is silicone tetrachloride, which is not recycled in China, but poisons everything around it.

“New demands for clean energy can produce great damage, although their goal is to bring about good”, said Aimé Boulanger, director of the Responsible Mining Initiative, adding that this should not be allowed. And then, of course, the man becomes inventive and begins to deal with ideas about cleaner methods of lithium extraction and battery making. Which will take.

Rio Tinto is an old mining company, founded in 1873, on the banks of the Rio Tinto River in Andalusia. Today, it is one of the largest in the world, with two seats – in Melbourne and London. The river after which the company got its name, for the most part of the river flow, owes its dark red color to a high concentration of iron. History or legend has it that the first mines on the banks of the Rio Tinto began operating 3,000 years ago. The water in the river is extremely acidic, which has caused controversy about the cause, and it is probably attributable to the long exploitation of the banks, rich in rare metals.

The controversial chemical composition of river water is equal to the company's controversial history. She deserves the name she bears. The company's website reads a lot of self-promotion: the company declares itself as an ethical employer, a good neighbor, an environmentalist. “Sounds good. But in reality, the company's activities are in line with its past and obvious cooperation with fascist and racist regimes, more than with statements about policies to respect the community, employees and the environment”. There is almost no continent where Rio Tinto has left no devastating traces. In Europe: at the end of the 19th century, overheated ore in Spain released huge concentrations of sulfur; in that same country, in the 1930s, during the Frankish era, a copper mine was opened, order was maintained by the Phalangists, and complaints about the destruction of the environment were barely heard; in the late 1960s, as zinc exploitation began, an increased concentration of lead was found in the blood of miners in Avonmouth, England; in a uranium mine near Lake Eliot in Canada, miners were exposed to more radiation than allowed; in the early 1970s, the company successfully lobbied the U.S. Congress to change environmental regulations, despite opposition from then-President Jimmy Carter's administration, and

managed to open a molybdenum mine; the copper mine in South Africa has almost destroyed the surrounding flora and fauna in the national park; in Papua New Guinea, after twenty years of copper and gold mining at the Bougainville mine, the company has been accused of devastating people, animals and plants; in the Yukan Gorge, digging in the company's mines destroyed the ancient cave shelters of the Aborigines, for which Rio Tinto expressed *deep regret*. The history of Rio Tinto, in addition to these, has about twenty more devastating episodes. That is why it is one of the most notorious of its kind.

But that is not the end, it is just the beginning. There is a wealth of evidence, and few completed court proceedings on human and labor rights violations. The aforementioned residents of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea have filed a popular class action lawsuit with a federal court in the United States accusing Rio Tinto of crimes against humanity, racial discrimination and violation of internationally guaranteed environmental rights. At the Grasberg mine in Indonesia, Rio Tinto, together with an American company, exploited copper and gold, devastating the environment and plundering the workforce with miserable compensation. In 1996, the locals revolted en masse, destroyed part of the equipment and closed the mine for a few days. According to a report by Indonesia's National Human Rights Commission, the rebellion was quelled by Indonesian security forces, residents were killed at random, others were tortured, and some were declared missing. That is why the Norwegian government eliminated Rio Tinto from the government pension fund in 2008. And much, much more.

No wonder Rio Tinto is in Serbia. I don't know if he came to us himself, or if someone brought him, he seems to have been sniffing here since 2007. It doesn't matter anymore. Rio Tinto opens its first lithium mine in Europe in the Vučić era. It's like he's tailored for something like that. The president openly supports it, promising the production of lithium batteries, and perhaps the coveted electric car. Vučić, on the one hand, cannot do otherwise, even if he could. On the other hand, he has a pure and repeatedly seen authoritarian concept, with the idea of transforming it into an open dictatorship. Here, we know when and where Rio Tinto irreversibly devastated the environment. With the opening of a copper mine in Spain during the Frankish era. The phalanxes maintained order in the mine and suffocated the miners' strike in blood. Preventively, more and more bloodthirsty tabloids are doing that in Serbia. The media shackles with which Vučić tries to stifle the idea of free speech have countless historical examples. Slave labor exists in China today. Uyghur Muslims, it should be repeated, live miserably in labor camps there today, producing a poison that is slowly killing them. In Congo, children dig cobalt and die. Dual education is being introduced in our country as the first step towards the slave labor of

minors. Diapers are only worn in our authoritarian era as part of work clothes. All the world's worst experiences of a corrupt, oppressive and authoritarian character are applied and promoted by Vučić and his people. It is a conscious experiment *in vivo*, a product of collecting the worst social deviations. Being a citizen is the last barrier to the wild society that is emerging here before our eyes. So much is against the citizen – Vučić and his interesting and corrupt cohort, firm centralization and submissive city leaders, indifferent EU with mutually contradictory concepts, lobbyistically and financially powerful company, accustomed to cooperation with repressive regimes. But we still have us, as many others have had, seemingly quite weak, and yet they have managed to prevent the complete devastation and complete social savagery of their communities. We have to now.

Source: Peščanik