

# The 7 Most Endangered 2013

## Project Fact Sheet

<b><u>Project Title</u></b>	<b>Roșia Montană Mining Landscape</b>
<b><u>Location</u></b>	<b>Transylvania, Romania</b>
<b><u>Initial input date</u></b>	<b>27.10.2017</b>
<b><u>Current status</u></b>	<b>Post follow-up</b>
<b><u>Latest update</u></b>	<b>27.08.2018</b>

### **Summary, status, prognosis:**

A prime heritage landscape is at stake, the result being dependent on a basically politically driven and non-linear process. Therefore, the result of the inclusion of Rosia Montana in the first series of 7ME has oscillated between a “quasi lost case” to potentially one of the largest successes, now possibly again being put in doubt.

**Classification: B. Good progress, but politically unstable**

### **Basic data**

#### **Nominator:**

Mr. Serban Cantacuzino, President of Pro Patrimonio Foundation, in cooperation with ARA/Architecture.Restoration.Archaeology, Alburnus Maior, OAR/Romanian Chamber of Architects and the National Committee of ICOMOS.

#### **Brief description:**

Historical mining landscape, incl places of worship, archaeological sites, industrial buildings, underground mining system.

#### **Owner:**

Mainly Municipality of Rosia Montana and RMGC/Rosia Montana Gold Corporation – both had not endorsed the submission.

#### **Administrator:**

idem.

### **Context, description.**

The landscape of Rosia Montana is part of the Apuseni Mountains, the Western part of Romania's Carpathians. The overall region of some 2500 km<sup>2</sup> is well known since early times for its rich deposits of precious metals. Rosia Montana has seen important underground gold and silver mining activities since at least Dacian and Roman times, continued with variable degrees of intensity through the Middle Ages and Modern times until some limited open cast mining ran out by 2006.

This long-lasting mining activity left many historic sites and buildings from all historic periods, including a vast historic gallery network (150 km, with 7 km from Dacian and Roman times). Some environmental problems continue to exist from the more recent mining in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Issues, problems, threats.**

The main threat was due to a planned massive open-cast mining project pursued by RMGC, owned 80% by Gabriel Resources, a Canadian-based company and 20% by a Romanian State mining company, to explore “the largest undeveloped gold deposit in Europe”. Despite some efforts on their side to conserve historic sites (often badly implemented from a conservation standpoint), such large-scale open cast mining would unavoidably destroy large parts of what specialists consider a unique historic mining landscape of national and European importance.

Modern mining technology, being based on the systematic use of cyanide, would also trigger major pollution problems, and this even more as the mining exploration was to be finished within some 18 years, leaving the practical management of toxic sludges and deposits thereafter all the more uncertain.

Also, the limited mining duration, and its likely leftovers, could not have provided a sustainable development base for the rather poor region in the longer term.

### **Status pre-mission**

The debate on the opportunity of starting such open cast mining started already in the early 2000s, and early on involved both Europa Nostra and ICOMOS as opponents to the scheme. RMGC managed to buy up significant land areas all while undertaking a major lobbying campaign, boasting the planned job creation and its promised efforts to pursue conservation and depollution efforts. At the same time, opposition to the project increasingly spread beyond specialised conservationists to gain vast popular support at national and international levels, incl. massive demonstrations. Changing governments basically looked at the planned investment more positively but shied away from granting formal permissions for starting with the open cast mining.

In July 2012 already, Europa Nostra wrote to the then Romanian Prime Minister to urge for an alternative development for the Rosia Montana area, in March 2013 the site was nominated for the newly created “7 Most Endangered” and in October 2013 ICOMOS reiterated its “deepest concern” about the planned mining.

### **Summary EN/EIBI mission recommendations, action programme:**

The specificity of the Rosia Montana situation implied that this “project” was rather of a “process” type, in the sense that the prime objective was not the conservation or restoration of specific heritage items, but rather avoiding that they were destroyed through open cast mining. Accordingly, the efforts deployed were broken down into several individual actions, synchronized with the political agenda in Romania, namely:

- October 2013: Europa Nostra urges all members of Parliament in Bucharest to refrain from approving a major law having freed the way to the planned mining.
- November 2013: Executive President and Secretary General speak at a dedicated session of the Romanian Academy of Sciences; the corresponding report is on the Europa Nostra website.
- 16-19 June 2014: Joint Europa Nostra-EIBI mission (J. Sell, C. Carras, M. Berza, S. Bâlici, G. Clause) to Rosia Montana and to Bucharest. The delegation met with regional associations, participated at a meeting with local population in Rosia Montana and another one with representatives of RMGC. In Bucharest, they met the EU representation, three Romanian Ministries and national associations. By contrast, it was not possible to meet the regional authorities. An internal report on the mission was prepared for the Europa Nostra Board meeting of 7 July 2014.

The main objectives were each time:

- To underline the crucial importance, also at a European scale, of conserving Rosia Montana and to avoid the planned open-cast mining. Instead, it was urged to propose the historic landscape for the UNESCO heritage sites list.
- To build bridges between the opposing parties involved in the debate, to thus help preparing for the day after the mining plans had been stopped.

- To urge that there was a need for an alternative and sustainable development strategy for the region, and that EU Structural Funds (and EIB) could help in that task.

## **Progress on recommendations and latest status**

The various efforts by Europa Nostra were interwoven into a wider campaign involving also e.g. ICOMOS and many national NGOs and associations. Together they created a momentum which managed to slow down and even turn around a political process which could have led to authorising the new mining; they equally sharpened the understanding for alternative options.

New perspectives arose by end 2014 when a new Romanian President was elected, followed also by new governments, less sensible to the lobbying by RMGC. ICOMOS set up a specific working group on Rosia Montana, the new Romanian President Iohannis spoke out in favour of Rosia Montana and in October 2015 the World Monument Fund put Rosia Montana on its 2016 Watchlist. As of early 2016 successive Romanian governments have actively considered protecting Rosia Montana and declared their interest in using EU Structural Funds to define an alternative development plan for the region. Accordingly, in February 2015 the Ministry of Culture put the Mining Cultural Landscape of Rosia Montana on the Romanian Tentative List.

An International Workshop at the European Parliament in March 2016, where Europa Nostra (C. Carras) and EIBI (G. Clause) spoke, confirmed these perspectives, but showed also that local mayors in the region share a sympathy for mining traditions (partly reflecting their own past) and are reluctant to exclude new mining activities. The meetings also highlighted examples where historic mining sites had successfully been converted into tourism destinations (Las Médulas in Spain, Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape in UK, Idrija in Slovenia). Korbach in Germany would be a similar case.

On 4 January 2017, the Romanian Ministry of Culture submitted the nomination dossier for Rosia Montana to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The evaluation is ongoing, the designated ICOMOS expert undertook his mission on 25-29 September 2017, and issued a favourable opinion.

In summer 2017, however, already rumours became more concrete that the latest Romanian government might start to doubt about the appropriateness of the nomination of Rosia Montana for the World Heritage List. Ultimately, any such U-turn would open the way for the authorisation of the open cast mining and might also be considered to soften the position of RMGC with its damages claim (see below).

At the same time, the international campaign against mining activities in Rosia Montana continues. As an example, the most recent version of the (German) "greenpeace magazin" (5.2017) had its cover story on the topic, and so were reports on TV. UNESCO proposed for its annual meeting (Bahrain, 24/6-4/7, 2018) to inscribe Rosia Montana Mining Landscape both on the World Heritage List and on the World Heritage List in Danger (Draft decision 42 COM 8B.32). Europa Nostra welcomed this proposal in a letter to the 21 State Parties of the World Heritage Committee dated 28 June 2018. However, and following another round of discussions between Romanian Government and President, the Minister of Culture wrote to UNESCO to postpone any decision for the time being. Such postponement was approved on July 2, 2018, for a period of up to three years.

## **Impact of EIBI/EN intervention**

### **Nominator's Comments:**

Extracts from the questionnaire sent in October 2017 to the nominator:

Expectations were partially fulfilled: There was very good mobilisation and advocacy as an outcome of the nomination, but there was little expert advice and no funding of proposed actions... Most needed in future is expert advice on independent development scenarios and on community building; seed funding for initiatives on the ground, dedicated to rebuild and

reinforce the local community. Advice to improve the programme: 1. If the nomination process continues to include fields for compiling concrete projects, it should be made clear that such projects will not be necessarily endorsed by EN upon listing, neither supported. 2. EN should however ensure that some sort of concrete support is granted to (all) listed sites, apart from advocacy and mobilisation. 3. The technical assessments should be better adapted to the reality on the ground and in the respective countries. (Advice like there is abundant European funding, in a situation where neither the nominator, nor anyone else from the community is eligible, is not helpful.)

### **Appraisal Team's Comments:**

Clearly an important heritage project, but also a difficult one, as heavily dependent on a complex political process within the country. The EIBI/EN intervention has certainly contributed to the political momentum which, unless political developments were still to imply an abrupt volte-face, has saved the site from the imminent threat of open-pit mining.

On a more critical note, the progress in defining and implementing a more sustainable development strategy for the Rosia Montana region seems to proceed only slowly beyond the stage of public declarations, perhaps due also to some hesitation at the level of regional or local authorities...

An open question is the success probability of a recently launched damages claim by RMGC at the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), after having launched arbitration in 2016. It probably depends on what kind of formal or informal commitments have been given by successive Romanian governments, all while staying short of a formal mining authorisation.

### **Lessons learned:**

- The tool box developed between EN and EIBI for the 7ME, based on an "experts mission" and a "technical report", can be applied to a "political process" only within limits and with a high degree of flexibility.
- Still, the nomination of the site has clearly improved its visibility, notably at European level, and underlined the importance of not only avoiding the mining, but of developing alternative activities. It has also contributed to bridge building between the various parties involved in what was initially a contestation movement.
- The fact that EU Structural Funds are deployed in Romania only through national sector and not through regional operational programmes makes it more difficult to cater well to the needs of relatively small and administratively unsophisticated regions like Rosia Montana and even the larger Alba Iulia region.