

Due to the fact that the Bosnian Mine and Thermal Power Plant (RITA) Gacko in the last five years without any public bidding awarded Optima Group d.o.o. Banja Luka, the procurement of diesel fuel worth 29.1 million convertible marks (about 14.5 million euros) Transparency International (TI) filed a criminal complaint with the Republika Srpska (RS) Prosecutor's Office against the company's management in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

The contracts, as explained by TI, were awarded through a negotiated procedure that can be applied only in exceptional cases prescribed by the Law on Public Procurement of BiH. The Complaints Office, TI, and the entity auditors have repeatedly warned that the management of the Gacko Mine and Thermal Power Plant in southeastern BiH favors a particular company.

The management of RITA Gacko did not answer the question of Radio Free Europe (RFE) why it has been procuring diesel fuel exclusively from the Optima Group for the last five years, through a negotiated procedure, as well as the reasons for the "extreme urgency caused by unforeseen events". states in contracts with Optima Group.

The founder of Optima Group is the Russian company NeftegazinKor with a 100% share in the share capital of the company. The majority owner of NeftegazinKor is the Russian state company Zarubezhneft with its headquarters in Moscow, which operates under the trademark "Nestro". Optima Group is engaged in the wholesale of petroleum products produced in the Brod Oil Refinery and oils and lubricants produced in the Modriča Oil Refinery, while it retails petroleum products and oils and lubricants through the Nestro Petrol retail network. The website of the Optima Group states that it is the largest oil company in BiH and the only company that, as it says, has a complete business system that includes: procurement of crude oil, processing and production of petroleum products, wholesale, distribution, and placement of petroleum products in retail segment through the network of Nestro gas stations. This company did not answer the question of RSE whether in the last five years they concluded all contracts with the company RITA Gacko exclusively through negotiation procedures.

### **In five years, no open fuel procurement procedure**

Damjan Ožegović from TI says for Radio Free Europe that this organization, following the public procurement procedures in Rudnik and the Gacko thermal power plant, noticed that five years ago they failed to carry out any open procedure for the procurement of diesel fuel to the end.

"What happens. They announce or announce a public procurement, one of the bidders complains, the procedure is annulled and they continue to procure fuel from one and the

same bidder through negotiation procedures, without publishing a notice, and it is always the one who did not complain – there are always two or three bidders”, explains Ožegović. One of the providers of diesel fuel that has participated in almost all tenders announced by RITA Gacko in the last five years is Hifa petrol d.o.o. Sarajevo. They complained several times about the public procurement procedure, and the Office for Review of Complaints accepted their remarks.

“Optima and Hifa apply for an open procedure, Hifa complains that the tender documentation is not always in accordance with the Law, the Complaints Review Office cancels the procedure and then Optima is divided into a negotiated procedure, where Hifa is not invited to negotiate. So, it is the least transparent procedure where they choose one bidder to whom they will award the contract”, explains Ožegović.

### **Where does BiH import oil from?**

According to the BiH Statistics Agency, petroleum products account for more than 28 percent of total energy consumption in BiH. Most of it is consumed in traffic, and all oil on the BiH market comes from imports. Data from the Indirect Taxation Authority show that from 2009 to 2019, about nine million and 600 thousand tons of crude oil and nine million and 450 thousand tons of refined oil and oil derivatives were imported to BiH. When it comes to the import of crude oil, the data show that as much as 98 percent is imported from Russia, while other countries account for only two percent.

In 2008, NeftGazinKor founded the company Optima Group in Banja Luka, through which it procures raw derivatives, processes and produces them, and sells them.

In the Brod Refinery, in October 2018, there was a major accident and fire in which one worker lost his life, while ten were injured. The investigation into this explosion has not yet been completed, and production at the Refinery has not been launched to date.

According to the data obtained by the Capital.ba portal, the Optima Group had an accumulated loss of 1.4 billion convertible marks (around 1.2 billion euros) in 2019.

Optima Group, which is owned by the Russian Neftegazinkor, and within which the entire RS oil industry operates, has been making millions in losses for years, and the latest financial reports have shown how much is really a minus for this and other companies from the group.

The accumulated loss of the gas station chain “Nestro Petrol”, which operates within this group, in 2020 amounted to 7.3 million convertible marks. The key reasons for the accumulation of debt in the oil sector are the insufficient amount of oil and oil derivatives produced and the high transport costs due to the lack of infrastructure. According to the

available audit reports, the ability of these companies to continue their business depends on the continuous financial support of the parent company, which is the Russian Zarubezhneft.  
Source: [slobodnaevropa.org](http://slobodnaevropa.org)