

Zijin wrote to the ministry in December with a claim that a study for the preparatory construction works within the expansion of its copper smelter in Bor isn't necessary. They include excavation and the enlargement and reconstruction of existing structures.

The two organizations Association of Young Researchers Bor and the Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute (RERI) have been raising the alarm in the public and with the Serbian Ministry of Environmental Protection, arguing that the Zijin attempted a case of salami slicing - artificial fragmentation of a project to hide the impact on the environment. Based on objections from the Association of Young Researchers Bor and RERI, the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia rejected the request by company Serbia Zijin Copper to decide on the need for an environmental impact assessment for a part of its project and ordered it to conduct a study for the entire complex.

Ministry changes course

Legal expert from RERI Hristina Vojvodić pointed out that the Chinese company already tried to break up the projects for increasing its output into smaller pieces and that the latest decision is "unique and made from a completely opposite standpoint" than in similar processes in Serbia lately.

She told Balkan Green Energy News it is the first time that an investor is trying to exclude preparatory works and said that the organization is looking into information that some of the planned structures have already been built.

"The construction permit can only be issued after the impact assessment study is approved. The project includes a desulfurization unit and a sulfuric acid plant and storage facility, making it potentially very dangerous for the environment. If Zijin obtained the permits, it would get the right to launch construction even though it wouldn't know if it would be allowed to implement the entire endeavor. The ministry instructed the company that it can't divide the project and it was a necessary move to get the whole picture," Vojvodić stated.

Preparatory construction works have no independent purpose

According to the Law on Planning and Construction, the construction of a structure consists of preliminary works, the production and supervision of technical documentation, preparatory construction works, the construction itself and simultaneous professional oversight. It means that the aforementioned works aren't a separate project and that they have no independent purpose, RERI said.

When the construction of the smelter in Serbia's east is viewed as a whole, the negative environmental impact and the necessity of a study become obvious, the experts and activists said.

Hristina Vojvodić stressed the responsibility of state institutions and highlighted the attempts by investors to "copy, imitate the methods" that worked for other investors. On the other hand, citizens and activists now pay more attention and the public is interested in the information on infringements, she underscored.

Typical examples of salami slicing were registered in projects for Linglong's tire factory in Zrenjanin and coal-fired thermal power plant Kostolac B3, Vojvodić said.

Izvor: balkangreenenergynews.com