

Serbia: “Minister was appointed to push the Jadar project, but she won’t be able to do it”

Residents of this region and members of the Association Ne damo Jadar have been pointing out since the beginning of the year that “the end of the Jadar project” was only a pre-election promise and that Rio Tinto does not intend to leave and abandon the construction of mines in western Serbia. If there were those who believed the words of Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, that the construction of the mine was abandoned, the recent statements of the new Minister of Mining and Energy, Dubravka Đedović, made it clear that the story about lithium in Serbia may have its continuation.

The minister’s words that “all countries that have some natural resource, but do not use it, are at a loss” and that “Serbia is lucky to have reserves of a very important mineral”, confirmed that Rio Tinto will most likely stay.

Zlatko Kokanović, vice president of the Citizens’ Association “Ne damo Jadar”, believes that the new minister was appointed to this position to “push the project forward”, but that she will not be able to do that.

“This is an indicator that the Government of Serbia is actually the government of Rio Tinto and that Serbia is ruled by foreign powers, American, English, Canadian and Australian, and all the lobbyists who are pushing the project are not doing it for nothing”, says Kokanović. He points out that he agrees with the minister that any country that does not use its natural resources is at a loss.

“We have agricultural land and a lot of water, which is a resource that is the greatest wealth for the one who owns it, because the future of the world is food, water and air”, emphasized the interviewee of Danas.

He believes that, if the state were to distribute the money it plans to invest in housing to agricultural households, it would be returned tenfold.

“If our valley was turned into greenhouses, canalized and consolidated agricultural plots, we could produce and export healthy, local, organic food at fabulous prices, because the world lacks quality food”, explains Kokanović.

The problem, he says, is that the government does not respond to people who live alone from their work and who can freely express their opinions and attitudes and be forgiven for them.

“Their goal is to put citizens in cages, in factories, and make everyone dependent on those companies, so they will have to obey and literally become slaves”, says Kokanović.

That luck is not in mining, he cites the examples of Bor, Majdanpek, Smederevo and Zrenjanin.

“Look at how people live in places where they have mines. Maybe the first generations, ten years after the opening of the mine, lived well and prospered, that’s why now their

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grandchildren are cursing them, because they left them with mockery and pollution”, he says.

He notes that Bor and Majdanpek are the cities with the highest rate of cancer patients. “We have three environmental bombs in Loznica, the failed Viskoza, Zajača and the Stolice tailings, where there was an antimony spill in 2014. In Zajaca, children have lead in their blood, and this government also brought us the companies Mint and Adijent”, reminds Kokanović.

He says that these factories operate normally in Serbia, even though they still do not have usage permits.

“They have construction, but they don’t have utility, because they haven’t solved the waste water system, and it’s an open secret in Loznica that unprocessed water from these factories ends up in the Drina. When the Drina is polluted, there is the Sava and the Danube, and we are left without drinking water. When we run out of water, the whole country is in trouble”, he warns.

He notes that money can be obtained in a much simpler and more harmless way, without pollution.

The message to the minister, he says, is to declare decisively whether he is for or against the Jadar project.

“And to confirm for us whether it is true that she received Serbian citizenship ten days before she became a minister, and whether her husband is one of the consultants at Rio Tinto?” “How much of a patriot can one be, to go from a salary of 10,000 euros to 1,000 euros, or is something expected of her in return”, asks Kokanović.

He hopes, he says, that all this is not true and that the new minister will help pass the Law on the permanent ban on research and exploitation of lithium and boron on the entire territory of the Republic of Serbia.

The minister has her hands full

Marijana Petković from the Ne damo Jadar association points out that before making any decision, Minister Đedović should read the proceedings of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) entitled “Project Jadar – What is known?”

“The professional public and the Academy of Sciences gave their opinion on this project, as well as the Faculty of Biology, which conducted a study, but which was never published because it was negative for Rio Tinto. Minister Đedović should consider the demands submitted by the Association of Environmental Organizations of Serbia (SEOS) and work in the interests of the citizens, as the Constitution obliges her to do.

He concludes that the minister has her hands full, and that the people will not allow her to

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choose between lithium and water, Danas writes.