

## **BRING LIFE BACK TO THE RIVERS" PREVENTION EDUCATION AND CO-OPERATION**

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Protection of the natural environment, the standard connection between human society and the environment, never was so important, well-known and strong as in the present time, during the last decade of the twentieth century. All the members of the human race, all the representatives of the states have to co-operate with each other, because we have no more and/or other opportunity.

One sorrowful fact that can be easily understood is the following: a major world-wide catastrophe can suddenly appear on our European "screen." One of these very sorrowful events is the case of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station. This power station and, also many other European nuclear plants, exist at the present time, and will exist in the future, and therefore, we have to live together with this type of danger too. This source of danger is quite unable to "recognise" borders of states or countries, but the members of the human race can co-operate better and more than before. In this case we can save our common future for a very long period of time.

For the European side of our globe waits a very hard and relatively long period. We have to clean our continent from all kinds of polluting materials and from the many kinds of existing "results" of the former pollution. Of course, during this period, we have to work on the development of a new kind of global thinking of all European people.

The total surface area of the globe is only 510 million square kilometres. Among this, only 29.2% is the, so called "dry land," the continent, or mainland. The territory of Europe is only 10,500,000 square kilometres. The rest of the globe, an area of approximately 361 million square kilometres, is covered by water.

Europe has eleven large rivers, which are longer than one thousand kilometres. The Danube is only 2,850 kilometres long, and is, after the Volga in Russia, the second longest river. If we really would like to bring life back to our rivers, then we have to start with one of the smallest, because every big and long river starts from a small source and, from this small source, a big and long river, such as the Danube, can arise. This can be a strong stepping-stone on the road to better understanding and co-operation between the European nations, in the field of environmental protection. I hope that I am not the only one sharing these ideas.

The total length of the eleven longest European rivers is, approximately, 20,474 kilometres. Europe begins in Great Britain and ends somewhere in the Ural Mountains. In such a big territory, how many kinds of water and other forms of environmental pollution can be found? Let me mention some interesting personal experiences with some European rivers.

In the middle of the summer of 1970, I had the opportunity to take a short kayak-tour on the very-polluted-by-industry surface of the Rhine, in Germany. The dirty, green and grey colour of this river became for me one of the bases for my later fights for the protection of the environment. The riverside was closed to animals (cows and horses) by a weak-current electric border. There was an open question before me: when and how can we save the unsuspecting people from the dangers for this river?

Only some months ago, but 25 years later, I travelled once more to this industrial part of the, now unified, Germany and observed that a state can reach such great and good results if it has money, policy and strategy, and, at the same time, well-prepared specialists to solve the very important environmental questions or problems.

My second experience is closely connected with Central Europe, where I started observing the Danube, approximately 40 years ago. As a child, I enjoyed the water of the Danube with my friends, as we swam and played. This was very dangerous at the time, because the river and the riverside were very polluted by debris from the only just recently finished, World War II. What is the real difference between the past and the present time? Today everybody knows, at least something, about the many kinds of water pollution and about the real danger of contaminated waters.

When travelling along the Danube, from Germany (Ulm, Regensburg) to Austria one can see beautiful scenery around the river, high mountains and picturesque settlements. But, on the riverside and on the surface of the river, one can find a lot of objects of the present stupidity of people. Iron, glass, paper and other materials are everywhere. Industrial factories and dirty harbours, are very near the riverside. In Austria and Slovakia, the presence of cement-works results in tons of polluting grey cement-powder to blow in the wind over the river.

There is a living and very painful problem between Hungary and Slovakia: the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros "Monument," the plans and the reality

of the hydroelectric power station. It is something from the recent past, but this phenomenon will survive this century without any legal result before the international court.

As a private citizen, concerned about what happens to our rivers, I am not alone in this opinion. I would like to swim in my favourite river, as was possible earlier, but without any fear of skin cancer or other dangerous illnesses. The polluted water reaches every metropolis around the former blue Danube river. Hopefully, the participants of this international conference will eventually be able to see and not only hear the celebrated object of the music of the famous Johann Strauss. We can wait for a better future, too. We would like to see a clean and healthy river in the middle of our common Europe. A plan and brief advice to reach these goals follows:

Starting today, please stop destroying the environment around the river. Please educate and teach the present and the next young generation for the better understanding of the reality between the human race and the environment. Only we, as members of the human society, can think about the world or about the destiny of the rivers. The basic elements of human life can "feel," without feelings, only what we can do against, or, for, the natural environment.

My personal plans are to write more articles in newspapers that are very popular among Hungarian children and youth, and to try to organise study-tours around the Danube for Hungarian and foreign young people. The hope is to also broadcast videofilms about the present situation of the river on Hungarian Television.

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