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Thousands protest lithium mining in Serbia amid coup warning (VIDEO)

Belgrade has claimed that the rally is a plot against the government along the lines of the 2013-14 coup in Kiev



Thousands protest a lithium mining project, Belgrade, Serbia, August 10, 2024. © Filip Stevanovic / Anadolu via Getty Images

Thousands of protesters took to the streets in the Serbian capital, Belgrade, on Saturday to march against the restart of a controversial lithium mining project. The country's authorities have claimed that the protests are intended as a Maidan-style coup against the government.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said a day earlier that Moscow had warned Belgrade about a potential coup attempt, noting that Serbia's Security Intelligence Agency (BIA) was already acting on leads provided by Russia.

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Commenting on the rally, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vulin, the former head of the intelligence services, claimed that the protest is *“moving in accordance with a Maidan scenario,”* referring to the Western-backed coup in Kiev in 2013-14 in which then-President Viktor Yanukovich was overthrown.

He added that *“There is no reason to fear,”* stressing that *“Vucic is not Yankovich, he has no intention of running away and handing power over to thugs.”*

The demonstrators demanded that the government ban lithium mining in the Jadar region in the western part of the country, claiming that the project involves major environmental risks.

Foreign Minister

Ivica Dacic said that up to 27,000 people took part in the rally on Saturday.



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Discovered in 2004, Jadar is Europe’s largest deposit of lithium – a crucial material for electric car batteries. The annual production of the mine is estimated at 58,000 tons of refined battery-grade lithium carbonate, which is reportedly enough to supply 90% of the continent’s current lithium needs. In 2021, British-Australian mining company Rio Tinto announced plans to invest \$2.4 billion in the project.

A license granted by the Serbian authorities to Rio Tinto was revoked in 2022 following widespread protests across the country. However, the project was resumed in July after the Serbian Constitutional Court ruled that the revocation was unconstitutional.

Both the company and the country’s authorities have pledged that the highest environmental standards will be upheld in the agricultural region. Vucic has announced plans for a referendum on the issue, and on Saturday, he stated that there will be no lithium mining in the country for the next two years.

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