

0125 Summary of auditing the use of finance spent on the environmental protection in Szigetköz

The average rate of flow of the river Danube decreased to one fourth following its diversion on October 25, 1992. It changed the water household system of the region, and the drop in ground water level triggered irreversible ecological changes. It became an urgent task to raise the water level in the region of unique natural value, however, Hungary did not have authority over the artificial means to regulate the rate of flow of the river.

In 1993, Parliament defined the strategic aims of diminishing environmental damage in a resolution. On the one hand, it recommended the Government to avoid definitive technical arrangements which would create exigency compared to the conditions before the diversion – with special regard to the international debates; and, on the other hand, defined the need to raise the level of the water. To achieve this, pump supply was used experimentally and then a river bed sill established at the 1843 fkm.

Between 1993 and 2000, the chapters of the KöM, the KöViM, and the MEH spent a total of 3,800 million HUF on funding task performance with their central and regional organisations to moderate environmental damage in Szigetköz caused by the diversion of the Danube. Of this, 18% was spent on construction work, 28% on expert documentation, and 54% on maintenance and operation.

Because of the loose alluvial ground structure of Szigetköz, the joint effect of the absence of canals and the decrease of water level endangered the under-surface water supply, an important source of drinking water in the country. By 1996, a network of canals and waste water cleaning plants had been constructed in the critical regions, using 3,113 million HUF for this purpose from the resources that had been made available for community and local government applications for funds. Between 1992 and 1996, in these places, the proportion of flats connected to the network had grown from 0.5% to nearly 63.3%, and so exceeded the average in Hungary. The proportion of those flats that are connected to the system, however, varies from community to community, is between 34 and 100%, which means that the technical features of operation and maintenance have not been developed according to the original plans, and it can cause premature failure of the technical equipment in the systems.

In order to increase the rate of joining the system and to diminish technical failure caused by unused capacity, we have recommended the Government to revise and define the ways and forms of support for the communities of Szigetköz region related to the network of waste water canals that are already constructed.

On the whole, the investments helped to protect the under-surface drinking water, which dropped to about 70% of the quantity before the diversion, and, in addition, contributed to the moderation of the harmful ecological changes that had been triggered by the diversion, increased the quantity of water in the Danube and in its sub-branches, as well as that of the ground water level.

In accordance with the aims set and approved by Parliament, the environmental damage was diminished, the investments of temporary nature produced the desired effect of increasing the water level, which can be verified by the monitoring data collected with appropriate frequency and in the right composition. The use of funds to moderate environ

mental damage can be considered expedient and productive despite the fact that, on the one hand, the arrangements used to supply the necessary water are subject to professional debates in terms of water management and environmental protection. On the other hand, however, in the period following the diversion, we have found shortcomings and co-ordination problems both in the decision-making process and in the implementation. These deficiencies also featured the definition of the damage caused by the diversion, as well as the organisation, implementation, and financing of diminishing the damage; and had an effect on the co-operation between the Government authorities, their regional organisations, and the local governments in the region. The measure of success can not be established since the objectives had not contained numerical parameters.

In the interest of maintaining water supply without any problems we have recommended the Government to ensure harmony between the tasks related to the operation of the water supply system and their financing, and that the tasks of water management and the assigned resources are presented clearly in the relevant chapter. We have recommended that the environmental protection and the water management portfolios should square matters, in compliance with the legal regulations in force, related to the way of financing the operation and maintenance of the water supply system of the flood-plain and the protected sides, and the development projects that are necessary to the problem-free and safe operation of the water supply system on the flood-plain and protected sides, and to the further construction of the water supply system on the protected side.

Surveying the damage caused by the diversion with questionnaires – organised by the KÖM – was unsuccessful both among the local people and the farming ventures. The Ministry of Environmental protection and Regional Development, in the case of damage measurable in natural indicators, established by counting, weighing, and estimating, at 1998 market value, a single damage of about 500 million HUF, due to the diversion, and a recurring damage of 570 million HUF/year caused to the agriculture, the woods, the fish stock, the flora and fauna. The local governments did not survey the damage caused by environmental changes in their own authority.

The professional authorities did not carry out a systematic preparation in the interest of the rehabilitation of Szigetköz and of the definition of the tasks to be done. Hungary cancelled the bilateral contract as early as in 1989, despite this fact we have not found documents related to the preparation for constructing the "C version", and for the expected changes. Action plans complying with the Parliament resolution were not made despite the fact that certain groups of members of Parliament and MPs from the region had initiated it several times.

The aim of our recommendation made to the Government was to have the rehabilitation and regional development strategy of the Szigetköz region revised, in compliance with what the Parliament resolution contained, and according to the new conditions.

The tasks related to diminishing damage were defined on the basis of various expert documents and studies which showed a great variety in terms of their content, objectives, elaboration, and utilisation. According to the certificates issued by the environmental protection and water management portfolio, the regional water management authority, as well as the Secretariat of the Government Commissioner of the Danube the completion of as many as 229 different studies and expert documents had been financed in the period of 1993-2000. The amount of 1,068 million HUF spent on expert documentation at current price is relatively high, however, the grouping of studies along professional considerations

points to their indirect and direct utilisation. The expert studies contributed to the formulation of the plans for the rehabilitation of Szigetköz, and to assisting the Government in making decisions.

In the course of operating the monitoring system for eight years, 66% of the amount was spent on data collection on a yearly basis (findings, evaluation, laboratory work) and on making regular reports and releasing information, the final results of which were included in expert studies. These reports served as a basis for making the Slovak-Hungarian joint environmental monitoring report, which was required by the agreement on sharing water between the two countries. In addition, 20% of this amount was spent on the impact analyses and evaluation of preliminary and subsequent water management operations and interventions. In the framework of this work, the versions of water supply were revised in view of maintaining the ecological balance, and the change in the reserve of the under-surface drinking water supply which could be used was analysed. About 7% of the amount was spent on strengthening Hungary's positions at the negotiations about implementing the ruling of the court in the Hague. The remaining amount (7%) was used, in part, related to the technical plans and preparation, and, in part, on producing publications and information materials related to environmental changes (e.g. UNESCO publication – 1995., English studies – 1994., ecological sensitivity of the population – 1995., making maps and charts, etc.).

The collection and classification of studies, papers, expert documentation, and opinions on the environmental state of Szigetköz had not been completed until the end of the audit. The data base established at the Secretariat of the Government Commissioner of the Danube – on the basis of a random check of the lists that were given over – is not complete. In addition to the resources from the appropriations in chapter management spent on these purposes, certain institutions (e.g.: the regional water management authority, the Fertő–Hanság National Park) financed expert documentation independently, from their own resources.

Since 1992 in Szigetköz, the existing elements of the water- and land-based monitoring system have been completed, and new ones have been constructed to assist to diminishing damage, and to evaluating the impacts of the intervention taken. However, the central data base to aggregate and evaluate the monitoring results has not been established. The results of measuring and findings are not utilised to the full, therefore we have made a recommendation to the Minister of Environmental protection to revise the monitoring strategy in Szigetköz according to the new conditions, to have a central computerised data base of environmental monitoring developed, and to see to it that the data are updated and used in the definition of further tasks of environmental protection related to water management and diminishing damage.

The plan existing in draft form since 1994 and updated last year to establish the Danube National Park has not been implemented, although it would make it possible to restrict business activities which have a harmful impact on the environment in the region.

On the basis of the on the spot visits and the mining, water management, and environmental protection surveys, it can be said that the mine ponds and so called sight ponds pose a serious danger to the mineral resources and the drinking water. We have made a recommendation to the transport and water management minister to have a nation-wide survey made about the mine ponds and the artificial ponds established for some other reason (e.g. sight ponds). On the basis of the survey, their potential impact on the water base

of the country should be evaluated and the amendment of legal regulations should be initiated so that they could provide an effective protection for the water base.

The correspondence between the tasks and resources related to the operation of the water supply system, working since 1995, had been ensured at the KöViM between 1995 and 1998, however, in 1999-2000, only 50% of the necessary appropriations were available, while the other half was provided by the KöM. The co-operation and agreement between the two ministries made it possible to provide the resources necessary to the continuous operation of the water supply system. Carrying out this water management task as well as the distribution of professional supervision and responsibility between the two ministries and the hand-over of finance by the KöM took place without the authorisation by the necessary legal regulations and not in compliance with the Government decree on the authority of the Ministers of Transport and Water Management. The amount of the appropriation for the operation of the water supply system at the KöViM does not give a real picture of all the resources provided to carry out the task function. We have recommended the leaders of these two portfolios to sort out the regulation and implementation of this.

Joint funding, in 1999-2000, produced a more unfavourable situation for the region. 51 million HUF and 31 million HUF less resources were available for the operation of the water supply system in 1999 and 2000 respectively, if we take unchanged expenditure on a yearly basis.

In the case of the KöM and a regional local government, we have found shortcomings in the application of the procedure regulations of the law related to the use of budget appropriations in a value of HUF 14 million. Financing was not appropriately assigned to the tasks, and the accounting of the appropriation was not performed.

It is the result of the activity of the rehabilitation committee established by the county general assembly that such professional recommendations had been worked out that were taken into consideration by the decision-makers when distributing the resources. Its professional and personal composition has made possible a consensus-based interest reconciliation and the real consideration of their recommendations, and the committee has performed co-ordination functions, too.
