

Marija Alimpic of the “Let’s Not Give Jadar and Radjevina” association told BIRN that they heard from their sources that Rio Tinto had discussed the “Jadar 2” project with Serbian authorities.

Marijana Trbović Petković from the association “Ne damo Jadar” says that they have no information about the project “Jadar 2”, and when asked about the potential expansion of capacity, they say that the whole story about the mine is a disaster and that recently they received a changed draft spatial plan of mine expansion.

Rio Tinto is considering the possibility of expanding the capacity of lithium mining and processing in Serbia, and the project is called “Jadar 2”, BIRN revealed after reviewing a document that the Serbian mission to the European Union forwarded to the Serbian Foreign Ministry in early June. The document provides details of talks between Serbian Ambassador to the EU Ana Hrustanovic and Lawrence Deschambeona, Rio Tinto’s chief foreign officer, held in Brussels on June 8th.

The two-page document, which was sent under the label “urgent”, states that the meeting was scheduled on the initiative of Lawrence Deschambeona. He confirmed to BIRN that the meeting had been held and was part of a regular procedure for informing about the latest developments in the Jadar project. When asked by BIRN to clarify what the “Jadar 2” project is and when they plan to present it to the Serbian public, he replied that our question was “factually incorrect”. However, the document created after the meeting states that Dechambenoa told the Serbian representative in Brussels on that occasion that Rio Tinto “is considering the possibility of faster realization of the current project” and possible expansion of the project. He especially emphasized that after the talks in Belgrade (with President Vučić), Rio Tinto decided to re-evaluate the deadlines for the realization of the existing project, so that it would be completed earlier than planned. In addition, the possibility of expanding the project will be considered, ie building a existence with larger capacities for lithium excavation and processing (Jadar 2 project). Lawrence Deschambenoa, who is otherwise mistakenly referred to as A. Deschambenoa in the entire letter, is the director of foreign affairs of Rio Tinto and has a rich biography. From 2010 to 2016, he was a member of the Albright Stonebridge Group, a firm founded by Madeleine Albright, a former US Secretary of State under President Bill Clinton.

The need for better communication with the population was one of the conclusions of the meeting between the Serbian ambassador and the director of Rio Tinto. According to the document, Deschambenoa assessed the talks between the executive director of Rio Tint, Jakob Stausholm, and the president of Serbia as successful, emphasizing that both sides want the realization of the existing project to run smoothly. “It is understood that one of the

basic preconditions for further activities is to meet the highest environmental standards.” The meeting of the Serbian ambassador and the director of Rio Tinto in Brussels took place eight days after President Vučić talked in Belgrade with Jakob Stausholm, the executive director of Rio Tinto, about current and potential projects, types of cooperation “that would not stop at lithium exploration and exploitation. on the wider economic development of the district and beyond ”.

On June 4, Vučić said that the state was ready to hold a referendum on the project of building a lithium mine, and as reasons why he thought the project would be useful for Serbia, he stated economic and demographic progress. Among other things, he mentioned the possibilities of cooperation with large car companies, which could start with the construction of a plant for the production of electric batteries, and then electric vehicles. This topic is also mentioned in the document that the Serbian mission in Brussels sent to the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

We learn from the document that Rio Tinto has already established initial contacts with three German car companies - Daimler Mercedes, Volkswagen and BMW. BIRN sources in Germany confirm that German companies are unlikely to accept an offer to build their factories in Serbia. Given that all three car companies are based in Germany, the directors of Rio Tinto plan to meet with German diplomats at the EU in Brussels.

Lawrence Deschambenoa, Rio Tinto’s director of external communications, told BIRN that yesterday was their first meeting with European Commission Vice President Maroš Šefčovič, where they allegedly discussed sustainable energy and its possible application in Serbia. Shefcovic’s cabinet did not answer BIRN’s questions.

Marija Alimpić from the association “Let’s not give Jadar and Radjevina” says that they have the impression that everyone conspired against them - both east and west.

“It suits the European Union to dig lithium in our country because it is cheaper for them to bring it from here than from South America or China. “Our president will give them whatever they want, and they will keep him in power for another 10-20 years,” she says, adding that they are asking for the entire Jadar project to be abolished, and not just for Rio Tinto to leave. “It is equally harmful whether it was done by the Chinese or by them,” she concludes.

Source: birn.rs