

Romanian government promises to respect property of villagers threatened by coal mine

After months of protests and the people in Runcurel, a small town in Romania that is to be swallowed by a lignite mine, have finally received positive news from the Romanian government. During a meeting with Bankwatch Romania and Greenpeace Romania, the Minister for Energy Vlad Grigorescu confirmed that the government will do more to protect locals and their houses.

After many requests since January, and a lawsuit filed against the government, the Energy Ministry finally agreed to grant a meeting to Bankwatch Romania and Greenpeace to discuss the planned expansion of the Jilț Nord lignite mine. The point of discussion was the Government Decision 960 from December 2015 which declared the expansion of the mine to be of overriding public interest. According to the decision, residents will receive a shameful 1 euro per square meter for their properties that are in the way of the mine. The amount is non-negotiable and no compensations for what is on the land, be it houses, farms or trees, are mentioned. Needless to say that this amount is not enough for locals, many older than 60, to rebuild their lives somewhere else.

The meeting was facilitated by the Ministry for Public Consultation and Civic Dialogue, a new government body set up to increase the transparency of public administration. It took place during a week when international media, including the New York Times and Reuters wrote about the faith of the people from Runcurel. Energy Minister Vlad Grigorescu and Public Consultation Minister Violeta Alexandru both attended the meeting, which was also joined by Energy Secretary of State Corina Popescu, Energy Strategy Coordinator Radu Dudău and three senior advisers.

Since the beginning of the year, the two organisations have sent the Government a letter from Runcurel residents demanding that GD 960 is revoked, have requested in court the same, and have launched a petition in support of the villagers which was signed by almost 5000 people. The constant pressure Bankwatch and Greenpeace had been putting on the Government since the beginning of the year is finally paying off. Minister Vlad Grigorescu said that houses will be either rebuilt or relocated. He also agreed to send company representatives to the village to explain to locals how the expropriations are to be made. Until now, residents only received formal notifications from the company by post or displayed at the Mătășari town hall, 7 kilometers from Runcurel.

Minister Violeta Alexandru described the situation as “frightening” and has invited the two organisations to collaborate for finding further solutions.

This uphill struggle is, however, not over. The only path for guaranteeing fair negotiations with locals is the revocation of GD 960. Otherwise, residents of Runcurel are dependent on the goodwill of Oltenia Energy Complex, the operator of the mine. The company is likely to

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attempt cutting its costs and spending as little as possible for the expropriations. The government decision is a legal instrument which allows the company to only use the money received from the state, removing any other obligation.

source: bankwatch.org