

MINERAL RESOURCES

AND THE RIGHT TO SAY NO

We all have the right to say no.

The education we receive, and democracy give us the right to say no, but it also teaches us the duty to respect those who say yes. The exercise of citizenship stems from the responsibility with which we love rights and duties, pondering the arguments of all parties. It is from this exercise that emerge solutions of common interest.

In September, the European Commission published a Communication reaffirming the importance of mineral raw materials and the need to ensure their supply to Europe and proposes the European Alliance for Raw Materials. In response, several Non-Governmental Organizations, including some based in Portugal, addressed an open letter where they defend, among others, the right of communities to say no to projects of revelation and use of mineral resources.

Mineral resources are generated by natural geological processes and are therefore not relocatable. It is essential that land planning plans and policies consider them, safeguarding access to them and reducing the risk of conflicts between their valorisation/exploitation and other economic activities, including urbanism. The latest version of the National Plan for Spatial Planning Policy gives them relevance, but has not had the desirable impact on regional and municipal plans. This recognition, based on geological knowledge, will decrease the number of those who say no. Refusals will also decrease if there is constructive discussion between communities in areas with potential mineral resources and the parties involved in their use. This is everyone's responsibility and must be coordinated by the licensing entities. This is relevant in new projects as licensed ones are generally well accepted by the communities that reside there, being recognised as generating jobs and wealth (in many cases the only local sources of economic development). Aljustrel, Castro Verde, Almodôvar, Vila Viçosa, Moncorvo, several localities of the Serra d'Aire and Candeeiros demonstrate it.

The Member States of the European Union are states of law, with laws recognized as the most demanding in the protection of the environment and populations. In Portugal, a new project for the exploration or exploitation of mineral resources is, prior to its licensing, advertised in national and local newspapers, inviting everyone to speak out. It is also officially send to the respective Municipal Chamber(s). We are not talking about clandestine activities or having something to hide, so the ad *hoc* suspicions about the procedures and the licensing authority lack justification. The exploitation of mineral deposits is also obliged to submit and be approved by the competent authorities an Environmental Impact Study (EIA). The EIA will result in measures of mitigation and compensation. Although we all have the right/duty to say no, it is not to communities

or municipal councils that it is incumbent to make a project of revelation or exploitation of mineral resources impossible. Whenever we talk about public domain goods, as the Portuguese Constitution establishes, the support for political decision is the responsibility of the entities with proficiency and experience recognized in these matters, which will take into account the opinion of the populations, provided that they are duly sustained. It is so in a state of law, like Portugal.

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