



## Threat of Environmental Catastrophe in Transylvania

It is a world-wide fame that the Rosia Montana Gold Corporation (RMGC), Romanian-Canadian joint venture, plans to establish Europe's largest outcrop gold mine in Rosia Montana (Verespatak in Hungarian, Goldbach in German), Transylvania. Romanian Ministry of the Environment soon re-starts the process of licensing the Rosia Montana gold mine investment, despite in April 2010 the European Parliament expressed its deepest concerns pertaining to the project which may lead to natural catastrophe.

The 2005 General Assembly of the ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) also stood up for the historic heritage of the ancient site, thus offering protection against the barbarous destructions the mine-opening would cause. The Hungarian-speaking Churches of Transylvania jointly protested against the gold-mine project in October 2002, and the Romanian Orthodox Church acted similarly, in 2003. Greenpeace and the European Alliance of Green Parties also spoke out against the cyanide-based technology of the mining project. During the past years, in the EP plenary sessions and at different forums, MEP László Tőkés, President of the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania, has spoken against cyanide-based mining and for the protection of the natural and human environment as well as our waters.

Yet, with hundreds of millions invested in the project, RMGC continues to push for this massive gold mine in spite of local, national, and international opposition and numerous rulings against the company, and is taking now advantage of the silent support of the newly appointed government.



*Rosia Montana is located in the middle of Transylvania. The accident at Baia Mare (Nagybánya) in 2000 brought home to Transylvanians the dangers of cyanide leaching of gold. In 2003, the Romanian Academy issued a report which was completely against the use of cyanide at the mine, recommending that all mining should be suspended until a non-cyanide method could be used. The Academy worried that the company would not fully neutralize the tailings and warned of the possibility of acid rains releasing hydrogen cyanide.*

It is common knowledge that the Bucharest Supreme Court in its legally binding resolution passed on 2 June 2010 prescribed the Ministry of the Environment to emit the license assessing the building of protective barrages for the Rosia Montana Gold Corporation.

The venture, which has been portentous and marked by a series of scandals, intends to implement the same potassium cyanide technology while the exploitation of metals, at Baia Mare, which poisoned the Tisza River fore-and-aft, in 2000. The mine exploitation based on the potassium cyanide technology now carries similar dangers in the case of the Rosia Montana gold and silver mine, which is planned to be opened.

The arrangements of its opening have permanently been overshadowed by series of scandals since 1995. The arrangements, which have been in process since 1995, ruined Rosia Montana's natural heritage entirely and pushed its inhabitants on the edge of social poverty. It seems that the unscrupulous hunger for profit of the multinational corporations, as well as the greed of its national subsidiary companies would repeatedly ignore and sacrifice the natural environment, the historical heritage and the basic interests of the indigenous community.

Two years ago, the Ministry of Environment Protection, led by Attila Korodi suspended the licensing process initiated by the Rosia Montana Mine. The new Romanian government, however, being heavily influenced by political and economic pressure exercised by the investors, now shows signs of tractability to give green light to the infamous mine investment.

RMGC is a Canadian-Romanian joint venture. The enterprise submitted a new license for landscaping. The expert committee working within the frame of the Ministry of the Environment will examine the permit and will most probably re-initiate the procedure for licensing the investment, which was suspended by the very same institution in 2007.

Minister of Environment, László Borbély said that the department thus will honour the European and Romanian laws and standards. At the same time, he declared that he would support the license of the investment in case he is convinced beyond doubt that the procedure will not do any harm to the environment.

RMGC plans the exploitation of 330 tons of gold and 1,600 tons of silver near Rosia Montana. In order to accomplish this, they intend to open Europe's greatest aboveground mine, which has met heated critical opposition on behalf of numerous Romanian non-governmental organizations so far.



*The mine would destroy 900 houses, 9 churches and 10 cemeteries. The remains of the mining town include ancient industrial facilities, temples, baths, houses and tunnels. The latter have been described by UNESCO as "a unique archaeological complex of Roman mine galleries", although company spokesman Adrian Dascalu has suggested that "They're more Austro-Hungarian than Roman". Most of these remains would be destroyed by the project.*

Rosia Montana lies in the Transylvanian Ore Mountains and is said to be Europe's largest non-ferrous metal region. The corporation, which intends to yield the gold and silver supplies with cyanide-based technology, was granted the landscaping license, the third in row, by the Alba County local government in May 2010.

In order to launch the project 255 acres of forest has to be cut out. The existing built heritage is first and foremost of Hungarian and German origins. The civil heritage consisting of 317 buildings and the churches belonging to the Catholic, Unitarian and Reformed congregations are to be found in the protected area.

In order for the project to be economically feasible, the Rosia Montana valley, one of the oldest documented settlements in Transylvania, would be carved into four open-pit mines. The neighboring valley of Corna would be transformed into an unlined cyanide storage "pond" covering a surface of up to 600 hectares (1,482 acres), held back by a 180-meter high dam. The pits would generate roughly 196.4 million tons of cyanide-laced waste.

Local opposition to the mine is based in part on the disastrous experience at the Baia Mare gold mine in Romania, where a cyanide spill in 2000 polluted the Tisza and Danube Rivers, contaminating the drinking water supplies of 2.5 million people and killing 1200 tons of fish.

Should the project continue, more than 2,000 people would be displaced - many of them are subsistence farmers who do not want to leave their lands - and nearly 900 homes would have to be torn down in order to make way for the mine project. The mine would employ a workforce of 250 to 300 people over the mine's estimated lifespan of 15 years.



**“Today, we do NOT serve Hungarians,”** announces a hostile banner at a bar in Cluj (Kolozsvár in Hungarian, Klausenburg in German). The city is considered the unofficial capital to historic Transylvania. Despite the massive settlement of ethnic Romanians into the city during Communism, Hungarians still make up about 20% of the population.

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*Previous Transylvanian Monitor issues are available at: [www.emnt.org](http://www.emnt.org)*