

Turkey: Villagers Confront Black Sea Region Mine

By: Northern Forests Defense (NFD)

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Local villagers in the Black Sea Region of Turkey are locked in a long and bitter battle against a foreign extraction industry that is destroying both the environment and peoples' livelihoods. The English mining company [Stratex International PLC](#) is the adversary, whose construction of a gold mine in Fatsa within the boundaries of the City of Ordu, in Turkey's Black Sea Region. In parallel with their legal struggle to end the destruction, the residents of the area have concluded their 80th day of a resistance encampment against the mine, which uses cyanide to extract the mineral.

Stratex International appeared in the area in 2013 and started its work with promises not to harm nature. Since then, however, it has destroyed thousands of trees in a region of Turkey that needs to be protected for its supreme ecologic value. In February 2014, Stratex concluded a \$162 million joint venture with the private Turkish company Bahar Madencilik [Spring Mining], which is funding all development costs of the project, including all technical and financial studies, permitting and construction, in exchange for a 55% interest. Current construction is expected to bring the mine into production during the first quarter of 2015.



The nearby villagers claim that the companies have degraded their lands in violation of legal obligations, including failure to conduct a proper environmental impact assessment. The locals complain that the 196-hectare mining operation has besieged the estates of people who are unwilling to sell them, encircling their land with the construction site. Moreover, the mine has exploited the spring water in the area to such an extent that residents of the area have to rely on tankers to supply water. In order to make room for the gold mine, the construction already has destroyed 100 acres of forest, in addition to thousands of hazelnut trees in Fatsa, the primary hazelnut reserve of the planet. In addition to this destruction, Stratex also seeks to expand the surface area of the mine by petitioning to alter the legal status of the area, which is replete with tombstones from antiquity. Starting with villages near the construction site, 12 villages joined a lawsuit against the mine.

The Turkish Union of Chambers of Engineers and Architects (*Türk Mühendis ve Mimar Odaları Birliği*—TMMOB) has conducted assessments of the area. The president of the TMMOB's Commission of Public Health and Ecology has acknowledged the imminent threat to environment and human life caused by the mine: "In the area where cyanide is used when there is a heavy rain, the chemical reaction caused by the accumulation of cyanide renders the air thick with hydrogen cyanide, which is so toxic that it causes death even when inhaled in small amounts." The Chamber's president also stated that, if the company starts to use cyanide in this area of heavy precipitation during the rainy season, humans and all life will be threatened not only in areas in close vicinity to the mine, but also in areas as far as Ünye, Ordu and many other cities and small towns in Black Sea Region.

People of Fatsa are trying to make their voice heard by the company with protests and press releases every day, but to no avail. Neither the companies, nor the Turkish government take notice of the growing public resistance to the project.

The people of Fatsa now are calling attention to the destruction of their habitat with resistance tents. Many organizations have pledged their support to the villagers' encampment, which forms the center of 80 days of peaceful resistance. Meanwhile, police forces are coercing and threatening the villagers to end their protests. İsmet Atar, one of the protesters says: "You have finished my home, my hazelnut plantation, nobody can do so much ill. The director of the mine says you can't do anything even with the help of the courts. I say why are you messing with my land? The state's officer puts a gun on my head. I trust no one but my fellow villagers. We will win if we join together."

Halil Bicil, a hazelnut and honey producer says: "When it doesn't rain, there is too much dust [from the mine]. The annual chestnut honey production used to be 300–400 kg. Now it is 60 kg. The reason for this is that the heavy machinery and the dust caused by the explosions in the construction fields have scared away most of the bees. If bees are finished, people are finished. Bees fertilize the vegetables and fruits. When there are no trees, where will the bee nest, in rocks?"

The villagers are steadfast in their battle against the destruction of the environment and against the cyanide, which releases its toxins to the land and into the air. "We will start a hunger strike if necessary, we will not give up," they say, as they await the English firm to end the destruction of their habitat.

The protestors assert that this is only one of myriad projects that threaten agriculture, hazelnut production, natural water resources and forest areas, thus all living things in Black Sea Region.

For more information:

[Fatsa Ünye Fatsa Ünye Doğa Koruma Platformu](#) (Fatsa Ünye Nature Protection Platform)

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[Kuzey Ormanları Savunması](#) (North Forest Defense)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGmwO54hAqg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoLbCvYz6r4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9g98it5W0O4>

"[Fatsa'da siyanür direnişi](#)," *Radikal* (1 December 2014)

"[Yeni Türkiye'nin `eski` hikayesi: Fatsa'da iktidarla sermaye `halka karşı iç savaşta`](#)" (27 November 2014)

"[Fatsa köylerinde yağma var](#)," *Özgür Gündem* (19 July 2012)

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Stratex [website page](#) on the project to mine the Altintepe gold deposit

Bahar Madencilik's [project description](#)

See also "[Turkish Architects & Engineers Respond to AKP](#)" *HLRN News* (16 July 2013)

http://www.hlrn.org/news.php?id=pmtkaA==#.V_udhljr0UA