

DANUBE RIVER BONDS - PAST PRESENT FUTURE

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The Slovak Republic has an area of 49,036 km², 5,300,000 inhabitants and constitutes the geographical centre of Europe. Historically, mining for zinc, nickel, cobalt, gold and other metals, urban construction and other developmental activities have resulted in environmental deterioration.

The Slovak Republic is a small country rich in water resources: surface waters, groundwaters, hot springs. 95% of its territory is traversed by the Danube. The first national strategy for environmental protection was developed in the Slovak Republic in 1993, and was based on Agenda 21 and the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro. Following the establishment of the Republic, legislation for environmentally-conscious development was immediately put into effect.

The national strategy for environmental protection is aimed at the reduction of the negative impact of pollution on the health and the life-span of the population. The strategy promotes: restriction of negative ecosystem changes; environmental stabilisation and the prevention of pollution; increased polluter liability; establishment of the right framework for the promotion of energy efficient economic activities; better exploitation of energy and natural resources; wider utilisation of non-conventional energy sources; efficient use of energy resources; increased environmental awareness; the creation of legal and economic incentives for environmental protection and sustainable development; the implementation of international environmental law.

Therefore, national environmental policy in the Slovak Republic has set the following priorities:

- protection of the air from atmospheric pollution
- conservation of drinking water quantity and the reduction of water pollution below the critical limits
- protection of soils from degradation and the guarantee of good quality agricultural products
- waste minimisation and environmentally-safe waste disposal
- conservation of biodiversity and the protection and efficient utilisation of natural resources

One of the main goals of Slovak foreign policy is integration with the European Union. The document based on which the Slovak Republic directs this process is the European Treaty for Co-operation, put into effect February 1, 1995. The first important step for the Slovak Republic is Article 184 of March 21, 1995, whereby the harmonisation of the Slovak legislation with EU legislation is attempted. For the Slovak Ministry of Environment, the following two elements are applicable: (a) regulation of waste minimisation and disposal, and (b) regulation of air quality protection.

Joint priorities set by the Slovak and EU representatives during their meetings together, lead to the preparation of a White Paper submitted at the EU Summit Meeting in Cannes in 1995. This document, outlining the process for prospective EU members to join the European common market, is of crucial importance, as it determines the basic principles of every sector of the European market and suggests the appropriate legislative procedures.

In reference to the protection of water resources, action has been determined by the Law on Water Protection, put into effect in 1973, but all instructions pertaining to technical demands are in full compliance with EU legislation. Correspondence will be even more complete once the new legislation on water protection has been effectuated in 1997.

During the 10th OECD Conference, held in Paris, December 5 and 6, 1996, all participating countries agreed that the Slovak Republic is ready and able to comply with OECD requirements. Slovak foreign policy takes into account the deliberations of such international meetings, and, in addition to aiming for EU membership, the Slovak Republic is also interested in joining the OECD.

The government of the young Slovak Republic is trying to replace energy intensive economic activities with sustainable development. In this effort, international co-operation is essential, as the environment recognises no boundaries and neither does the Danube. Sustainable development requires a strong connection between the economy, the environment and the political system. It is believed that this conference will be of crucial assistance in this effort.

