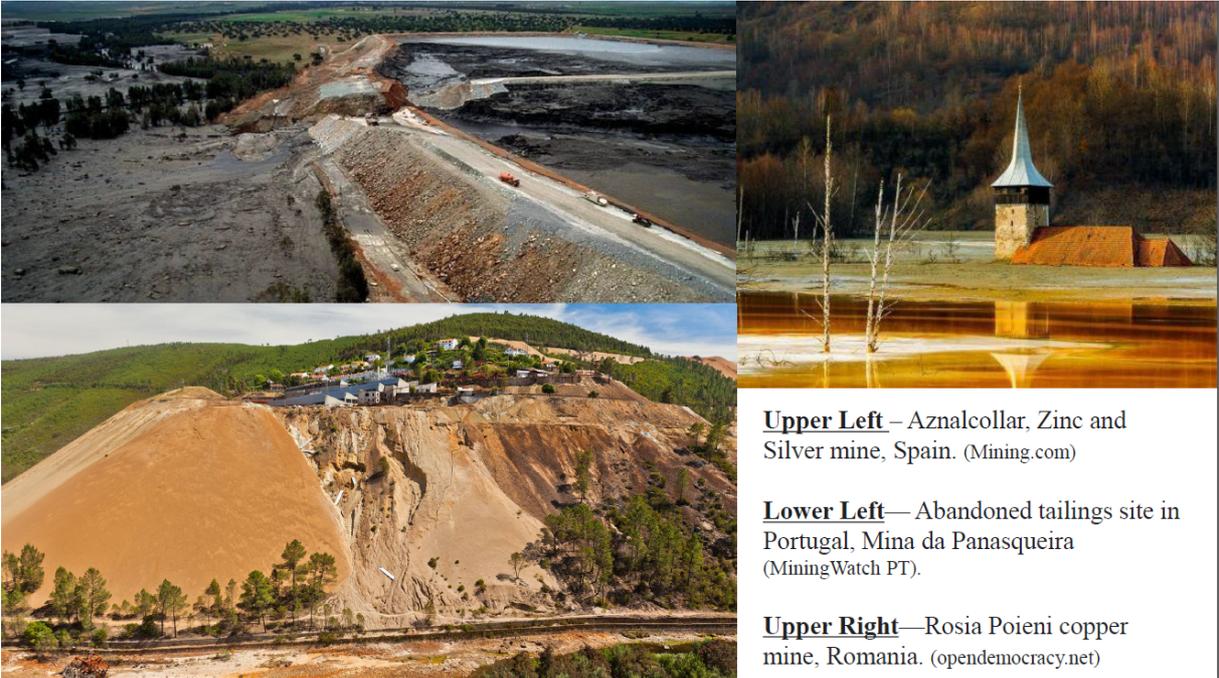


# Employing EU Public Money to Persuade Environmental Sacrifice: This Must End.

Greetings Members of the Parliament,

I want to frame this intervention by stating something obvious, but largely neglected in public policy. While this hearing is about mining today, *it is really about* the unrestrained industrial production, consumption and profiteering that generates enormous energy and material needs. Which, consequently, leads to the need for more mines, larger tailing dams, waste dumps and smelting plants that have severe ecological impacts and are among the main contributors *enabling* and *propelling* the current climate catastrophe. We should not speak past the roots of the current socio-ecological problem.

I have studied copper mining in Peru and a coalmining in Germany, the latter research lead by Dr. Andrea Brock. Likewise, I have also conducted research studying the socio-ecological impacts of wind turbines, a large-scale energy transformer and high-tension power lines in Mexico, France, Catalonia and Spain.



**Upper Left** – Aznalcollar, Zinc and Silver mine, Spain. (Mining.com)

**Lower Left**— Abandoned tailings site in Portugal, Mina da Panasqueira (MiningWatch PT).

**Upper Right**—Rosia Poieni copper mine, Romania. (opendemocracy.net)

Now that we have heard about the insufficient ecological standards of mining in the EU and their impacts, let me focus on the social impacts of mining and infrastructure projects.

While extraction and infrastructure companies’ claim to generate employment and social development, in reality these claims are often grossly overstated—especially with the rise of automation and digitalization. Likewise, there are profound psychosocial impacts that are rarely acknowledged in public policy. This raises the question, what does “social acceptance” or gaining a “social license to operate” really entail?

The general idea is that by gaining approval of mining or infrastructure projects from the local or regional population, it can minimize conflict, create mutual social benefits and, most of all, prevent unexpected costs, delays and maintain a steady profit stream from a given project. This,

in actuality, is a negotiation process attempting to persuade people to give up their local environments, collective resources and, in many instances, their livelihoods. Social acceptance and corporate social responsibility schemes attempt to organize the sacrifice of ecosystems to enclosure, privatization and extraction to create manufacturing materials to be bought and sold on national and transnational markets. Frequently, this also involves writing off basic rights, such as informed public participation, and the duty to report environmental offences and crimes of corruption associated with mining and infrastructure projects.

People recognize extractive impositions as attacks on where they live, and processes of unequal exchange. This is apparent by watching people with closer connections to their environments, regional traditions and value protecting the quality of water, air, food and social relationships where they live. Research has shown, contrary to the easy claims of the Not in My Backyard “syndrome,” people recognize extractive impositions as being connected not only to environmental degradation and corruption but also to wider patterns of consumerism, profiteering and unsustainable urban lifestyles. The causal connection between mining and large-scale infrastructure projects with capitalism and climate change are all too apparent.

Gaining a social license to operate for mining, or corresponding infrastructure projects, we are led to believe will create environmental justice: Inclusion in project planning and decision making; offering equitable social development; and maintaining the highest ecological standards. Yet, in reality, everything is done to avoid addressing the hard scientific realities of water, air and soil contamination, land-use changes, the impacts on flora, fauna, existing social fabrics and governance practices. Not to forget, mining is used for generating more profit and, in the case of wind and solar panels, privatizing common resources to extract more kinetic energy. More still, companies are designing “social license” standards that are voluntary and with minimal public oversight or enforcement.



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Then, the real issue emerges. Social license to operate, in actuality, is a weapon to control land and people, degrading ecosystems and generating profit. Take the Hambach forest coalmine,

which resembles systematic attributes we can find in mining projects all over Europe, like the proposed lithium mines of Cáceres in Spain, Covas do Barroso in Portugal or Jadar in Serbia.

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## RWE Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)



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In Germany, mining and energy major RWE, found various ways to sponsor politicians, town halls, and police departments; built coal mining museums, created bar-restaurants that celebrate mining (Terra:Nova), organize festivals and sponsors schools. This even includes hiring ecologists. In Spain, Portugal, and Serbia, populations are confronted with massive public relations campaigns by Infinity Lithium, Savannah Resources, Rio Tinto, neglecting possible risks, as Dr. Emerman has already shown us. The social response to such plans is usually branded as the uninformed opinion of a few. While this sounds innocent, far from it.



**Savannah Resources bike team, Northern Portugal**  
(Savannah Resources, Twitter)



**Covas do Barroso proposed lithium mine, Portugal**

(source: Savannah Resources)

This approach to obtaining a social license to operate is public relations or, more accurately, propaganda—nothing objective by any honest standard—which works to pre-empt local economic, social and ecological concerns through discursive manipulation, money, gifts and token social development. This includes setting up astroturf groups or proxy-NGOs, such as “Our region—our future” in Germany<sup>1</sup> or “Mineros Touro-O Pino” in Galicia, Spain.<sup>2</sup>



*Terra Nova, Source: RWE*

Sometimes people walk door-to-door, make speeches at public events or schools, companies dispense money, roll out an entire public relations apparatus and match this by organizing

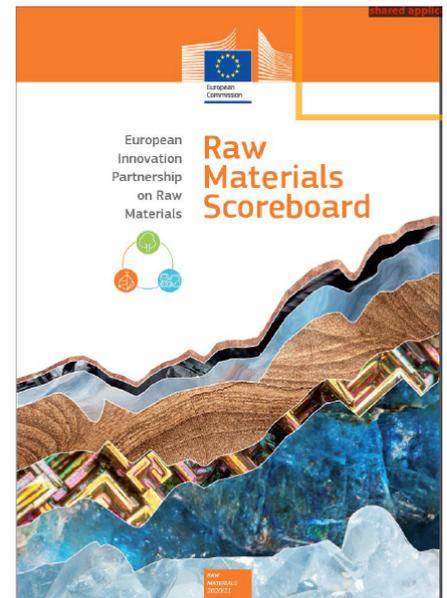
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0962629817300835>

<sup>2</sup> <https://minerostouropino.com>

armed forces, whether local police or private security, to ensure local submission to ecological extraction and business as usual. These efforts display slow and long-term attempts, which erode people's critical faculties, their ability and—and more so—their willingness to identify and report corruption and ecological damage created by the mine. My research,<sup>3</sup> and others,<sup>4</sup> have demonstrated how this maneuvering closely mimics military manuals and population-centric counterinsurgency tactics deployed to occupy foreign countries.

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*“Tailings dam failures, chronic pollution, and fatal accidents are abrupt drivers of opinion. Changing public opposition to passive tolerance or active support requires a lot of persistent effort. Public relation campaigns, transparent stakeholder dialogues, cultural heritage (mining museums, local heritage ceremonies) may help develop positive public opinion” (p. 27).|*



This does not only happen in particular sites, but is systemically encouraged by the European Commission. In its 2020 Communication on “Critical Raw Materials Resilience”<sup>5</sup> it identified “public acceptance” as one of four major challenges while its *2021 Raw Materials Scoreboard* actually lists and recommends many of the methods used in Hambach to mitigate reactions to mining:

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The problem of mining are well known, but instead efforts seek to coerce acceptance. The Horizon 2020 grant scheme have been and continue to fund ‘soft’ counterinsurgency initiatives

<sup>3</sup><https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14747731.2019.1682789?journalCode=rglo20>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0962629821000020> & <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08263663.2021.1855892>

<sup>5</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0474>

<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/news/raw-materials-scoreboard-highlights-urgency-strengthen-resilience-and-sustainability-raw-materials-2021-11-17\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/news/raw-materials-scoreboard-highlights-urgency-strengthen-resilience-and-sustainability-raw-materials-2021-11-17_en)

designed to enforce mining and industrial production—regardless of the ecological and climate catastrophe slowly taking place as we speak. Think about the “Vectors to accessible critical raw materials” (VECTOR) or the controversial “Mining and Metallurgy Regions of EU” (MIREU) research initiatives—The latter meanwhile admitted that key parts of their results do not comply with scientific standards.<sup>7</sup>

Counterinsurgency is about capturing the ‘hearts’ and ‘minds’ of local populations, working by every means to pre-empt potential resistance. This is attempted by buying the support of local leaders; popularizing corporate science; distributing t-shirts and inundating entire regions with multi-media advertisements; sponsoring sports clubs and events; organizing school visits and creating “educational” materials with a distorted vision of mining. This social engineering initiatives promote a surreptitious vision that mining is good for their lives and the environment. This, on the flipside, entails the criminalizing resistance and allowing violent action to be carried out against concern citizens.

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**Protest Cáceres, Spain, April 2018**

(Source: Salvemos la Montaña)



**Viana do Castelo, Portugal, Oct. 2021.**

(Source: Ana Peixoto Fernandes)

Take for example, the arson attacks carried out to intimidate locals protesting the EU funded San Finx tin and tungsten mine in Spain.<sup>8</sup> In the name of ecological and climate policy, the EC must stop criminalizing land defense activities.

Social license to operate, then, is code for propaganda efforts aimed at implementing what amounts to a campaign of ‘soft’ counterinsurgency, designed to pre-empt and disable resistance protecting local ecosystems, traditions and livelihoods. How does this encourage public trust?

In her 2019 mission letter to Thierry Breton from Ursula von der Leyen highlighted the importance of strengthening “the link between people and the institutions that serve them”. She

<sup>7</sup> [https://suomenkuvalehti.fi/jutut/kotimaa/talous/korruptioepailyja-valituksia-ja-syytoksia-ymparistotuhosta-suomen-gtkn-johtamat-kaivoshankkeet-suututtivat-jarjestoja-euroopassa/?utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_source=Facebook#Echobox=1637927830](https://suomenkuvalehti.fi/jutut/kotimaa/talous/korruptioepailyja-valituksia-ja-syytoksia-ymparistotuhosta-suomen-gtkn-johtamat-kaivoshankkeet-suututtivat-jarjestoja-euroopassa/?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook#Echobox=1637927830)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.contraminacion.org/2016/05/03/que-hai-detras-do-lume/>

also stated that: [And I quote] “A stronger relationship with citizens starts with building trust and confidence. I will insist on the highest levels of transparency and ethics for the College as a whole. There can be no room for doubt about our behaviour or our integrity.”<sup>9</sup> [End of quote]. Meanwhile the Commission, the last five years, has allocated over 100M€ to over a dozen of Horizon2020 projects with objectives of both researching and at the same time influencing social acceptance of domestic raw material extraction. This includes mapping civic actors and campaigning at primary schools. All of the projects consortia have rejected NGO requests to disclose their public funding agreements, referring to “commercially sensitive information.” The European Commission has endorsed this activity in all cases, negating a public interest in disclosure and transparency. The Commission, moreover, has nearly financed 30 “Wider Society Learning” projects through the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) RawMaterials, with a similar objective of “building the social license” and to “achieve society acceptance” by targeting NGO’s or initiating social engineering efforts against citizens through schools and museums. The European commission must stop the various funding streams aimed at social engineering extraction in or outside the EU in order to comply with its own standards of ethics and transparency.

Equally alarming as these insidious and repressive maneuvers are the attempts at justifying this mining by calling it “green”, “environmentally friendly”, “responsible” or the even more preposterous “sustainable.” There is nothing ecologically sustainable about these projects, except the green 100€ notes backing and being made from these projects. The low-carbon infrastructures necessitating mining, fossil fuels, chemical leaching, smelting, manufacturing and operation are an expansion of ecologically destructive projects that are being added to the existing energy mix of coal, gas, nuclear and hydroelectric dams. Carbon accounting is not enough for understanding ecological and climate catastrophe. Life cycle assessments are not enough for understanding the real socio-ecological harms of low-carbon technology supply webs. This money used to pacify conflict in favor of ecological and climate catastrophe must be put into actually trying to mitigate and remediate ecological destruction, not renewing and extending it. Research funds should be urgently dedicated to developing degrowth and post-economic growth strategies so the European Commission can actually start taking environmental policy seriously. Members of parliament, this destructive socio-ecological trajectory must be derailed and transformed.

Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>9</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/breton\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/breton_en)