

JAWS ON THE DANUBE: THE CASE OF THE MIDDLE DANUBE HYDROELECTRIC DAM

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0. INTRODUCTION

This article treats the history of the Hungarian movement that emerged in opposition to the Gabčíkovo(Bôs)-Nagymaros Barrage, attempting first of all to trace the change in the field of conflict within this. We follow this phenomenon through the story which stretches over decades, and where from time to time new pairs of actors step onto the stage, and the conflict developing between them appears to be the main conflict in the whole matter.

A survey of the longer period of time serves up a few perhaps surprising lessons. On the one hand, it becomes clear that the value of the crystallizing principles and experiences of separate periods is limited, and that an examination of a longer time-cycle in its entirety makes it possible to learn different lessons, for example the parallel clarification of the events with great political fluctuations. On the other hand, it is worth noting that it is not at all certain that this always signals the real conflicts of the period, as they are declared, and as they only appear to be at the center of the events.

1. PREHISTORY I, HYDRO-ENGINEERS VERSUS NATURE (UNTIL 1950)

The past century was the period of triumphant river control. The Tisza, the fickle running river meandering through the Great Hungarian Plain (=Alföld), was first controlled by cutting the windings, then by straightening the channel, thus causing the water arriving on the Tisza to be prodded into leaving the Great Plain as quickly as possible. A further river control period was necessary -- already in this

century -- to make it possible for part of the rushing water to be caught in the reservoirs created in the arteries, that is, to make it recoverable. In the case of the Danube, in the last century, the most significant intervention on the lower stretch took place at the Iron Gates, where the goal was to ensure navigability. Besides this, significant dead branches -- but not those connected with the main channel -- were drained.

The control, and the rivers' periodic inundation of increasing numbers of territories resulting from the water works connected with it, necessitated providing for ever greater masses of water to move across the original channel by raising the embankments. Thus, in the end the danger of flooding became rarer in controlled rivers, but on the other hand quantities of water that had not been experienced until then, and mainly water-levels, formed, endangering territories that had not previously been affected by floods. To an outsider, the problem itself became absolutely baffling, while precisely these floods strengthened the water management's position against others: it could sound the catastrophic danger alarm in the face of every claim against the government. But the fruits of this would ripen only in a period to follow.

First, however, another strand of the story must be picked up -- the energy use of rivers -- which is not, of course, a development independent of the river control.

Pre-World War I Hungary filled the entire Carpathian Basin, that is, the rivers' alpine and high-incline sections also belonged to the country. Whereas hydro-energy needs not only a large volume of water, but also an appropriate slope and difference in heights, first of all it was these alpine areas, with their precipitation, which were taken into account for energy production. It is significant that the territories detached as a result of the 1920 Paris Peace Treaty included 94.5 percent of the country's hydraulic power reserves.

In spite of this -- and this is in accordance with previous foreign examples -- throughout the period between the two world wars, Slovak and Hungarian water management specialists continually called on their governments to accept one -- or several -- Danube barrages as energy-creating works. On the Slovak side, support for the plan was not free of a territorial escalation: the Danube was precisely the newly agreed state boundary between the two countries, but already at the peace talks Slovakia would have liked to win the right to exclusive use of the river-boundary water power reserve.

2. THE PLAN

Breaking the thread of the story, but in the interest of contributing to further understanding, here we must interrupt with a technical description of how the main player in the whole story, the Water Barrage, looks.

Leaving the Alps, the Danube falls about 50 meters along each 100 kilometers of the Austrian stretch. Along the full 417 kilometers of the Hungarian stretch, it falls just about as much. Arriving in the flat regions, the Danube slows down, deposits its alluvia, and creates islands. In these conditions, a dam built in the channel, even if it dams up the river for several dozens of kilometers, can succeed in creating a difference in level of only a few meters.

The *side-channel* is intended to improve on this ratio. In this case, the river moves into an artificially constructed, asphalted canal, running parallel to the origin channel, in which the mass of water, proceeding with a very small drop, will be containable at the side-branch level. For this, of course, the side-channel

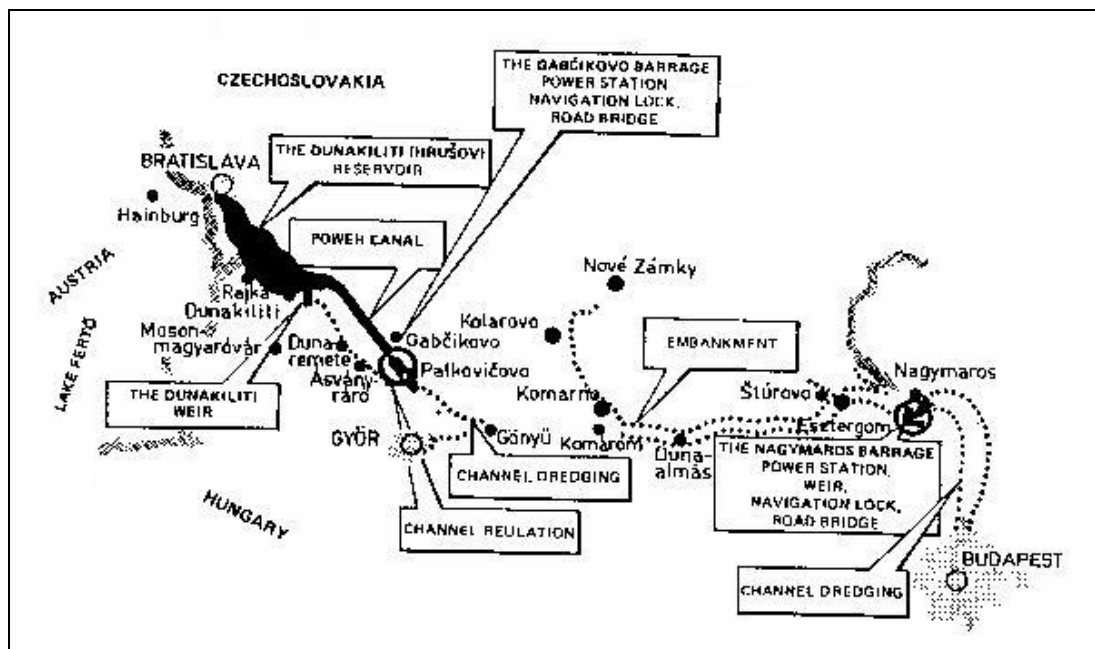


Figure 1. General layout of the mid' Danube project

must be moved even further from the original ground-level, and a five-ten-fifteen meter-high dam cap must be reached. At the end of the dam will be the power station: it will be used precisely when the mass of water returns from this level to the level of the original channel. Thus we will not be building a power station in the river-channel, but rather next to and above it, and we will bring a river to it. In the

concrete case, this side-channel was built on the Slovak side, and were about 20 kilometers in length. (See Figure 1.)

In the case of the Gabčíkovo power station, even this solution was not attractive enough from the energy production point of view, so the plan had to be filled out in such a way that in the *peak period*, that is in the morning and afternoon electric energy peak consumption periods, the power works would be used to their maximum capacity. Thus it is necessary that the waters of the Danube be held back for half a day, and then released to the power-station during the defined peak periods. For this -- also taking this into account from a technical-hydraulic point of view -- a reservoir capable of holding about an average two-day flow of the Danube must be formed above the power station. This was the Dunakiliti reservoir, two-thirds of which would be on Hungarian territory, one-third on Slovak, with the controlling sluices on the Hungarian side.

The peak-time running, that is the power station's periodic operation, would not change the water-flow relations only above the power-station, but also below it. It is not permissible that at those periods of the day when the power-station is not in operation the section of river below the power-station would in essence be emptied. That is why *a second dam* is necessary, with the help of which the stretch after the first power-station -- the so-called sub-water -- would also become controllable. In our case, this second dam is the Nagymaros dam, which falls on the Hungarian stretch of the Danube, where the Danube is thus already not a border-river.

3. PREHISTORY II, WATER MANAGEMENT VERSUS GOVERNMENT (1950-75)

Let's jump back into the period preceding the concrete plans. Notwithstanding the significant proportion of the chronology of the period 1950 to 1975 devoted to international negotiations (Czechoslovak-Hungarian, Soviet-Hungarian, Austria-Czechoslovak and Soviet-Czechoslovak talks following one another), from the Hungarian point of view, two prime ministerial decisions can be considered as real landmarks. The first of these is in 1953, when Prime Minister Ernô Gerô, the second man in the Hungarian party leadership being confronted with an almost accomplished fact dictated by preliminary water management talks, still rejects the side-channel plan forming on the Slovak side; delaying by this action with 10 years the hour when similar conception gets a signature on the government commissioner level. The second landmark of the period is 1975, when the Hungarian Council of Ministers accepts the plan put before it, which is in essence the version still debated today and briefly introduced above. From here, a straight road leads to the 1977 signing of the inter-governmental agreement.

Meanwhile, in the two decades that have elapsed, the Hungarian water management organization has become significantly swollen (by 10 times, that is,

70,000 people) and its powerful position has been strengthened. The key element in this has been the "good management" appropriate to floods at all times, that is, cleverly making use of the period of flooding danger in the intragovernmental bargaining positions. The Danube barrage itself runs just as a sort of side show for most of the period; its preparation is reported not through open planning, but rather by the professional representation at the international talks on the matter, and through hints hidden in the international specialists' declarations. Meanwhile, a barrage is completed on Hungary's second biggest river, the Tisza (1954, at Tiszalök) and yet another reservoir comes under construction (at Kisköre in 1973), which to this day has not been filled entirely.

Probably everywhere in the world there are provisions in the records of the contracts of large state investments as to what must be kept secret, and for how long. It is, of course, in the government's interest that before it commits itself, it should have its position checked by as wide a professional openness as possible. The investor thus has to endeavour to get the government interested in secretiveness. It is very useful for this if behind the investment, military and strategic interests can be marched out. In Eastern Europe even less than this was enough; indeed it was enough that "foreign interests," "energy considerations" or something similar enter the package, really anything for which it would be better if it did not end up coming to the attention of mere mortals cut off from the culture of great politics, for "they would hardly understand anyway." In itself, however, this would have been too little without such a great political turn, when the government virtually has begun looking for an opportunity to be able to demonstrate its resolution.

Today it would be difficult to reconstruct exactly and in detail what background considerations led to the political hardening and conservative workers power wave coinciding in the period 1974-1977, when the agreement to accept the plan came about relatively smoothly. Still, as they say, it is no coincidence that this occurred precisely in a period when a centrally directed force to return order was gathering strength in opposition to the limited economic reforms unfolding since 1968; when sociologists who began to connect social problems with the peculiarities of the political regime were forced into emigration; and when the (one-)party ideology declared in opposition to the economists that the impact of the oil price explosion could not affect the socialist countries. They could not affect them: yet still, in strange parallel, while for example in France the atomic lobby succeeded in gaining acceptance of large-scale atomic energy plans, in our country the plan for the barrage arrived on the threshold of signing.

Neither the hard-line communist politicians nor others yet guessed how perfectly the plan that had come into existence would serve as a model for the circumstances of production, and how this symbolism would shortly become capable of taking on a life of its own.

4. WATER MANAGEMENT + GOVERNMENT VERSUS PROFESSIONAL OPPONENTS (1977-84)

It is a fact that even the limited professional openness could meet with a few opposing opinions only a good while after the signing of the agreed plan. These points of view were represented at professional talks or critiques by a few specialists who generally were not tied directly to the water management: one was an engineer working on the capital's civil engineering, one was a railway engineer, and one a hydro-biologist at an academic research institute, but in connection with discrete problems of detail, from 1980 on several employees of the Scientific Research Institute of Water Management also were involved.

It must be noted that the professional critiques did not call into question the fact of the barrage's construction or of the objective of energy production. They aimed instead at the improvement of individual, mistaken, partial solutions and at supplementing individual tests that had been left out. It would be difficult, naturally, to answer "what would have happened if" the planners of the investment project had paid attention to the criticisms, treated them as professional proposals, and opened them up for debate. In any case, this would have meant not only another investment project, but another story, too.

In any case, when in 1981 biologist János Vargha, a journalist of the *Búvár* (=Diver) nature-protection monthly, introduced with the theme, for him it was not the professional debating points that brought the first shock, but rather the realization that the matter was full of hurt, shelved people, silent and silenced opinions, and publications that had been laid aside. There was still no question of water management, environment or energy: it was simply a political affair that steamrolled ahead, grinding opposing opinions beneath it. The tools of repression were out of all proportion to the weight of the opposing opinions: really, it was precisely this that betrayed how the plans' partisans feared that the system, improvised with difficulty as it was, could show how weak their base was.

At the time it was obvious to the competent circles of government that something was not right. In 1981, everything was done to slow down the preparations: the Economic Committee passed a decision by which the Hungarian-Czechoslovak Economic and Technical-Scientific Cooperation Committee would agree on interrupting the construction of the barrage system. Again, the Kádár-era dictatorship entered a "softer," more sober period, the second oil price explosion of 1979-80 in the end forced the leadership's mistaken strategy of the 1970s to be brought under control, and the word and weight of economic specialists within the government temporarily grew. As to the power station, the examinations began in 1978, with the announcement of a Győr-Sopron County Central People's Supervisory Committee on the insufficiencies of the plan. In 1979 and 1980, the debate continued in various committees or programs of the Patriotic People's Front, the Hungarian

Hydrological Society, and the Association of Technical and Natural Sciences Societies.

After this, all the way up to the middle of 1983, the various scientific committee investigations followed one after another. Among others, the National Technical Development Committee and the National Environmental and Nature Protection Office prepared opinions, and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences also was asked to for its position. In a peculiar way, in most of the committees decisive roles were played by university specialists or specialists from banks with an interest in the construction, and the opinions that were emerging were at least not unambiguous.

The struggle within the government continued. Not even waiting for the announcement of a few preparatory committees, in summer 1983 the Hungarian-Czechoslovak Economic and Technical-Scientific Cooperation Committee took a position siding with continuation of the construction works, and then in the fall the agreement was signed at the heads of government level.

In December, the viewpoint of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences presidency, which sided with postponing or completely cancelling the investment, was ready. But since politics had, however, already gone beyond this, the decision was kept secret, and the Academy itself could not publicize it.

5. WATER MANAGEMENT + GOVERNMENT VERSUS GERMS OF THE MOVEMENT (1984-1988)

By the beginning of 1984, the Water Management felt as if it had won the battle. Behind its back, a political decision was taken to begin an information campaign. But even here, however, they wanted to avoid a real debate: when on January 27, 1984, the deputy office director of the National Water Management Office was to debate with János Vargha, at the last moment the Office renounced the debate to which it had previously agreed.

In place of the debate, János Vargha told everything he knew about the barrage. Numerous specialists attended the presentation as listeners and commentators, and they told how they had been set aside through every means. Afterwards, a few from the audience stayed behind, and they decided to initiate a movement, an educational and signature-collecting campaign to call attention to the dangers of the barrage. This moment can be considered the birth of the Danube movement. It is remarkable that in the same year, the Hungarian Architects' Association took a position at its general meeting calling for reconsideration of the barrage system, and the Budapest City Builders' Association and the Communist Youth League committee of the Eötvös Loránd University's Humanities Faculty also made an appeal.

Until May, clubs from many Budapest universities and institutes offered space for the debates organized by the new movement. It turned out that the Water Management was unable to produce presenters capable of debating. They ordered an "information embargo" to avoid further struggles. (Later, in many cases, they alluded to the fact that they had been blocked from informing the population about the advantages of the investment.) The information embargo naturally affected every publication connected with the barrage.

Thus by the middle of 1984, it was obvious to the Water Management that political support was not enough to defend the construction in open, "democratic" debates. Every further effort to move the construction along was made in this knowledge. The defense of the compromised economic policymakers was always the "sincere" surprise: they did not know, if they had known, etc.

In the beginning, the movement targeted these "sincere" decisionmakers. The starting strategy was to seize every legal means, offer petitions, and ask for official permission to operation. These tactics forced the authorities to decide they could not play the well-meaning and misled anymore. It is true, meanwhile, that even without this they were inclined to a tougher stance. Successfully surviving the beginning of the 1980s (avoiding the payments crisis that threatened) made the holders of power conceited, and in preparation for their new party congress those who felt they had given too wide a sway to more liberal economic policies gained the upper hand. It was time to tighten the reins. But the mid' 1980s cannot be compared with the situation 10 years earlier: Gorbachev's Soviet Union, for example, cannot be used as such a basis of authority as Brezhnev's, and the conceived hard line turned out to be softer than planned.

During the first half of 1984, the movement gathered more than 10,000 signatures for a letter to the Parliament and government urging postponement of the construction and the elaboration of new plans. At the same time, the struggle for registration as an official association began, for which the official organs were unprepared. For all they knew was that they did not want to register the movement. Thus, they tried to buy time through a method not yet recorded in law, by trying to debate over competence, and in the end, after a change of personnel they throw out the prior spoken agreement.

The name *Danube Circle* first appeared at this time on various documents and newsletters. This branch of the movement was supported by specialists opposing the construction, that, beside the presence of János Vargha ensured acquaintance with the prior history and its continuation. The Danube Circle also developed foreign ties; indeed, in October 1985, János Vargha and the Danube Circle won the annual alternative Nobel Prize, the *Right Livelihood Award* for its activities.

The official media reacted to the prize with a prohibition. (This fact itself characterized the situation: on the one hand, the Information Office or the party's Central Committee could bring to the attention of the editors of *every* press organ, periodical and other media what was *not* permitted to transmit -- and on the other hand, they complied with this!) At the same time, it became ever more clear to the authorities that silence was not enough. They wanted to make the activity which the movement conducted their own, and transform it.

Still, as long as the population's right to learn the opinions tied with the environment was not recognized, naturally organizations could not be formed to control the activity from above. At one and the same time, "pioneer" steps had to be taken by the authorities to accept environmental problems raised by the society, and brand or consider to be not existing the movement forming really from below. In 1984, an "umbrella" organization integrating environmental protection groups came into being within the Communist Youth League. This was followed in 1986 by an Environmental Protection Council in the Federation of Technical and Natural Sciences Associations, which wanted to draw together, channel and take in hand the professional-type social expression of views connected with the environment. In the end, in 1988, when the Danube Circle again applied for official registration as a national association, within weeks the "Hungarian Environmental Protection Union" was hobbled together under the aegis of the Patriotic People's Front which, monopolizing the problem-field, according to the official conception and declaration, would be made responsible for every other, national-level, that is not territorially-limited, environmental protection organization. The action, however, was so amateurish that already at its founding sessions, with their exclusivist organization and choice of invitees on a political basis, the organizations managed to discredit themselves.

The sequence of events of these years would not be completely comprehensible without having a look around.

In fall 1984, a Czechoslovak-Austrian debate about a power-station being negotiated on the stretch of Danube under Vienna came to attention on the diplomatic level. The Czechoslovak side favored joint use of the hydraulic power, and recommended building the power station near Bratislava. The Austrian side, however, weighed in with the choice of Hainburg, which lies on the completely Austrian stretch. In spite of the preparations underway, Prague made official protests, referring to the destruction of the ecological balance and the danger of flooding in Bratislava. The Austrian environmentalists stepped forward strongly against the destruction of the flood-plain forests, to which the government answered by bringing in the police, in scandalous circumstances. This road could not, however, be followed, and the Austrian government suspended the works, cancelling the power station once and for all.

With this, the Austrian construction industry interested in building the barrage was left without work. This played a big role in the fact that in 1985, preparation of a second agreement accelerated: at Nagymaros, the works performed by the Hungarian side were to be completed by Austrian firms with Austrian state credit guarantees, which the Hungarian side would repay for twenty years beginning in 1996 with electric energy produced in the power station (or from some other source).

The Austrian Greens protested alongside the Hungarian movement against Austrian participation in the construction, and chiefly against the government support for this, and they took part in organizing many Hungarian protests. Both in 1986 and 1987, the police liquidated (dispersed) Budapest environmental protests or leafleting. In the latter case, they arrested for a short time a few Austrian citizens protesting against the construction of the power station. But in spring 1988, the situation was still the same. Today it is already clearly evident -- while it was not so obvious at the time -- that the weakening dictatorship's last display of strength was at stake, when the police already was incapable of dealing with conflicts that could not be handled by police means; but at the same time, the authorities were not capable of dealing with them by other means, either.

6. WATER MANAGEMENT + GOVERNMENT VERSUS POLITICAL OPPOSITION (1988-89)

In 1988, the Hungarian leadership was trying to present itself as reform communist, and to flirt with Europe not least in the interest of upholding the economy. At the same time, a decidedly conservative wing within the party brought about the removal of János Kádár, whose person symbolized the past three decades. This two dissonant facts caused daily tensions and contradictions. One of the telltale signs was the barrage itself: while the appearance of the social movements became more freer, and the expression of views began to follow European patterns, the water management affairs were entrusted to a newly created ministry. The ministry was brought into existence by merging the former Water Management Office and the Environmental and Nature Protection Office, under the leadership of a high-level conservative party official kicked down(!) to minister. Here it was possible to create a kind of island where the leaders could convince themselves that the changing times did not affect them: over more than a year -- this is already visible with hindsight -- they brought to perfection in a caricaturish way the symbolism that the barrage as a model of the rigid communist dictatorship had already expressed earlier.

The model worked to force the party apparatus and the Grósz government to show their true colors. Indeed, in fall 1988, after long and exhausting debates in the press and on television, many spectacular open conferences, and a 30,000- strong demonstration in front of the Parliament building, the parliament had to deal with the power-station. When after a sharp parliamentary debate the party that feverishly wanted to prevail at all costs prescribed the MPs' machine-voting according to earlier

practice, in a peculiar way this gave the parliament final credentials not about the barrage, but about itself: the Hungarian parliament had openly, spectacularly and perfectly discredited itself.

After the decision, already in October, the demonstrations continued. With them, a new signature-collecting movement is initiated to require a referendum on the barrage affair. In the wake of the action, at the end of February 1989, already the movement could hand 140,000 signatures to the parliamentary president.

Miklós Németh, the reform communist prime minister taking office in December 1988 naturally sensed the tension, and he wanted to avoid in any way possible that a referendum against the barrage should demonstrate the masses' dissatisfaction with the regime. As a first decisive step in his position, just through the barrage affair he found it necessary to markedly separate himself from the party leadership that continued to bear the stamp of Károly Grósz. Already in March, in the parliament he was hinting at a necessary reexamination; then, on May 13, 1989, suspension of the Nagymaros river works was announced at a government session. The terminus of the decision was fixed at a date two months later.

7. GOVERNMENT VERSUS WATER MANAGEMENT (MAY 1989-APRIL 1991)

It would be difficult to say what would have been the result in 1989 if a referendum had really taken place. Perhaps believers in the barrage were right to think that they would have suffered a certain defeat as victims of a demonstration against the regime. In any case, the Nagymaros council president initiated a pretty strange signature-collecting counter-campaign: signatures were collected by water management enterprises and offices from their own employees, protesting not only against suspension of the construction works, but also against there *not* being a referendum on the matter!

There was a short period, immediately after announcement of the suspension of the construction work, when the representatives of the water management themselves awaited further decisive measures. High-ranking water management representatives announced, that they had already said...already written...it was just impossible....Afterwards, several weeks passed, but nothing happened. Nobody was moved, nobody responded to their questions. The office-leader who previously supervised the construction in the National Planning Office was named government commissioner. The specialists' committees were set up, and among these three water management specialists' committees were formed in the ministry favoring construction. It turned out that everyone could still be present, and could continue the earlier debates and methods.

True, the order setting up the committees appointed by name several organizations, including the Danube Circle, to be brought into the work, but this came to light only after the first meetings. Thus, the movement representatives were brought into work that had already been initiated and divided up. In many instances, massive compilations arrived with invitations for the next day; in others it emerged at the meetings that new materials had been prepared in place of the ones that had been sent out, and that these were to be discussed at the meeting. The head of the committee bringing together the economic analyses wanted to avoid sharp positions in any case, and the costs of suspending or continuing construction somehow always ended up to be just about the same. If a mistake came out on one side, immediately a correction was made on the other side, as well. It is interesting that attempts similar to this stalemate generally characterized the activity tied to the government commissioner and the government.

Formally, only the Environmental Protection and Water Management portfolio spoke against the government decision, but in reality the government carefully arranged that only neutral steps should take place: it is true, the fact that the Dunakiliti works should be suspended belonged to this; and that within half a year the Austrian contract came to final settlement. The original two-month decision-making deadline formally was lengthened to twice that period; in reality, however, it grew to three years: until May 1992, no step could be taken in the direction of either destroying or building further. (Naturally, the bills from this second two years already were a burden to a different government.)

In fall 1989, the government commissioner ordered two summaries of the committee's statements, one from the Oviber investing group, and an other from independent specialists. The government and parliament in the end accepted a decision in which they assented to suspend the construction, but on the basis of the committee's work they did not move in any direction, except for their position on the need for further studies.

That fall, the reform wing of the communist party practically liquidated its own party. As a result of obviously mistaken judgment, it provoked such a vote at their congress that at the end hardly five percent of the earlier membership joined the two newly formed successor parties. The Németh government similarly erred when it measured their chances during the next elections: it can be said that its activity in large part was subordinated to a previous image of popularity, and it failed to carry out numerous steps which would have been in its power. This kind of vacillation to please everybody was characteristic of the government's position on the barrage, too. To this can be attributed the prime minister's many progressive letters and exchanges of messages with the Czechoslovak head of government, Marian Calfa, in the beginning of 1990, in which he wrote about the specifics more concrete as to the parliamentary decision, thus about the suspension of Hungarian work on the river on

Slovak territory, and meanwhile the execution of the steps mentioned in the letter was not initiated.

The movements that in 1988 stepped forward together against the barrage as the *Nagymaros Committee*, now were branching out onto different roads. The Hungarian Democratic Forum became a party, which after the elections became the governing party. The entire membership of a few smaller groups, and elsewhere part of the membership, chose direct politicking and were absorbed into the political parties. Many personally took part in the not very successful formation of the Green Party, occupied by continual internal political battles. The period of forced actions when it had to be present continually in committee work as an administrative office - - on the side, without any significant pay as officials -- practically put the further labors of the Danube movement out of order as a movement.

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If in this three-year period, technically little happened with the barrage, further outside connections cannot be left aside. In fall 1989, the East European communist powers collapsed like dominoes: this was the time of the disappearance of the Berlin Wall, and in Czechoslovakia and Romania we witnessed fast personnel changes. And just as in Hungary during the short Grósz era replacing Kádár, in Slovakia, too, the barrage heralded like a sensitive instrument what was behind the new power's words.

8. INTERPARTY SKIRMISHES? (MAY 1990-APRIL 1991)

Although from the point of view of the situation of the barrage this is not justified, we will continue the first year of the period of the Hungarian change of regime and government as a separate sub-section. It is not the events tied to the barrage, but rather the expectations tied with it, that had changed by this time.

In 1990, western observers sensitive to environmental questions generally took it for granted that in Eastern Europe, where the environmental movements played such a significant role in motivating the masses, and through this in eliminating the old regime, now the development of environmental consciousness had begun. Here at home too, everyone counted on the emerging new parties to pay more attention to environmental problems than the previous policy-makers did. Various parties included those very people, often in leading positions, who had fought to the end in actions against the barrage.

A few important declarations, promises and slogans on environmental protection made their way into party programs. But the closer the elections came, the fewer words were uttered about these questions. Entirely new parties were now forming

their profiles, and it became very important for them to begin to differentiate themselves as markedly as possible from the other parties. A few stock-phrases tied to the environment were not too useful for this, and these often were more in agreement with other parties' similar environmental programs and phrases than with the economic policies of their own party.

As mentioned above, one of the institutional bastions on the side of finishing the barrage was the Environmental and Water Management Ministry, formed in 1988 at the time when the movement was spreading. This forced marriage of the elimination and formation of the new ministry was not questioned. In the course of execution, the new government noted, and it was lost in the background, that in the course of separation the lobby, in essence the water management leadership, remained unchanged, joined together. Only it was turned over to the transportation portfolio (from which in exchange the construction and settlement development were joined with environmental protection). Otherwise, more generally it is true that in contrast to the new and inexperienced political leadership, the various industrial lobbies remained on their feet and so they grew relatively stronger.

The relative strengthening of the lobbies became manifest in how easily they were capable of blackmailing the government, because it was missing those politicians who knew and could see through the principles. This "specialization" could be supplemented precisely by the lobbies, and a longer time and expensive learning money was necessary for them to be detected and for a new, politically maintainable balance to develop.

Until then the kind of money-divying struggle continued, confronting the government with *fait accompli* situation, making them jump into cheap and attractive-seeming investments, and prepare for situations without alternatives, as the Gabčíkovo(Bôs)- Nagymaros power station symbolized. Within this, the barrage become by this time a lucky exception that, because of its symbolic political content, had already discredited itself to such an extent that on this question not a single political force could allow itself to step back.

Still the government's recognition of this was not explicable in itself. In September 1990, when in a pretty unfortunate way just the opposition parties recommended to the parliament that the earlier, too open government authorization tied with the barrage be made unambiguous, and that the intent to destroy the construction be stated, the motion fell apart along rigid party lines, and the governing parties blocked the introduction of the question on the agenda. The proposal would come forward again only in April 1991, when it could count on the support of all the party fractions, and thus the parliament opened the way for the government delegation at the talks with the Slovak partner to unambiguously come down on the side of cancelling the original agreement.

With this, on the Hungarian side, the two-year-long, formally open period of suspension reached an end, and at least at Nagymaros the preparatory works to return the channel to its original state began, admittedly mostly at the drafting tables. From the point of view of the barrage, the whole period was characterized by a "we can talk about everything, only do nothing" principle, which in a peculiar way the change of regime did not change.

9. HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT VERSUS SLOVAK GOVERNMENT (APRIL 1991-?)

Has the Hungarian government's policy truly moved beyond this stalemate-principle, or has the confrontation merely moved onto a new plane? It is difficult to answer this question even today. Two different scenarios can be traced in relation to this.

According to the first, like many new governments in Eastern Europe, the Hungarian government has more confidence in the basis of its legitimacy on a nationalist-national foundation than its own deeds. According to this, to maintain the tension with Slovakia, to address it harshly, make reference to it but at the same time solve nothing, is the tactic that according to its own notions makes the government popular, and which makes even a confrontation with the water management lobby unnecessary.

Unfortunately, on the other side, too, there is the readiness, and indeed the attempt, to develop such a conflict. This behavior offers a certain protection against further *common* work on the barrage in the short term; in reality, however, it forms a more serious policy leading to certain failure.

According to another scenario, to which there is less susceptibility in the region, if the government is not preparing for an eternity in power, then what will be done in the interest of eliminating the problems really will depend on the new elections. For this, it is not an answer to the question of "why not," that is necessary to prepare but instead to help along the solution of the problems and, in our case, the consequences of the mistaken plan.

In the interest of this a decisive, purposeful step would be necessary on the Hungarian side, avoiding statelemates and endless confrontations.

It is unfortunate that today the tactics on both sides are determined by declarations that are either belived advantageous for the authorities domestically, or belived advantageous from the point of view of the western image. The Hungarian government thinks that the ecological viewpoints it has chosen, and its intent to carry out a modern reexamination of the mistaken decisions, ensures western sympathy for it and even material help for returning the area to its natural state. The Slovak

government, however, thinks that the fact that Slovakia in any case hold itself to a concluded agreement, is such *European* behavior that the west will somehow respect it, and will even express this with material support. Thus, from time to time it comes up that the questions under debate should be handled by approaching international professional arbiters: naturally, by "professional" one side means ecologists, while the other has in mind hydraulic builders and lawyers.

Neither side reckons that a specialist having any self-respect would step back if s/he recognizes what kind of political battles his or her expertise is to be used to fight. The danger that mostly those "specialists" will remain on the ground who in return for necessary payment are likely to support any point of view, and the course of decision-making will not reach an end with this; only costly lobbying will develop, which will only deepen the conflict and not lead in the direction of its solution.

It is not only impossible professionally, but noting the international political stage, it would be a baseless expectation, or illusion, that international professional organizations could take a position as arbiters in an internal conflict between two East European states. (It is particularly baseless to suggest that someone should give material aid to one country in opposition to the other's conceptions.) In itself, this sheds a very bad light on the two countries, which in opposition to one another try to lobby in the interest of a solution more advantageous to them by leaning on their own "greater Europeanness." At the same time it is obvious that the proof of *Europeanness* would be if the two countries could come to a consensus in an adult way and through their own efforts. It is also absolutely clear that the professional and material support would start when and if this agreement comes about. It would be much more cultured to turn this aid really to correcting the mistakes committed by the previous regime than to sacrifice it on the altar of unproductive arbitrational specialists' opinions.

Otherwise we could point out that there is no professional (technical, economic, ecological, legal, etc.) question affecting the bases for judgment of further tasks, for which the professional knowledge useful to one country or the other would not be sufficient to provide the answer.

If international consultations are justified in continuing, then they would be the method for handling conflict, for leading talks toward consensus. Because of the fashionable content of the problem, it could turn into the newest example of research (the ecological field, paradigm difference, international players in political changes of regime, the East European background). In this case, the scientific preparation would be international, a few conditions with preliminary assurances (the choice of persons who are competent and informed, and at the same time capable of forming consensus, etc.), but the negotiation itself and resolution of the conflict would remain

an internal matter, in which, with its result, the sides would appear *jointly* in the wider international arena.

...not the end...

12. RECENT PERIOD. WATER MANAGEMENT VERSUS ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT, AGAIN?

The *history of the Danube dam* itself has not been coming to an end, so it is very difficult to finish this *story*.

On the 24. of October, 1992 the Slovakian water management closed the Danube and begin to alter the waterflow to the side-channel constructed by the "*variant C*".

As on the surface one can hear more and more about the Hungarian - Slovakian debates, about the international conflict, and about the attempt of the EC to lead the conflict to a peaceful end, it can be surprising that it is the returning opposition between the management and the environmentalists that has been chosen as title for the recent half year. The cause for it is, that the pro-dam part of the water management was the main power that could feel a hope to gain again looking the successfully frizzed development of the matter for years, and by now this group seems to be more active again.

It is a quite controversial, but very characteristic nature of the debate. As the first step there was an increasing impatience in the public opinion because of the unchanged situation, accusing the government *and* the movement too who were not able to promote a more rapid reconstruction. In November being troubled by the Slovakian action of closing the Danube at first several government officer tried - exploiting this *dissatisfaction* - to shift upon responsibility to the movements as they would not give good advices to the government *to avoid* the Slovakian action. The pro-dam propaganda recently has tried *to continue* accusing the movement stating that they would have been the cause of the whole problem *because they promoted to stop the construction*. Naturally in a strict sense this is true: if nobody had had protested against the senseless projects, then *this kind of conflict* wouldn't have been occurred. In the same time this argument lead us to the necessity of re-examining the actual conflict situation.

The Slovakian dam-builders continued to force the accomplishment of the original agreement and since, in spite of their best hopes, they were not able to alter the Hungarian opinion, captured by their own strategy they were driven to fulfil the construction of the "*variant C*".

The action of the Slovakian water management was hastened by the political situation as same as by natural endowments. Political reason was beside the above-mentioned ones the separation of the Czech and the Slovakian state, as this would have given another occasion for a legal-political debate at the beginning of 1993 when the sustain of the original contracts needed a re-confirmation. The natural reason was, that the closing and alteration of the river is not possible but at a very low water-level, and this arrives on the Danube traditionally at the second half of October.

The fulfilment of the action make possible to draw several lessons from it. As for the *technical lessons* one could state that the action was a rash and thoughtless one, the construction was not well prepared and ready and the whole action was a hazardous one. It kept for months just to finish the technically indispensable works to ensure the minimal technical security, and this work has not been ended yet. A medium-size flood in November swept away three iron-gates, the flood gates have not operated, there was no possibility to let down the water to the original branch. A badly manoeuvring tow-boat fully loaded with rocks has been sank in November closing several gates for a longer time. These mistakes proves the argument, that the too early operation was not a well considered action but an irresponsible one.

For the general argumentation there are more important proofs that verify such mistakes that would relate *the operation of the original project* too. From this point of view the whole operation can be considered as an irresponsible experiment in the original size and site. Since it is not our task to give detailed argumentation for the debate itself, here we just mention the sank ground-water level, as a consequence of it the problems of the vegetation and the different ecosystems; the pollution of the water in the original river bed, in the reservoir and in the side channel covered with asphalt; the changes in the stream deposit balances; and other consequences of similar significance. (The expected dangerous consequences were foreseen by the Ecological Institute of Slovakian Academy of Sciences too.)

Turning back to the international conflicts, the Slovakian argument states, that the only valid agreement would be the one signed in 1977. Both the suspension of the works in 1989 and the official ceasing of the agreement in 1992 would have been one-sided Hungarian steps, not accepted by the Slovaks, so these actions would not have been existing in legal terms. But the construction of the "variant C", the alteration of the frontier river, the one sided diversion of the water, even if the construction did not fit to the agreement, would aim at the realisation of the original idea, so it would be legal.

The Hungarian argument states just the opposite - not denying the responsibility for signing the agreement and assuming the consequences of it up to 1989, or partly up to 1992. The debate should be decided bilaterally, but if it is not possible, the two sides have to apply for the Hague International Court.

The author's opinion is that the decision of this original debate over the contract, and over the consequences of the ceasing of the agreement should not have been mixed with a second and quite different question. The *protest* against the physical aggression, that is against the alteration of the frontier river and against the appropriation of the water and the common part of the construction would not need further Slovakian approval, and the Hungarian government should have expressed immediately his protest for that before international forum, among other to make it clear, that it is not to be mixed with the questions debated and legally acceptable.

It is to be seen that both governments are captured by internal political pressures. There is very weak chance to change this determination. But even more clear, that the EC too has special determination. After getting involved into this inconvenient matter, the most important aim is to have the appearance of creating a solution. To achieve this aim they are pressed to accept any solution independently of its contents. What is *practical* in such a case: to put pressure on *those* side that present any willingness to accept a compromise. In the case of a mixture of legal debates and physical aggression, above analysed in details, there is a great danger of the support of the aggression for the sake of a successful short-term conflict resolution. The common lesson of the EC arbitration and the Hungarian government to avoid this special trap.

To give a more optimistic perspective of the whole story we would like to draw the attention to a *second* periodicity of the events. The *first* one was the political periodicity: as the more strict periods of the political dictatorship were always associate with an accelerating construction of the dam, while the more liberal periods made possible a kind of re-thinking.

The *second* periodicity follows rather a natural cycle. In the fall of 1988 the Hungarian Parliament voted for the construction of the dam. Later it turned out to be more determining for the parliament than for the dam. In spring, 1989 the government suspended the construction. In that fall the parliament could not decide but prolonged further examinations. Next spring the new government declared his ambition to follow the ecological priorities, but in that fall the parliament had no willingness to reinforce this ambition with an unambiguous decision. This decision has been born by the spring of 1991. This fall the movement of the government seemed to be very irresolute as keep on tried to avoid the ceasing of the contract, but after several postponed ultimatum the spring of 1992 brought this step. As the consequences of the Slovakian aggression the Hungarian opinion seemed to be softer again by the fall of 1992.

In the first days of 1993 in the frame of a more extent government re-organisation the Hungarian prime minister changed all the three ministers officially dealt with the Danube dam, and whose role and intention were very different in this matter. The three ministers are the transport minister to whom the water management

belongs to (the head of the water management has been changed two months earlier); the environmental minister and a minister plenipotentiary without special portfolio dealing with the Danube negotiations. In the recent period the role of the foreign minister seemed to be increasing in connection with the dam.

February, 21. 1993.

10. SUMMARY

There were many who at the time of the change of regime, based on the behavior they witnessed, overestimated the ecological consciousness of the East European masses. These observers, whether they were analyzing the events from the west or on the spot, expected the birth of ecologically centered societies in Eastern Europe, and in the end they were disappointed in their expectations. It must still be stated that in Eastern Europe today, there still is not a real mass demand for all this.

The difference can perhaps be characterized with the difference that appears in the background symbolism of the movement against the barrage and of the western anti-nuclear movements. The barrage, the monster made of concrete, was the unintended symbol of political power running rampant over everything. It signified the model of totalitarian party rule.

The anti-nuclear movements also carry a very definite symbolic content, for atomic energy means a much more refined direction and control on a high technological level. The struggle directed against it symbolizes disillusionment with industrial society, a revolt against the value system of industrial society, on the soil of a somewhat environment- friendly, post-industrial value system, all rolled into one.

Doubtless the environmental defenders of the East European countries have as their goal this same world of ideas, the priority of ecological values, as their colleagues from more developed countries. Next to the appreciation for environmental viewpoints has come, on a conscious level, the globalization of this sphere of questions as a result, that is the understanding that we live in a common world, and must solve our problems in common. This outlook doubtless turns environmental protectionists into professional partners with the goal of analyzing conflicts and solving conflicts. At the same time it must be taken into account that at present, the questions before the East European societies of the transition from central direction to a market economy form the main problems to be solved, and they are not identical with the sphere of questions connected with the surpassing of industrial society. Many signs point to the fact that these societies are moving toward the merciless capitalism of the last century, struggling with the post-feudal world of ideas and interest assertion of the present. They are present on the

awareness side, but sociologically the values related to dismantling the industrial society are moving only a bit: in many cases, the problems that will sweep across society, and which must be put behind us, have not even formed yet -- we are thinking here of the concentration of data brought into being by a high-level information network, or the concentration of modern technology in the hands of a few people. (It is no accident that in the west this came to be the focus of battle for the anti-nuclear movement.)

At the same time, there is a very great need for all the lessons that the anti-barrage movement carries to become an organic and conscious part of wide layers of society and the politicians of the East European countries. Up to now, even those politicians who wanted to take advantage of the barrage movement seem not to have recognized the significance of the symbolism behind it. Otherwise they would have realized that precisely on the *political* level the barrage can be used only in one direction.

The barrage *politically* signifies the large, central investments of the old regime. The politicians and political forces not believing and recognising this fact, have only ranged *themselves* along this scale.

January 1992

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