

For decades, Nazi and Communist regimes ruled Romania, kept her people impoverished and exploited her resources - tearing vast mineral wealth from her mountains, with little regard for worker safety, people's health or the environment. When the Soviet Empire collapsed, Romania eagerly embraced a more hopeful future and embarked on a course to join the European Union.

Life has improved for many, especially in cities like Bucharest. But Romania remains one of the EU's poorest nations, and valleys that once echoed with the shouts of workers and roar of heavy equipment are now silent. Over 300,000 miners are jobless. Their villages have descended into squalor, misery and despondency that have no historic parallel. Rosia Montana is one such place. This Transylvanian town hosts a massive open-pit mine, enormous waste dumps and, beneath them, hundreds of tunnels. The legacy of 2000 years of mining - the most damaging of which occurred under Ceaucescu - they leach toxic chemicals into local streams that now are red-orange from cadmium and contain 110 times the EU's legal limit of zinc, 64 times its iron limit, and three times the limit for arsenic, the most dangerous chemical on the US government's toxic substances list.

Homes and buildings are crumbling, two-thirds of them lack indoor toilets and running water, and 70% of the workers are unemployed. Families survive on wild berries, subsistence farming in rocky, acidic soil, welfare, and often less than US\$2 a day. Few own a car. Frigid winters are warmed only by wood stoves. Malnutrition and ill health are constant problems. The dentist serves as the area's only doctor.

Unlike most former mining towns, however, Rosia has one last chance. Gabriel Resources wants to reopen the mine, to tease out nearly 2,000 tons of gold and silver that the antiquated methods of bygone eras could not extract.

In the process, the Canadian company would spend millions to erase the horrific environmental legacy, restore the land to forests, pastures and grasslands, and leave the alpine waters sparkling. All at no cost to the Romanian government, which cannot afford to clean up the mess itself.

Gabriel would also create high-paying jobs, revitalize the community, protect and restore Rosia's most valuable churches and buildings in a special historic zone, build a modern village with homes in traditional Romanian styles, save Roman and other archeological treasures in a museum - and provide precious metals for jewelry, computers and other marvels. (The company has already spent over US\$200 million; its US\$10-million expenditure thus far on archeology is 40 times the Romanian Culture Ministry's annual budget between 1990 and 2003.)

Over a 29-year period, the project would create 1,200 construction jobs, more than 600

mining jobs, and 6,000 indirect jobs in service sectors. It would inject US\$2.5 billion into the local and Romanian economy, and leave Rosia Montana with a modern infrastructure: roads, electricity, internet, safe running water, a new school and clinic, and dozens of new businesses that will sustain a strong economy long after the mine is gone. Of course, other ore bodies might be discovered, prolonging the area's mining economy for decades. The museum, clean environment, and new hotels and restaurants will attract tourists who have never before had a reason to visit this cold, polluted, inhospitable region.

No wonder the mayor strongly supports the new mine and was re-elected with over 80% of the vote. If the project moves forward, miracles will happen. If it dies, the land and water will remain polluted, because Romania cannot afford to clean it up. More young people will leave, the elderly will be abandoned, and investors will think twice about coming to Romania.

But none of this matters to the international anti-mining movement. Almost the moment the plan was announced, foreign NGOs (non-governmental organizations) launched a local opposition group (Alburnus Maior) and well-financed campaign to stop the project - using techniques they had refined in countless actions across North and South America, Asia and Africa.

The region is idyllic, they say - perfect for farming and tourism. The people love their quaint homes and prefer horse-drawn carts over automobiles. Gabriel would uproot families, destroy Rosia's churches and landmarks, and pollute the pristine environment. The people don't want these temporary jobs. They'd rather pick mushrooms and carve wood figurines. These and other absurd lies are chronicled in the documentary film "Mine Your Own Business." Residents can hardly imagine anyone would believe them. But websites, awards from celebrities and like-minded pressure groups, and a constant flow of spurious allegations have generated opposition all over Europe. A recent PBS television pseudo-documentary (funded by Greenpeace) is carrying their anti-mining battle to US audiences. The latest fabrication attacks the proposed use of cyanide to recover the precious metals. The NGOs claim the method is dangerous and used only in destitute Third World countries. They have persuaded Romanian legislators to introduce laws banning the chemical - and thus scuttling the project and future mining prospects.

Actually, cyanide is produced by bacteria and fungi, and found in almonds, coffee and other foods. Over 400 modern mines in the US, EU, Canada, Australia and many other nations use it to extract gold and silver. Because it degrades quickly and naturally, and does not involve acids or heavy metals, it is safer for workers and the environment than alternative methods. Indeed, it is far less toxic than automobile exhaust or the arsenic and other chemicals that

now foul Rosia Montana's water.

Gabriel Resources - the only EU-licensed company to sign the International Cyanide Management Code - plans to use it in a state-of-the-art system that will safely recycle the chemical repeatedly and send nearly cyanide-free water into a lined waste facility. The system is designed so that even major storms will not release dangerous chemicals into the environment - a huge difference from the risky, antiquated system that caused the Baia Mare overflow.

The radical NGOs simply hate mining, don't live in the village, have no compassion for these families, and are under no legal obligation to be honest, transparent or accountable for the consequences of their actions. As one foreign activist said in an email:

"Why should any NGO come forward with alternative projects? That is not the job of civil society. We are not a humanitarian organization, but a militant environmental NGO. If the whole community is in favor of the project, we simply put it on the list of our enemies." They will spend millions to stop development, but not one cent on poor people or the environment. They destroy thousands of jobs, but create no new ones. When someone asked the Alburnus Maior president where his money comes from, he said "It's not your business!" George Soros and his Soros Foundation Romania appear to be the principal money behind this campaign. Not only is this support anti-poor, anti-environment and anti-Romania. It's also hypocritical, because Soros has made millions from mining operations that use cyanide - and a silver mine that relocated an entire village. But stopping Gabriel and other Western corporations could certainly benefit his political agenda and provide opportunities to profit from fluctuations in metals prices caused by restrictions on mining in the face of surging demand to meet the needs of new technologies and developing economies.

It also promotes Hungary's desire to assert influence over lands that once were part of its empire, or at least prevent those regions from becoming economic competitors. That desire may explain why its government issued a press release condemning the project, almost immediately after it had submitted 122 questions about the project, but before it had received a single answer.

Twenty-one Romanian NGOs visited Rosia Montana and met with the people and company. Eighteen of them changed their minds and now support the project. The radical activists refuse to have any dialogue.

Draped in gold, actress Vanessa Redgrave used a Cluj-Napoca film festival to proclaim her opposition to the mine. When the people of Rosia Montana wrote her a letter - asking "Where will we go? How will we live?" - she responded with stony, callous silence. Wealthy San Francisco insurance magnate Richard Goldman gave Swiss-British Stephanie Roth

US\$125,000 for leading the project's opposition. He has also given nearly US\$1-million to radical anti-insecticide groups that help perpetuate malaria, misery and childhood death in Africa.

But what possible reason can the Royal Society, Catholic Church, news media and Royal Family of Romania have for opposing this project? Why do they want to ensure that thousands of their own people remain unemployed, living in squalid homes and sentenced to suffer in one of Romania's most polluted areas? Why do they want to give George Soros and Hungary veto power over Romania's mining industry and thousands of jobs and families? Would Princess Margareta or any of the journalists, Church leaders or Society elites want to live even one winter in this "paradise" they want to "save"? Do they hate mining with enough passion to give up its benefits: their fine homes, jewelry, computers, cars and jet travel - none of which are possible without mining? Will Redgrave, Roth, Soros, Goldman and other project opponents do likewise? Will the anti-cyanide legislators?

Rather than aligning with the foreign militants, Romanian legislators, journalists, celebrities and citizens should visit the village, strip mines, streams and waste heaps, and speak with the people of Rosia Montana and Gabriel Resources. If there is a need for legislation, it is for laws that compel anti-development NGOs - and those that bankroll them - to abide by basic rules for honesty, transparency and accountability that every decent organization should be happy to follow.

Most important, they should let the people of Rosia Montana decide their own future - without lies and pressure from foreign activists. If that future includes this mining project, it will give Rosia and the entire nation an opportunity to rehabilitate this ecological disaster, preserve the best of their cultural heritage, and become healthy, modern and prosperous. Together, these actions would help ensure that a half-century of oppression by totalitarians is not followed by oppression at the hands of unaccountable eco-imperialists.

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