

To the prime ministers of Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine
To the ministers for the Environment of Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine
To the presidents of the Romanian, Hungarian, Slovakian and Ukrainian Parliaments

29 July 2008

Dear Prime Minister, Minister, President

Stop mining related river pollution in the Danube and Tisza water catchments!

Heavy rainfalls over the past days have again broken one of the two Colbu tailing dams at the Baia Borsa mine site in Romania. In an attempt to prevent total dam failure, Romanian authorities have responded by releasing mining waters and waste into the river system close by. The rainfall is still continuing and Hungarian environmental authorities have already recorded manganese, copper, iron, lead and high levels of cadmium pollution in samples taken from Tivadar at the Hungarian/Ukrainian border. According to the Hungarian authorities no information exists about the exact amount of toxic sludge which has entered the Viso River and the time of the accident is also unknown. Despite previous technical assurances people are now left in a situation in which all they can do is hope that the rainfall stops before it causes pollution on a scale similar to the Baia Borsa accident of 2000. Such a situation is unacceptable.

After the Baia Mare and Baia Borsa dam failures and resulting cyanide spills of 2000, expert bodies from the European Union and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) identified more than 50 potential pollution sources ('hotspots') in the Carpathian Basin, but to date none of these have been cleaned up completely. These 50 potential pollution sources include the Baia Borsa mine. The undersigned citizens' groups are therefore calling on you to take immediate measures to clean up the hotspots as identified by EU and UNEP expert bodies.

This latest heavy metal spill which occurred in Romania over the weekend of 26/27 July 2008, and which at the time of writing is still not contained, clearly shows the vulnerability of the mining industry to extreme weather conditions which are occurring on a regular basis. Since 2000 large and small scale spills from mine sites have occurred regularly, polluting important waterways and putting human and environmental health at significant risk, whilst also highlighting the ineffectiveness of current legislation.

In addition there currently exist several proposals for large scale mines which would have a potential impact on the Carpathian Basin. The Rosia Montana proposal and Certej proposals in Romania and the Kremnica proposal in Slovakia are pertinent examples. From a purely technical point of view these proposals fail, amongst other things, to take into account extreme weather patterns and thus pose a significant risk to the already unacceptable current situation.

In order to put an effective halt to the pollution of waterways caused by new mining operations, Romanian civil society organizations have repeatedly campaigned for a ban of cyanide in mining. According to a nation wide opinion poll carried out in April 2008, 67% of Romanians support a legislative proposal to ban the use of cyanide in mining.

Until effective legislation to stop dam failures from mine sites is in place and until the hotspots have been cleaned up successfully, we are urging you not to approve new mine developments. We are also asking you to take immediate measures to ban the use of cyanide in mining in Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine.

In light of the current spill and in order to prevent future river pollutions, the undersigned citizens' groups call upon the governments of Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine

- to clean up the hotspots in the Carpathian Basin as identified by the EU and UNEP expert bodies
- not to approve new mine developments until the current hotspots have been cleaned up and until effective legislation is in place
- to ban the use of cyanide in mining in Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine.

Yours sincerely,

Friends of the Earth Europe, Belgium
CEE Bankwatch Network, Czech Republic
National Ecological Center of Ukraine, Ukraine
Golos Pryrody, Ukraine
Friends of the Earth-CEPA, Slovakia
Greenpeace CEE, Austria
Asociația "Salvati Dunarea și Delta", Romania
Alburnus Maior, Romania
Fundatia StrawberryNet (StrawberryNet Foundation), Romania
Eco-Media Association, Romania
Romanian Herpetological Society, Romania
Noii Golani, Romania
ARIN, Romania
Independent Centre for the Development of Environmental Resources, Romania
Societatea Carpatina Ardeleana (Transylvanian Carpathia Society), Romania
National Society of Conservationists / Friends of the Earth Hungary, Hungary
WWF Magyarország (WWF Hungary)
ELTE Natura Conservation Club (ETK), Hungary
Tisza Klub, Hungary
Reflex Környezetvédő Egyesület, Hungary
Energia és Környezet Alapítvány, Hungary
Inspi-ráció Egyesület, Hungary
Biokultúra Közép-Magyarországi Egyesület, Hungary
Zöld Kör (Green Circle) Hajdúböszörmény, Hungary
Környezeti Tanácsadó Irodák Hálózata: Hungarian Network of Ecocounselling Offices
Zöld Kapcsolat Egyesület (Green Connection), Hungary
Hatvani Környezetvédő Egyesület, Hungary
HOLOCÉN Természetvédelmi Egyesület (Holocén Nature Protection Organisation), Hungary
E-misszió Természet- és Környezetvédelmi Egyesület (E-misszió Environmental Association), Hungary
Ökorégió Alapítvány a Fenntartható Fejlődésért, Hungary
Szövetség az Élő Tiszáért, Alliance for the Living Tisza, Hungary
Debreceni Lycium Kör, Hungary
Tokaji Természetvédelmi Egyesület, Hungary
Messzelátó Egyesület (Messzelato Association), Hungary
Független Ökológiai Központ (Independent Ecological Center), Hungary
Beretzk Péter Conservationist Club, Hungary
Magosfa Környezeti Nevelési és Ökoturisztikai Alapítvány, Hungary
Tanácsadók a Fenntartható Fejlődésért, Consultants for Sustainable Development, Hungary
Keresztúri Társas Kör (Cultural and Environmental Association of Keresztúr), Hungary
Zöld Akció Egyesület (Green Action Association), Hungary
Védegyelet (Protect the Future!), Hungary
Balmazújvárosi Környezetvédelmi Csoport, Hungary
Hajdúsági Civil Központ és Adattár Alapítvány (Civil Centre Foundation of the Hajdu Region), Hungary
Kalocsakörnyéki Környezetvédelmi Egyesület, Hungary
Dél-Nyírség Bihari Tájvédelmi Egyesület, Hungary