

## Belgrade lithium-ion battery technology

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, left, and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic leave after a press conference at the Serbia Palace in Belgrade, Serbia, Friday, July 19, 2024. Scholz visits Serbia to discuss a tentative deal with the Balkan country for the controversial excavation of lithium, a critical substance in making batteries for electric vehicles. (AP Photo/Darko Vojinovic)

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, right, speaks during a press conference after official talks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Serbia Palace in Belgrade, Serbia, Friday, July 19, 2024. Scholz was in Serbia on Friday to discuss a tentative deal with the Balkan country to excavate lithium. (AP Photo/Darko Vojinovic)

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, center, speaks during a press conference with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, left, and European Commission Vice-President Maros Sefcovic at the Serbia Palace in Belgrade, Serbia, Friday, July 19, 2024. Scholz was in Serbia on Friday to discuss a tentative deal with the Balkan country to excavate lithium. (AP Photo/Darko Vojinovic)

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz listens to Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic during a press conference after their official talks at the Serbia Palace in Belgrade, Serbia, Friday, July 19, 2024. Scholz visits Serbia to discuss a tentative deal with the Balkan country for the controversial excavation of lithium, a critical substance in making batteries for electric vehicles. (AP Photo/Darko Vojinovic)

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) -- German Chancellor Olaf Scholz praised a tentative deal between Serbia and the European Union signed on Friday that paves the way for the disputed excavation of lithium, a mega project that could reduce Europe's dependency on China but one that has been fiercely criticized by environmentalists and opposition groups.

Scholz attended a "critical raw materials summit" in the Serbian capital where a memorandum of understanding between the EU and Serbia's government on a "strategic partnership" on sustainable raw materials, battery supply chains and electric vehicles was signed.

He said after the signing ceremony that "this is an important European project," adding that it's necessary for Europe "to remain sovereign in a changing world and not be dependent on others, which is why new sources of raw materials should be discovered."

Germany, the largest carmaker in Europe, is seeking to secure lithium for its electric vehicle makers as the EU struggles to reduce its dependence on imports from China. Lithium is a critical substance in making batteries for electric vehicles

"This is a project that is good because it will be developed in an environmentally compatible way, and is good

because it creates economic activity and prosperity where world history made it possible to bury raw material in the earth, and we are now extracting it," Scholz said.

Serbia's constitutional court earlier this month overturned a previous ruling to cancel a \$2.4 billion mining project launched by British-Australian mining company Rio Tinto in the fertile western Serbian valley of Jadar, which is believed to be the largest lithium discovery in Europe.

The Serbian government's decision to cancel the excavation plans came after thousands of protesters in Belgrade and elsewhere in Serbia blocked major roads and bridges in 2021 to oppose Rio Tinto's plans because of potential hazards to the environment. The protests were the biggest challenge yet to the increasingly autocratic rule of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić.

Zlatko Kokanović, an anti-mining activist from the region where the lithium excavations would take place, said that "we will defend ourselves with all means, because we have no other backup state."

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