

Really Necessary?

The Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal

Position Paper

Justice and Environment 2011

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The objective of this position paper is to summarise the position of Justice & Environment on the DOEC (<http://www.d-o-l.cz/index.php/en>) incorporating an environmental and legal point of view, and including conclusions on the respective project.

The exact routing for the canal is still unclear. Generally, the DOEC is said to be constructed as a combination of river canalisation and lateral canals. A new version of the Danube branch is planned to lead through the Trilateral Natura 2000 site of the Morava-Dyje-floodplains from the Danube confluence upwards to Prerov (Czech Republic) - the additional canalisation or development of the Morava (groynes, lateral dikes, straightening) would produce massive habitat destruction. The DOEC would lead to the destruction of the Morava floodplains which are also a trilateral RAMSAR Site¹. Additionally the impact on the water system would cause an impairment of the ground water. That kind of project entails various claims on settlement areas – through construction of harbours for instance - and further more has considerable social and economical impacts on the affected population. The DOEC Project is one of the reasons for the listing of the Morava-Dyje floodplains as a threatened RAMSAR site (Montreux register)².

Over and above that, the negative impact on numerous (potential) Natura 2000 sites is in direct conflict with EU environmental legislation. Furthermore it will stand in direct conflict with the main goals and principles of the Water Framework Directive of the EU and would lead to the deterioration of water quality in the affected rivers. The self-purification capacity of natural waters would be reduced. The Canal construction might also aggravate problems with invasive and non-native species as well as with flood-management.³

Current plans and strategies for the DOEC (though not realistic in due time) pose also a severe obstacle for the implementation of the Natura 2000 and WFD objectives. Existing implementation projects to reach the good ecological status (according to WFD) and restoration projects (according to the Habitats-directive) are set back, or even blocked within cross border permission procedures to keep opportunity rights for a possible future DOEC project.

The main Lobby for the DOEC is conducted by the 'Association Danube-Oder-Elbe (Association DOE)' based in Prague. The association seeks to provide 'comprehensive documentation' about the DOEC project.

¹ Wetland of international importance. www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-trss-transboundary-ramsar-21073/main/ramsar/1-31-119%5E21073_4000_0__

² www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-montreux-montreux-record/main/ramsar/1-31-118%5E20972_4000_0

³ E.g. Janak et al. 2003. Danube-Oder-Elbe-Canal. An opportunity or a threat? Institute for Applied Ecology – Daphne, Bratislava

The Czech Republic's government's national spatial planning strategy, still reserves the possible DOEC route for the future. In Slovakia the project is part of the strategic plan for waterways. Austria ratified the AGN treaty, which lists the DOEC as a future waterway project.

Although the DOEC has not been included into the in 2010 established Danube Region Strategy, it is still to be found on the list of TEN-T Network Inland Waterways and is considered within the TTT (Transcontinental Transition Terminal) project - which aims at the creation of a multimodal node, a transnational transport terminal with access to water, rail, air and road transport. The European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance (AGN) defines the DOEC as a waterway of international importance.

Due to various negative impacts on the ecosystem as well as on the populations affected, a clear commitment of the European Commission to the existing legal framework on environmental protection and its goals, and thus the revision of European acts and strategies in the light of the aforementioned goals would be highly appreciated.

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