

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0035/10  
pursuant to Rule 115 of the Rules of Procedure  
by János Áder and László Tőkés, on behalf of the PPE Group  
to the Commission

Subject: Ban on the use of cyanide mining technologies in the EU

Cyanide is a highly toxic chemical used in the gold mining industry that can have a catastrophic and irreversible impact on the environment and human health. It also qualifies as a main pollutant under the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

10 years ago more than 100 000 cubic meters of cyanide-tainted water were released from a gold mine reservoir in Baia Mare (Romania) into the Szamos - Tisza - Danube River system and caused the largest ecological disaster in Central Europe at that time. Toxic materials killed many organisms, damaging the ecological system, food chain and essential human use of the river for many years.

Although several pieces of EU legislation have been adopted in order to strengthen the rules on the use of cyanide in mining - some Member States have even introduced a ban on it - the technology can still be used in the territory of the European Union, legally. Nevertheless, prudential rules and proper financial guarantees are still missing, and the implementation of the existing legislation also depends on the skills of the executive powers of each Member State.

Therefore, there is no real guarantee that such an accident will not happen again, especially taking into consideration the escalating extreme weather conditions as a consequence of climate change. There are several existing and planned cyanide mining projects across Europe and it is only a matter of time and human negligence for a catastrophe to occur.

Taking into account the fact that the European gold mining industry represents only 1% of global gold production, performed mostly by multinational companies, and that cyanide mining is less job-intensive, while it runs the risk of enormous cross-border ecological damage, a general ban on cyanide mining should be considered at a European Union level.

Given the precautionary principle of the EU environmental legislation and in the light of the commitments under the WFD to prevent and control pollution, as well as to reach and preserve 'good status' of waters, will the Commission propose an EU-wide ban on the use of cyanide in gold mining?

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Forwarded: 19.03.2010

Deadline for reply: 26.03.2010