Resolution adopted as amended

THE BALKAN GOLD RUSH IN THE YEAR 2012: A TRAGEDY IN THE MAKING

It is a fact that gold mining activities are expanding in the Balkan countries. The current crisis is contributing to a steep increase in gold prices, which, in turn, renders gold mining investments more profitable (despite very low concentrations (0.5 gr of gold in 1 tonne or lower) and tough mining conditions. Thus, gold mining companies, using the "current crisis" as an excuse, are exerting pressure on governments to further minimize existing regulations on mining activities and environmental protection. However, gold mining is certainly not a panacea to all evils in this crisis, especially skyrocketing unemployment levels.

Large scale, cyanide-based metal mines are currently being proposed and developed at Krumovgrad (Bulgaria), Ilovitza (FYR of Macedonia), and Rosia Montana and Certej (Romania). In Greece there are numerous proposals such as the 'Hellas Gold' proposal in Halikidiki. Similar issues have arisen in the Galician region of Spain. There are other areas with low concentration gold deposits that have already received approval to go ahead (Perama Hill) or are close to obtaining approval (Sapes).

All these proposals are heavily contested by the impacted communities and society at large. For years, complaints, concerns and calls for action have inundated those responsible for regulating mining activities. Going through all the correct procedures, these citizens are right to question the democracy of those in charge. Sadly, those petitioned are either not listening or are not seeing the disasters in the making or are simply choosing to ignore. Meanwhile those lobbying for increased mining are gaining ground. Urgent action is needed now!

While the primary mining of precious metals is destructive and not labour intensive, Belgian company 'Umicore' focuses solely on reclaiming and recycling metals. It employs 13,720 people and in 2009 had a turnover of €6.9 billion. It extracts metals such as gold from toxic e‑waste; from the mountains of unwanted televisions, computers and cell‑phones that the EU public generates each year. The company describes its work as "above ground mining." The shift from a consumer to a recycling society is a solution that must be actively promoted by EU institutions as an alternative to primary resource consumption including cyanide-based mining.

We as European Greens warn industry and our governments that a trade-off between social and environmental concerns and mining interests is not "sustainable development", but rather a source of destruction.

Resource developments in countries where law enforcement is weak have typically been accompanied by corruption and conflict, which in return leads to social, political and economic instability. In the Balkan region the permitting of current mining developments are already associated with corruption, scandals and violent conflicts, while it is almost impossible for gold mining to co-exist with other economic activities as mining is a mono-industrial activity. More importantly, the potential benefits for the local communities, as well as the national economies,

remain vague and are superseded by the enormous, long-lasting and practically irreversible damages provoked to the environment during construction, mining and closure.[1]

The potential for serious environmental destruction is very real. The example of the Baia Mare accident in Romania in 2000 is terrifying. The problem of cyanide use in gold extraction has not yet been solved.[2] That is why on May 2010, the European Parliament adopted a resolution urging a pan-European ban on cyanide use in gold mining by a large majority[3]. It is very unfortunate that Environment Commissioner Mr Potocnik, refused to implement this crystal clear legislative demand from the majority of the democratically elected Parliament[4] [5]. In response to the Baia Mare accident, the EU adopted the Mining Waste Directive (MWD) in November 2005. It is a weak legislative instrument due to intensive lobbying from the part of the precious metal mining industry, plus concerns expressed by resource-rich CEE countries. Implementation has also been weak [6].

There are also more recent developments in a very negative direction. Last month, in Halikidiki, Greece, the gold mining company "Hellas Gold" has proceeded with the urgent felling of an ancient forest without the proper licenses and in violation of the relevant environmental regulations[7]. This has triggered an overwhelming response from the local community, which unfortunately led to violent action from the police on 21 October[8]. Greek MEP Nikos Chrysogelos has submitted a question for written answer to the Commission, focusing on the illegal practices that were used in the case of the forest in Skouries, Halikidiki[9] .

These "open-pit" projects have a very destructive impact on archaeological sites, classified historical monuments and protected areas. One of the four proposed quarries at Rosia Montana (Romania) overlaps with Carnic Massif, despite the fact that this area belongs to the national list of historical monuments, and by law mining activities is thus prohibited. The recently approved Certej mining project overlaps with designated Natura 2000 sites. These historical and environmentally protected sites are part of our common European heritage. Huge mining waste disposal sites are left in place from previous mining activity and are not properly managed by national authorities. Hazardous substances and waste contribute to the overall environmental pollution and put in danger biodiversity and public health far beyond our borders.

The Balkan region has already been affected by heavy exploitation of its mineral deposits, undermining its real wealth: the natural ecosystems, water resources and rich biodiversity. We strictly oppose worsening the situation further.

In that respect, we as members of the European Green Party, demand from EU institutions that they take immediate measures to:

- Impose strict compulsory rules rather than self-regulatory guidelines;
- Ban the use of cyanide in gold extraction activities, through the adoption of the relevant

1 See annex A1
[2] See annex A2
[3] Resolution P7_TA(2010)0145, "Ban on use of cyanide mining technologies": 488 votes in favour, 48 against, 57 abstentions.
[4] http://www.mining-journal.com/production-and-markets/ec-rejects-proposed-cyanide-ban
[5] http://www.proactiveinvestors.com/companies/news/6816/emed-mining-permitting-boosted-as-eu-knocks-back-proposed-cyanide-ban-6816.html
[6] See annex A3
[7] http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=dwyauo-DYaM
[8] Greek police chase anti-mining demonstrators at the Skouries forest, beating them up.
[9] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+WQ+P-2012-009365+0+DOC+WORD+V0//EN&language=EN

resolution from the European Parliament;

- Propose an amendment to existing legislation on the management of waste from the extractive industries requiring that every operating company should take out insurance of adequate level to guarantee compensation for all damages and cover all remedial costs incurred in restoring a site to its original ecological and chemical status in the event of an accident or malfunction;
- Be in active control of all mining activities and their transboundary impacts, mainly through the strict observance of the International Espoo Convention on transboundary pollution;
- Prevent any negative impact of mining activities on archaeological and historical sites, and on NATURA 2000 protected areas.

Annex A 1

Modern mining is a chemical process rather than stereotypical mining per se. This chemical process is regulated by national mining laws that in return only mention the complex chemical process involved rather than actually regulating it. As can be seen from relevant examples all around the world, the chemical process and modern mining is not labour-intensive. It leads to an influx of labor forces during the short-term construction phase while ex-pat specialists are usually the dominant workforce during the mining and closure phase.

Annex A 2

It is often highlighted that mining accidents (i.e. Baia Mare/ Romania/2000) are a thing of the past as modern mining has developed beyond such risks. Actual evidence points to the contrary. The Talvivaara nickel/zinc mine in the EU member state Finland was opened as a model of modern mining in 2008. The construction license had been granted illegally; it had been granted in absence of an environmental permit. Shortly after, nearby lakes and their fish died and tourists complained about the water's foul smell. Subsequent tests showed that the water's sulphate and manganese contents were four-hundred times above permitted levels. Earlier this year a miner died after being poisoned by the sulphate rich discharge waters.

Amongst other things the Talvivaara example highlights that modern mining is in constant search of cheap mitigation measures to increase profits at the expense of the environment and people.

Annex A 3

Since the accident in 2000 mining spills from the Baia Mare and Baia Borsa sites have occurred on an almost yearly basis. Worse still, in Bulgaria the transposition of the MWD Directive was simply postponed to 2018. Permitted cyanide levels in Bulgaria are currently 25 parts per million (ppm) while the MWD sets a maximum of 10ppm. This is a matter for particular concern given that foreign mining companies are proposing large cyanide-based gold/silver mine operations at densely inhabited locations in Bulgaria with some along the Martiza River which feeds cross-boundary into Greece.

To put the 10ppm standard in context, an accidental cyanide discharge of just 1ppm into the river Trent in the United Kingdom in October 2009 led to a fish kill that affected 20 miles of the river. The cyanide killed the bacteria used at a nearby sewage treatment works and a

combination of ammonia and cyanide killed thousands of fish. Under the MWD permissible cyanide levels are ten times higher.

Another major shortcoming of the MWD is that it does not address cyanide emissions into the air that result from mining operations. Canadian 'Gabriel Resources' is proposing a 13 Mt/a development at Rosia Montana in Romania. It would require the use of 13-15 million kilograms of cyanide per year, with more than 130 kg of cyanide emitted into the air every single day during the 16 year mine life. There exists no EU legislation that regulates cyanide emissions into the air.

Annex B: More background documents:

1. Klondike in Lappland, **Der Spiegel,** No.44/29.10.2012, pp.122
2. Why cyanide-based precious metal mining should be banned in Europe, by Daniel Popov, Maria Kadoglou and Stephanie Roth
3. Cyanide free Romania
4. Trent accident (Link)
5. Annex to the EIA, RMGC, page 68 of volume 62 (English version)
6. Resolution P7_TA(2010)0145, "Ban on use of cyanide mining technologies"
7. Mining Journal Production and Markets: EC rejects proposed cyanide ban
8. Europe, Headlines, Health: ROMANIA: Digging Gold With a Cyanide Lining
9. EMED Mining permitting boosted as EU knocks back proposed cyanide ban. EMED Mining at (Link 1, 2)
10. Hellenic Mining Watch – Resistance to destructive mining in Greece
11. Σκουριές: το βίντεο της καταστροφής
12. Question for written answer P-009365/2012 to the Commission