

SURVEY

on biodiversity v. energy and extractive projects



Name of country: **Serbia**

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1. Is there a conflict between biodiversity conservation and energy and extractive industries in your country? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples of investments that demonstrate this conflict.

Biodiversity is a professional term that replaces the term nature protection in legal regulations in Serbia.

Whenever there is an energetic or extractive industry facility, their conflict with nature protection is inevitable. For example, the mines are located in areas of lower population density and higher biodiversity, which in itself causes a conflict between the performance of activities and the environment.

The biggest problem are cases in which energy or mining facilities are located or placed in protected areas. There are few such cases in Serbia. Cases of conflict arise in relation to energy and mining facilities on the edge of protected areas, especially in the case of the need for spatial expansion of energy and mining operators.

Current the biggest conflicts between nature protection and energy and extractive industry in Serbia are open pit mines of lignite (Kolubara lignite basin near Belgrade and Kostolac lignite basin near city of Požarevac), operated by national electricity company EPS (Elektroprivreda Srbije), then open pit mines of copper (Bor-Majdanpek basin near city of Bor), operated by Serbia Zijin Bor Copper Ltd, ironworks (in city of Smederevo) operated by Hesteel Serbia Iron & Steel Ltd, and a large number of abandoned tailings from inactive mines. The conflict is due to the constant expansion of areas affected by mining and industrial operations and the need for additional areas for waste.

2. Is there a public attention towards the said conflicts? Is there public media coverage of the said conflicts? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples of investments that demonstrate this conflict.

The problems of conflicts between energy and mining plants with their environment and the need for nature protection are generally poorly noticed in public. The main reasons for this are the relatively remote location of these plants and the small number of people affected by the problem. Also, until five years ago, all major examples of conflicts between nature and the environment with energy and mining facilities were only those inherited from the period before 1990. These facilities still practically have attention and protection as objects of special state interest and were never fully in public focus.

The attitude of the media towards the threat of nature and biodiversity has changed since large energy and mining plants started working again in full, approximately in 2015. However, the reasons for this change are mostly political, and less genuinely interested in improvement and protection of nature. For example, the ironworks in Smederevo operated from 2002 to 2012 as part of American company US Steel Košice and during that period did not attract attention as a pollutant, while after 2016 coming

under the management of the Chinese company Hestil Serbia Iron suddenly became a large polluter – although the technology remained the same. The similar case is with the mining and smelting company in Bor, which after the transfer to the Chinese company Serbia Zijin Bor Copper Ltd in 2018 became highly covered by the media and negatively presented, although technology remained the same as before – only scale of operation is increased. On the other hand, although a much bigger problem, open pit lignite mines are still almost invisible to the media.

3. Are there active civil society organizations working for the protection of biodiversity in your country? Do they implement actions against energy and extractive industry projects that are in conflict with biodiversity conservation? If yes, please give a short description and if possible, give examples.

CSOs for protection of biodiversity are in Serbia closely related to those that protect the environment, although their activities generally do not match fully. A relatively small number of CSOs deal only with nature protection.

The most famous relatively recent example of action for nature protection and against energy facilities were the campaign and protests which was led by Defend the rivers of Stara Planina movement against the construction of small HPPs in the vicinity of the city of Pirot, in the Stara Planina Nature Park, during 2019 and 2020. Long lasting protests were very favourably covered by the media. As a result of protests and favourable media coverage, in the spring of 2021 a ban on the construction of small HPPs in all areas of protected nature was adopted.

However, this was a big exception in Serbia. Although the media in last about five years often inform the public about the problems of pollution and endangering nature, CSOs and activists who carry out actions regarding nature protection generally remain unknown, and their activities remain in the spotlight for a relatively short time, while the impression of a change of narrative in the media rests on short stories on different locations and regarding different topics. Most nature conservation CSOs and activists are isolated and do not have sufficient support (if any) in their activities.

4. What would these active NGOs need in order to improve their work against energy and extractive industry projects that are in conflict with biodiversity conservation? What kind of support (e.g., funding, networking, training, joint actions, joint legal cases, scientific support in analysing environmental assessment reports, etc.) would these NGOs require for their work?

Literally all of the above-mentioned variants of support (e.g., funding, networking, training, joint actions, joint legal cases, scientific support in analysing environmental assessment reports, etc.) would be useful to CSOs and nature conservation activists. However, it is impossible to determine in advance which sort of support would be more useful, especially for each individual CSOs.

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