

## Workshop Report

### The “Green Transition” and Its Costs for the Balkans: Resisting Authoritarian Extractivism in Bosnia& Herzegovina and Serbia

*Kassel, 4–5 May 2025*

The workshop “The Green Transition and its Costs for the Balkans: Resisting Authoritarian Extractivism in Bosnia& Herzegovina and Serbia ”, organized at the beginning of May 2025, brought together activists, academics, and students to discuss the social, political, and ecological implications of green extractivism in the post-Yugoslav region. The workshop was supported by the Global Partnership Network and the Global Labor University.

The initiative to organize the workshop responded to the growing expansion of mining projects in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, often promoted as contributions to the European Union’s “green transition.” Yet, as participants emphasized, these projects reproduce dependency and extractivism rather than sustainable development. While the EU modernizes its industries to reduce carbon emissions, the environmental and social burdens of “green” production are increasingly externalized to peripheral regions of Europe.

The workshop series aimed to highlight the contradictions of the EU’s Green Deal as experienced in the Balkans — a region rich in critical minerals but marked by economic precarity, weak democratic institutions, and high social inequality. Guest speakers, representing activist initiatives from Serbia and Bosnia, referred to growing protests against lithium and other mining projects, particularly in Serbia, where local communities have mobilized against the destruction of farmland, forests, and water systems.

The workshop sought to:

- Facilitate dialogue between activists from the Balkans and academics and students in Germany;
- Provide space to exchange strategies of resistance and organizing against authoritarian extractivism;
- Reflect on the role of labour and education in promoting a just transition;
- Encourage transnational solidarity through the Global Labour University (GLU) network.

### Workshop Agenda (4–5 May 2025)

The workshop opened in Kassel with a film screening and discussion at *Cinema Filmladen* on 4 May. The documentary *Flotacija*, co-directed by Eluned Zoe Aiano, offered a visually striking account of life in mining areas of the Balkans, capturing both the material and emotional landscapes of communities confronting extractive capitalism.

On 5 May, activities continued at the University of Kassel. The morning workshop “*Balkan Activists Meet the Global Labour University*” introduced participants to the GLU’s online course *Just and Green: Labour’s Ecological Question*.

The Balkan delegation Stjepan Ćurković, Ratko Pilipović, Miroslav Stakić, Suzana Rajković, Svjetlana Nedimović, Aleksandar Kulić, Mladen Ilić, Nebojša Petković, and Iskra Krstić. They were joined by contributors affiliated with ZBOR, a collective of researchers and artists, including Sofija Stevanović (University of Cambridge), Zoe Aiano (Wapping Project, Berlin), and Christin Stühlen (University of Marburg).

The day continued with an informal “*Walk-and-Talk: Strategies in Motion*”, encouraging open exchange between local organizers and Balkan delegates. The evening culminated in a public panel discussion featuring speakers from the Balkans alongside Carla Noever Castelos (University of Kassel), Edlira Xhafa (GLU Online Academy), and Devan Pillay (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa).

Panelists debated how local struggles against extractivism can connect with global labour and climate justice movements. Participants noted that while mining projects promise economic progress, they often undermine long-term livelihoods, weaken democratic accountability, and deepen North–South inequalities within Europe.

Several key themes emerged from the workshop:

- **Unequal Green Transition:** The EU’s drive toward decarbonization risks reproducing global hierarchies by turning peripheral regions into resource frontiers.
- **Labour and Ecology:** The struggles against mining in the Balkans demonstrate that ecological and social justice must go hand in hand.
- **Transnational Solidarity:** Building alliances between environmental, labour, and academic actors is crucial to challenge extractivism’s authoritarian tendencies.
- **Pedagogical Innovation:** Decentralized and participatory learning, such as through the GLU Online Academy, offers tools for empowering grassroots movements.

As the EU accelerates its green industrial agenda, the discussions in Kassel underscored a shared responsibility to ensure that ecological transformation in EU does not come at the cost of environmental degradation and social exploitation elsewhere.



*Panel discussion, 5 May 2025*



*Movie screening and discussion, 4 May 2025*