

Part of the public in our country still resents the plan of the multinational corporation to open a lithium mine in the Jadar Valley

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Although President Aleksandar Vučić said at the beginning of the year that he was “dying of laughter” due to the undisguised resistance of the public in Serbia to the plans of the Anglo-Australian corporation Rio Tinto to open a lithium mine and a metal processing complex in the Jadar Valley, several top scenarios are being considered, having in mind the unenviable reputation of the mentioned company. According to unofficial information from Demostat, it should not be ruled out that official Belgrade may abandon the project due to citizens’ concerns that the environment and human health will be polluted, or that another partner will be involved instead of Rio Tinto, “which is not so compromised internally but and internationally”.

It is often claimed that the whole process of presenting the idea of starting with the exploitation of “jadarite” ore (a combination of lithium and boron, which Rio Tinto discovered in 2004 while exploring the area of Western Serbia), was “clumsy, unprofessional and non-transparent”, so currently represents one of the most unpopular topics in Serbia. As it is explained: “The inconsistent messages sent so far on this topic by the President of the Republic, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić and representatives of Rio Tinto itself, as well as the politicization of this issue by almost all actors on the domestic scene, have led to widespread aversion to the project. and it is believed that Rio Tint will be widely discussed during the upcoming election campaign.” Since it has long been known that Aleksandar Vučić is trying to achieve the most convincing victory in the race for a new presidential mandate, ie that he does not want to lose a single vote because of Rio Tinto, it is possible that a more suitable world company will be found. In that context, it is speculated that some German and Chinese corporations are “in the game”.

It is believed that the company Rio Tinto was wrong to place the video on all televisions with national frequencies in our country. Marketing experts estimate that it is “the cheapest propaganda, which additionally strengthens the negative attitudes towards this project, and also increases the number of opponents of Rio Tinto.”

As for Chinese companies, it is speculated that many of them are interested in the exploitation of jadarite because the production of lithium batteries, which are used, among

other things, for electric cars, is massive in that country. To illustrate, it is estimated that about 80 percent of lithium is imported to the Chinese market. "If the Serbian authorities enter into negotiations to find an alternative to Rio Tinto, German and Chinese companies could offer to close the entire production cycle. This means that both of them have the opportunity to invest in addition to the mine in the factory of lithium batteries and plants for the production of electric cars that use such batteries ", notes the source of Demostat. Chinese companies already own numerous lithium mines in Australia and South America, which is why the West considers Beijing the most competitive in the race for lithium. Among other things, the European Union does not hide that it is seriously counting on the largest possible production of electric vehicles in order to achieve the ambitious goals of preserving the environment. Last year, the EU included lithium on the list of key raw materials for the "green agenda", and it is estimated that Europe will need as much as 18 times more lithium by 2030 compared to the current situation, and 60 times more by 2050. Moreover, prestigious car companies such as Ford, Volkswagen, BMW, Mercedes and Jaguar are increasingly launching models with electric motors on the market, but batteries are still a limiting factor, as existing lithium quantities cannot meet production needs. When it comes to potential partners from Germany for the lithium exploitation project in Serbia, it is considered that the capabilities of the German-Australian company Vulcan Energy Resources (VUL.AX) should not be underestimated. According to German media reports, VUL.AX claims that they can provide carbon-neutral lithium (which would mean reducing carbon emissions as much as possible). The stated goal, it is claimed, can be achieved if geothermal energy is used during exploitation. Research in this segment is largely conducted by the German company EnBW (EBKG.DE).

Source: demostat.rs