

Europe wants to get rid of dependence on imported raw materials, and lithium has one of the key roles in that, but the exploitation of that metal in many countries is met with resistance from the population, writes the German “Handelsblatt”.

In an extensive article mainly about the struggle of local authorities and residents of Cáceres in southwestern Spain against the opening of lithium mines near their city, the economic-political paper writes that this is no exception and that in other parts of Europe where lithium has been discovered the curses and blessings “of that revelation.

“For example in Portugal, Great Britain and Serbia. The fact is: This light metal plays an important role in the fight against climate change, because it is one of the most important raw materials for the production of batteries, not only for smartphones, laptops, but above all for electric cars”, the diary writes.

“Handelsblatt”, however, points out that “European reserves on a global scale are relatively modest, and the population’s concern for the environment is great, which could endanger exploitation”, the Euractive Serbia portal reported.

As an example, the daily cites Rio Tinto’s plans for a high-quality lithium deposit in the Jadar River Valley, but also claims by NGOs that it could cause “irreparable damage to water, land, air and people”. The paper writes that the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts also asked the Government of Serbia to consider the irreparable consequences.

Also, the daily states that civic initiatives accuse the Government of Serbia of selling lithium in the future, since Rio Tinto will earn four billion euros in the first ten years of exploitation, and the state of Serbia only 300 million.

“They believe that it would be better for Serbia, like Bolivia, to exploit the ore through a state-owned company and thus finance the highest environmental standards and at the same time earn more”, the daily writes.

According to the research of the American Geological Institute USGS, Bolivia has more than 26.5 percent in Bolivia, which is the largest part of the total world lithium reserve, estimated at 79.4 million tons.

Argentina has about 24.3 percent and Chile 12.1 percent. According to those data, Serbia has about 1.2 million tons of that light metal at its disposal with 1.5 percent of the total world reserves. 3.4% of the world’s reserves are in Germany, and 1.6% in the Czech Republic, Handelsblatt writes.

The paper states that Europe wants to become more independent from the import of raw materials in important areas, and reminds that lithium has so far been mainly imported from China, since it has the largest refinery capacities for extracting lithium from ore mainly mined in South America.

“And the needs are huge. According to the European Commission, Europe will need 60 times more lithium for batteries and electric cars in 2050 than today. Demand has already raised prices. A ton of lithium carbonate, which is good enough to produce batteries, now costs in “Europe \$ 12,500 - 30 percent more than at the beginning of the year”, the paper said.

“Countries where there is lithium hope that they will not only exploit it, but that they will also attract the production of battery cells, car batteries, and as a final step the production of electric cars”, the paper writes, citing Prime Minister Ana Brnabic’s words that Serbia will not allow the export of raw lithium, but only semi-finished products or batteries. According to the diary, the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, “dreams of a factory of batteries and electric cars in Serbia” and hopes that he will even attract German car manufacturers to the country. The diary reports Vučić’s words that it would be “a shame not to make anything out of that lithium”.

“However, many parts of Europe hope that due to the lithium deposits, they can become places for the production of batteries, and that is a strategic area of European policy”, the article reads.

“We have already made the decision to exploit lithium only if we can bring the next phase in the chain of creating new value”, Handelsblatt and Portuguese Economy Minister Pedro Siza Vieira told Handelsblatt. This includes refining lithium and producing battery cells, or whole batteries in Portugal.

A similar “renaissance” of the lithium deposits discovered in 2017 is expected by the English traditional mining region of Cornwall”. And the British government hopes to bring the whole chain of creating new value in the field of electric cars into the country”, Handelsblatt writes.

However, in the Spanish city of Cáceres, the lithium exploitation project was “put on ice” due to the opposition of the local authorities and the population.

“A lithium mine will never be built here”, said Caceres Mayor Luis Salaja. The 100,000-strong city is located in the Estramadura region of southwestern Spain. It is one of the poorest parts of the country. Youth unemployment is 56 percent. delight that the Australian mining company Infiniti Lithium, after test drilling, believes that it is one of the largest deposits in Europe - despite all the promises”, Handelsblatt writes.