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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
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**Possible negative impact of mining activities in Trstionica
– Gornja Bukovica and Vareš (Bosnia & Herzegovina)**

- COMPLAINANT REPORT -

Document prepared by Park prirode Trstionica i Boriva

REPORT FOR THE BERN CONVENTION

To: Secretariat of the Bern Convention / Bureau of the Standing Committee

Subject: Updated report of the complainant

Complaint No. 2022/07, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Possible negative impact of mining activities in Trstionica – Gornja Bukovica and Vareš

Date: August 15, 2026

PUBLIC SUMMARY

This updated report is submitted pursuant to the Bureau's request of July 15, 2026. Despite the Bureau's clear recommendations to halt mining operations and systematically monitor water quality, the competent authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina continue their practice of ignoring institutions, covering up ecological accidents, and favoring a private investor at the expense of natural habitats, protected wildlife, and consequently, public health.

The current situation on the ground represents a blatant example of environmental crime and state capture. The analysis of hydrochemical data for the Bukovica river basin—a vital ecological corridor and the main source of drinking water for the Kakanj municipality—revealed the presence of heavy metals, including dangerous levels of barium. These levels of toxicity are lethal to aquatic ecosystems. Instead of an urgent reaction, the institutions resorted to a cover-up. The laboratory, under public pressure, retroactively altered two publicly available reports to conceal the pollution, claiming that the "wrong unit of measurement" (mg/l instead of µg/l) had been used for two years. The latest report for July 2026 was adjusted to fit this narrative. As the ultimate indicator of this complete environmental destruction, an evident and alarming increase in carcinogenic diseases among the younger population has been recorded in Kakanj.

The cover-up extends to earlier ecological incidents that directly destroyed protected habitats. Tracer test results from the Report on the Impact on Bukovica show a drastic spike in the tracer in the Borovički stream from 22 ppm to 117 ppm, which was falsely attributed to "rain" in official documents. Simultaneously, drilling mud was directly observed in the Vrući Potok stream, suffocating the spring's micro-ecosystem, confirming the continuity of the poisoning recorded back in 2023.

The situation in Vareš is equally critical. Strictly protected forests have been clear-cut, natural habitats are fragmented, and wild species (including large carnivores and protected fauna) have completely abandoned the area due to noise and daily poisoning by toxic dust. The authorities have formed non-transparent working groups that have been "talking" for months without taking a single concrete step, allowing the investor to continue the devastation. Due to the complete absence of the rule of law and the ongoing destruction of prime habitats, the complainant reiterates the request to open a Case File and for urgent international intervention.

MAIN REPORT

1. Destruction of Aquatic Habitats, Falsification of Hydrochemical Data, and Cover-up of Barium Pollution (Kakanj)

The analysis of the hydrochemical data of the Bukovica river indicates severe contamination lethal to aquatic life due to mining activities, and the response of the institutions represents a textbook example of state cover-up.

Manipulation of findings: After the public was alarmed due to the high presence of barium in the water, the director of the competent laboratory stated that the "wrong unit of measurement was used," despite the fact that the same unit (mg/l) had been officially used for a full two years.

Alteration of documents: Two disputed reports were retroactively altered. The values were artificially recalculated to fit within "permitted" parameters.

Endangering ecosystems and public health: The citizens of Kakanj are left to fend for themselves, and a dramatic increase in carcinogenic diseases is evident on the ground, which directly correlates with long-term exposure to heavy metals. The mass poisoning of the human population serves as the most severe indicator that the natural aquatic habitat of the Bukovica river has been completely destroyed.

2. Manipulation of Tracer Test Results and the History of Poisoning the Vrući Potok Habitat

The environmental impact on the catchment areas is systematically minimized by doctoring official reports:

In the official Report on the Impact on Bukovica, a sudden spike in tracer values in the Borovički stream from 22 ppm to 117 ppm was recorded. The authors baselessly attributed this drastic spike to "precipitation," ignoring clear evidence of underground toxic leakage into the aquatic habitats.

During the same tracer test, drilling mud was visually observed and documented in the Vrući Potok stream, directly burying and destroying the fragile ecosystem of the spring.

This is not an isolated incident; laboratory findings from 2023 had already previously proven severe poisoning of the Vrući Potok stream, to which the inspectorates never reacted.

3. Devastation of Terrestrial Habitats, Institutional Apathy, and the Crisis in Vareš

While the protected area and prime wildlife habitat has been turned into a completely devastated mining zone, the mechanisms of the rule of law have been suspended:

All reports regarding the destruction of nature are met with a wall of silence. The authorities openly favor the investor, allowing exploitation in an area that was designated for strict protection by the Spatial Plan.

As an illusion of solving the problem, government representatives formed a "working team" that has been delaying the process for months without any concrete measures to protect the environment.

During this time, the investor digs and drills without any hindrance, fragmenting forests and destroying ecological networks. The local population is continuously poisoned, and wildlife has permanently abandoned this severely degraded area.

Conclusion and Demands:

Due to the deliberate destruction of protected habitats, the concealment of water quality data, the endangerment of public health, and the authorities' refusal to act on the Bureau's recommendations, we demand the urgent opening of a Case File at the autumn meeting and immediate international expertise on the ground.

Respectfully,

NGG Park prirode Trstionica i Boriva

Hajrija Čobo

Complaint No. 2022/07, Possible File, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Possible negative impact of mining activities in Trstionica – Gornja Bukovica and Vareš

ANNEX 1: Evidence of Systemic Manipulation of Hydrochemical Data, Institutional Repression, and the Chronology of Heavy Metal Poisoning

Official laboratory reports prepared by the "SISTEM QUALITAS" laboratory from Pale, and published by the public utility company JP "Vodokom" d.o.o. Kakanj, unequivocally prove the presence of dangerous levels of heavy metals in the drinking water (sample: "Drinking water from the tap after the Bukovica plant"). Although the competent authorities claim this is an alleged error in the unit of measurement, a detailed analysis of the documentation dating back to 2023 reveals years of systemic concealment of pollution and repression against citizens.

1. Culmination of Pollution and Media Cover-up (2026)

The multi-year trend of ignoring the danger reached its peak in the spring of 2026, when a clumsy attempt to cover up the extreme pollution occurred:

April 2026: The analysis of the water¹ sampled on April 17, 2026, shows that the measured level of barium jumped to a record 52.8 mg/l. Despite this, the technical manager of the laboratory signed the compliance declaration², and the Facebook page "Općina Kakanj - načelnik" (Municipality of Kakanj - Mayor) publicly published³ this report on June 5, 2026, claiming that the "results are in order" and calling the citizens' concerns "misinformation".

May 2026: A month later (May 14, 2026), the laboratory issued a report⁴ showing the presence of barium at 11.9 mg/l. The identical pattern repeated: the laboratory claimed the water was safe⁵, and local authorities used this to mislead the public⁶. After the public noticed these extreme values, the director of the laboratory went to the media claiming that for two years the unit mg/l was mistakenly written instead of micrograms (µg/l).

2. Chronology of Poisoning, Active Repression, and Intimidation (2024)

Evidence from 2024 shows that the values from 2026 were not an exception, but the rule. They confirm the alarming presence of barium, as well as the use of the state's apparatus to intimidate the public, which represents a direct violation of the Aarhus Convention:

December 2024: The analysis of the water⁷ sampled on December 12, 2024, shows a terrifying barium concentration of 22.0 mg/l. The laboratory⁸ and institutions ignored these findings, issuing a "Declaration of Compliance".

3. Active Repression and Intimidation (July 2024):

The culmination of the abuse of power⁹ occurred on July 11, 2024. After a conscientious citizen took a water sample for independent analysis to Munich, whose findings confirmed the pollution, local authorities initiated state coercion. The official Facebook page "Općina Kakanj

¹ [31.jpg](#)

² [32.jpg](#)

³ [OBJAVA NAČELNIKA APRIL.jpg](#)

⁴ [33.jpg](#)

⁵ [34.jpg](#)

⁶ [OBJAVA NAČELNIKA MAJ.jpg](#)

⁷ [Dec 2024.jpg](#)

⁸ [Dec 2024 II.jpg](#)

⁹ [Objava načelnika 2024.pdf](#)

- načelnik" threatened criminal charges¹⁰ before domestic and German authorities against those spreading "false information". The citizen was reported by the authorities and interrogated by the police. However, the police did not charge him with any offense, reportedly finding it absurd to interrogate a citizen merely for posting a laboratory report on Facebook. Despite the absolute lack of legal grounds, this institutional abuse of the reporting system achieved its intended chilling effect – citizens are now terrified and no longer dare to conduct independent analyses or publicly share results, fearing further harassment. As "proof" for their threats, the authorities attached the report from June 2024 (No: 499-II/24)¹¹, which is toxic in itself, showing barium at 11.2 mg/l.

4. Debunking the Lie About the "Error" and the Beginning of Pollution Growth (2023)

The findings on surface waters from 2023, commissioned by the investor itself ("ADRIATIC METALS BH" d.o.o. and "EASTERN MINING" d.o.o. Vareš), absolutely refute the laboratory's media claims about the "wrong unit of measurement" and show a clear beginning of the pollution:

Manipulation of units of measurement: The same laboratory neatly and precisely used the technically correct unit of measurement mg/m³ (equivalent to micrograms per liter) in the reports for the mining company during 2023¹². This irrefutably proves that they possessed the professional knowledge and correct methodology. Using the measurement unit mg/l for drinking water from 2024 to 2026 is not a technical error, but a factual state that they are trying to cover up through retroactive alteration.

The beginning of a drastic spike in the watercourses (March–May 2023): Reports from this period show an exponential growth of pollution in the Borovički stream (a tributary of the Bukovica) from 4.8 mg/m³ in March, to 9.0 mg/m³ in April, up to 11.8 mg/m³ in May 2023. An identical spike was recorded in the Bukovica river itself, going from 2.1 mg/m³ in March to 8.8 mg/m³ in April and May of the same year.

Conclusion: The documentation clearly shows how the initial pollution of surface waters from 2023 turned into extreme levels of barium in the drinking water of Kakanj during 2024 and 2026 (up to 52.8 mg/l). The response of the competent institutions involved collusion with laboratories, ignoring toxic findings, and abusing the legal apparatus to intimidate the local population defending their right to clean water and life.

ANNEX 2: Evidence of Ecological Accidents in the Vrući Potok Stream and Unprofessional Manipulation of Tracer Test Results in Official Reports

In the official investor document titled "Report on the Possible Impacts of Pollution on the Surrounding Hydrological System and the Bukovica Water Intake" (Eastern Mining d.o.o., June 2022)¹³, there are direct admissions of ecological incidents, as well as blatant examples of data manipulation aimed at concealing the actual hydraulic connection between the mine and the surrounding watercourses.

¹⁰ [Prijetnje građanima](#)

¹¹ [Izveštaj br. 499 II 24.pdf](#)

¹² [5. izveštaj o vodi.pdf](#)

¹³ [ELABORAT O MOGUĆIM UTICAJIMA ZAGAĐENJA NA OKOLNI HIDROLOŠKI SISTEM I VODOZAHVAT BUKOVICA - Vareš, Juni 2022](#)

1. Official Admission of Drilling Mud Leakage into the Vrući Potok Stream¹⁴

Although competent authorities often ignore citizens' reports regarding the pollution of the Vrući Potok stream, the investor itself confirms this as an indisputable fact in its Report:

On page 13 of the Report, in Table 4.2.1 (Observation points during the tracer test), the authors explicitly and literally state for the observation point Vp-1 (a spring in the Trstionica basin): "A spring where drilling mud appeared during drilling. Indicates a direct hydraulic connection."

This is the written proof that toxic drilling mud is directly discharging into the springs of the Vrući Potok stream.

Thus, the company itself has unequivocally confirmed that drilling and mining activities have a fast and direct underground communication with surface waters.

2. The Spike in Tracer (Dye) Concentration and Absurd Explanations¹⁵

To investigate underground flows, a tracer test (dyeing of groundwater) was conducted by injecting Na-fluorescein into the underground (sinkholes REW-4 and excavation R-1). The analysis of the results of this test represents a textbook example of doctoring conclusions:

On page 30, the Report states that before the dye was injected, the so-called "zero samples" showed concentration values ranging from 0 to a maximum of 22 ppb (0.022 ppm).

However, after the dye was injected into the underground, on page 31, the authors admit that the recorded values at the measuring points spiked drastically, reaching up to 117 ppb (0.117 ppm).

Instead of acknowledging this evident spike of the tracer from 22 to 117 ppb as irrefutable proof that the dye had reached the watercourses, the authors of the Report resort to a highly unprofessional explanation on page 49.

They state that these are "apparent increases in concentration" that chronologically coincide with "changes in hydrological conditions (rain, snowmelt)" and the subsequent turbidity of the watercourse.

Attributing a drastic and detected spike in the chemical tracer (from 22 to 117) to ordinary "rain" and "snowmelt" represents a deliberate distortion of facts.

The sole purpose of this manipulation is to justify the preconceived conclusion on page 58, which claims that "no visual colouring was observed" and denies any danger to the surrounding hydrological system.

3. Geographical Deception for the Purpose of Obtaining Permits (Page 24)

In the "Study for the Issuance of Preliminary Water Consent" (Mining Institute d.d. Tuzla, November 2020)¹⁶, which the investor used to justify the absence of risk, a blatant geographical falsehood was presented.

On page 24 (or page 60 of the PDF document) of this Study, under point 3.5., it is explicitly and falsely claimed: "Since both the exploitation and exploration areas of the 'Rupice' locality are located downstream from the Bukovica water intake, the subject activities will in no way affect the quality of surface waters at the source."

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 13

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 30, 31, 49

¹⁶ [Studija za prethodnu vodnu saglasnost.pdf](#)

However, common sense, the actual situation on the ground, as well as the graphical attachments within that very same Study (e.g., Figure 3.3 on page 22 / PDF page 59), unequivocally show the exact opposite – that the Bukovica water intake is located downstream from the mining operations, and that the mine belongs to the catchment area gravitating towards the water source.

If the competent authorities and the investor are willing to falsify basic geographical facts ("upstream/downstream") in official, stamped documents in order to ignore and deny the danger to people and drinking water, it is absurd to expect that their actions will show a minimum of care for the protection of nature, habitats, and wildlife.

Conclusion: Excerpts from the investor's official documents directly contradict their own reassuring conclusions. The admission that drilling mud appears at the springs of the Vrući Potok stream, along with the unfounded and unprofessional justification of the drastic tracer spike (to 117 ppb) by blaming "precipitation," irrefutably proves that an underground hydraulic connection between the mine and the watercourses exists. Furthermore, the blatant geographical falsification—falsely claiming the mine is located downstream from the Bukovica water intake to deny any risk—demonstrates that severe threats to drinking water, habitats, and the environment are being systematically manipulated, covered up, and downplayed in official documents.

ANNEX 3: Comparative Analysis of Independent Laboratory Reports from 2023 – Confirmation of the Presence of Heavy Metals and Unit Manipulation

Official reports on surface and groundwater testing (such as the reports by the Institute for Chemical Engineering Tuzla for the investor Eastern Mining and the supervisory analyses by Eurofins Croatiakontrola from 2023) provide additional insight into the state of the waters in the exploration area, further confirming the correctness of the methodology using micrograms and milligrams in the earlier period.

1. Consistent Use of Correct Units in the Earlier Period (2023)

Documentation from January, February, and May 2023 (e.g., Test Report no. 33-12/23, 72-01/23¹⁷, and reports for points PP 5, Vrući Potok, and BRW/REW wells) unequivocally shows that accredited laboratories at the time used precise units of measurement and clear detection limits for heavy metals.

For example, in the reports by the Institute for Chemical Engineering Tuzla¹⁸ for groundwater and surface water (such as the samples for BRW-1, BRW-2, BRW-3, REW-3, REW-4, and Vrući Potok from January and February 2023), the values for barium (Ba) are properly expressed in milligrams per liter (mg/l) with precise decimal places (e.g., 0.051 mg/l to 0.145 mg/l). This directly corresponds to the microgram values that were later maliciously interpreted or "altered" in the drinking water in Kakanj.

Similarly, supervisory analyses by the European laboratory Eurofins Croatiakontrola (Zagreb)¹⁹ from June 2023 on groundwater samples delivered via Inspekt RGH (reports no. AR-23-06-027895-01 to AR-23-06-027902-01) confirm the testing of metals using the ICP-

¹⁷ [Test report no. 72-01/23 to 72-08/23 - Institute for chemical engineering Tuzla - Groundwater](#)

¹⁸ [Test report no. 236-12/23, 380-12/23, 33-12/23, 333-13/23 - Institute for chemical engineering Tuzla](#)

¹⁹ [Eurofin lab](#)

MS method, where barium in piezometers and wells was precisely measured in micrograms per liter (µg/l).

2. Presence of Hazardous Parameters in Surface and Groundwater (May 2023)

The surface water testing report by Inspekt RGH Kakanj (no. 1331/23 to 1339/23)²⁰ for samples taken on May 26, 2023, shows elevated parameters in certain impact zones, including sulfates of 300.2 mg/l at the Veovača site, as well as the presence of total petroleum hydrocarbons (TPH) ranging from 1.0 to 3.6 mg/l in certain observation points (such as MW20 TSF). This clearly indicates the presence of industrial and oil pollution associated with mining operations.

3. The New 2025 Permit Issued Following the Court Annulment – Anatomy of Ignoring Judicial Rulings

After the Cantonal Court in Mostar (Judgment No. 07 0 U 019948 21 U of December 31, 2024) upheld the lawsuit filed by JP "Vodokom" d.o.o. Kakanj and annulled the original underground exploitation permit for the Rupice site, the Federal Ministry of Energy, Mining, and Industry hastily issued a new Decision (Up/I No. 06-14-1-334/21) on January 14, 2025, re-approving the exploitation (this time issued to ADRIATIC METALS BH d.o.o. as the legal successor to Eastern Mining).

Evasion of Court Directives: Although the court explicitly instructed the ministry to thoroughly clarify before making a decision whether the exploitation threatens the Bukovica water source, its relation to the II and III sanitary protection zones, and whether it could permanently jeopardize the drinking water supply of Kakanj's residents, the ministry in the repeated procedure utilized the period during which the mine had already unlawfully conducted operations (taking advantage of the fact that the lawsuit did not delay the execution).

Reliance on Biased Studies: Instead of protecting the drinking water source, the ministry incorporated into the 2025 decision a whole series of subsequently commissioned reports, revisions (Geokonozalting), expert opinions, and studies (Institute for Hydrotechnics Sarajevo), as well as "monitoring" reports claiming that the mine allegedly has no hydraulic connection to the Bukovica basin.

Legalization of the Status Quo: Through this conduct, the authorities exploited the passage of time and the already commenced mining operations to justify the issuance of the new permit, completely ignoring the real risks to the water supply of thousands of citizens of Kakanj and the evidence of the presence of heavy metals.

ANNEX 4: Fictitious Public Hearings (2014–2024)²¹ – Privatization of Institutions, Geographical Engineering, and Exclusion of the Public from Decision-Making

Documentation from the Federal Ministry of Energy, Mining, and Industry (FMERI) regarding the held "oral/public hearings" in the period from 2014 to 2024 provides irrefutable evidence

²⁰ [Inspekt RGH Kakanj - Reports no. 1331/23 to 1339/23 and Eurofins Croatiakontrola Analytical Reports, June 2023](#)

²¹ [Zapisnici 2014-2024](#)

of complete state capture. These minutes expose the *modus operandi* through which competent authorities systematically violated the provisions of the Aarhus and Bern Conventions, eliminating the participation of the public, experts, and civil society in decision-making on projects with devastating environmental consequences.

1. Privatization of State Institutions: Public Hearings in the Investor's Private Headquarters

In a blatant example of conflict of interest and the privatization of the state apparatus, competent federal ministries organized key "public" hearings in the private premises of the very mining company seeking the permits:

The hearing of January 18, 2021 (issuance of a permit for surface exploitation and processing) and the hearing of March 28, 2024 (approval for the construction of a high-risk flotation tailings dam) were officially scheduled and held "in the headquarters of the company ADRIATIC METALS BH d.o.o., Tisovci bb, Vareš".

By doing this, the state literally came to the foreign investor's doorstep, physically and institutionally closing the doors to any participation by citizens or independent organizations.

2. The Exclusive "Club of the Chosen": Physical Elimination of the Public and Experts Not a single independent ecologist, NGO representative, or concerned citizen attended any of the five analyzed hearings spanning a decade (2014, 2019, January 2021, May 2021, and March 2024).

The hearings were reduced to meetings of a narrow circle of bureaucrats and capital representatives (from 6 to a maximum of 15 attendees).

At the hearing regarding the construction of the potentially catastrophic flotation tailings dam (March 2024), the fate of nature was decided by only eight people—three of whom were directors and lawyers of the investor (Adriatic Metals), while the rest were state bureaucrats. Representatives of the Daštansko local community (MZ), on whose territory the tailings dam is planned, did not even attend, confirming the fictitious nature of these processes.

3. Geographical Engineering: Falsification of Cadastral Data to Exclude the Municipality of Kakanj

To prevent the participation of the neighboring Municipality of Kakanj, whose water intake and ecosystem are directly affected by the mine, authorities resorted to geographical engineering in official documents.

In the minutes from 2014 and 2019, when defining the expanded exploration area, the institutions state that the area "extends according to the new survey over the cadastral municipalities of K.O. Borovica and K.O. Lipnica, Municipality of Vareš".

The Cadastral Municipality of Lipnica does not belong to Vareš, but to the Municipality of Kakanj²². Through this deliberate administrative falsification, FMERI and the investor formally excluded the Municipality of Kakanj and its citizens from all legal processes and the right to make decisions regarding the fate of their own natural resources and water protection zones.

4. Absence of Environmental Impact Assessment and "Buying" Local Consent

The minutes clearly show that the protection of the environment, human health, and habitats was never the actual topic of these hearings, but solely the economic assessment of the deposit.

²² www.katastar.ba

Legalization of Accidents: Instead of independent state studies, the institutions blindly relied solely on PowerPoint presentations by the investor itself (such as at the March 2024 hearing on the "gold standards" of tailings disposal), expressing "satisfaction" with what was shown, without any critical verification.

Pacification of the Community: Statements by local proxies (e.g., the May 2021 Minutes) reveal that damages to private properties and watercourses due to drilling already existed, and that consent was procured through miserable infrastructural concessions (such as promises to asphalt a local road in MZ Borovica and promises of employment).

Conclusion: The analysis of five "public" hearings undeniably proves that the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina systematically suspended its legal order in favor of a mining corporation. Through the usurpation of state competencies, the relocation of public hearings to the investor's private offices, and the falsification of cadastral municipalities, an administrative shield was created for the unhindered and non-transparent expansion of ecocide over tens of square kilometers of protected forests and river basins.

ANNEX 5: Expansion of Ecocide to the Krivaja River Basin, Resale of Rights, and the Health Crisis in Vareš

The pattern of corporate engineering is being confirmed on the ground, where the ecocide from the Kakanj municipality and the Trstionica river is now expanding to new, untouched areas, while the local population suffers direct health consequences.

1. Resale of exploration rights and a new target: As was the case with the Trstionica river, exploration rights are being non-transparently transferred to new legal entities. The company "Vareški Minerali d.o.o." is now pushing for geological exploration of chromium in the Krivaja river basin (tributaries Duboštica and Tribija)—an area planned to become a national park. Despite public opposition from dozens of organizations and citizens of Vareš, Olovo, and Zavidovići, the institutions remain silent, and the company is publicly advertising for geologists²³, completely ignoring the will of the community.

2. Health crisis and lead poisoning: Citizens of Vareš are conducting blood tests on their own initiative and at their own expense, with shocking results continuously confirming lead poisoning.

3. Bureaucratic cover-up (July 2026): While citizens are proven to be poisoned by heavy metals, the Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism (FMOIT) informed the public on July 10, 2026, that its "Multidisciplinary Team" had held only its second meeting²⁴. No decision on the immediate suspension of operations was made at this meeting; instead, they are merely "considering the drafting of an Environmental Testing Plan." This clearly shows that the institutions are buying time for the investor, while the state refuses to declare a state of health and environmental emergency.

²³ Advertisement for the continuation of exploration in the Krivaja basin: [Radio Bobovac - Oglas za posao \(Geolog na istražnim radovima\)](#)

²⁴ FMOIT press release regarding the meeting (July 2026): FMOIT - Multidisciplinary team continues activities to determine the possible causes of pollution: [FMOIT - Multidisciplinarni tim nastavlja aktivnosti na utvrđivanju mogućih uzroka zagađenja](#)

Complaint No. 2022/07 (Bosnia and Herzegovina) – Complainant’s Update Report for the Summer 2026 Bureau Meeting

May 29, 2026

Dear Secretariat and Bureau Members,

Following the Bureau’s decision of 30 April 2026, and in light of the upcoming summer meeting on 17–18 June 2026, I am submitting an urgent update on behalf of the informal civic group “Park prirode Trstionica i Boriva”.

We have just obtained the official institutional report issued by the Municipality of Vareš on April 27, 2026, titled “Report on the Results of the Action Plan for the Health Protection of the Population of the Municipality of Vareš”.²⁵

This official document constitutes an admission by the local government of a systemic toxic crisis and contains undeniable data that further justifies an immediate international intervention.

1. Official Institutional Confirmation of Widespread Lead Poisoning

The Municipality’s report confirms that due to detected lead contamination, a municipal Working Group was established to run an emergency Action Plan. A total of 238 residents were tested through the public Health Center Vareš (“Dom zdravlja Vareš”)²⁶, alongside over 80 individuals tested via other organized means and independent testing.

The official results, analyzed by the “Medicover” laboratory²⁷, confirm heavy neurotoxic exposure among the population. The state’s own records highlight catastrophic values: µg/l µg/dl

- Patient No. 51 (Daštansko, born 1958): 249 µg/l (24.9 µg/dl) — nearly 9 times above the medical reference limit.
- Patient No. 65 (Daštansko, born 1961): 136 µg/l (13.6 µg/dl)
- Patient No. 102 (Daštansko, born 1954): 122 µg/l (12.2 µg/dl).
- Patient No. 10 (Mir, born 1954): 117 µg/l (11.7 µg/dl).
- Patient No. 93 (Daštansko, born 1973): 114 µg/l (11.4 µg/dl).
- Patient No. 50 (Daštansko, born 1960): 109 µg/l (10.9 µg/dl).
- Patient No. 197 (Borovica Donja, born 1976): 106 µg/l (10.6 µg/dl).

The World Health Organization (WHO) explicitly states that there is no safe level of lead exposure. Despite these alarming figures, the municipal Working Group concluded its operations on April 16, 2026, stating they are “not authorized to interpret the results”, effectively deflecting responsibility while public health remains critically compromised.

²⁵ https://drive.google.com/file/d/16govqqymvXXJtNORwliMJHoCj42fTiX0/view?usp=drive_link

²⁶ See ¹

²⁷ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tS-6hTR13lt59XZtfA1WQ5qx_op7wU_0/view?usp=drive_link

2. Catastrophic Soil Contamination Along Ore Transport Routes

The report incorporates an official study by the Federal Institute for Agropedology²⁸ (“Zavod za agropedologiju”, Report No. 01/03-20-2-932-7/25, dated March 23, 2026).

The data regarding heavy metals along the active ore transport routes reveals ecological devastation:

- At Location 15 (Daštansko - Forestry land): Total lead (Pb) concentrations have reached an astronomical 9,661.67 mg/kg, while Zinc (Zn) has spiked to 2,626.67mg/kg.
- At Location 21 (Vareš - Built-up land): Lead levels are officially recorded at 302.00 mg/kg and Nickel (Ni) at 249.33mg/kg.
- At Location 19 (Borovica - Forestry land): Lead levels are at 296.33mg/kg and Zinc at 332.00mg/kg .

This unprecedented level of soil contamination on high-value forestry land directly threatens the surrounding wild flora and fauna, causing irreversible damage to the habitats protected under the Bern Convention.

3. State Collusion: Environmental Permit Renewed Despite Toxic Crisis

In a shocking display of bad faith, instead of invoking the precautionary principle (Article 6 of the FBiH Law on Environmental Protection) or issuing an emergency suspension, the Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism (FMOIT) renewed the environmental permit²⁹ for the operator DPMetals BH d.o.o. on March 27, 2026, for another five years.

This renewal directly ignores community objections, warnings of toxic dust, and an unauthorized tailings dam expansion at the Rupice site.

4. Institutional Collapse: Constitutional Review and Request for Interim Measures

To demonstrate the total capture of the state apparatus, an official Request for Constitutional Review accompanied by a Motion for an Urgent Interim Measure³⁰ was filed before the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina on January 19th, 2026 under Article VI/3.a of the Constitution by Representative Damir Nikšić³¹ on behalf of 1/4 of the members of the House of Representatives of the FBiH Parliament.

The submission challenges the illegal, unconstitutional land conversion of 6,055.8 hectares of state-owned forestry land into construction land and the illegal issuance of concessions to

²⁸ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uB89vEYgRzESCD-uOxG8XBsZynYTc_oW/view?usp=drive_link

²⁹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pi1mmHY9xOkSy9U5zbOdes9C16afo2z0/view?usp=drive_link

³⁰ https://drive.google.com/file/d/142LkEoZqUGT4Jm77TAHLpmMVUVlv_cHs/view?usp=drive_link

³¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t47Do3ZxBqThaap5CNjmCTtg8c8ShhKc/view?usp=drive_link

private mining entities (such as Eastern Mining/Adriatic Metals BH/DPM d.o.o.), in direct violation of the Constitutional Court's landmark ruling No. U-3/24.

The constitutional appeal highlights catastrophic facts that are directly relevant to the Bern Convention:

- **Plunder of Strategic Water Resources:** The mining operations are unconstitutionally consuming 28 liters per second of pure, drinking source-water from the Bukovica River. Over the 30-year concession period, this amounts to 26.46 billion liters of drinking water permanently removed from public circulation for industrial processing without proper compensation to the state.
- **Ecological Ruin of Protected Rivers³²:** Mining wastewater is actively being discharged via the Vrući potok stream directly into the Trstionica River. Prior to mining, these waters were pristine habitats for strictly protected and sensitive species, including the European crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) and native brown trout (*Salmo trutta*). Today, Vrući potok has been completely biological deadened, turned into an open industrial sewer.

Despite the immediate, irreversible threat to public health and protected habitats, the Constitutional Court has failed to issue the requested Interim Measure to freeze these activities. Faced with total institutional silence, on May 5, 2026, civil society organizations filed formal Criminal Charges³³ against the operator's management and top-tier state officials (including the FBiH Prime Minister and FMOIT Minister) for heavy offenses against public health and organized crime.

5. Institutional Erasure of the Transboundary Impact: The Destruction of the "Trstionica - Gornja Bukovica" Protected Area (Kakanj Municipality)

The Complainant strongly alerts the Bureau to a calculated, bad-faith strategy of "geographical blindness" and spatial data manipulation employed by the FBiH authorities even presented to the Secretariat. While recent municipal interventions focus heavily on the transport routes strictly within the Vareš municipality, the state institutions completely ignore the catastrophic ecological impacts on the adjacent Municipality of Kakanj. The mining project is strategically positioned on the mountain slopes directly above the "Gornja Trstionica - Bukovica" area, ensuring that core excavation, toxic dust emission, and heavy metal-laden wastewater discharge gravitate directly into this high-value watershed and sensitive ecosystem (as presented in previous Complainant reports through photos and documents). We urge the Bureau to note the following crucial facts and institutional deceptions, backed by the official

³² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bW_SSkXkfR6Wt5gEe3holh5rsnXB02J7/view?usp=drive_link

³³ 1. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ReqKAm-pvMGHMS4fSkC1IKCiMUX_Gkwm/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=100025188355678722538&rtpof=true&sd=true
2. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CziV-xrWXugjX8YxkjTsJB56PBTUGuW/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=100025188355678722538&rtpof=true&sd=true

decision of the Kakanj Municipal Council³⁴ (Odluka o davanju saglasnosti za uspostavu zaštićenog područja “Gornja Trstionica - Bukovica”):

- **Illegal Revision of Protected Status:**

Under the official Spatial Plan of the Zenica-Doboj Canton (2009–2029)³⁵ (pdf page 103), the "Trstionica - Gornja Bukovica" area was explicitly designated for high-level institutional protection. However, to accommodate the investor's mining ambitions, authorities are now intentionally manipulating spatial data. They are attempting to reduce this vast, interconnected ecosystem to a mere 30-hectare nucleus of primeval forest (prašuma), deliberately erasing the remaining thousands of hectares from protection maps to justify open-pit mining.

- **Severe Deception Regarding Protected Surface Area:**

Based on comprehensive scientific research³⁶ conducted by the Faculty of Science of the University of Sarajevo (Prirodno-matematički fakultet Sarajevo), the Kakanj Municipality officially approved the establishment of the Protected Landscape "Kraljeva Sutjeska - Trstionica" covering an immense area of 55,108 hectares³⁷. However, to unconstitutionally accommodate the private investor's mining operations, authorities are currently manipulating spatial planning data. They are attempting to reduce this vast, interconnected ecosystem of over 55,000 hectares to just its tiny 30-to-80-hectare primeval forest core (Nukleus-1 of 56 ha and Nukleus-2 of 24 ha). By treating only this 2% core as "protected," the state is intentionally erasing the remaining 98% of the designated area—specifically the vital Buffer Zone (52%) and Transition Zone (46%) from active protection maps to legitimize destructive industrial mining right on the boundaries of the core habitat.

- **Deliberate Failure of Buffer Zone Protection:**

The scientific justification explicitly states that “the level of preservation and functionality of the primeval forest ecosystem will be directly threatened unless adequate active protection measures are provided in the neighbouring ecosystems”. By ignoring the 52% Buffer Zone and allowing heavy mining exploitation on these adjacent slopes, the state is causing irreversible damage to a highly vulnerable ecosystem known for its high species diversity and presence of rare, endangered, and endemic species.

- **Zero Environmental Monitoring and Transboundary Contamination:**

While residents of Vareš are suffering from heavy lead poisoning primarily due to ore transport, the Kakanj region is facing a direct, unmonitored toxic influx from the core

³⁴ https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&source=web&rct=j&url=https://kakanj.gov.ba/v5/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Odluka-o-za%25C5%25A1ti%25C4%2587enom-podru%25C4%258Dju-Kr-Sutjeska-Trstionica-NOVA-3-Autosaved.doc&ved=2ahUKEwib0o7rwN6UAxUk5QIHhfr0NR4Qy_kOegYIAAgFEAE&opi=89978449&cd&psig=A_OvVaw3fKhAST18nRnIC34ACbyMC&ust=1780144410456000

³⁵ Spatial plan: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xwFHbnh3qErU5RKW_10vLwN0dnKDeY-C/view?usp=drive_link

³⁶ 1a https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T868a3HHxM4YggHfKUc0DqOq--hZmN6m/view?usp=drive_link
1b https://drive.google.com/file/d/15GPKATYL7x4b0N2_hXCfTMolHzBratnm/view?usp=drive_link

³⁷ Media report: <https://www.akta.ba/vijesti/bih/168043/kakanj-ce-zastititi-55000-hektara-a-zenica-dva-stabla>

extraction site. The authorities are conducting absolutely no monitoring of water, air, or soil quality in the Trstionica and Gornja Bukovica zone, deliberately avoiding the creation of official records that would prove the destruction of this habitat. Despite the official designation of this 55,108-hectare zone, the authorities are conducting absolutely no monitoring of water, air, or soil quality within the Kakanj municipal borders for this area. They are intentionally avoiding the creation of official records that would prove the ongoing destruction. The Vrući potok stream and the Trstionica River the primary water veins of this designated protected area, noted for their high water quality are being used as unmonitored dump sites for toxic mining waste. This directly threatens the public water supply of tens of thousands of citizens and wipes out Bern Convention protected species, such as the European crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*).

- **Ecological Death of Vrući Potok and Trstionica:**

As highlighted in our previous updates, the Vrući potok stream and the Trstionica River which should enjoy strict protection under the 2009 Spatial Plan are being used as unmonitored dump sites for toxic mining waste. The state is completely ignoring the transboundary pollution moving from the Vareš mining peaks down into the Kakanj water basins, threatening the water supply of tens of thousands of citizens and completely wiping out Bern Convention protected species.

By pretending that the mining impacts stop at the municipal border, the state is committing a severe breach of the Bern Convention's core principles regarding habitat integrity and transboundary environmental assessments.

Conclusion and Immediate Requests

The domestic legal system has completely collapsed. The authorities are actively prioritizing investor profits over the lives of their citizens, the rule of law, and their international obligations under the Bern and Aarhus Conventions.

Therefore, the Complainant respectfully requests the Standing Committee's Bureau to:

1. Immediately open a formal Case-File regarding Complaint No. 2022/07 during the June 17–18 meeting.
2. Issue an urgent international demand to Bosnia and Herzegovina for the immediate suspension of all mining activities at the Rupice/Vareš site until independent, transparent toxicology and biodiversity baselines are established.

Some of the documents in English:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1NIqTHmYXlyxQGILScJBcyOcc_z3OyLVr?usp=drive_link

Evidence folder(BOS):

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1cs-E_b25DX_KEafnepE30Y21j6EgNTpc?usp=drive_link

Respectfully submitted,

Hajrija Čobo

Representative, Informal Civic Group “Park prirode Trstionica i Boriva”

Kakanj

**Update Report February 2026
To the Bern Convention Secretariat**

February 13th, 2026

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find below my Report for the Spring 2026 Bureau meeting.

Subject: Complaint No. 2022/07, Possible File, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Possible negative impact of mining activities in Trstionica – Gornja Bukovica and Vareš

Abstract

This report documents ongoing environmental and public health impacts linked to mining operations in the Vareš–Kakanj region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with particular concern for the Rupice site and downstream watercourses (Vrući Potok and the Trstionica River). Community observations and official monitoring data indicate persistent water pollution, repeated exceedances of particulate matter and heavy metal deposition, and significant soil contamination, alongside reports of wildlife mortality and widespread lead poisoning among local residents, including children. These impacts suggest continued habitat degradation and risks to protected wild fauna, raising serious concerns regarding compliance with obligations under the Bern Convention, particularly Articles 4 and 6. The report calls for urgent investigation, enforcement measures, and international follow-up to prevent further ecological damage and protect human health.

INTRODUCTION – SUMMARY OF BACKGROUND FACTS

Hajrija Čobo is an environmental human rights defender from Kakanj and representative of the informal civic group Park prirode Trstionica i Boriva. She advocates for the protection of forests and rivers that constitute the primary source of drinking water for local communities. Since May 2022, she has raised concerns about deforestation, pollution of watercourses, and health risks connected to heavy metal mining activities. Her advocacy has also resulted in a strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP) filed by Adriatic Metals BH d.o.o.

Adriatic Metals (now DPM) holds concessions for exploration and exploitation of lead, zinc, barite and associated metals at the Rupice site in Vareš, on the border with Kakanj. This project has also been marketed internationally as the “Silver Project”.

This report highlights ongoing water pollution, public health risks, wildlife impacts, and compliance issues under the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention).

1. CONTINUED WATER POLLUTION OF VRUĆI POTOK AND TRSTIONICA

Field observations and community monitoring indicate that the mining operation continues to discharge polluted and toxic wastewater into Vrući Potok on a daily basis. This contamination flows directly into the Trstionica River. The river frequently appears persistently turbid, with a muddy, clay-grey and whitish coloration, suggesting heavy sediment and chemical contamination. Such conditions threaten aquatic ecosystems, fish, amphibians, and drinking water sources.

Official environmental documentation also recognizes risks associated with mining effluents: <https://kakanj.gov.ba/v5/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/DPMetals-Vares-Zahtjev-za-obnovu-OD-za-rudnik-Rupice-Final.pdf>

These impacts represent degradation of habitats protected under the Bern Convention.

2. LEAD POISONING OF THE POPULATION IN VAREŠ (2025–2026)³⁸

Independent testing in December 2025 and early 2026 revealed widespread lead contamination in the blood of residents of Vareš, including children.

Relevant media reports:

<https://n1info.hr/regija/masovno-trovanje-u-bih-alarmanantni-nalazi-medju-zarazenima-i-djeca/>

<https://n1info.ba/english/news/vares-lead-poisoning-crisis-escalates-as-toxic-contamination-spreads-to-city-centre/>

<https://sarajevotimes.com/increase-in-the-number-of-lead-poisoning-cases-in-varesh/>

Despite these findings, official communications have often minimized or relativized the problem, emphasizing technicalities rather than public health protection.³⁹ Such responses have confused and misled the public.⁴⁰

Under the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mining Law, when mining operations endanger human health or contaminate land and water, the competent authorities must suspend or revoke exploitation. Nevertheless, no suspension has occurred.

3. ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY EVIDENCE

³⁸ Lead poisoning: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UgMfZXYBvN8u85xCON78paqhPyFU4l-N/view?usp=drive_link

³⁹ TRANSCRIPT_EN Statements for the media by the Federal Minister of Health Nediljko RImac after his visit to the Vareš Health Center:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DDflumolQHfAZj7iodRAZ_JjRG1JoNYV/view?usp=drive_link

⁴⁰ Original article: https://www.radiobobovac.com/portal/index.php/podcast/item/6830-izjave-za-medije-federalnog-ministra-zdravstva-nediljka-rimca-nakon-posjete-domu-zdravlja-varesh?fbclid=IwB21leAP7Or5jbGNrA_s6tmV4dG4DYWVtAjExAHNydgMGYXBwX2lkDDM1MDY4NTUzMTcyOAA_BHrWGNCSDFs6woI-42Z_HpuDfRIksPB_KTNHGBnWmWo2pq630OdKmrqIGvFk__aem_pbPtfOfa6UVLpU8z_bcHiQ

Additional documentation from residents indicates repeated ecological degradation, fish mortality, and visible pollution along the Trstionica and Vrući Potok. These concerns warrant formal investigation.

4. WILDLIFE IMPACTS

Reports from 2024–2025 describe numerous poisoned or deceased roe deer and other wildlife found near Vareš and along the Trstionica corridor. No effective institutional response or investigation has followed. These events constitute a serious threat to protected wild fauna and habitats under the Bern Convention.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF MINING ACTIVITIES IN THE VAREŠ AREA⁴¹

In the Context of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats

5.1. Official Air and Soil Quality Monitoring and Heavy Metal Deposition (2022–2024)

Official monitoring reports issued by the Federal Administration for Inspection Affairs and the Public Health Institute (SQS Pale) confirm repeated exceeding of legally prescribed limit values for air pollutants and heavy metal deposition in the Vareš area, in the immediate vicinity of mining activities.

Monitoring conducted during the period 2022–2024 recorded concentrations significantly above permitted limits at several locations, including Rupice, Semizova Ponikva, Pržići, Bijelo Borje, Tisovci, and the Vareš Primary School area. **Read more in Annex 1**

CONCLUSIONS

The information presented in this report demonstrates persistent and serious environmental pressures arising from mining operations in the Vareš–Kakanj area, particularly in the Rupice mining zone and downstream watercourses (Vrući Potok and Trstionica River). The evidence includes continuous turbidity and suspected toxic wastewater discharge, repeated exceedances of particulate matter and heavy metal deposition, extensive soil contamination, and credible community reports of wildlife mortality.

The documented impacts and risks are directly relevant to the obligations of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural

⁴¹ Federal inspection findings: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NY-t1rkaQzV2hBl4o_zpmog0-lzbIRAw/view?usp=drive_link

Habitats (Bern Convention). In particular, the situation indicates an ongoing risk of habitat degradation, disturbance of wild fauna, and pollution-driven ecosystem decline, contrary to the objectives of the Convention.

The scale and persistence of pollution, combined with the lack of effective institutional response, suggests systemic weaknesses in prevention, monitoring, enforcement, and public health protection. These shortcomings are incompatible with the preventive and protective standards required under the Bern Convention, especially regarding the obligation to avoid deterioration of natural habitats and to ensure strict protection of wild fauna.

The reported lead poisoning cases among residents (including children) further confirm that contamination is not confined to industrial zones but has spread into inhabited areas, raising concerns about the broader ecological and human health consequences of heavy metal pollution. Such contamination is particularly alarming in the Bern Convention context due to the long-term impacts of heavy metals through bioaccumulation and biomagnifications across food chains, affecting birds, mammals, amphibians, and freshwater biodiversity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above, and in accordance with the Bern Convention's aims and obligations, the following measures are recommended:

1. Immediate assessment under the Bern Convention framework

The Bern Convention Standing Committee should consider this case as a matter of urgency and request a formal response from the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding compliance with obligations related to habitat conservation and protection of wild fauna.

2. Independent investigation of water pollution and habitat degradation

An independent investigation should be conducted into the daily discharge of wastewater into Vrući Potok and the Trstionica River, including:

- identification of pollution sources,
- chemical analysis of water and sediment (including heavy metals),
- assessment of impacts on aquatic habitats and species,
- evaluation of downstream impacts on protected ecosystems and drinking water sources.

3. Emergency suspension of activities where pollution risk is confirmed

Where evidence confirms ongoing pollution or serious risk to habitats and wildlife, mining activities should be suspended until effective prevention measures are implemented, in line with the precautionary principle and the Bern Convention's conservation objectives.

4. Comprehensive biodiversity and wildlife mortality monitoring

Authorities should establish a systematic monitoring programme for:

- fish and aquatic biodiversity,
- amphibians and invertebrates,
- mammals and birds (including bioaccumulation monitoring),
- investigation of wildlife deaths (roe deer and other species reported in the area).

This should include transparent reporting and involvement of independent experts.

5. Establishment of baseline (“zero-state”) ecological and soil data

Given the documented absence of baseline soil monitoring, a full baseline ecological assessment should be conducted, including:

- soil contamination mapping,
- vegetation and forest ecosystem surveys,
- identification of sensitive habitats and ecological corridors.

6. Strengthening of air pollution controls and enforcement

Given repeated exceedances of PM2.5, PM10, UTM, and heavy metal deposition, urgent measures are required to ensure:

- continuous monitoring in residential and ecologically sensitive areas,
- effective dust suppression systems functioning at all times,
- enforcement actions where mitigation is inconsistent or inadequate.

7. Public health protection and transparent communication

Authorities should ensure that public health protection measures are prioritized, including:

- transparent reporting of blood lead findings,
- medical screening and support for affected residents,
- clear public warnings where exposure risks exist,
- coordination between environmental, health, and inspection bodies.

8. Protection of environmental human rights defenders

Given the SLAPP case described in this report, the Standing Committee should urge Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure a safe enabling environment for public participation and environmental defenders, in line with international standards and the principle that environmental protection depends on civic oversight.

9. Long-term ecosystem restoration and remediation obligations

Where contamination is confirmed, the operator and responsible authorities should be required to:

- remediate polluted soils and sediments,
- restore affected habitats,
- prevent further spread of contamination,
- provide long-term monitoring and ecological recovery plans.

10. Consideration of opening a Bern Convention case-file

If adequate corrective measures are not taken, the Bern Convention Standing Committee should consider opening a case-file and applying relevant follow-up mechanisms to ensure compliance with the Convention.

Respectfully submitted,

Hajrija Čobo

Representative, informal civic group Park prirode Trstionica i Boriva
Kakanj, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Date: February 2026

ANNEX 1

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF MINING ACTIVITIES IN THE VAREŠ AREA

In the Context of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats

5.1. Official Air Quality Monitoring and Heavy Metal Deposition (2022–2024)

Official monitoring reports issued by the Federal Administration for Inspection Affairs and the Public Health Institute (SQS Pale) confirm repeated exceedances of legally prescribed limit values for air pollutants and heavy metal deposition in the Vareš area, in the immediate vicinity of mining activities.

Monitoring conducted during the period 2022–2024 recorded concentrations significantly above permitted limits at several locations, including Rupice, Semizova Ponikva, Pržići, Bijelo Borje, Tisovci, and the Vareš Primary School area.

5.1.1 Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂)

Tisovci (VP): 251.2 µg/m³ (limit value: 125 µg/m³)

Vareš Primary School: 156.7 µg/m³ (limit value: 125 µg/m³)

Bijelo Borje: episodic pollution recorded at 79.52 µg/m³

5.1.2 Particulate Matter

Rupice:

PM_{2.5} = 50.19 µg/m³ (limit 25 µg/m³)

PM₁₀ = 53.70 µg/m³ (limit 50 µg/m³)

Semizova Ponikva:

PM_{2.5} = 42.84 µg/m³ (limit 25 µg/m³)

Vareš Primary School:

PM_{2.5} = 26.69 µg/m³ (limit 25 µg/m³)

Pržići:

PM_{2.5} = 44.80 µg/m³

S. Ponikva:

PM_{2.5} = 70.07 µg/m³

PM10 = 73.64 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$

These levels represent continuous exposure to fine particulate pollution known to carry toxic metals and pose serious risks to respiratory and cardiovascular health, particularly among children.

5.1.3 Heavy Metal Deposition in Sediment

Laboratory analyses of deposited sediment identified elevated concentrations of toxic metals:

Cadmium (Cd)

Semizova Ponikva: 0.0042 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$

Zagarski Potok: 0.0031 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$

Pržiči: 0.0037 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$

Vareš Primary School: 0.0039 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$

Arsenic (As)

Pržiči: 0.0079 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$

Vareš Primary School: 0.0044 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$

Later measurements confirmed increased arsenic at all monitoring points

Lead (Pb)

Semizova Ponikva: 0.145 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$ → later 4.280 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$

Pržiči: 0.123 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$ → later 46.05 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$

Zinc (Zn)

Semizova Ponikva: 4.840 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$

Pržiči: 0.6356 $\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$

The presence of arsenic, cadmium, lead, and zinc in deposited particles indicates atmospheric transport and dispersion of mining-related contamination into residential areas, schools, forests, soils, and watercourses.

5.2. Additional exceeding of Total Settled Matter (UTM) – March Monitoring

Recorded exceeding ($\text{mg}/\text{m}^2/\text{day}$):

Rupice Mine – 238.2

S. Ponikva – 440.9

Vareš Primary School – 250.6

Bijelo Borje – 252.9

Tisovci – 210.3

JKP Vareš – 278.8

Highest recorded value: S. Ponikva (440.9 mg/m²/day).

5.3. Air Quality Monitoring Reports (2024–2025)

Report No. 10-2285/24 (04 October 2024)

S. Ponikva:

PM_{2.5} = 163.38 µg/m³

PM₁₀ = 168.96 µg/m³

UTM = 286.97 mg/m²/day

Report No. 1-68/25 (13 January 2025)

Vareš Primary School:

UTM = 252.19 mg/m²/day

Report No. 8-1766/25 (05 August 2025)

Period: 24 June–01 July 2025

Rupice North: PM_{2.5} = 61.60 µg/m³; PM₁₀ = 66.59 µg/m³

Rupice South: PM_{2.5} = 61.81 µg/m³; PM₁₀ = 68.61 µg/m³

S. Ponikva: PM_{2.5} > 120 µg/m³; PM₁₀ > 150 µg/m³

Report No. 11-2154/25 (03 November 2025)

S. Ponikva:

PM_{2.5} = 33.24 µg/m³

5.4. Inspection Findings – Dust Suppression System

During inspection of the ore crushing plant:

The dust suppression system (water spraying system) was not operational during crusher operation.

According to the operator, it is activated “as needed” depending on production capacity.

This indicates inconsistent mitigation of airborne emissions.

5.5. Soil Quality Monitoring (2025)

Important observations:

No baseline (zero-state) soil quality assessment was conducted prior to exploitation.

Some locations with elevated heavy metal concentrations are situated outside the exploitation field.

The operator conducts testing twice annually. Multiple locations do not meet prescribed limit values.

5.1 Report No. 856/25 (December 2025)

Daštansko:

Hg = 1.32 mg/kg (GVI = 0.01 mg/kg)

Veovača TSF:

Hg = 3.76 mg/kg

Cd = 1.717 mg/kg

Pb = 352 mg/kg (GVI = 3.80 mg/kg)

Zn = 837 mg/kg (GVI = 4.80 mg/kg)

Tisovci:

Hg = 1.821 mg/kg

Cd = 1.44 mg/kg

Cr = 64.3 mg/kg (GVI = 3.10 mg/kg)

Pb = 57.5 mg/kg (GVI = 3.80 mg/kg)

Ni = 96.8 mg/kg (GVI = 4.55 mg/kg)

VPP:

Hg = 5.244 mg/kg

Pb = 241 mg/kg

Zn = 595 mg/kg

Ni = 97.5 mg/kg

5.2 Report No. 562/25 (August 2025)

Daštansko:

Hg = 1.44 mg/kg

Veovača TSF:

Hg = 4.82 mg/kg

Cd = 1.525 mg/kg

Pb = 334 mg/kg

Zn = 865 mg/kg

Tisovci:

Hg = 2.075 mg/kg

Cd = 1.38 mg/kg

Cr = 88.2 mg/kg

Pb = 87.5 mg/kg

Ni = 114 mg/kg

VPP:

Hg = 4.176 mg/kg

Pb = 205 mg/kg

Zn = 621 mg/kg

Ni = 88.2 mg/kg

Rupice North:

Hg = 1.211 mg/kg

Rupice East:

Hg = 1.684 mg/kg

Cu = 72.5 mg/kg

Pb = 162 mg/kg

Ni = 66.1 mg/kg

5.6. Federal Mining Inspectorate Findings

Exploitation began August 2024 (ADRIATIC METALS BH d.o.o.).

Ownership change in October 2025; now DPMETALS BH d.o.o.

Mining permits issued by competent Federal Ministry.

Underground mine air: no exceeding detected.

Soil samples (09 December 2025): non-compliant regarding Mercury, Chromium, Zinc, Nickel and other metals.

Surface water (Veovača and Rupice): compliant.

5.7. Relevance to the Bern Convention

Persistent air and sediment contamination directly threaten:

Terrestrial and freshwater habitats

Soil organisms and vegetation

Wild mammals and birds through bioaccumulation

Overall ecosystem integrity

Repeated exceeding of particulate matter and heavy metal deposition demonstrate systemic environmental pressure incompatible with conservation obligations under the Bern Convention, particularly:

Article 4 – Conservation of habitats

Article 6 – Strict protection of wild fauna

Prevention of habitat degradation and ecological disturbance

Heavy metals such as mercury, arsenic, cadmium and lead pose long-term ecological risks due to bioaccumulation and biomagnifications.

5.8. Conclusion

The collected official data demonstrate:

Repeated exceeding of air pollutant limits

Significant heavy metal deposition in residential and natural areas

Extensive soil contamination across multiple sites

Contamination detected outside exploitation fields

Absence of baseline soil data

Inconsistent emission mitigation practices

These findings indicate ongoing environmental pressure with potential adverse impacts on habitats and protected wildlife species, raising serious concerns regarding compliance with the Bern Convention.

The evidence demonstrates persistent pollution, risks to biodiversity, and documented human health impacts. These conditions conflict with the objectives of the Bern Convention.

It is recommended that the Secretariat request official monitoring data, encourage independent assessments, consider precautionary suspension of polluting activities, and ensure thorough investigation of wildlife deaths.