

## **THE GABCIKOVO-NAGYMAROS HYDROPOWER SYSTEM AND THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT**

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I was among those who originated the idea of initiating a broad discussion on the relationship between the Gabčíkovo hydropower structures and the environment. The aim was to narrow the differences in opinion and standpoints on the broad use of those natural resources of the common Slovak-Hungarian stretch of the Danube; to find a way that would save and further develop the natural values for future generations. This aim gave birth to the conference "Ecology of the Danube," four years ago.

Jan Morovic, President of City University Bratislava, undertook to organise and to moderate the extremely rapacious discussions which were being held in the pages of newspapers and other media. Thanks to his courage, this was the first open dialogue between the protagonists and opponents of the hydropower systems, lasting until late in the night. It helped begin taking the edge off of the brutal mutual attacks.

The second conference on "Ecology of the Danube," held in 1995, was already a relative idyll. Two years of operating the Gabčíkovo hydropower system, in the mode of the supplementary solution, as well as the monitoring of the impact of the hydroelectric power project on the environment, contradicted the false and groundless prognoses of those opposed. Just the opposite; positive impacts of various technical means were observed, mainly the revitalisation of the river branch system and the proper impact of the hydraulic guiding structures, proposed and modelled in the European Union PHARE project.

This project is also discussed by George Zavvos, Ambassador of the European Union to the Slovak Republic. Proposing to study the impact of the hydropower structures on groundwater, together with the Hungarian experts and in co-operation with the EU in the framework of the PHARE project, was my first step as Plenipotentiary for the construction and operation of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros hydropower system of the Czechoslovak government, in 1990.

The PHARE Project "Danubian Lowland Groundwater Model" was evaluated as one of the best by the Commission of European Communities. The Hungarian party refused to participate in this project, and it was therefore realised as a first project in Czechoslovakia, under the evidence code EC WAT 01. The project was completed in 1995 and the head of the Danish Hydraulic Institute presented the results to the International Court of Justice, in The Hague. On behalf of the Slovak government, I would like to express my appreciation to the European Union for supporting this project.

The Slovak government has always been propagating scientific and technical debates, while keeping in mind concrete and precisely defined questions and topics of dispute, without any limitations and pre-conditions. According to the 1977 Treaty, this is in the competence of the government plenipotentiaries, of both countries, for the construction and operation of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros hydropower system.

The Slovak side did not accept the Hungarian parliament's pre-conditions to only negotiate cancelling the 1977 Treaty and returning the whole construction area to its original state. The Hungarian and the Slovak arguments, presented in the International Court of Justice, cover about 10,000 pages and appear in a number of documents that are quoted by advocates of both parties. The three paragraphs of the Treaty dealing with the protection of the quality and quantity of surface and ground waters, the protection of the environment, and the protection of fish, are interpreted differently by the two parties.

The Hungarian side stressed that these paragraphs were included in the Treaty, because these questions were not properly solved at the time the Treaty was prepared. The Slovak side documented that the protection of the environment was fully solved at the then current scientific level, mainly in the framework of a broad project known as the "Bio-project." This project was elaborated at the time of the treaty, in 1976, and supplemented in 1982 and 1986. Professor Juraj Hraško is a co-author.

The Bio-project, and many other studies, have demonstrated that environmental protection was fully accounted for, and that the Treaty had the possibility to include the latest scientific results for the protection of natural conditions, as well as results based on the monitoring of the operation of the Gabčíkovo structures. This is shown in the five-year operation results of the Gabčíkovo structures and in the results of the joint Hungarian-Slovak Environmental Monitoring System, defined in the Intergovernmental Agreement, signed April 19, 1995.

In the 1977 Treaty, there is a paragraph confirming that the intergovernmental plenipotentiaries could agree on changes in discharges into the river branches, the river bed, and the Hungarian Mosoni branch of the Danube, for agricultural irrigation purposes. However, the Hungarian party had cancelled the function of its plenipotentiary, even before cancelling the Treaty, and standard technical negotiations were thus

blighted.

By decision of both Governments, the dispute was handed to the International Court of Justice and a resolution is expected in the second half of 1997. The dispute was pushed forward to The Hague not by the technicians, but by politicians and diplomats, who are often not thinking in the most rational way. The results of such non-rational decisions are not only juridical and diplomatic disputes, but also military conflicts, as can also be confirmed by other participants of this conference.

This conference, appealing to all Danube states to be both closer together and joined by the Danube river, is unusual due to the interweaving of music played by excellent musicians. In this chamber-music atmosphere, in beautiful, artistic surroundings, we are speaking about burning problems of today and of tomorrow, trying to reach agreement and harmony, and to accept our partner's arguments without emotion, offence and inferior intentions.

So far, the Gabčíkovo hydropower station has been in operation for five years. The conferences on "Ecology of the Danube" have been helpful in reaching this goal, and following a visit to Gabčíkovo, there will be ample time to hear the sounds of Johann Straus' waltz "On the Beautiful Blue Danube," as is the wish of the President, Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis.

In such a nice atmosphere it is not possible to have bad intentions. It is believed that all presentations will be constructive and enriching, and will focus on solutions to previous conflicts between environmental, economic and political interests. Thus, bio-politics is equated to ratio-politics. In this sense, I am wishing this Conference and the effort of rational biopolitics full success, and I hope that, during your visit to Slovakia, to the capital - Bratislava, and to the Gabčíkovo hydropower project, you will be deeply impressed.

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