

At a press conference held on July 23, Macedonian Mining Association Chairman Nikolajco Nikolov talked about the amendments proposed in the Bill on Amendments to the Law on Mineral Resources, submitted by a group of MPs. According to him, the bill is vague, selective and limited in its effect, and in case it gets adopted, may prove to be detrimental to the mining sector.

The representatives of the Macedonian Mining Association held a meeting earlier this year with members of the Committee on Economic Issues, where they voiced their concerns and commented on the Bill. However, the Bill, only slightly changed by amendments of the Committee on Economic Issues, has been put on the agenda again and is currently awaiting adoption according to a shortened procedure. According to well-informed sources from the Association, the Ministry of Economy has not been acquainted with the new bill, nor has it been consulted.

The Law on Mineral Resources is a complex law, whose amendments require a broad public discussion, not adoption according to a shortened procedure, comments Nikolov.

Article 1 of the Bill, amending the Article 36 of the Law on Mineral Resources, stipulates that the concession to exploit mineral resources shall not be awarded for the methods including leaching or floatation of metallic mineral resources using cyanide or sulfuric acid in open cast mines. The exceptions would be concessions to exploit mineral resources in the existing mines.

According to the companies involved, the bill is confusing and vague. It remains unclear how to make a distinction between the ore obtained from an open cast mine and the ore from a shaft mine. Besides, even though the proposed article stipulates that concessions to exploit metallic mineral resources in the existing mines make an exception, the Association emphasized that in order for the existing mines to survive and develop further, it is necessary to expand concessions, implying that this provision will inevitably apply in such cases. Hence the opinion that such approach is selective in its effect and incompetent, as it leaves unclear how the proposed amendment could attain its supposed goal, i.e. environment protection.

At the same time, Article 3 of the Bill stipulates that in addition to the request for concession to exploit mineral resources, the investor is to submit a bank guarantee of a financial deposit in case of the harmful impact to the environment. According to the Association, if this bill is adopted, it will additionally complicate the situation in the mining sector, owing to too broad formulation, which does not define precisely the 'harmful impact to the environment', nor the financial guarantee that an investor is obliged to submit. Such situation would discourage prospect investors, hindering further development of the mining

industry and new investments.

According to Nikolov, mines are not the principal pollutants, as the mining sector in Macedonia observes the highest standards of environment protection.

Regarding the mining production, mining and ore extraction combined have a share of 8% to 9.5% approximately, whereas mining only comprises 4.5% to 5%.

According to the official data from the State Statistical Office, the share of mining and ore extraction in GDP is within the range from 1.4% in 2013, to 1.3% in the 2014-2016 period, to 1.2% in 2017 (estimated).

There are 540 companies in the sector of mining, ore extraction and non-metallic mineral resources, while the number of employees, including related services, is within the range of 11 to 12 thousand.

Source: factor.mk