

The future of European mining: What should our mining industry learn from the Skouries and Rosia Montana community gold conflicts

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The popular image of mining portrayed by media and by a majority of public opinion is a dominantly negative one. From worker's rights to environmental damages, disasters such as the Copiapó mine collapse (Chile), the acid mine drainage at Lousal (Portugal) and the Pb contamination of waters around the Tyndrum mines (Scotland) overshadow initiatives like the ICMM. Some companies receive little praise despite creating active community education and investment projects, while others simply build higher barbed wire fences and attempt to weather the protests, budgeting them into mine life assessments.

This image problem, combined with the decentralised political segregation of Europe and the increased power of grass-roots protest initiatives (such as Antigold in Greece), has resulted in mining companies joining a long list of industries effected by the 'auto-protest' reaction in face of development, regardless of potential regional and national benefits, there is a pre-existing lack of trust in corporate and government powers to protect community interests. The poor management of existing licences is thus becoming a significant danger to future operations and the wider industry.

Here we report on the Rosia Montana dispute (Romania) and the ongoing Skouries conflict (Greece). We then discuss how the European mining industry may need to significantly adapt its exploration and community engagement strategies to avoid future conflicts and, present a recent example of how effective suitably organised community engagement projects can be for local mining initiatives from Southern Portugal.