

Lithium extraction and processing: the future that should not be easily dismissed

Dear readers, from the texts before you may be surprised to learn that back in the Middle Ages, King Uroš I brought German (Old Saxon) miners to these territories and that, thanks to his long-term vision, poor Serbia began digging silver and develop economically faster, catching up with its neighbours. There may have been disapproving voices even at that time, but general welfare was louder than them. Seven and a half centuries later, history repeats itself, and our state is facing similar challenges: whether to extract lithium while observing the highest ecological standards and develop the economic and political capital of entire humanity, or stay trapped in the fears from ecological differences perhaps lurking from the depths of Jadar.

The study drafts by more than a hundred Serbian and international independent experts, including 40 university professors from over 10 faculties show that “Jadar” project may be safely implemented with the application of the highest

domestic and international standards. After six and a half years of thorough work and more than 23,000 biological, physical and chemical analyses of soil, air and noise, on more than 2,000 pages, a comprehensive study has been prepared with accurate data about potential impacts on the environment and with adequate protection measures. By publishing a comprehensive review of the lithium extraction risks, we place a special emphasis on environmental sustainability and new technologies to be integrated in the protection measures. Moreover, we see continued monitoring of the environment as a key and mandatory strategy of sustainable mining. Surface waters, soil and air are important resources for preserving public health, which no exploitation can ever bring into question.

Today, lithium is a *par excellence* complex political issue in Serbia, and to provide the best response, the academic debate is the best manner of informing the public in a quality way, because only

6 | a thus-adopted solution may be good for all. Hence this thematic edition, as a contribution to the debate which should take place in a broader scientific community. Global energy pre-composition with an increasing number of surprises on the political chess board, with lithium as a strategic stake, enables us to participate in the game of power redistribution with an opportunity of improving Serbia's position in economic, energy and, at the same time, in political and security terms. Our public, just as on many similar occasions, is divided. Plenty of disinformation, conspiracy theories, subversive acting of those who would like to gain extra profits even before the beginning of the project implementation, rumours, hearsay, lies, spins and fear from changes have entered the public space, spreading moral panic and suspicion about environmental pollution that will destroy the

terrain and the population. Scientific arguments have quieted down and been replaced by sound and fury towards those who support lithium extraction.

In today's Serbia, everything is politics. Sport, education, agriculture, the church, economy, history, vaccination and the theatre – and, as we can see now, ore extraction. It is much more devastating that the civilian, political and professional public seem not to hear or have any mutual understanding. This issue of *Napredak* is our academic contribution to the social dialogue, whereas we are aware that the dialogue also calls for the readiness of those who do not want to hear about, let alone to understand arguments. Nevertheless, we hope that those who want will be able to draw appropriate conclusions from the scientific papers published here.