

Romania asks UNESCO to protect planned open-cast goldmine site

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A view of Rosia Montana, 430 kms west from Bucharest, taken on September 20, 2011

Romania has asked the UN cultural agency UNESCO to give world heritage list status to a village where a Canadian firm is battling to locate a controversial open-cast goldmine.

The village of Rosia Montana and a radius of two kilometres (just over a

mile) were last month declared a site of historical interest by Romania's culture ministry thereby granting it protection from mining activity.

But in comments Saturday, Romania's Culture Minister Vlad Alexandrescu sought further protection for the area from UNESCO.

"Rosia Montana carries the imprint of a close interaction between man and environment, which has generated a cultural landscape that is among the richest and most spectacular," Alexandrescu said.

"Rosia Montana fulfils five of the UNESCO criteria to be included in the cultural landscapes category," Alexandrescu added, calling on the organisation to propose projects to ensure the sustainable development of the area.

The government's move in January was a new blow for Canada's Gabriel Resources which had been trying for 15 years to get an environment ministry permit to extract 300 tonnes of gold from the picturesque village in a project it claims would create hundreds of jobs and boost Romania's economy.



Activists stand next to a hot air balloon with a banner reading "Do not destroy Rosia Montana", to protest against the Rosia Montana Gold Corporation on June 5, 2014 in Bucharest, Romania

Experts say the project, which would use thousands of tonnes of cyanide, would pose a pollution risk, level four mountains in a historic area of western Transylvania and would also damage Roman-era mining shafts.

The plans have sparked widespread anger, bringing tens of thousands of people onto the streets in a scale of protest not seen in Romania since the 1990s.

Gabriel Resources, which holds an 80-percent stake in the Rosia Montana Gold Corporation, last July filed a request for international arbitration to obtain compensation from Bucharest over the delays to the project.

Initially in favour of the mine, Romania's former leftwing government abruptly changed its position in 2013 following the wave of protests.

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