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Zivana sold the house because of Rio Tinto - and she regrets it

The Rio Tinto company has become one of the most important topics in Serbia - it is mentioned by politicians, both from the government and the opposition. Environmental activists, even the top of the country, are talking about it. But the people who live in Macva are the most afraid.



"They came to us and started exploring and digging some holes. We peasants are also welcome, they pay nicely for an ar or two of land. That was in 2014 or 2015. They are not for me then, but they are for the neighbors around ", says Zivana Sakic from the village of Gornja Nedeljica. So he continues:

"And years later, they told us beautiful stories about how we will earn well, how good ore was found, how it is not poisonous. And we tell them: 'Well, you don't make us a spa, but a mine'. That mine - lithium and boric acid - is dangerous. And they started telling us how we were going to get rich and started offering us nice prices. "

In June this year, Zivana Sakic is packing up with all her family members. She received 200,000 euros for a house of 200 square meters and a hectare and 30 acres of land. The deadline to move out is August 28. "I feel cheated now. And I regret it. Is there anything more beautiful than this? "Zivana said sadly.

Together with her house, 34 of the 83 houses have been sold so far.

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Impact of livestock mines

Just outside the border within which the tailings of the Rio Tinto mine are planned, there is a large household of Predrag Đurić with a view of the green valley of the Adriatic. Predrag has 40 head of cattle, 20 dairy cows and breeding heifers. It produces 120,000 liters of milk a year, and 40 hectares of land are cultivated by all family members, six more of them.



Predrag Đurić: I can't learn a new craft at my age

Predrag fears that he will soon have a view of the mine: "For these 40 head of cattle, a huge amount of food needs to be prepared. We don't know how that mine will affect, whether there will be salty rains. And how are we going to prepare that food for the cattle? But if there is not enough food, you can't keep cattle either, we can't do that anymore. "

Predrag says that the worst case scenario that could happen to him, since it is not planned in the area of the mine, is that due to the work of the mine and possible pollution of the land, he and his family have to leave the property.

"I can't learn a new craft at my age. My wife, my mother and father, too. And what about the children? Children somewhere to be cheap labor instead of staying on their property and engaging in agriculture and making a living from it. We live from it and pay all obligations to the state. We contribute to the state, and we don't take money to some islands or I don't know where. Nobody knows what will happen to us, "says Predrag. He adds: "Not only domestic animals and my cows are endangered, a rare European beaver lives in the Jadra Valley, 20 families. How will he protect them? "

Nobody offered Predrag money for a house and property, because he does not belong to the mine zone. We ask him what he would do if they offered him. "I do not know, I really do not know. I am against that and I really hope that people will understand that this is a big problem. I hope that someone will come to their senses and that it will stop ", says our interlocutor, adding that a total of 22 villages will be directly affected by the mine.

"They never explained to us what they were doing there."

One of the mine's loudest opponents, Milorad Djurdjevic, says the Jadra Valley has fed thousands of locals from surrounding villages because there is no other arable land in the area. The Rio Tinto company will occupy 300 hectares of that land, and recently 140 hectares of the Štavica forest have been mentioned, which, according to local activists, will only be disclosed.



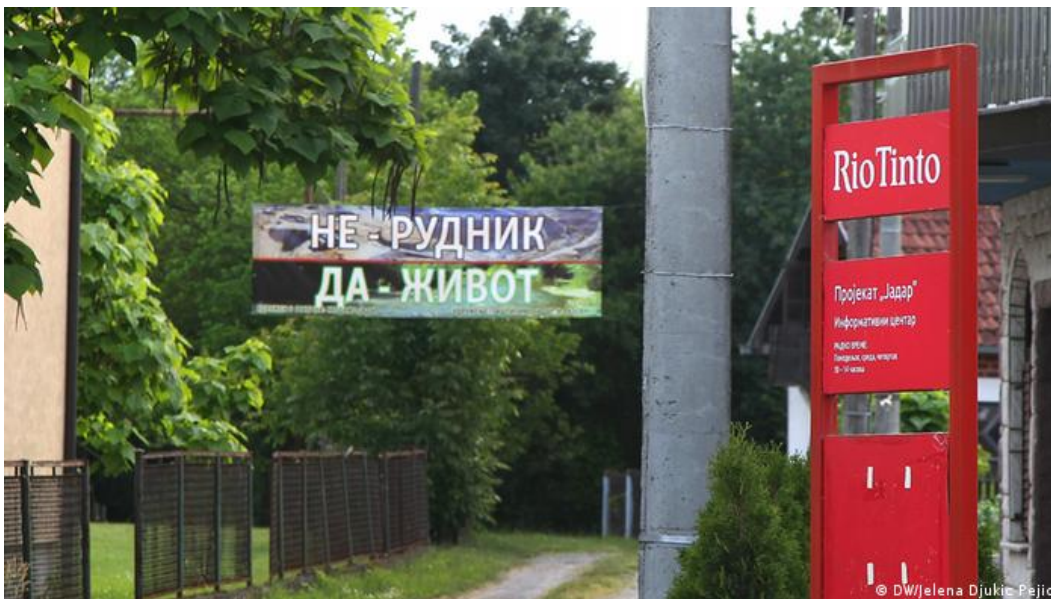
Milorad Đurđević shows a map showing how many hectares Rio Tinto will occupy

"For these 18 years, no one from the local government or from anywhere has ever come to explain to us who is in our field, and what they are doing in this field," Milorad told DW. "I guess experts should be hired to make it clear to us: let agricultural experts say what the salary is, what the taxes are, the income." And then, mining experts tell me nicely - they say it will be 50 years of exploitation, where the probabilities are from the accident. Not only this part is endangered, the whole river basin is endangered, Jadar, Posavina, Macva, part of Semberija, part of Posavo-Tamna, Pocerina, everything is endangered! Hydrochloric acid and sulfuric acid should be taken here on a daily basis. The trains on our railways pass through populated places ", says Milorad Đurđević.

He adds that he does not blame the locals who sold what they had. Some welcome it, because they never had money, and some did not even live there. "The question is how I would decide, money is a powerful argument. I don't blame anyone, but we are fighting so that it is not to the detriment of everyone ", says Milorad.

Rio Tinto - transfer to "green business"

However, the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, has been claiming in the media for a long time that there is no damage and that the new mine will bring billions of euros to Serbia. He believes that the only damage can be done by the protests of environmental activists, which threaten the stay of investors and the arrival of new ones. Vučić also said that the Rio Tinto project for now includes only the construction of a mine and an ore processing factory, but that, until the battery factory for electric cars is built, there will be no drilling.



Poster in front of the company's headquarters

One thing is for sure, the Jadra valley in the vicinity of Loznica is ranked as one of the richest lithium deposits in the world due to the high concentration of lithium and boron per ton of excavated ore, points out Andrea Radonjić in front of Rio Tinto in her answer for DW. According to her, the reserves of jadarite can satisfy a significant part of the demand for lithium, the most sought-after raw material in the world.

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As ecology is the strongest trump card for activists against this mine, Andrea Radonjić points out that as a trump card on their side: "Lithium is one of the most sought-after raw materials in the world, given its role in the current fight against climate change, transfer to green business." In the EU, measures related to carbon dioxide emissions are constantly being tightened, which is why the expansion of electric and hybrid cars is expected in the coming years. The official forecasts of the European Commission predict that the market for batteries in the EU will be at the level of 250 billion a year by 2025, and that the demand for lithium will jump 20 times by 2030, and an incredible 58 times by 2050. how important this deposit is on the global map ", says Radonjić for DW.

At the same time, domestic experts claim that their production would not meet world demand, but only the needs of Rio Tinto.

"Danger for everyone, especially for the government"

Rio Tinto says that the study on the impact on the environment, which is being prepared by over 100 experts, will last until the end of this year. This is followed by an investment decision. If approved, they claim that the construction of the mine in accordance with the highest standards of environmental protection will take four years. And they say that Serbia will earn more than three billion dollars from the mines alone, from direct revenues.



Aleksandar Jovanović Čuta: It is a matter of violent abduction of nature

Both local and other environmental activists, however, point out that they will fight against the lithium mine. Aleksandar Jovanović Čuta from the association "Let's Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina", who also announced the participation of environmental activists in the Belgrade elections, claims that the "Jadar" project, which is a danger to everyone, will be most dangerous for the government. That is why he believes that the referendum announced by the President of Serbia does not suit the ruling party.

"As before, when it comes to the violent abduction of nature, its devastation and expulsion of people, after wide discussions about legality, impact on the environment, in the end it all comes down to when that damn mechanization appears. So on to physical resistance. "There were many such scenes on Stara Planina, and as far as Loznica is concerned, it is easy to imagine columns of volunteers from all over Serbia moving towards Loznica to defend what belongs to all of us," Jovanovic told DW.

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Author Jelena Đukić Pejić

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