

The Rape of the Danube

by Dr. István Mailath

This article was published in the Hungarian Quarterly, in October 1986. It warns of the environmental consequences of the plan by Czechoslovakia and Hungary to divert the Danube and build dams to keep the water of the Danube in reservoirs.

The project was initiated by the Budapest Treaty of 16 September 1977 between the [Czechoslovak Socialist Republic](#) and the [People's Republic of Hungary](#). The project is aimed at preventing catastrophic floods, improving river navigability and producing clean electricity. Only a part of the project has been finished in [Slovakia](#), under the name *Gabčíkovo Dam*, because [Hungary](#) abandoned the construction due to environmental concerns. This caused a still unresolved international dispute between Slovakia and Hungary. Both parties turned to the International Court at The Hague for a ruling.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gab%C4%8D%C3%ADkovo_%E2%80%93_Nagymaros_Dams

The Danube has been diverted from Hungarian territory to Slovak territory, enabling Slovakia to finish construction of the Gabčíkovo Dam. On the Hungarian side, the Hungarian government has not continued construction because there are still environmental issues that have to be resolved. Hungary has been heavily fined on two occasions for causing delays in construction.

The Most Destructive Plan Ever Conceived in Central Europe

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by Dr. Istvan Mailath

Throughout all history it has happened, that crazy and irresponsible rulers sacrificed sometimes wealth and human lives in a megalomaniac frenzy to create some monstrosities which were of no use to anyone and brought nothing but desolation and suffering. Under the totalitarian regimes of communist dominated countries it is not unusual either to undertake projects of tremendous financial costs which do nothing but damage the economy instead of bringing it forward. Until now the Russians were foremost in pursuing irresponsible actions. However, it seems now that the communist bosses of Hungary and Czechoslovakia made up their minds to outdo their Russian masters.

One such irresponsible action is the plan by the two neighboring governments to construct two huge hydroelectric power plants on a contractual basis on the Danube River. This would involve more than 200 kilometers of riverbed between Bratislava (Pozsony) in Czechoslovakia and Nagymaros in Hungary, about 30 kilometers north of Budapest.

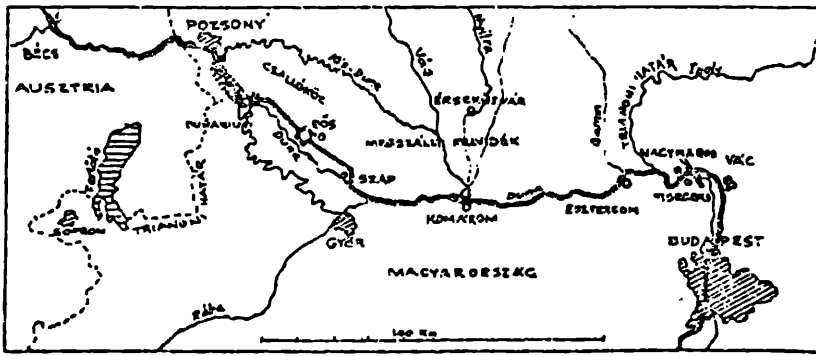
A group of environmentalists, geologists, economists, writers, etc., known as the Independent Danube Circle, are striving frantically against the plan and were honored for their efforts with the \$25,000 prize of the Right to Livelihood Foundation in 1985, in Stockholm, Sweden. Even the Europa Parliament discussed the dangerous effects this plan holds for the entire continent. The European press; Austrian, German, French, Swiss, and Swedish newspapers and magazines, have been informing the public in detail for more than a year, unanimously declaring the plan as "the craziest ever".

The Czechs would build the first dam 20 kilometers east of Bratislava at the little town of Dunakiliti, with the objective of covering the entire area of 20 kilometers with water. From here the dammed water would run through a 20 kilometer channel, built on the surface, to the community of Bos (Gabcikovo), where on Czechoslovak territory, the first of the hydroelectric power plants would be built. From here the water would return to the Danube at Szap, again through an 18 kilometer long artificial canal built on the surface. Thus the natural riverbed of the Danube would be completely eliminated between Danakiliti and Szap along a 35 kilometer stretch.

The Hungarian government is planning to build the second dam 30 kilometers north of Budapest in the Big Bend near the town of Nagymaros for the purpose of installing a second hydroelectric plant.

In Czechoslovak territory the Danube runs through flatland. In order to store the approximately 400 million cubic meters of water and to establish the channels, 15 meter high concrete walls must be built above the ground. The length of these walls, counting both sides of the channels would be approximately 120 kilometers. There is no precedent of such a bold enterprise in the entire history of European water management, stated the well known West German magazine *Der Spiegel*. It must also be noted that the area designated for this purpose is earthquake-prone. A break in the dam or any one of the channels would have dreadful effects on the dense population.

The natural flow of the Danube changes from a fast running, mountain-type river into a



slow, flatland stream near the community of Gonyu, 70 kilometers from Bratislava. There all the waste and drift brought down from the upper portion is deposited. Due to this fact the riverbed has to be dredged yearly at this section in order to maintain the proper depth for the international navigation. In case the plan is carried out, this natural debris of the Danube, increased heavily by the waste-waters of Vienna and Bratislava will have to settle in a special storage basin to be built at Gonyu. It is the opinion of experts that this could pose extremely difficult and costly maintenance problems as well as dangerous health hazards.

The second dam, to be built at Nagymaros, would be located between 200 meter high hills. These hills run 25 kilometers farther into flatlands. Therefore the riverbed, which is supposed to be turned into a huge water reservoir, would have to be surrounded on both sides with concrete walls of proper heights for a distance of 70 kilometers, as far as the city of Komarom. Since the plan calls for the storage of 300 million cubic meters of water at this point, raising the water level 25 meters above ground, a break in the dam would be catastrophic to Budapest and the densely populated area between.

Press commentators throughout Europe agree that it is unprecedented irresponsibility and criminal recklessness to conceive such an insane plan.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

As it came to light, the contract between the Czech and Hungarian governments relative to this plan was secretly signed in 1977. According to the *Tages Anzeiger* of Switzerland there was strong opposition within the Hungarian govern-

ment to the approval of the plan. With reference to the enormous sum of money needed as the share of Hungary in this project (more than two-billion dollars) the Hungarian government kept on postponing the final approval.

In the Fall of 1984, the news of the plan leaked out through unknown channels and the people of Hungary reacted with a public outcry; unprecedented under any communist regime. In its #51 issue, 1984, *Der Spiegel* commented: "It happened for the first time in a communist country that 342 members of the (Hungarian) parliament had to face a situation known only to their western counterparts: a flood of thousands of protest letters from outraged citizens, especially from environmentalists, water-management experts and geologists".

An unusual memorandum sent to every member of the parliament and to every member of the executive government body was signed by the leader of an organization previously unknown, calling itself The Independent Danube Circle. The memorandum demanded the immediate cancellation of any agreement concerning the infamous plan and was signed by more than 10,000 persons from the private sector; among them well-known writers, artists, scientists, geologists, and water management experts. Another list, containing 4,000 signatures was seized and confiscated by the state police.

In spite of the unified protest of the entire country the Kadar government, according to a report published by the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, "gave in to a massive Czechoslovak pressure" and on August 15, 1985 the plan was approved and responsibility assumed for the expense involved, without any provision as to the source of funding for this project.

Though the Danube Circle vehemently pointed out repeatedly that according to the communist constitution of Hungary the government had no right to approve such enormous expenditures without the approval of the parliament, the Kadar government persisted in preparing the preliminary drafts in secrecy. According to the latest information, the Czechs already began implementing the plan.

COMPLETE DISREGARD FOR THE BASIC RULES OF ECOLOGY

The memorandum of the Danube Circle directed attention to the effects this plan, considered as "irresponsible megalomania", would have on the environment. An estimated 160 square kilometers of rich agricultural land would be inundated. This means the annual shortage of some 50,000 metric tons of food for the country's economy. Approximately 100 square kilometers of forestland would be eliminated, which would effect adversely the natural regulation of the water supply. The level of the ground water would be considerably lowered. Fertile lands would be turned into steppe and sections of the Danube would become stinking cesspools. The deposit of two-million tons of mud per year, added to the sewage of the cities of Vienna and Bratislava, would destroy the quality of the drinking water supply for 13 million people. The well-known biologist, Janos Vargha, summed it up in his protest document in one sentence: "Energy can be imported, drinking water not."

The memorandum points out also the destruction of the natural beauties of the Nagymaros and Visegrad area as one of the adverse consequences of the plan on the environment, as well as the imminent dangers of flooding, especially during the season of the ice-drifts which could have devastating effects on Budapest. In Visegrad, for example, the marvelous 15th century palace of King Mathias, excavated between two big wars, would come under water.

The shipping industry would also be facing difficult technical problems by the interference of the natural flow of the Danube River. The abandonment of the natural riverbed between Dunakiliti and Szap, and the artificial redirec-

ting of the waterflow through huge channels into Czechslovakia, violates the internationally guaranteed freedom of navigation, placing it completely under Czech control. On the Bos-Nagymaros stretch the long established settlements and harbors would be completed cut off from the river.

In addition to their memorandum and constant protests, the Danube Circle produced a film, which illustrates the expected ill effects of the plan; based on scientific research and calculations embracing all possible details and points of view. Those who were present at the exclusive premiere of the film were shocked by what they saw.

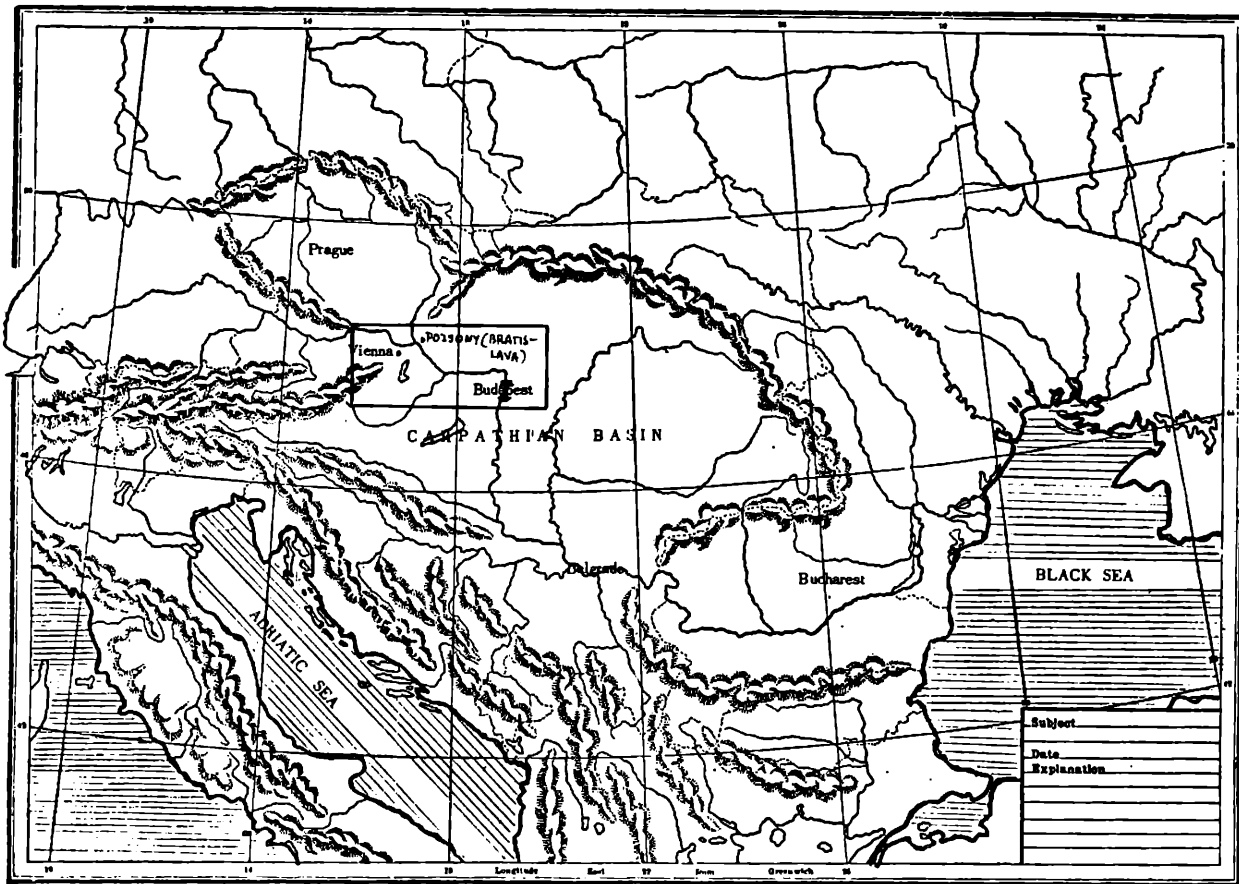
ECONOMICAL VIEWPOINTS

The voice of the Budapest government, the Budapest Agency, qualified the plan as "extraordinarily reasonable" since the powerplant in Nagymaros could provide seven per cent of the total power-need of Hungary and would save the importing of 700 metric tons of crude oil per year.

In response to the official claim the experts of the Danube Circle calculated it to be less than 3.5 per cent production of the nation's total power supply and proved that the immense cost would certainly not justify the investment. Furthermore, the Danube Circle revealed in its memorandum that other investments in the areas of housing, telephone, and transportation systems, as well as lowering the level of health of the people should be considered in prioritizing the spending if the government would care for the welfare of its people as it claims it does.

Nevertheless the Kadar government, firmly repudiating any sensible argument, decided to implement the plan. Having no available funds to finance the project, they turned to Austria for the money.

During the first half of the nineteen-seventies the socialist government of Austria did entertain a somewhat similar idea, namely to build a giant power plant on the Danube near the town of Hainburg. However, the wisdom of the Austrians prevented the destruction of their environment by popular vote. Therefore the Austrian industry grabbed eagerly at the opportunity to finance the Hungarian venture and sell



their outdated, rusty machinery left behind from the aborted Hainburg plan. According to an article in the *Wiener Zeitschrift fur Zeitgeist*, Austrian industry will furnish the Hungarian project with that old, outdated equipment, already junked.

The Danube Circle, representing Hungarian public opinion, published an entire page-long appeal in the leading Austrian newspaper, *Die Presse* pleading with the people of Austria and their government to refuse the financing of the Nagymaros project. "We implore the people of Austria in the name of solidarity" says the appeal "not to aid in any way this insane venture which can bring nothing but destruction and tragedy for the Hungarian people".

In spite of the appeal, the Austrians did not withdraw their offer to finance the Hungarian project which they themselves had eagerly rejected for their land. The private enterprise Osterreichische Donauwerke A. G., signed the

contract with the Kadar government to furnish and equip the plant at Nagymaros with the needed hardware in the framework of seven billion schillings. The government of Hungary agreed to repay the money with interest by surrendering to Austria for twenty years all the electric power produced by the plant. In other words, as it stands now, the people of Hungary will have nothing from the whole enterprise for twenty years but the destruction of the environment, the pollution of the drinking water and all the other ill effects, including the possibilities of major catastrophies which in all probability will come to pass sooner or later; according to geologists, biologists, environmentalists, and water management experts alike. Over and above all this the Hungarian economy will have to carry the burden of another 80 billion forints needed to build the dam and the channels and pay for the upkeep which is estimated to be one billion annually. Then after twenty years, if the

plant is still there, the Hungarian people will need to replace the entire obsolete installation purchased from Austria.

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAN

It would be false to claim that the Kadar government is composed of idiots who are unable to perceive the dangers and the tremendous economical burdens this plan represents. Especially since during the last decade we have witnessed the unfolding of an extremely clever policy throughout Hungary; the only country under the heel of Moscow providing its peoples the opportunity of easing the pressures caused by the hopelessness of an orthodox communist doctrine and enabling them to achieve a certain degree of prosperity and well being.

Therefore we have to raise the question: What are the reasons that after years of resistance the Kadar regime meekly agreed suddenly to share in an enterprise which in no way could benefit the people of Hungary, but instead is prone to create hardship and destruction?

Today we can only guess the real reasons of this humble submissiveness, since Budapest is carefully guarding the secrets of what was going on behind the "Bos-Nagymaros disaster" as the project is being referred to by the people of Hungary.

Perhaps the Swiss newspaper *Tages Anzeiger* knew something when on August 16, 1985, it published the following lines: "The Kadar regime was yielding to the massive Czechoslovak pressure when yesterday the agreement was signed between the two countries..."

There is no question that there are strong Czechoslovak interests involved in connection with this absurd plan. Those interests are more political than economical.

In its loyalty to Moscow, Czechoslovakia clings firmly to the orthodox communist system. Due to this, the living standard of the population in Czechoslovakia, as well as the level of individual freedom and well-being is far below that which the population of Hungary enjoys today. This creates discontent amongst Czechoslovakians. The feeling of respect toward

the Hungarians is increasing rapidly. Especially in Slovakia the opinion is secretly becoming popular that it would be wiser for the Slovaks to co-exist with the Hungarians than with the Czechs. Therefore it is in the interest of the Husak government to cause economical problems for the Hungarian comrades by the creation of the new power plant and the destruction of the Danube River; problems which could bring about the collapse of the new economical mechanism, bringing their level of the well-being down to that of the Czechs.

Another Czechoslovak interest in the project is tied to the extremely chauvinistic national policy of the Czechs, which borders on ethnocide. The area between Bratislava and Bos is one of those sections where Hungarians have lived in one massive block for more than a thousand years; today under Czechoslovakian rule. The flooding of this territory would force the Hungarians out of that region and they would have to be dispersed as far from the Hungarian border as possible, thus increasing the Slavic character of Slovakia. What we see here is in reality a sly plan of ethnocide under the disguise of energy production. Knowing the Czech methods in the past, for example the "secret weapon of corruption" used so brazenly by Benes in convincing the French politicians that the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the creation of Czechoslovakia was for the good of Europe, is causing some political experts to explore the possibility that the same devious methods are being employed once again and might have been a decisive factor in this case.

According to observers, it might have been Moscow's hand working in the background. Since the times of Peter the Great (1672-1725) the constant aim of Russian policy was the takeover of Europe. After the fall of the Czars the lords of the Kremlin adopted this goal; zealously expanding it to dominate the entire world.

The Russians are skilled chess players at the chess table as well as in politics. Following the old practice of, "two fast steps forward, one slow step back" they have made considerable advances in Europe; all the way into the long desired fortress of the Carpathian Basin, which can be regarded strategically as the key to the remainder of Europe.

Regarding the situation from this angle it makes sense to assume that the Czechs exerted pressure on individual members of the Kadar government with the aid of some covert Russian mediation; a pressure the Hungarian "comrades" were unable to refuse without endangering their own personal safety. To say it bluntly: they did not have enough backbone to put the well-being of the people before their own personal welfare.

The Russian interest in the implementation of this abominable plan seems manifold. It may represent a preliminary step to such strategic, economic and political plans which are already outlined for future actions in the Danube valley. It is also possible that it serves as a preparatory step to place the entire navigation of the Danube River under Russian control and super-

vision. It is also conceivable that the Russians are eager to aid their most loyal allies, the Czechs, in their effort to get rid of another half-million Hungarians and thereby make a giant step forward in the direction of a Unified Slavic Empire from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean. It would be much easier to absorb the Czechs and the Slovaks than it would be the Hungarians into a unified Russian nation.

The Czech-Russian collaboration, so obvious during the entire twentieth century, should not be underestimated. Fodojev, a Russian general during World War I, was the first to put it into words: "Without Bohemia (the old name for the homeland of the Czechs) the Slav cause is lost, because the Czechs are the outpost as well as the vanguard of all Slavs!"