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New dam project on Czech Elbe is environmentally and economically unacceptable

On the 12th November, the Czech minister of transport J. Šimonovský, publicly announced the start of permission process for new dam on the last free flowing part of Elbe river in Czech Republic, near Decin city, close to the German border. The new project is heavily criticised by Czech as well as international environmental NGOs, as economically unjustified and environmentally destructive. NGOs also stress on the necessity to assess the project according Espoo Convention – international treaty on transboundary impact assessment.

This plan began to be prepared in March 2005, after the Ministry of Transport cancelled the project of building two dams near Decin and Usti nad Labem. This cancellation was due to a long term opposition of environmental NGOs and of the Ministry of Environment. The Ministry of Transport, according to Šimonovský, wants however to push through the construction of a second dam, immediately after completing the first one.

"Even one dam will have negative impacts on nature, including Natura 2000 site *Elbe Valley*", said Vlastimil Karlik from the environmental Czech association Arnika. "It could interrupt international important migration path in narrow Elbe Valley, and also start a process of further canalisation of the river. The dam is located near the Czech – German border and could also impact German Natura 2000 site *Elbtal zwischen Schöna und Mühlberg*. Therefore we consider that a cross – border assessment is a must".

"This project is an economical nonsense", said Roberto Epple, from European Rivers Network. "The Elbe River is a naturally shallow river and is consequently not adapted to large size vessels. The planned dam cannot help to increase the volume of freight on the Elbe, — the conditions in the adjacent German sector are the same as in the Czech part of the Elbe now. Indeed, Germany's Federal Government and the Land Sachsen stopped any plans to deepen or to build dams on Elbe, after the floods in 2002.

The german Association for Environment and Nature protection BUND considers this dam project as irresponsible and rash. "There should not be any funds from Brussels to continue to concrete the Elbe against the UE directives", said the Elbe – project's director from BUND, Ernst Paul Dörfler.

The Land Sachsen also firmly rejects the building of a dam in the nearby Czech Republic.

Dams for improvement of navigation have been planned on this part of the Elbe since 1992. The previous project of two dams was rejected the Ministry of Environment. "We see the current project as a clear example of what we call the *salami tactic*", said R. Epple. "The real plan is to start transforming the Elbe River into a channel, according to the long term plan for a large Elbe – Oder – Danube connection".

The Elbe represents an unique set of natural and cultural values. Along the endangered section of the river, are situated two national natural parks, three Natura 2000 sites and one landscape protected area, and only about 45 km downstream is the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage *Dresdner Elbwiesen* located. Such a succession of protected areas along the scenic Elbe Canyon landscape underlines the exceptional character of this European river.

In order to protect this patrimony for the future generations, the Ministry of Transport has to abandon its project and develop alternative solutions. We must adapt the ships to the river, and not the river to the ships.

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More informations : <http://www.rivernet.org/elbe/staustufen/staustufen.htm> (in German) www.arnika.org (in Czech)