

Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev has finally given way to the strong pressure from activists and opponents of mining projects in the southeast. Two days ago he officially confirmed that a decision was made to unilaterally terminate the agreement on the construction of the Kazandol mine. "Citizens' health is more important than the health of any private company," the prime minister said on a press conference. When we last wrote about the struggle of the Macedonian southeast for an ecologically safe and healthy environment, just a month ago, it was still uncertain how the future of the settlement and the municipalities around Kazandol would look.

Since 2012, the government has allowed over 370 concessions to geological exploration and exploitation of sources of mineral water, limestone, marble, coal, copper and gold, etc., of which 86 concessions relate to mines. Research permits were quickly (and non-transparent) transformed into exploitation licenses, and works at the Kazandol site, which were to become a copper, silver, and gold mine, were until recently in full swing.

However, the citizens of the Macedonian Southeast, aware of the dangers of such projects, wrecked because they did not have the opportunity to decide when the concessions were awarded, have been resisting for a long time. Educational gatherings and protests were organized, the Stop for Kazandol initiative was launched, followed by local referendums where 40,000 voters (98% of respondents) voted against the opening of the mines. In addition, the contract between the state and the concessionaire was on the hottest legs because the investor failed to fulfill the obligations he had to perform within the set deadline.

Prime Minister Zaev, who has been working on creating a positive atmosphere for investors since the beginning of his mandate, was initially not interested in closing down the works and closing Kazandol. Since he said in a press that he is in favor of "both for economic growth and for citizens' health," he remains to monitor how it will go with each other. Not only does the unresolved issue of other concessions remain, but there are also a whole series of problems that endanger the health of Macedonians, and for which the government has not offered any solution - from polluted air or water in certain places, to the end of the health system in worse condition.