

Rio Tinto is considering expanding the capacity for lithium mining and processing in Serbia, under a project called Jadar 2, according to a document forwarded by Serbia's mission to the EU to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, seen by BIRN. The document contains details of a meeting between Serbia's ambassador to the EU, Ana Hrustanović, and Rio Tinto's global head of external affairs, Lawrence Dechambenoit, which took place in Brussels on June 8. According to the document, the meeting was initiated by Dechambenoit, who told Hrustanović that Rio Tinto was considering options for a faster realization of the ongoing project and its possible expansion.

He particularly stressed that following a conversation in Belgrade [with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić], Rio Tinto decided to reassess the timeframe for the realization of the existing project with a view to completing it earlier than planned. Also, the company will consider an expansion of the project, that is the construction of a facility with a bigger lithium extraction and processing capacity (project Jadar 2), according to a report by BIRN. One of the conclusions from the meeting between the Serbian ambassador and the Rio Tinto official was that there is a need for better communication with the local population.

The meeting between the Serbian ambassador and the Rio Tinto official in Brussels took place eight days after Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić's met in Belgrade with Rio Tinto Chief Executive Jakob Stausholm to discuss ongoing and potential projects, forms of cooperation that would not be limited to lithium exploration and mining, but would include a broader economic development of the district and beyond.

Dechambenoit confirmed for BIRN that the meeting had taken place and that it was part of a regular reporting procedure on developments on the Jadar project. Asked to clarify what Jadar 2 meant, and when it was expected to be presented to the Serbian public, he replied that the question was "factually incorrect."

Ministry initiates procedure for environmental impact assessment

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Environmental Protection has issued a notification, dated July 5, that Rio Sava Exploration, Rio Tinto's Serbian subsidiary, has submitted an application for determining the scope and content of an environmental impact assessment for lithium and boron underground mine Jadar, an ore processing plant, and a mining waste storage facility.

All these activities, according to the notification, will be conducted in the cadastral municipalities of Gornje Nedeljice, Brnjac, Veliko Selo, Jarebice, Slatina, Stupnica, and Šurice (on the territories of the city of Loznica and the municipality of Krupanj).

The ministry invited members of the public to view the contents of the application each

business day from 11 am to 2 pm on the ministry's premises in Belgrade and submit comments within 15 days from the date the notification was issued.

This is the standard procedure in producing an environmental assessment. What these comments will be like is not hard to guess, but it remains to be seen whether the ministry will take them into account or not.

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