



Draft

Title: **Nature Restoration Law vs. EU plan for critical raw materials - challenges to protect nature and food sovereignty**

Tabled by: Partido Ecologista Os Verdes

Draft text

1 The European Greens have been spearheading policies to respond to climate
2 challenges while putting people and the planet at the top of its priorities. In
3 the European Parliament, at both national and local levels, EGP members have
4 been proposing measures to mitigate such impacts and to politically address
5 changes in production, distribution and consumption models to achieve more
6 balanced ways of using essential resources, ensuring less impact on nature and
7 human health.

8 For this reason, Greens all over Europe recognise the need to bring back nature
9 and restore those precious ecosystems which are under threat today. At the same
10 time, they are demanding
11 political action to reduce pollution, to ensure breathable air, clean water, and
12 toxic-free consumer goods while significantly reducing the risk of contamination
13 from pollutants and chemical contaminants and tackling climate challenges.

14 ***Nature Restoration Law***

15 On 17 June 2024, nature protection was the subject of a very important
16 resolution approved by the EU national environment ministers. The Nature
17 Restoration Law (NRL) will contribute to the definition of binding goals for
18 national implementation in order to restore degraded ecosystems, *stop the*
19 *extinction of species and promote healthy ecosystems. The NRL provides important*
20

21 *guidelines for restoring the health of fresh-water bodies while also improving*
22 *biodiversity in agricultural ecosystems with the aim of improving organic carbon*
stock in cropland soils and promoting high-diversity landscapes.

23 Despite the urgent need for action, restoring nature has not been consensual,
24 largely because of the difficulty the EU faces in reconciling public interest
25 and environmental conservation with the pressure from and interests of the
26 energy sector, agro-business, super-intensive forestry and agricultural
27 production, the agrochemical sector and, most recently, mining industries.

28 ***Need for critical raw materials***

29 The EU's demand for critical materials – mainly to reduce its dependence on
30 China and to supply the electric vehicle industry – is forcing those European
31 countries with identified lithium deposits to respond to EU pressure to ensure
32 that at least 10% of such critical minerals are extracted in Europe by 2030.

33 Europe's green transition and digital transformation – associated with an
34 unsustainable model of overconsumption and overexploitation of raw materials –
35 are far removed from plans for the transition to place prevention and precaution
36 at the forefront of productive and technological solutions.

37 ***Portuguese and Serbian conflicts***

38 The governments of Portugal and Serbia have seen this as an opportunity for
39 investment, in most cases creating a fast track for licensing and ignoring the
40 precautionary principle concerning the environmental impact of lithium mining,
41 while jeopardising national needs and goals regarding nature protection. In both
42 cases, governments have not gone any further with the projects thanks to strong
43 popular demonstrations and the persistence of civic movements and parties,
44 including Partido Ecologista “Os Verdes” in Portugal, which have put these
45 concerns on the political agenda.

46 Lithium mining industry, whose exploitation using open-pit models severely and
47 irreversibly impact soils, water quality and availability, resulting in massive
48 deforestation, soil destruction and increased carbon emissions, is far from
49 consensual in these countries.

50 Governments have opened the way for exploitation to be carried out on productive

51 farmlands, which is the case in Serbia's Jadar Valley and in the Portuguese
52 region of Barroso.

53 In Portugal, these projects overlap with ecologically sensitive areas and are
54 close to protected and classified areas, such as Natura 2000 areas or the FAO's
55 classified agricultural areas, thereby creating extreme impacts on the
56 landscape, the identity of rural regions, on food production and the economic
57 sustainability of communities. Lithium extraction - the aim of which is for use
58 in decarbonization solutions - is absolutely incompatible with regions suffering
59 from severe drought, water scarcity and devastating forest fires, such as
60 Portugal. Therefore, this option is not a solution to climate change in these
61 territories. On the contrary, it is a problem and will soon become a huge burden
62 for future generations, due to the
63 environmental liabilities it will leave behind.

64 In Serbia, populations fear that the lithium mine will pollute water sources and
65 endanger public health. After years of public protests, the Serbian government
66 recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the EU which is seen as the
67 first step in developing Serbia's lithium resources.

68 Extraction and processing of lithium in the Jadar Valley, planned by the Rio
69 Tinto company, could significantly harm the environment, creating a devastating
70 impact on the surrounding areas of farmland, forest groundwater and soil,
71 leading to a loss of biodiversity and the accumulation of large amounts of
72 hazardous waste.

73 These political options have been guided by subservience towards an economic
74 imposition, conducting the energy transition without social and environmental
75 justice, mainly due to the failure to make exploration sites compatible with
76 areas of lower environmental and socio-economic impact.

77 We oppose both the EU's and governments' hasty granting of licences for lithium
78 extractive projects that reduce environmental criteria while exempting mining
79 companies from a thorough assessment of the environmental and socio-economic
80 impacts in extractive areas.

81 These regions cannot be sacrificed and made to give up their agricultural
82 livelihoods and, potentially, regional ecosystems. Thus, efforts must be made to
83 protect nature – particularly water resources, fertile soils and biodiversity –

84 as well as the food sovereignty of Member States.

85 **The European Greens parties gathered in Dublin demand further and strengthened**
86 **actions on processes involving lithium exploration projects:**

- 87 • transparency and the democratic participation of local populations and
88 communities, NGOs and the scientific community
- 89 • governments must embrace the precautionary principle
- 90 • guaranteed rigorous environmental impact assessment processes
- 91 • safeguarding biodiversity
- 92 • stopping projects that jeopardise the contamination of drinking water
93 aquifers and/or access to drinking water in the regions
- 94 • respecting integrity, livelihoods and the cultural heritage of rural
95 regions.

Background

Since early in 2019, “Os Verdes” has been supporting the local populations of Barroso in Portugal and protesting against the open-pit mining of lithium in their region, not only among our MPs who were in parliament at the time (see parliamentary requests [here](#) and [here](#)), but also by participating in [local and national demonstrations](#) against these projects. EGP Co-Chair Thomas Waitz stated recently that the European Greens support Serbians’ protests against lithium mining in the Jadar Valley.

Supporters

Verdes Equo