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Belgrade, July 17, 2024

Dear Chancellor Scholz  
Dear Madam President von der Leyen  
Dear Vice-President Šefčovič  
Dear Madam President Calviño Santamaría  
Dear Madam President Renaud-Basso

We are writing to you regarding **the Rio Tinto lithium mine in Serbia**. This proposal has given rise to the largest citizens' protests in post-war Serbia. Kreni-Promeni is a citizens movement and the political organization with the best opposition result in the last local elections (**Belgrade 17,7%**), campaigning for a truly progressive Serbia where the rights of ordinary citizens are respected and not run over or ignored by nepotism or politically-motivated decisions. We and our members have since long supported the struggle of the local property owners from Jadar who refuse to give way to Rio Tinto (whose largest shareholder is Chinese state-owned Chinalco). We organized and joined many protests that saw hundreds of thousands repeatedly taking the streets all over Serbia. We also host a petition opposing the mine signed by 295.659 Serbian citizens.<sup>1</sup>

In September 2021, the outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel made her farewell tour to the Balkans. In Belgrade, she was welcomed by President Aleksandar Vučić, whose authoritarian stunts she was, as was the case in other countries east of Germany, willing to overlook in exchange for 'stable' partnerships. Deep running red lines such as – media freedom or the rule of law – were pushed to the side. Instead, Merkel revealed<sup>2</sup> that Germany, too, was interested in Serbia's lithium. "We have a large number of investments in the automotive industry," she said. "If

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<sup>1</sup> <https://peticije.kreni-promeni.org/petitions/stop-rudniku-litijuma-rio-tinto-mars-sa-drine>

<sup>2</sup> <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/merkel-germany-is-interested-in-serbias-lithium/>

the whole world is interested, we are also interested.” The detrimental impact of Mrs Merkel's approach of ‘overlooking in exchange for’ has in hindsight proven to be the single largest destabilizing force to Europe and the European project.

It's important to learn from mistakes so as to not repeat them. The Balkan and Serbia in particular has historically been a force often underestimated because never truly understood. Each and everyone of you has influence over the Jadar proposal, and with this in mind **we would like to meet you when next in Serbia to underline the reasons why the vast majority of Serbian citizens reject Rio Tinto's Jadar proposal.** We believe in European values such as peace, dialogue, the wellbeing of citizens, freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

There exists urgency because Serbia's Constitutional Court ruled on July 11—at the demand of Rio Tinto—to invalidate the January 20, 2022 governmental decision that canceled the Jadar project following mass protests across the country. The court did so based on a minor formality, under urgent procedures, and under pressure from the government. **The Constitutional Court has, at the same time, ignored a “constitutional citizen initiative” citizens aiming to cancel unconstitutional governmental actions regarding the Jadar project. At the same time, the National Assembly illegally refused to decide on the constitutional people's initiative validated by 38.191 citizens within the constitutional deadline, which violated the Constitution. We believe that democracy is at its strongest when it has the courage to face not just half but the full truth.**

We refuse rushed decisions to plump the wrinkles of a Commission's ending mandate; as proposed by Vice President, Mr. Šefčovič, via a highly controversial trade agreement on rare raw materials between the EU and Serbia. Behind its seemingly general scope, it aims at aiding political and business lobbies to revive the Jadar lithium proposal. **Jadar is not a means in exchange for Europe's or Germany's political or economic ends.** Jadar is a place, a home, a community with a rich farming tradition and history, and a purpose with a strong pulse into the future. Jadar is not for sale.

If mistakes from the past are repeated then it should come to no surprise if this raises legitimate concerns amongst Serbia's citizens.

Chancellor Scholz, hundreds of thousands of Serbian citizens have again and again repeatedly and peacefully taken to the streets; they endorsed citizens' initiatives and signed petitions because of the proposal's destructive environmental impact and negligible economic benefit. To this very day all opinion polls show that an overwhelming majority of Serbians are against the mine. Why would you and Germany want to support a proposal unwanted by good neighbors when there is so much to focus on and build together in terms of trust, Europe's future and its values as well as in terms of real solutions to the climate crisis?

We can not help but wonder whether this sudden rush to go against the vast majority of Serbian citizens from the part of the outgoing Vice President Šešelj is related to the link between the Jadar proposal and the Slovak lithium battery company Inobat? In 2023 this company officially requested a total of €419m in subsidies from the Serbian government for its development at Jadar, at a time when its projects are either delayed or canceled across the continent.

We are unafraid of arbitration and any notice thereof but we do think that for the sake of the European project it would be more constructive and sustainable if the EU Commission and its President von der Leyen would take notice to respect citizens rights rather than using EU taxpayers money to fund socially engineered acceptance to mining while brushing away instances of corruption and legitimate objections for projects that fail to meet applicable laws. In addition to repeating mistakes this is also futile, counterproductive and inappropriate from a cultural point of view. We regard the EU as a democratic and green project, not one where aspiring country candidates have to destroy their environment and go against the law and the will of their people in exchange for membership.

With the above in mind we are also seeking written assurance from Mrs. Calviño Santamaria and Mrs. Renaud-Basso that neither the EIB nor the EBRD will finance anything related to the Jadar lithium proposal, be they lithium transport roads, railways or any direct or indirect infrastructure such as Inobat's battery factory etc. Jadar is an important source for Serbia's water and agriculture needs and it is densely inhabited. The EIB and the EBRD both have a democratizing and environmental mandate. Therefore it would be incomprehensible for the two financial institutions to go against their very mandate and Serbia's citizens.

**The more there exists an effort to rush and push through the Jadar mine proposal, the more Serbia's citizens will be determined to act for it to not be implemented.** Because of our recent past and to a certain extent also because of our present, we have learned to not rely but to take things into our own hands. If decision-makers fail to understand this and fail to listen to as well as honor the will of Serbians, we will organize just as we did in 2022, again large scale and peaceful demonstrations as well as civil disobedience actions. Brushing away Rio Tinto's failure to secure the social license to operate will only lead to increased political risk and that will take away energy and opportunities that could be used to build a truly stable Serbian partner and EU member.

**As we can see now stablocracy brings war, crisis and instability; and in looking for solutions we would argue that European values such as the rule of law and democracy should be strengthened to the point of not being negotiable.**

We would look forward to meeting you in the near future to exchange in greater detail on the above and welcome your reactions. In the meantime we assure you of our

Best regards,  
Marina Pavlić and Savo Manojlović  
Kreni-Promeni