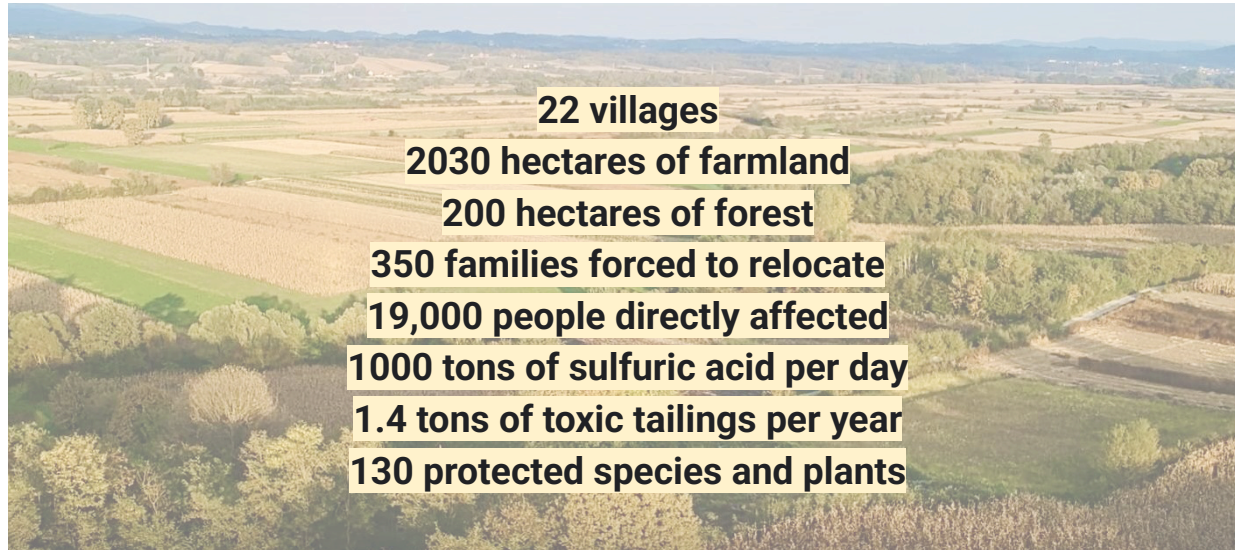


RIO TINTO'S PROPOSED JADAR PROJECT IN SERBIA



The JADAR valley is a unique ecosystem of nature and humanity. Surrounded by mountains and two rivers, this valley is home to generations of farmers, who produce over 70 million Euros of agricultural yield every year. The valley is self-sustaining and feeds not just its inhabitants, but surrounding areas as well. Groundwaters run so deep that even during drought, crops yield food. There are schools, churches and shops, a thriving cultural landscape and thousands who want to remain and maintain what has been handed to them for over generations from their predecessors.

In May 2021 the European Commission confirmed that the EIA directive and SEA directive will be applicable for assessing the environmental impact of the Jadar proposal and that the EIA must cover the entire proposal so as to assess its cumulative impact. In early July 2021 Serbia's ministry for the environment released RT's scoping presentation report.¹ It was incomplete and contained only the mine complex without the processing plant and tailings landfill. Assessment proper was supposed to commence early december 2021 and then construction in 2022, but enormous public opposition, including a [petition](#) with over 290 thousand signatures (5% of Serbia's population), a book released by the Academy of Sciences² and two weeks of [civil disobedience](#) with over 100 thousand people on the streets, led the government to [annulling](#) the Special Purpose Spatial Plan - Jadar, the legal premise for the project³. They did this in view of quieting the subject before elections, after which President Vucic announced that the cancellation had been [a mistake](#). The company then stated they hope to "be able to discuss all of the options with the government of Serbia [now the elections are out of the way](#)." Mars sa Drine responded stating that "Serbia's effort to transition into a politically stable country will be jeopardized if companies like Rio Tinto believe they can undermine democracy and try to

¹ https://www.dropbox.com/sh/shz8l6p3aejm7qr/AAAY7p4K8l_EVr0.JY3h5lBpEYa?dl=0

² <https://www.euronews.rs/srbija/drustvo/39320/zbornik-radova-sanu-eskplotacija-litijuma-ostavila-bi-velike-posledice-na-zivotnu-sredinu/vest>

³ <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/awliij2fn7n0arx3/AACJAYuKmCNEZESenxFd4n4ka?dl=0>



*re-introduce nepotism. The government made its choice: it listened to the people.*⁴ This new but not unexpected reality means that our movement continues until we have achieved complete legal protection of Jadar and sent Rio Tinto and any other potential investors packing.

As of 2025, more than 60% of Serbians oppose the Jadar project.⁵ The public's stance remains unshaken, rooted in the defense of land, water, food sovereignty, and democratic accountability.⁶

Rio Tinto's jadarite (lithium and borate) mine proposal in Serbia⁷

Rio Tinto's lithium and borate proposal in the Jadar Valley covers 22 villages, with infrastructure included. The area is a rich agricultural area consisting of farming, bee-keeping, tourism etc. Agricultural yields alone are estimated at over 70 million Euros per year.⁸ The spatial plan for the mine embraces an area of 2,031 hectares for a special purpose complex, accompanying corridors and traffic infrastructure systems. Nearly 200 hectares of forests would need to be cut: 80 hectares for roads/ railways and 164 hectares for 35% of projected tailings. Rio Tinto needs to purchase 600 hectares of land from 335 landowners to develop. The mine is envisaged on the bank of the Korenita river, a tributary to the Jadar river, with underground mining to be performed underneath both riverbeds. Close by, a flotation facility would use 1000 tons of concentrated sulfuric acid per day (to be diluted by 5000-6000 tons of water). There is no information on where this sulfuric acid would come from, but an acid spill in February 2025 at Vrcin—unrelated to the mine but involving similar transport—served as a chilling preview of what's at stake.⁹ The proposal is designed to operate 24/7 over a mine life of 60 years.

The mine tailings and industrial waste disposal plan includes placing over 1.4 million tons of toxic material annually (90 million tons during mine life) above flood-prone terrain and near major water systems—including the Drina and Sava rivers, and the Belgrade water supply. The Jadar and Korenita are prone to flooding every year, with a [state of emergency declared in 2020](#) and the most recent floods being in 2025.¹⁰ The Drina flows into Bosnia & Herzegovina and the Danube flows into Romania. It is expected that changes in temperature will imply a higher risk of floods in extremely rainy periods, and of droughts in extremely warm periods of the year¹¹.

The proposal is low-cost and expandable,¹² which taken together is the worst combination for a mine as most accidents occur with badly planned (low cost) mine extensions that keep adding to the tailings and waste deposits planned for the initial or first phase of the mine.

⁴ https://www.dropbox.com/s/fcac3gn7jctwkpj/XR_MSD%20Joint%20Press%20Release.pdf?dl=0

⁵ Vesti. (2024). "What does the research say: Did the president's tour appease the people on the lithium issue?." N1. 11 September <https://n1info.rs/vesti/sta-kaze-istrazivanje-da-li-je-predsednik-turnejom-odobrovoljno-narod-po-pitanju-litijuma/>

⁶ Marš sa Drine, Banktrack (2025): Mining for Trouble: A Wakeup call for Banks and Investors. April. https://www.banktrack.org/download/mining_for_trouble_a_wakeup_call_for_banks_and_investors/risk_assessment_2025_final.pdf

⁷ <https://www.riotinto.com/en/operations/projects/jadar>

⁸ <https://marssadrine.org/en/ratko-ristic-rad-sanu-serbian-academy-of-sciences/>

⁹ Marš sa Drine, Banktrack (2025): Mining for Trouble: A Wakeup call for Banks and Investors. April.

https://www.banktrack.org/download/mining_for_trouble_a_wakeup_call_for_banks_and_investors/risk_assessment_2025_final.pdf

¹⁰ BBC Serbia (2025). "Strah od poplava: Reka Jadar se izlila u zapadnoj Srbiji, vanredna situacija u gradovima u BiH" 28 March 2025 <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/articles/czxnx4z7505o/lat>

¹¹ (Observed climate changes and projections of the future climate based on different scenarios of future emissions, Vladimir Đurđević, Ana Vuković and Mirjam Vujadinović Mandić, United Nations Development Program, 2018).

¹² <https://www.riotinto.com/-/media/Content/Documents/Operations/Jadar/RT-Jadar-Fact-sheet-EN.pdf>



The proposal is situated in an area of exceptional archaeological importance and Rio Tinto is currently considering an alternative to the current tailings site which would be situated in close proximity to Paulje, an archaeological site roughly 3500 years old. The Spatial Plan mentions some of them but omits several extremely important archeological and cultural sites and natural monuments (sections 5.1.1 and 6.2).¹³

Nowhere in the world has lithium mining been permitted on fertile, inhabited land. No country has allowed a mine that would wipe out thriving villages, destroy farmland cultivated for generations, and threaten areas rich in cultural heritage and protected wildlife. This would set a dangerous global precedent.

There exists considerable [local, national](#) and transnational¹⁴ opposition to the mine proposal. *Ne Damo Jadar (NDJ)* is an association of 335 property owners, based in the Jadar Valley, Western Serbia opposed to Rio Tinto's proposed lithium and borate mine and processing center based on social, environmental, economic and heritage grounds. [Marš sa Drine \(MSD\)](#) is a network comprising 20 organizations and independent experts throughout Serbia, its diaspora and internationally. A [petition](#) launched by MSD has gathered over 290,000 signatures (5% of the Serbian population) against the proposed mine in Serbia and almost [half a million in Europe](#).

Irregularities are already identified from Rio Tinto's first (2021) and second (2024) scoping report applications:¹⁵ In both scoping reports they do not take into consideration the effects of the entire project. Provisions of the EIA Directive cannot be avoided by splitting projects into smaller projects, and failing to take into account their cumulative environmental impact.^{16/17} In 2021, the PPR did not include ore processing and final products, as well chemical and other ore treatment, or planned solutions for treatment and disposal of waste. Hence there was no mention or description of the technology used for the processing of lithium ore, how the mining waste will be treated, what its character is, its composition, the location of the landfill, or any other information related to it. There was no description on the significance and quality of natural resources in existence or on protected natural areas.¹⁸

In September 2024, the scoping request was limited to the area and surface necessary to access the mine facilities. According to information provided by Rio Tinto, the company intends to

¹³ The Law on Mining and Geological Research explicitly prohibits a company, ie other legal entity and entrepreneur, which has due but unsettled obligations on the basis of, among other things, unfulfilled obligations related to the rehabilitation and protection of the environment and cultural goods and goods that enjoy prior protection, to be the bearer of exploration and exploitation. Article 31, paragraph 3 of the Law on Nature Protection prohibits all actions and activities that endanger the features and values of the natural monument, which will arise from the implementation of the "Jadar" project.

¹⁴ Environmental organizations in Romania are extremely worried about potential transboundary impact of an accidental spill into the Drina river. They have requested their environment minister trigger the ESP00 Convention transboundary impact assessment.

¹⁵ https://www.dropbox.com/sh/a1hxx3fie33oq1f/AAA_4Cmi6aGNzUc6uVHhtinaa?dl=0

¹⁶ (Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Environmental Protection, decision number 353-02-00984 / 2020-03, dated 5.6.2020)

¹⁷ <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/showPdf.jsf?jsessionid=C5DC2B5FA562F10AEE65605779F05FF9?text=&docid=44721&pageIndex=0&oclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=549973>

¹⁸ There is no mention of:

- a. "Cer" (classification code RS024IBA), total area of about 19,000 hectares.
- b. "Cer" part of the IBA program & verified with BLI (BirdLife International), which has 130 registered bird species, national protected species of birds and fish, including the MLADICA (saplings), which sees its highest concentration in the Drina and was declared a protected species - Declared by the Rulebook on the Proclamation of Protected and Strictly Protected Wild Species of Plants, Animals and Fungi ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 5/10 and 47/11) and on the IUCN global list of endangered species it is classified as endangered (EN B2ab (ii, iii)).



request separate scoping decisions for the processing site and waste disposal at a later stage. The request for subdivision violates Serbian Law on Environmental Impact Assessment which requires the assessment of the environmental impacts of a “project” as a whole.¹⁹ Other sub-zones not included in the scoping request are the construction of planned roads, a planned 110 kV power line protection zone, the alteration of a section of the Korenita River, and a clay borrow pit.²⁰

Since Serbia’s EIA Law has been adopted as part of transposing the European *acquis communautaire*²¹, the Court of Justice (CJEU)’s case law and official guidance by the EU Commission can be consulted to resolve ambiguities. The CJEU has repeatedly ruled that the EIA directive shall not be circumvented by the splitting of projects and that the cumulative effects of a project’s different elements must be taken into account.²²

In addition, the request for the scoping decision failed to include a description of the water supply system from the Drina alluvium⁸⁹ and its transportation to the facilities. Water extraction needed for facilities is an integral part of the project and cannot be treated as a separate concern. Moreover, the request does not contain an appropriate description of the impact of climate change on the project. Given the planned lifetime of the project indicated by the project developer of 71 years, an analysis of these effects would be important to address.²³

An open [letter from the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts](#) to prime minister Ana Brnabić outlines experts’ concerns of environmental and scientific irregularities in the project. Their peer approved publication [“Project Jadar - what is known”](#) contains numerous studies, analysis and opinions on the catastrophic potentialities of this project. In September 2021 Banktrack also listed the Jadar proposal on their [dodgy deal database](#), where letters to [banks and investors](#) of Rio Tinto and to their [shareholders](#) are made public, and with Marš sa Drine they published financial risk reports in [2023](#) and [2025](#).

It is no exaggeration to state that Serbia’s government has no control over the implementation of its own environmental protection laws, let alone of its obligations towards the environmental

¹⁹ Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute, Opinion on the Request for Establishing the Scope and Contents of the Environmental Impact Assessment Study of the Project for the Under- ground Exploitation of Lithium and Boron Deposits “Jadar”, online at

https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2024-10/reri-opinion-on-scoping-request-eia-riotinto-jadar-project_0.pdf

²⁰ Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute, Opinion on the Request for Establishing the Scope and Contents of the Environmental Impact Assessment Study of the Project for the Under-ground Exploitation of Lithium and Boron Deposits “Jadar”, p. 3, online at

https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2024-10/reri-opinion-on-scoping-request-eia-riotinto-jadar-project_0.pdf.

Or

<https://reri.org.rs/en/rio-tinto-salami-slicing-in-accordance-with-the-highest-european-standards-of-environmental-protection/>

²¹ European Commission (2016), Screening Report – Serbia, Chapter 27: Environment,

https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-12/screening_report_serbia_-_chapter_27_-_environment.pdf accessed last on 26 November 2024.

²² CJEU, *European Commission v. Ireland*, C-392/96, paras. 76, 82; CJEU, *Ecologistas en Acción-CODA v. Ayuntamiento de Madrid*, C-142/07, para. 44; CJEU, *Umweltanwalt von Kärnten v. Kärntner Landesregierung*, C-205/08, para. 53; CJEU, *Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest and Others v. Vlaams Gewest*, C-275/09, paragraph 36.

²³ Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute, Opinion on the Request for Establishing the Scope and Contents of the Environmental Impact Assessment Study of the Project for the Under-ground Exploitation of Lithium and Boron Deposits “Jadar”, p. 14, online at

https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2024-10/reri-opinion-on-scoping-request-eia-riotinto-jadar-project_0.pdf.



acquis. Premier Ana Brnabic [endorsed](#) Rio Tinto's proposal of 'strategic importance' in 2021 without even the existence of an EIA or feasibility report. Power of Attorney was signed off to Rio Tinto by Serbia Roads²⁴, in order for the company to be able to act on behalf of this publicly funded agency.

The project has been fraught with irregularities at the highest political level. In 2017 the Serbian government and Rio Tinto signed a memorandum of understanding²⁵ (MOU) which was withheld from the public for many years (despite Rio Tinto's claims for CSR, transparency etc.)²⁶ In spring 2021 the government approved the proposal's local spatial plan [despite being incomplete](#). It was adopted without a feasibility study at its base (which is a legal requirement) and without a long-term exploitation program, required for projects longer than 10 years. This local spatial plan was [annulled](#) after local opposition gathered 5 thousands signatures in 7 days. However the annulment did not [legally alter the company's permits](#) as they were based on the federal Special Purpose Spatial Plan, which was only [canceled](#) on January 20 2022 after public pressure, and also came with controversies of its own.

The EU Commission has been a strong supporter of the project's development; going so far as [to endorse it](#) despite its early stages and not permitting. In October 2021, Marš sa Drine exposed correspondence between EU Commission department DG Grow and Rio Tinto which showed the [mine was planned to receive approval](#) in May 2022, after Serbia's general elections, and that it had the support of Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic²⁷. This generated significant backlash against Vucic because he had actually announced that the decision over Jadar would belong to the people via a [national referendum](#). To amplify this betrayal, Mars sa Drine and experts met with EU ambassador, Emanuele Giaufret, where it was made clear that further political pressure on this project would have adverse effects for the relationship between the Serbian people and the European Union. What followed in the next few years, proved just that.

Reacting to huge on- and off-line public outcry at a time of imminent general elections, Serbia's prime minister announced on 20 January 2022 that Rio Tinto's entire mine proposal had been [canceled](#) with the annulment of the Special Purpose Spatial Plan, which is the legal basis for all of the project's permits.²⁸

A correct legal procedure following the cancellation of the SPSP would have been for all relevant authorities to repeal without delay all individual acts they adopted with connection to this spatial plan. That did not happen, and requests for access to this information yielded no results. However, it was [widely reported](#) that Rio Tinto was continuing to purchase properties within the project footprint, as well as [trespassing](#) on local activists' land and employing more people. .

Then, a mere week ahead of 3 April, a whistleblower shared evidence confirming that Rio Tinto was currently working with Thyssen Schachtbau on delivering a [VSM boring machine](#) to the Jadar Valley after the elections. MSD released material of [the leak](#). The government [reacted](#) instantly stating that "the Administrative Commission annulled the decision of the Ministry of Environmental Protection on the scope and content of the EIA."²⁹

²⁴ <https://www.dropbox.com/s/8hb3lltex025ihb/PUNOMO%C4%86JE%20DROBNJAKA.pdf?dl=0>

²⁵ <https://www.riotinto.com/news/releases/Jadar-MoU-Serbia-signed>

²⁶ https://www.dropbox.com/sh/0i0h1b2d88z3985/AABUHcdg_J3-AfUQu1IPdYVBa?dl=0

²⁷ <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/22mx5n4j5wrrwpb/AAA0tJbrp8Kk8aEtrISAI9Ba?dl=0>

²⁸ <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/awliij2fn7n0arx3/AACJAYuKmcNEZESenxFd4n4ka?dl=0>

²⁹ <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6rdcq98liqf8loh/AACt-bubW6ScQ3vX-HtDqkXha?dl=0>



To that end, civil society groups initiated a “[citizens initiative](#)” which is a process that grants its authors the right to present a bill to parliament if they manage to gather 30,000 notarized signatures. In this instance, 38,000 signatures were gathered in 20 days. The request is for a legal ban on the extraction of lithium and borates in Serbia. It will be presented as soon as parliament reconvenes after the summer recess.

Two days after his re-election president Vucic confirmed that canceling Rio Tinto’s project had been [a mistake](#). Rio Tinto then announced intent of [coming back](#). Marš sa Dine addressed the entitlement of the company and its assault on the will of the people with an open statement to the press³⁰ and letters to the company’s lenders³¹ in collaboration with [Banktrack](#).

Organisation [Earth Thrive](#) submitted a complaint to the Bureau of the Bern Convention, of which Serbia is a full signatory, in April of 2022.³² The complaint outlines serious harm that could be caused to the numerous and highly protected species and wild habitats in the region, and carries within it potential evidence of breaches of international law and ethical corporate social responsibility. *“In consideration of the ecological value of the area at the center of the complaint,”* The Bureau *“expressed its concern on the considerable negative effects on the species and habitats that the construction of a lithium mine would have.”*

In May 2022, through a Freedom of information response, it was revealed that the exploitation license for the Jadar mining complex, which was supposed to have been cancelled with the Spatial Plan, was still in process³³. This was further confirmed by the Ministry for Mining in October³⁴. An [open letter](#) to Prime Minister Ana Brnabic, from MSD and local landowners demanding clarification for these legal irregularities, still remains unanswered.

At around the same time Rio Tinto was having [behind closed doors meetings](#) with the European Commission, sharing new strategies for their officially cancelled project. EU documents revealed by MSD show that Rio Tinto was forming more relationships with locals and academic institutions, and strategising to get involved in agriculture³⁵.

In October, local businesses started receiving email requests for quotes regarding work on a wastewater treatment for Project Jadar from US company Bechtel³⁶. In response to public complaints about this and job offers, Rio Tinto put out a statement on their website³⁷ claiming

³⁰ https://www.dropbox.com/s/fcac3gn7jctwkpi/XR_MSD%20Joint%20Press%20Release.pdf?dl=0

³¹ https://www.dropbox.com/s/qdgrkptsntv7t93/CommonwealthBankAus_13072022.pdf?dl=0

³² https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6vaxiyuikr1J7f6/AADVtYSwE_H8_gtM1BEv04nna?dl=0

³³ <https://www.dropbox.com/s/ylcf6cnt0s5fdq2/3.%20060122%20ministarstvo%20rudarstva%20i%20energetike%20odgovor.pdf?dl=0>

³⁴ <https://www.dropbox.com/s/7xri0pawi7hhq75/6.%20101022%20sa%20potpisom.pdf?dl=0>

³⁵ <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/b4mfmbg6esnhu18/AACIDKGTgHG6CcuZ0wqXvCqOa?dl=0>

³⁶ <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/seos-rio-tinto-i-behtel-rade-na-projektu-za-preciscivanje-otpadnih-voda-za-projekat-jadar/>

³⁷ <https://riotintoserbia.com/mediji/saopstenja-za-javnost/2022/2022-08-10-Interna-studija-izvodljivosti-mora-biti-završena>

Internal Feasibility study must be completed AUGUST 10TH, 2022 This statement is a response to the SEOS claim that Rio Tinto and Bechtel are progressing the development of the Jadar Project. Rio Tinto reiterates that it respects the Government decision earlier this year to revoke all permits and licenses for the project. We are continuing to conduct our business activities in accordance with Serbian laws. All of our activities are a continuation of previous commitments. This includes completing the internal Feasibility Study, which requires collecting and assessing design data from relevant vendors in order to meet applicable technical, environmental and sustainability standards. The Feasibility Study is being completed in partnership with Bechtel, who have provided Project Management Contractor (PMC) support to the project since 2018.



they have “outstanding legal commitments” including the completion of an internal feasibility study. They claim to “respect the government's decision to revoke all permits and licenses for the project” despite evidence of the licensing procedure still being in process.

In July 2022, representatives of nine organizations from Serbia, Portugal, Germany, Chile and Spain [signed the Jadar Declaration](#) on international solidarity against lithium exploitation and for environmental protection. The dominant narrative around lithium normalizes “sacrifice zones,” and the Jadar declaration is a basis for mutual support, cooperation, exchanging information and help against extractivism brought by an unjust energy transition. The greenwashing of the energy transition saw further exposure in [media coverage](#) about the potential sacrifice of The Balkans for Europe’s Energy transition with the latter’s attempt to [move away from reliance on China](#), which is now becoming irrelevant due to Tariffs as [Marš Šefčović and the EU turn back to China](#).

Given the huge public awareness campaign in Serbia, other regions in danger from lithium exploration have been active. In December, the region of Valjevo won a victory against Euro Lithium, after the Ministry for mining [refused to renew](#) the company’s exploration license, while local citizens of the villages of the Levac area have been camping [for over four months](#) in order to protect an acre of land from being test drilled.

As prime minister Ana Brnabic proclaims that this is [a historic opportunity for Serbia](#), negating her previous statements that she has put a “full stop” to the Jadar Project, we continue to prepare for further actions in the goal of protecting and preserving the Jadar Valley.

Despite the Serbian government’s cancellation of the project, Rio Sava continued to invest heavily —spending over €600 million to date, over €300 million of which was spent after the 2022 cancellation, including €92 million on feasibility studies and €100 million on consultations. Marš sa Drine revealed in 2024 that much of this spending—especially the majority on “intangible” services—raises serious questions about transparency, legality, and the company's true intentions.³⁸ With suspicions of tax evasion, and attempts to sidestep the project’s cancellation through legal loopholes, scrutiny of Rio Sava’s financial and operational conduct is intensifying.

In May 2024, the EU Commissioner for Trade Maroš Šefčović told the media that a raw materials agreement between Serbia and the EU was imminent. Speaking on the controversial Jadar Project, he stated: “There were some legal issues in the past, which are now being discussed between the company and the government.”³⁹ However, this statement runs contrary to legal regulations, as the project was still undergoing administrative proceedings in Serbian courts —something Šefčović himself acknowledged.

In July 2024, the Serbian Constitutional Court controversially overturned the 2022 annulment of the Special Purpose Spatial Plan, effectively reopening Rio Tinto’s path to pursue the Jadar project. Despite widespread insistence from the government that the 2022 cancellation was final, Rio Tinto’s uninterrupted activities—including land acquisitions, feasibility work, and attempts to re-establish legitimacy—suggested otherwise. The court’s decision reactivated the permitting process, sparking renewed public outrage and street protests in over 50 cities,

³⁸ <https://www.miningsee.eu/miningsee-europe-serbia-rio-tinto-jadar-project-lithium-mining/>

³⁹ <https://n1info.rs/english/news/euronews-eu-commissioner-says-deal-on-lithium-from-serbia-soon/>



culminating in tens of thousands of people across the country, and one hundred thousand in Serbia's capital, Belgrade, demanding that the mine be permanently banned.⁴⁰

In parallel, Rio Tinto submitted a draft Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for three project segments, published between September and December 2024. These were met with fierce scientific and civic backlash. The Faculty of Biology of the University of Belgrade publicly disassociated itself from Rio Tinto's interpretation of its biodiversity study, asserting that the conclusions had been manipulated and warning that the only scientifically viable mitigation was full project abandonment.⁴¹

Meanwhile, damning peer-reviewed research published in *Nature* (July 2024) documented that even the exploratory drilling phase of the project had already caused serious environmental degradation—boron and arsenic leaks, crop damage, contamination of downstream water systems, and significant exceedances of soil pollutant thresholds.⁴²

Despite this, Serbia's government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the EU in July 2024 under the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA), opening the door for the Jadar project to be designated "strategic." Civil society groups, including Marš sa Drine and Green Legal Impact Germany, filed a complaint to the EU Commission in November, warning that strategic recognition would violate both Serbian law and human rights standards.⁴³

"Granting strategic status to a company that violates laws, lacks operational permits, and has no waste management approval would only worsen the Serbian public's perception of EU integration." — Bojana Novaković of Marš sa Drine said.⁴⁴

Throughout 2024, the repression of activists escalated dramatically. According to the POLEKOL report, over 40 environmental activists were arrested during the August protests, many under absurd charges such as "calling for violent overthrow of the constitution" based on social media posts. Ivan Bjelić of Marš sa Drine was arrested and imprisoned and later released due to lack of evidence.⁴⁵ Multiple activists—including scientists—were harassed or threatened, and some were physically assaulted or unlawfully detained by unidentified officers.⁴⁶

In economic terms, a landmark independent analysis released in October 2024 found that the Jadar project would bring negligible benefit to Serbia. Serbia stands to receive just €17.4 million per year in public revenue—equivalent to €2.6 per capita—while carrying the cost burden of public

⁴⁰ Marš sa Drine, Banktrack (2025): Mining for Trouble: A Wakeup call for Banks and Investors. April. https://www.banktrack.org/download/mining_for_trouble_a_wakeup_call_for_banks_and_investors/risk_assessment_2025_final.pdf

⁴¹ 2024 Saopštenje BF ENG.pdf. Statement by the University of Belgrade - Faculty of Biology rejecting Rio Tinto's interpretation of their biodiversity findings

⁴² Đorđević et al. (2024). "The influence of exploration activities of a potential lithium mine to the environment in Western Serbia". *Nature*. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-024-68072-9>

⁴³ 1. 2024-11-28_Formal Request EU Commission_CRMA_Rio Tinto.pdf. MoU with EU and application under Critical Raw Materials Act; legal challenge submitted by civil society.

⁴⁴ Luka Petrušić, 2025. Granting strategic status to a company that violates laws..." Radar. September 2024.

<https://radar.nova.rs/drustvo/hoce-li-projekat-jadar-biti-strateskim-za-eu/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/ivan-bijelic>

⁴⁶ POLEKOL 2024. Report on Repression of Civic Freedoms and Activist Suppression in Serbia. April.

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/tg0t7sbil6mkdgp0gtxar/2024-12-POLEKOL-Report-on-Repression-of-Civic-Freedoms-and-Activist-Suppression-in-Serbia-2024.pdf?rlkey=j6ildndrzb6reqxkbjla7fqcq&dl=0>



infrastructure, risk mitigation, and environmental disaster response. Meanwhile, Rio Tinto's projected net profits exceed €11.5 billion, with full ownership of extracted resources.⁴⁷

While Rio Sava and the Ministry for the Environment commenced the EIA scoping process, it was significantly stalled by over 10,000 Serbian citizens who filed complaints against the government's approval process. The complaints specified how the project was being pushed through illegally, which if taken seriously could potentially paralyze the administrative system.⁴⁸ Each complaint must be individually addressed before the decision becomes final, and the decision has been delayed now since Jan 2025.

Serbian Academy of Sciences members reiterated their opposition in April 2025, stating that the project violates both national and EU environmental laws, notably the Water Law and Waste Management Law. It emphasized that the Mačva aquifer—among Serbia's most critical drinking water sources—would be irreversibly contaminated if the mine were built. The Academy restated that "abandonment is the only rational option."⁴⁹ There is no example of a struggle of this magnitude, with a hundred thousand people on the streets in over 50 cities, a domestic and international campaign involving everyone from local farmers to academics, lawyers and activists, against a mine that has no permits, where the company hasn't withdrawn.⁵⁰

"There are things that money can't buy. Our land, our roots, our home, our heritage are not for sale, nor are our souls. We inherited everything we have, and it is our obligation to pass it on to our grandchildren. You do not have our permission to build a mine in the Jadar Valley! We will defend this country at the cost of our lives." Zlatko Kokanović, vice president of the association "Ne Damo Jadar".

We just want our normal little lives back. We want to do our agriculture and our jobs. We do not want to think about the mine, nor about pollution. Life is in full force here. Our children, these fields, houses, - this took generations to build. One company cannot erase all this or erase the traditions of our people. Marijana Trbović Petković, "Ne Damo Jadar" Gornje Nedeljice.

Given that the insatiable drive for profit is what got us into the climate crisis in the first place, is its solution a cheap mine in the hands of a world polluter, where we replace one form of extraction with another? If we let Rio Tinto come to Europe, we are incentivising environmental degradation at the expense of looking at real solutions. We are allowing corporations who are responsible for the climate crisis to act as if they are its solution. Bojana Novakovic - co-ordinator Mars Sa Drine campaign

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⁴⁷ Drakulić et al. 2024 HOW MUCH WOULD SERBIA GAIN FROM THE JADAR PROJECT? 10.10.24.

<https://www.dropbox.com/sc/fi/jhib5ioahe8v8jv6dbkn0/20241010-HOW-MUCH-WOULD-SERBIA-GAIN-FROM-THE-JADAR-PROJECT-FINAL.pdf?rlkey=jmcysfbo4x77shohc5q2sqmqj&dl=0>

⁴⁸ <https://n1info.rs/vesti/advokat-djordjevic-vise-od-10-000-zalbi-gradjana-na-resenje-o-projektu-jadar/>

⁴⁹ Statement from Serbian Academy of Sciences on the risks to Mačva aquifer and legal violations.

<https://www.dropbox.com/sc/fi/g3nysbx908k98fjzqw6sc/2025-04-10-SANU-for-EU.pdf?rlkey=80lnmtv5ozd7br1n11yi9zkxc&dl=0>

⁵⁰ Luka Petrušić, Radar. "The 'Jadar' project by Rio Tinto threatens to destroy the most fertile land in Serbia..." May 2024.
[https://radar.nova.rs/autor/bojana-novakovic/1\(https://radar.nova.rs/autor/bojana-novakovic/](https://radar.nova.rs/autor/bojana-novakovic/1(https://radar.nova.rs/autor/bojana-novakovic/)