

After the four-hour consultations on the Ilovica-Stuka Mine Copper- Gold Project, held in the city of Strumica, chaired by Macedonia PM Zoran Zaev, with the participation of competent ministry representatives, city mayor, local government representatives, civil society, experts and representatives of the concessioner, Euromax Resources Ltd, the government has issued a statement.

In order to reduce environmental risks and concerns of the locals, Euromax will not use neither cyanide nor sulfuric acid, but 'less harmful chemicals', and an independent supervisory body will be established, with a goal to check every step in the coming phases. "Economic parameters, which have also been checked with a great deal of attention, show that the investment and business activity of the mine will comprise 3% of Macedonia's GDP, providing tax income in the amount of 24 million euros annually, contributing 500 direct and 2,700 indirect job openings for this region", reads the statement.

Kostadin Ristomanov from the Eco Valley Association declared for Voice of America that even though the meeting had a satisfactory content owing to PM Zaev, the government statement shocked him.

„The previous government, ruled by MNRO-DPMNE, was untouchable regarding mines and environmental problems, unlike then opposition, i.e. the current government, who encouraged us saying that the 'mines in agricultural areas are preposterous'. We trusted them. All the more so because at the meeting, we voiced our doubts and concerns, that would have been taken into account by any government that cares about the environment and health of its citizens, and any such government would have revoked the concession. At the meeting, neither the members of Mining and Geology Institute from Stip and Civil Engineering Faculty from Skopje, nor the representatives of EBRD and Euromax had answers to our questions, while PM Zaev proposed a conclusion according to which two sides expressed reasoned opinions with consultations to be continued in August", said Ristomanov.

"However, according to the government statement, meeting participants allegedly agreed on establishing some kind of a supervisory body, implying that we, environmentalists, are also in favor of proceeding with the opening of the mine. We are well aware that the answers to all of the questions that we asked are negative i.e., if Euromax had submitted the entire documentation for operation permit on time, in July 2016; if the resources have been allocated for compensation of forests to be cut down owing to the mine, in the amount of 12-13 million euros; if the concessioner has prepared an updated basic design for the project. Hence, we announce we will make a protest march and a blockade of the road Strumica - Novo selo and the border crossing towards Bulgaria, as well as three more

border crossings, together with environmentalists from Gevgelija, Valandovo, Dojran and Bogdanac“, says Ristomanov announcing he will press charges against the responsible persons who violated the law in 2016, when the concessioner filed an application for permit. Activists fiercely criticize the government that it gave the green light to “start a genocide in the southeast region”.

Healthy Valley Organization from Strumica has also declared that it would not participate in any sort of supervisory body for the mining operations, as it does not agree to the opening of the mine in the first place.

According to this organization, the government statement is misleading, as there was no agreement regarding participation in a body supporting the opening of the mine. It declared that it would never have a common cause with its 'prospective grave-digger', Euromax. “Our unequivocal, sole and unchangeable goal is that Ilovica-Stuka Mine never opens. We will never give up this goal, at any cost, as we emphasized many times before. Both government and Euromax, and hopefully the public, will finally realize that we are not fighting for any personal interests or material gains, but to stop the greatest danger in Strumica’s history - the death mine Ilovica-Stuka”, stated the organization.

Source: factor.mk