

Chinese companies announced in 2019 that 625 million dollars will be invested this year. The question is, under what conditions will the money enter Serbia, what will be its obligations, but also whether China will respect the already violated environmental standards in the host country. Chinese investments in Serbia were presented to the citizens as a development opportunity, and the technologies of this country as a section of the highway that should take the country into the future.

Serbian Finance Minister Sinisa Mali explained China's increased presence in Serbia as the need to diversify the economy, and projects such as the sale of RTB Bor and Smederevo Ironworks were presented as a lifeline for stumbled giants "the state cannot manage." In Zrenjanin, a city that has not had drinking water for decades due to pollution, the Chinese company Linglong plans to open a tire factory, and the value of the investment is around one billion dollars. The plan is for the factory to produce about 13 million tires a year, and according to the representatives of environmental associations, the environmental impact assessment has not been done yet.

"We have a hunch that the project is being" split "into smaller parts in order to avoid an environmental impact study. They even divided the production facilities into two parts in order to reduce the potential impact. Namely, in the first part, they say how they will produce rubber bands, and in the second, how they will make tires from these tapes, as if it is a separate production process ", says the program director of RERI, Mirko Popović.

A better quality country was donated

He reminds that the Republic of Serbia donated 100 hectares of the highest quality land to Linglong, and that the project was declared a project of national importance based on the conclusion of the Government of Serbia.

"We asked for that Conclusion, to see how the factory becomes a project of national importance, but we did not get it. At the public debate, on the occasion of the construction of the factory, 215 comments were sent by individuals and associations. They were all rejected in one sentence without explanation ", states Popovic.

As he further states, the tire factory is by definition a major polluter, and according to the Law of the Republic of Serbia, the investor had to obtain an integrated permit before the construction of the factory began, which was not done.

According to Popovic, an additional problem is that in a city where there is no drinking water for citizens, a large consumer will be connected to the water supply, but also to the sewerage and gas network, which will certainly additionally affect the supply.

"We are also concerned that experience has shown that Chinese investors mostly bring

labor from China, so the question is how many of the announced 2,500 jobs will be given to the citizens of Serbia,” Popovic concludes.

Multiple times the pollution

The example of the sale of the mining and smelting basin Bor, where after the takeover of the mine by the company Zidjin, pollution was detected many times higher than allowed, shows that Chinese investments often lead to a bright future in the bright future, as announced.

“Pollution measuring instruments in Bor showed pollution 20 and even up to 100 times higher than allowed, when it comes to PM particles. Zinc, arsenic and lead were also several tens of times more than allowed”, claims for Al Jazeera Balkans, vice president of the association of citizens from Bor” There is a choice”, Violeta Stojcic.

The company Zidjin has already been sued for pollution in Bor, and the defense that the bad ecological situation was “found on the ground”, the citizens say, does not stand.

“It is no secret that the pollution started when RTB Bor was taken over. A few years before that, the pollution was reduced to some normal measures, but it started again and all the measuring stations for monitoring the pollution show that”, states Stojcic and adds that the situation is especially dramatic in the surrounding villages where due to the terrain configuration and air flow to the environment.

“When the state sold RTB Bor, the investor took over not only the mine, but also the hotels, the spa, everything that was part of RTB Bor. In return, the state of Serbia has committed itself that all environmental damage will not be collected from Zidjin, but will be regulated by the state itself”, says Stojcic.

“In the morning and when it gets dark, nothing can be seen from the smog. It is especially difficult during autumn and winter.”

Smederevo steel plant is a source of pollution

During the winter, pollution with both PM 10 and PM 2.5 particles was repeatedly detected in Bor. These are particles ranging in size from 10 to 2.5 or less than 2.5 nanometers. Their size allows them to reach the smallest blood vessels in the lungs and even to spread throughout the body through the bloodstream.

The deposition of these nanoparticles in the lungs leads to narrowing of the alveoli, difficulty breathing, decreased oxygen exchange in the blood and, with prolonged exposure, bronchitis and asthma. Recent research has shown that coronavirus is more easily transmitted in an environment that has an impermissible concentration of PM 2.5 and PM

10 particles in the air.

However, Bor is not the only city that has problems with PM particles and pollution in Serbia. The Smederevo steel plant, which Serbia sold to the Chinese company Hbis, having previously taken over the debts and handed over the infrastructure, is another source of pollution.

“When Hbis came to Smederevo in 2016, according to his own words, he found chaos. The system of filters that purify the air from the factory did not work because the state, the previous owner, did not maintain it for four years”, says Kolja Krstic from the Smederevo environmental association” Tvrđava “for Al Jazeera Balkans.

“However, since then, the factory has multiplied production and the filters have not been replaced. As the production grew, so did the pollution”, says Krstic and adds that the functionality of the filter decreased even more during those years.

Illegal tailings

The Smederevo region, which is a wine and fruit region, is often covered with a thin layer of red dust.

“Red dust practically covered some places in the vicinity of Smederevo, it is the so-called steel dust. Although we have been told that this problem will be solved, nothing has been done so far. The company promised us that they would replace the filters in July”, says Krstic.

What is especially worrying, says Krstic, are the illegal tailings in the surrounding villages, where the investor disposes of the slag that remains after the production process.

“There are no barriers on these tailings that protect from spills, nothing has been done according to environmental regulations. But that is what is seen. What is not visible is the pollution with PM particles, which was also detected in our city.”

“PM 2.5 particle pollution is 4-5 times higher than allowed. We addressed the state but nothing was done. We addressed the company and offered some solutions, but again we came across a wall of silence. “Obviously, this is a complex problem, but it must be solved,” Krstic concluded.

Serbia, which is a candidate for the EU, will have to pay special attention in the accession negotiations to Chapter 27, the one that concerns ecology. Namely, according to the estimates of the members of the EU Convention, which advises and monitors the path to the EU, it will take about seven billion dollars for Serbia to reach EU environmental standards and repair the already existing damage.

Source: balkans.aljazeera.net

Chinese investments in Serbia are potential environmental bombs