

THE LEGACY OF 47 URANIUM MINES IN BULGARIA - OUTRAGES, LAWLESSNESS AND HAZARDS

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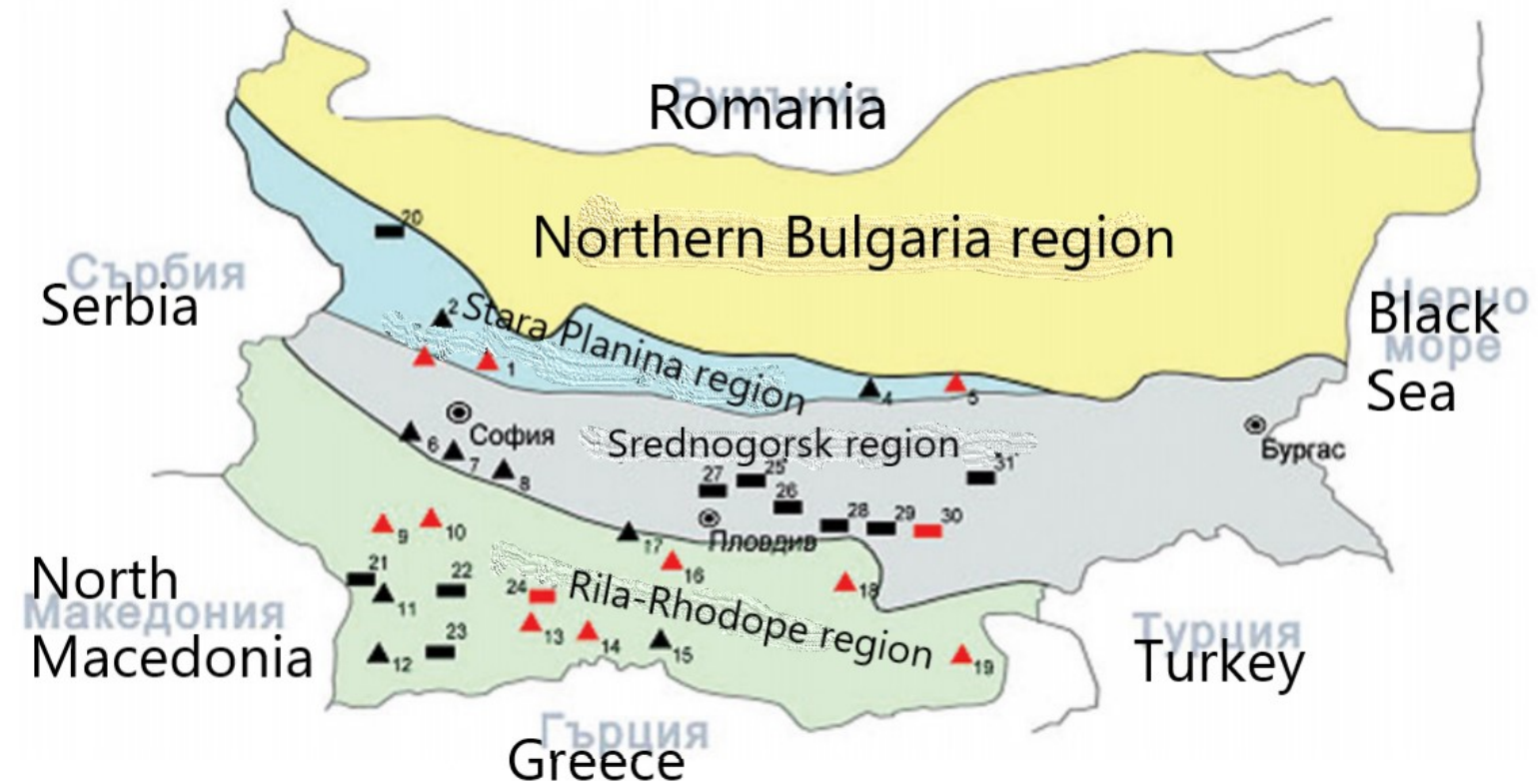
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A VERY SHORT HISTORY OF URANIUM MINING IN BULGARIA

- U-mining in Bulgaria - from 1945 to 1992 was one of the earliest in Europe
- The activities of the Soviet-Bulgarian UM were secret and carried out under the guise of radium mining
- In 1956, the Rare Metals Association - 13,000 workers - research, mining, processing and export of the extracted U; 300 engineers from USSR; U was used in the first Soviet reactor - 25.12.1944
- In 1988, 47 U-mines were operating in BG - 662 - 1.5% of the world output
- In 1992, uranium mining in Bulgaria was declared economically unprofitable

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Map: Bulgarian Geological Society

UMMT ARE UNGUARDED, USED FOR ILLEGAL BUSINESS AND POLLUTE THE WATER (1)

- In 2012, in the Lakatnik region (50 km north of Sofia), environmentalists raised the alarm about illegal gravel mining in the former U-mine Probojnitsa. Despite many reports to the local prosecutor's office and the local mayor's office, the mining continued for more than a year.
- The area, visited by mountaineers, cavers and climbers, is one of the most popular places for alternative tourism in Bulgaria.
- Despite the popularity of the place, there is no marking anywhere indicating that there is a uranium mine nearby and an increased radiation background.



Pictures: Dnevnik.bg

UMMT ARE UNGUARDED, USED FOR ILLEGAL BUSINESS AND POLLUTE THE WATER (2)

- After the liquidation, some of the mines were “resurrected” with new functions. The closed uranium mine in the Rhodope village of Barutin, for example, was converted into a regional waste landfill for 4 municipalities – Devin, Borino, Dospat and Satovcha. There was also an idea near Kostenets to use a closed uranium mine as a garbage landfill. Under conditions set by law, the mines could be used as landfills or quarries.



Pictures: Stopatom.wordpress.com

UMMT ARE UNGUARDED, USED FOR ILLEGAL BUSINESS AND POLLUTE THE WATER (3)

- In June 25, 2025, a journalistic investigation revealed the reasons for the water being contaminated with uranium three times the norm in 14 villages in Haskovo district and in the city itself. In 2017, uranium was found in Haskovo's drinking water 13 times the norm (30 micrograms per liter)
- After digging 8 new water wells, another 14 villages are experiencing excessive pollution from 14-18, up to 25 times above the norm (Nov 2024); village of Sarnitsa - 40 times.
- The reason: the ex U-mine in Bolyarovo district - changes in hydrodynamics lead to the diffusion of uranium



Screenshot: The Traces Remain, BNT

LACK OF REGULATIONS FOR URANIUM MINES AND TAILINGS IN BULGARIAN AND EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

- The Bulgarian **Act on the Safe Use of Nuclear Energy** (updated in 2002) makes no mention of the concept of a “*uranium mine*“. The term “*nuclear facility*” encompasses all facilities requiring considerations of nuclear safety and radiation protection. No measures or requirements regarding decommissioning of mines and tailings are stipulated. In 2010, a provision for a “*license for the decommissioning of a nuclear facility*” was introduced into the Act; such a license is issued only upon “*the existence of a positive decision regarding environmental impact assessment*” (Article 39, para. 2 and 3). **No such EIAs have ever been conducted for Bulgarian uranium mines and tailings, nor have any such licenses ever been issued by the Nuclear Regulatory Agency.** Consequently, the Bulgarian state has been in violation of its own law for 16 years.
- In 1999, **Ordinance No. 1 of November 15, 1999, on Standards for Radiation Protection and Safety Objectives Regarding the Remediation of the Consequences of the Uranium Industry in the Republic of Bulgaria** was adopted. It sets out standards and indicators for radiological status but **contains no specific requirements for the cleanup, rehabilitation, and monitoring of soil and water.**
- **Council Directive 2011/70/Euratom** establishes a community framework for the safe management of SNF and radioactive waste, but it **excludes extractive waste from uranium mines** unless a member state explicitly chooses to include such legacy or mining waste in its national inventories and programs.

REFERENCES

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4. [*Act on the Safe Use of Nuclear Energy of the Republic of Bulgaria \(link\)*](#)
5. [*Ordinance No. 1 of November 15, 1999, on Standards for Radiation Protection and Safety Objectives Regarding the Remediation of the Consequences of the Uranium Industry in the Republic of Bulgaria \(link\)*](#)
6. [*Council Directive 2009/71/Euratom of 25 June 2009 establishing a Community framework for the nuclear safety of nuclear installations \(link\)*](#)