

On its website, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development claims to be unique among development banks in that it does not finance coal-fired power plants due to their environmental impact. It is further stated that in 2018, 42% of its investments had a low environmental risk, in line with the climate goals set by the Paris Agreement.

In addition to this, eight months ago, EBRD website published news with a title “EBRD and a Group of Global Cities To Increase Resources for Urban Greenery”. The article explains how the bank intends to achieve it.

“The EBRD’s special business model for green cities includes direct engagement of local governments and local businesses, involving the private sector in the financing and operations of the infrastructure whenever possible.”

However, considering EBRD’s connection to Euromax Resources regarding the Ilovica-Stuka mine, advocating green cities and a clean environment looks like a joke, or maybe it does not apply to peripheral countries such as Macedonia. In December 2014, EBRD became the owner of 19.99% of the share capital in the Canadian-British company Euromax. Thus, EBRD doubles as a creditor and a shareholder of the Ilovica-Stuka mine.

While investing or giving loans at favorable rates to other projects in Macedonia and elsewhere in the Balkans, the EBRD aims to make a profit through its co-ownership in Euromax, as any other investing company. Euromax CEO Steve Sharp even says the EBRD offers “solid support” for this project, despite of the fact that the representatives of the EBRD showcases the project as a good help for Macedonian citizens.

“The project will enhance further development of Macedonian economy and bring innovations at the same time. EBRD is proud to work with new private investors and diversify market opportunities,” said Anca Ioana Ionescu, Head of the EBRD office in Skopje immediately after EBRD became part of Euromax in 2014.”

On the other hand, Euromax uses the EBRD’s involvement in the company as a guarantee that the highest standards will be met in the environmental protection and public health. Representatives of the EBRD, more precisely the spokeswoman of Bank, Viktorija Quartly, have surely confirmed this.

“We have been on the spot twice to assess environmental and social aspects and to grasp the current activities of the company. Based on this, we can conclude that the project is fully in line with our requirements, it has been designed and has been developing accordingly. The EBRD requirement is well understood and approved by the company,” Quartly said in 2016.

However, the accident that happened at the mine in Romania, the closure of a similar mine in Trn in Bulgaria, the opportunism of the Macedonian oligarchs, the bias and servility of

the political elite; the general relation of global capital to countries such as Macedonia, that involves violation of constitutional order and corrupt institutions when profits of powerful countries are at stake, leaves little hope that the sixth highest dam on the planet at the hydroelectric power plant, 267 meters high, will survive at the Ilovica-Stuka mine, or that other aspects of the mines will be safe, as the EBRD claims.

Controversial EBRD projects are not new to Macedonia

An additional reason not to believe in the professionalism and objectivity of the EBRD is its history of controversial projects in Macedonia.

In 2011, the EBRD approved a loan to ELEM in the amount of 65 million euros for the construction of the Boskov Bridge dam, which was supposed to be part of the hydroelectric power plant in Mavrov. However, pursuant to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, the Committee of the Council of Europe requested an immediate termination of the project, because the planned dam threatened the complex biodiversity in this area, and its importance as a reproductive area for the Balkan lynx, one of the most endangered mammals in Europe. In January 2017, the EBRD canceled the loan. In the second case, in 2015, the EBRD acted as the investor of the Ohrid-Pestani highway. In order to construct the highway, the elimination of the existing protection level of the most vulnerable area of the Galicica National Park was planned, since the area of the proposed project included 324.6 hectares, out of which 310.5 hectares were in the protected area of the National Park. However, in July 2017, UNESCO called for abandoning of the planned route. Six months later, as in the previous case, the Government of Macedonia canceled the project and reallocated the money for other infrastructure projects.

These examples clearly show that the EBRD is often not guided by democratic principles, has no understanding for the needs of the local population, the environment and sustainable development, and finally - being managed by 70 countries does not necessarily mean that it involves more humanity or solidarity.

After the fiasco with the dam in the Mavrovo and the Galicica National Park, the Ilovica-Stuka mine is about to face the same fate. Neither Council of Europe nor UNESCO are there to react, so the inhabitants of the Strumica region have no choice but to fight against the so-called mine of death, as it is an antithesis to the idea of an environmentally friendly and sustainable economic development.

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