

## **The majority owner of privatized RTB Bor cannot be amnestied of pollution responsibilities**

More than three months ago, at a news conference in Bor, Mayor Aleksandar Milikic and the local government were warned that they were under an obligation under the Air Protection Act (Articles 33 and 34) to adopt a Short-term Action Plan because of the toxic substances in air far beyond the legal limits.

The plan, to which the Ministry of Environmental Protection approves, contains short-term measures that are taken to reduce the risk or duration of the overdraft.

The monthly pollution reports provided by the Laboratory for Chemical Testing of the Institute of Mining and Metallurgy in Bor (available on the Bor website) are an alarm to which the competent authorities in Bor and the Republic did not respond in a timely manner.

These reports show that the pollution lasts for months and is well above the legal limits for both sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and suspended particles (RM10), with concentrations of extremely hazardous substances, arsenic (As) and cadmium (Cd) persistently present and multiplied by lawful allowances. After a long time, hazardous metals lead (Pb) and nickel (Ni) appear. The local government has promised to take concrete measures in cooperation with the Republican environmental inspector Emil Tomic and representatives of the Zijin company to resolve the problem of excessive air pollution in the shortest possible time.

That is why a meeting was organized in Bor Administrative District at the beginning of July this year, attended by: Mayor of Bor, Director of Serbia Zijin Bor Copper DOO Bor, Representatives of the Ministry of Environment, Chief of the Police Department in Bor and, to the surprise of many, Chief of the Security Intelligence Agency (BIA) department. After the meeting, it was announced that concrete proposals were made to address the problem of air pollution in the Bor area. And that's all the authorities have done.

Many appeals, from citizens to environmental associations and political organizations, addressed to those responsible in the Republic and local self-government have failed.

Clouds of poisoned smoke were present daily above Bor. Excessive air pollution also triggered protests by citizens, which Mayor Milikic ironically called political, although it was clear to everyone that it was a people's vital interest.

Bearing in mind that nothing visible was triggered, on September 15, I announced, on my own behalf and on behalf of councilors from the list "We or They", who in the local elections in Bor in 2018, a criminal complaint against polluters and those responsible failure to take measures to protect the citizens of Bor and surrounding villages, as well as the workers

themselves in the smelter.

Neither did this announcement trigger those responsible to show seriousness. Neither the polluter nor the authorities were paying attention, although the pollution was increasing. The June 2019 report shows that sulfur dioxide, for example, exceeded the limit and tolerance value (which is 125 micrograms per cubic meter (g / m) of air) by as much as 18 times with the measuring point "Jugopetrol". According to the legal regulations in force during the calendar year, it can be exceeded only three times, while in June it is six times higher than the allowed annual limit.

In the July 2019 report, 15 days of overdrafts were recorded at the same measurement site, while in the August report it was even higher, even 20 days. In September too, sulfur dioxide exceedances in the air were recorded for 15 days.

Enormous short-term (hour-two) pollution occurred at certain intervals throughout the day, with sulfur dioxide concentrations exceeding 1,000 and even 2,000 micrograms per cubic meter of air. It is known that a concentration of 500 micrograms is considered very dangerous for human health.

It should also be borne in mind that much more dangerous substances such as arsenic, cadmium and lead are constantly appearing in the fractions of suspended PM10 particles (heavy metals). Only in September 13 days was the PM10 particulate matter exceeded at the "Jugopetrol" measurement site. And the lead exceeded the permitted concentration for 10 days.

In October, pollution continued, with daily reports from measuring sites showing that sulfur dioxide content regularly exceeds 500 micrograms, and on October 23 more than 1,700. Seeing that the appeals failed on 30 October, I filed a criminal complaint with the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Bor against those responsible for the criminal offense of Environmental Pollution and the criminal offense of Failure to Take Environmental Measures.

With the criminal complaint, I demanded that the following be prosecuted: Long Yi (Director and responsible person at Serbia Zijin Bor Copper DOO Bor), Aleksandar Milikic (Mayor of Bor) and Emila Tomic (Republican Environmental Inspector for Bor and Zajecar Administrative District) .

According to experts, the polluter (Zijin) must, in order to solve the problem of desulphurisation or construction of a new smelter (as announced), adjust the production to the projected capacity of this and such smelter.

The smelter operates at a capacity beyond what is foreseen and is the root cause of air pollution. The sulfuric acid plant cannot accept all the dust and gases from smelting

converters. Considering how much the Chinese paid for 63 percent of RTB Bor, the announcement of the construction of new plants would not be a big bite for them. The responsibility of the state of Serbia is also great, given that it still owns 37 percent of the privatized RTB Bor.

In the period 2015-2018. (before privatization) the air was cleaner because the smelter was operating at a reduced capacity. Even so, the annual Bor Air Quality Report for 2018 shows that the mean annual arsenic concentration was 145.3 nanograms per cubic meter of air (ng / m<sup>3</sup>) and exceeds the maximum allowed concentration for the annual averaging period by 6 times the law ng / m<sup>3</sup>. Given that this year the smelter is operating at a higher capacity than before, worse results should be expected, primarily in arsenic and cadmium.

On the other hand, the problem of air pollution did not arise this year, but it is a decades-long pain of Bor, and this is greatly emphasized by Zijin, whose management constantly notes that it is a responsible company that always operates in accordance with all applicable regulations and standards, both local and national as well as European .

They emphasize, as a long-term measure, the construction of a desulphurisation plant and the technical upgrading of a smelter so that gas emissions are always and fully in accordance with the prescribed standards. Construction of such facilities would take about two years. They often call on the management of the former RTB company to neglect the necessary exhaust gas desulphurisation measures when constructing a smelter so that sulfur dioxide could not be effectively and completely accepted and processed.

As a result, an unstable production process is imposed over a longer period, and thus increased air pollution. In particular, they emphasize that the smelter equipment is outdated, which is a new moment and an indicator of great fraud. To the detriment of the state and especially the citizens of Bor.

These findings and conclusions of ZIJIN management raise the question - what was built into the reconstructed smelter and why then the state allowed huge money (from the initial 130 to over 350 million euros) to be spent on something that is inefficient and unstable. The current work of the smelter shows that everything was done afterwards and that the interest of the state and RTB Bor was neglected. In vain, the profession (primarily engineers from RTB Bor and the Institute of Mining and Metallurgy) indicated that this type of "new" smelter was not a good solution for RTB Bor. They indicated that it was necessary to announce an international tender for the construction of a new smelter, in order to obtain state-of-the-art technology, not as the Chinese say.

The contract for the construction of the smelter was signed with the Canadian company SNC Lavalin in 2010, and after the loan arrangement with the Canadian EDC bank in 2011

construction began.

Deadlines for completion of the smelter project (no comprehensive project even existed) were exceeded by two and a half years. A clear sky and the ultimate solution to the accumulated decades of environmental problems has been promised. In those election promises, the then minister and president of the URS, Mladjan Dinkic, was particularly prominent.

At these promises, elections were won in Bor. Aleksandar Vucic continued to use the same route, which RTB used for pre-election purposes until the privatization in 2018. Today's situation shows that there is no clear sky over Bohr and its surroundings, and there is no longer any RTB, a company of national importance that should by no means be sold. No one was held responsible for the uncontrolled use of funds in the reconstruction of the smelter, nor was any liability raised. The authorities did not react at any time to the management and management of the company RTB Bor. Instead, the management of the copper plant (as well as the leadership of the local SNS) and the top SNS jointly rushed for new electoral victories.

RTB was the company of the greatest (party) importance for the power of Aleksandar Vucic, who, during his visit to Bor, announced, together with Blagoje Spaskovsky, new investments and flourishing of mining in Bor, and that after obtaining a strategic partner RTB Bor would remain in the majority state-owned.

Apparently, there was a reason to sell the majority of RTB to the Chinese. Uncontrolled spending of money during the reconstruction of the smelter, and various damaging contracts, especially in relation to the imported copper concentrate, led to this scenario. Someone may have thought that all the problems with RTB, from the air pollution to the ferro smelter and the scandal about the grand theft of gold, would disappear with his sale. Unfortunately, we are again at the beginning of solving the problem, especially in the area of excessive air pollution in Bor and its surroundings.

The majority owner of privatized RTB Bor cannot be amnestied of pollution responsibilities. They knew what they were buying. In addition to the plant, they also purchased ore deposits and, as a result, were able to plan for the purchase of new, explored and rich copper and gold ore deposits outside RTB Bor, for whose purchase they incurred incomparably more money than to purchase a majority stake in RTB. And the copper combine was important to them because of the purchase of the Chukaru Peki ore deposit.

Moreover, the question arises as to why a valid Environmental Assessment Study of the Chukaru Peki Mine was not done, clearly not applying the environmental standards in force in Europe. This was the reason for the protests of villagers in the villages of the future

copper and gold mine due to pollution of watercourses and other uncontrolled activities. Does Bor, in addition to air pollution, face new ecological temptations, because with the arrival of its strategic partner, it has continued to be the most polluted environment in Serbia and Europe. This price, in which our country has played a major role, is mostly paid by the innocent citizens of Bor and the surrounding villages, and especially their children.

Source: [danas.rs](http://danas.rs)