

**Three Serbian villages and a civil society organization have filed a criminal complaint against the Chinese company HBIS. According to the organization Tvrdjava the steel production in Smederevo has been an “environmental catastrophe” since the Chinese investors arrived.**

In 2016 the Chinese company HBIS took over the operations of the Smederevo Steel mill, originally founded in 1913. In a few months HBIS, China’s largest steel producer, more than doubled the production in the declined former Yugoslavian factory.

Nikola Krstić, the president of the organization Tvrdjava, told the national broadcaster N1 that “the iron works in Smederevo did not start polluting with the arrival of a Chinese investor, but since they came, we have had an environmental catastrophe. We have tried everything, but we came up against a wall of silence on the part of the company”.

Everyone who lives in that city, he said, is threatened because of the pollution coming out of the factory’s chimney.

“The village of Radinac is the most endangered in terms of the number of cancer patients in Smederevo. From 1,800 in 2011 to 6,800 who are on treatment (nowadays), which represents a four-time increase. Around six or seven percent of the population has cancer in Smederevo,” he said to N1.

Nikola Krstić told N1 that last October the organization hired a Belgrade laboratory to perform dust analysis. The results were analyzed by the National Ecological Association which found elevated levels of arsenic, cadmium, nickel, lead and cobalt. “It says ‘cancer, cancer, cancer’ everywhere, cancer is mentioned everywhere and no one reacts, not to mention about autoimmune diseases and asthma”, he told N1.

He points out that residents submitted heaps of medical documentation as evidence for the complaint.

“People can’t breathe, they can’t open the windows, their children and grandchildren don’t go out to play, because it’s dirty,” said Krstić to N1.

Lawyer Nina Nicović told N1 that she identified elements of environmental crimes in the complaint. Nicović said that they asked prosecutors to investigate not only air pollution, but also the pollution of soil and water.

Nicović told N1 that the company’s management did not respond to their request. They are hopeful that the Prosecutor’s Office is conducting an initial investigation.

“It is important to act as soon as possible,” said Nicović. The plaintiffs have asked the court not only to punish those responsible, but to order mitigation measures to stop the pollution. HBIS Group has previously been accused of causing heavy pollution in China. In May 2019, 11 cities in Hebei Province in China had air quality that reached hazardous levels. The

executive of HBIS, with 47 other directors of heavy industry in the region, was criticized by the city government for failing to implement anti-pollution measures.

HBIS is China's largest steel producer, with an annual production of 190 million tons of crude steel a year, twice as much as the entire US, Just Finance reports.