



FACTSHEET

Gravel extraction and river regulation violates EU law

The engineering works by the Croatian Water Management Authorities on the Drava River in the Croatian-Slovenian border area conflict with Croatia's national environmental legislation and the country's efforts in meeting EU environmental obligations, which is a condition for its further integration into the European Union – and ultimately for EU accession.



Environmental Impact Assessment

The gravel extraction and river canalization works defy the conclusions of the Croatian Environmental Impact Study (EIS) conducted for the new flood protection dykes between Varaždin – Svibovec – Družbinec: "In addition it has been proved that extraction of gravel is not acceptable along the whole Drava section" (SPP d.o.o., Hrvatske Vode Zagreb, 2001, summary, page 92). Subsequently, the Ministry of Environment also issued a negative statement, but the State Water Directorate still awarded licences for these works. Furthermore, the concession expired in 2003: for the last few months they have been undertaken without a legal permit!

Thus the works are in direct violation of Croatia's environmental law. Furthermore, though the impacts of the project affect Slovenian territory, Croatia has not conducted an Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context according to the Espoo Convention (1991). This is clearly at odds with Croatia's international obligations.

The project also contravenes Croatia's Biodiversity Strategy (Official Gazette No. 81/99) and the Physical Plans of Varaždin and Medimurje counties, which highlight the Drava and Mura rivers as high priority areas for nature protection.

Conflict with international obligations

The works also violate the following international conventions to which Croatia is a signatory:

- Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Habitats (Bern, 1979)

- Convention on Co-operation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River (Sofia, 1994)
- Convention on the Conservation of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar, 1971)
- Convention on Biological Diversity (Rio, 1992)
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn, 1979)
- Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Helsinki, 1992)

Conflict with EU environmental law

Croatia formally applied for EU membership on February 21, 2003. In the "National Programme for the Integration of the Republic of Croatia into the EU", Croatia committed itself to adopt the legal and constitutional framework of the EU, *the aquis communautaire*, which includes environmental obligations. Despite this, the water management works contravene the following EU Directives:

- The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC): Member States are obliged to protect Europe's most valuable and threatened habitats and species as Natura 2000 sites. The Drava qualifies as such a site, as it comprises 10 habitat types incl. two priority habitats: Alluvial forests and semi-natural dry grasslands which are endangered in all over Europe.
- The Birds Directive (79/409/EEC): the area is home to more than 50 protected bird species such as the white-tailed eagle, black stork and kingfisher.
- The Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC): Member States are expected to prevent the deterioration of surface and ground waters. The current works clearly oppose the Directive's requirements.

There is a clear contradiction between Croatia's commitment to harmonising with EU law as an appropriate nature conservation and water management framework on one hand and the destruction on the Drava on the other.

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