



Dear Andrea Orcel – Unicredit,

Greetings. We are writing from the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre to invite Unicredit to respond to the findings of our recent report, 'Digging in the Shadows'. We recognise the value of Unicredit investments, but write now to express concern regarding the human rights impacts of your investments in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

'Digging in the Shadows' examined the human rights policies and performance of the 10 largest extractives companies in Armenia, Georgia and Kazakhstan. The report found grave abuses related to many of these companies, including those receiving foreign investment. You can find our investor summary [here](#) and key findings [here](#).

According to our findings, Unicredit investments have been linked to allegations of severe abuse, including mass illness linked to toxic emissions, retaliation against workers and labour activists, catastrophic harm to the environment, and torture and abuse of protestors.

Unicredit's human rights commitment states, "UniCredit, throughout its sphere of influence (e.g., operations, financing activities, and the supply chain), strives to minimize its reputational, social and environmental risks and to maximize the positive impacts generated on human rights." The bank further affirms these commitments through the code of ethics and environmental statement. However, evaluations of Unicredit's projects in the region stand in stark contrast to these policies.

We believe that it is important to give companies and investors the opportunity to respond when concerns are raised about their operations, so that our readers have access to their perspective. We would like to publish your response alongside this letter, and kindly ask for your response by **5:00pm CET, Friday 10 December 2021**.

Notable Rights Allegations Related to Unicredit Investments

- **KazMunaiGas (via Unicredit Tiriac):** KMG directly owns or has significant shares in nine out of the ten largest oil companies in Kazakhstan. Major allegations against KMG-related companies include: the mass poisoning of children in Berezovka (Karachaganak Petroleum Operating); hundreds of deaths and thousands of illnesses related to Tengiz oil field (Tengizchevroil); risks that tens of thousands of residents in Atyrau could be exposed to mass poisoning (North Caspian Operating Company); criminal charges against labour activists (Mangistaumunaigaz); violations of union rights and retaliation against protesting workers (Karazhanbasmunai); and severe contamination of the environment (Kazgermunai). KMG subsidiaries were also at the centre of the violent events at Zhanaozen in 2011, which resulted in up to 64 deaths and 400 injuries. (However, Kazakhstani authorities claim the fatalities were much lower, just 15.) Protestors went on trial for their participation in the strikes against KMG subsidiaries; most of them asserted that they had been tortured or abused while in detention. Witnesses were allegedly coerced, threatened and tortured into giving false testimony against the striking workers. KMG and its related companies have been accused of corruption multiple times. [You can see the sources for the above allegations within the company profile.](#)

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- **Tengizchevroil (via Unicredit Austria):** The Tengiz oil field has been characterised by emergency situations that have caused catastrophic harm to the environment and the health of local communities. Emergencies and technical failures have allegedly become a ‘systematic phenomenon’, and toxic sulphurous gases are regularly released into the atmosphere. According to Crude Accountability, Tengizchevroil accounts for 70% of emissions in the oil and gas sector of Atyrau, despite the presence of several other major fields and projects in the area. Hundreds of deaths and thousands of illnesses have been linked to toxic emissions from the Tengiz oil field, according to local community members. The village Sarykamys had to be resettled after 90% of the population fell ill. A study found that the daily inhalation of emissions exceeded allowable concentration by up to 12 times, and in the company’s production area, this amount increased to 40 times above the permissible limit. [You can see the sources for the above allegations within the company profile.](#)

We asked KazMunaiGas and the other companies noted above to respond to the allegations and provide information on their human rights policies. North Caspian Operating Company [submitted answers about its policies](#), and Karachaganak Petroleum Operating [responded to the allegations](#). KazMunaiGas and its other subsidiaries did not respond. We also invited Tengizchevroil to respond to the allegations; it did not.

While Unicredit’s sustainability policies are welcome and have promise, continued investment in the above projects demonstrates that the bank should do more to ensure these policies are implemented in practice.

Investors like Unicredit play a critical role in ensuring business projects in Eastern Europe and Central Asia do not infringe on human rights or contribute to severe environmental destruction. Many governments in this region, including those of Armenia, Georgia and Kazakhstan, have failed to address human rights issues, or are unable or unwilling to do so. In many cases, government officials have ownership or significant interest in business projects like those above, making it difficult or impossible to seek justice from the state. When states fail to protect, and businesses fail to respect, communities look desperately to investors for assistance and intervention.

In light of this, the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre has issued a few [preliminary recommendations](#) on responsible investment in the region, based on engagement with activists monitoring these extractives projects. Notably, these recommendations focus on public participation, due diligence, and grievance mechanisms. Early and timely access to information for affected rights-holders is also a key issue. Access to information is critical for preventing and addressing human rights impacts, as well as securing access to remedy for those who have been adversely impacted by extractives projects. However, such access to information is poor in the region as a whole, meaning investors should pay particular attention to this topic when making investments.

About the Resource Centre

The [Business & Human Rights Resource Centre](#) is an independent non-profit organization that tracks the human rights impacts of over 10,000 companies, including [Unicredit](#), in over 180 countries. With

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an audience of more than 2 million users per year, our digital platform links to reports about positive initiatives by companies as well as reports about concerns that have been raised by civil society. For further details, please see the [“About us” section](#) of our website.

Invitation to Respond

While socioeconomic development is greatly needed in the region and can play a critical role in the achievement of human rights, growth without human rights due diligence and remedy undermines the stated purpose of development: to improve the lives and well-being of the individuals and communities within a society.

We are encouraged by Unicredit’s public commitments to human rights and sustainability, and believe in the bank’s potential role to ensure human rights are protected. We invite Unicredit to respond by **5:00pm CET, Friday 10 December 2021**. Please notify us if you need additional time. We hope to publish your response along with this letter. We are also inviting the other investors mentioned in the report to respond.

- Format: PDF, word document, or web link
- Must clearly indicate the date
- If Unicredit has already taken action with regards to any or all of the allegations, please feel free to include that in your response.

If Unicredit does not provide a response, we will indicate in the Weekly Update that we invited Unicredit to respond, but that it did not. Your response or non-response will be permanently registered in all relevant sections of our website.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you require any further information – we can be reached by email or telephone (see contact details below).

Kind regards,

Ella Skybenko (Eastern Europe/Central Asia Senior Researcher & Representative based in Kyiv) & Ashley Nancy Reynolds (Eastern Europe/Central Asia Research Assistant based in Croatia)
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Dear Ashley,
Many thanks for your email.

We never comment on our clients.

We have strict policies in place at Group level to ensure the bank always upholds the highest standards in managing social and environmental risk. This includes a specific commitment on human rights, in line with accepted international standards and principles, such as the Equator Principles, the UN Global Compact and the World Bank Group Environmental, Health and Safety Guidelines.

Best regards,
[Unicredit]