



FACTSHEET

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udruga za zaštitu prirode i okoliša  
**ZELENI OSIJEK**



## “Europe’s Amazon” under Threat! New river regulation plans in Croatia would transform natural Danube, Drava and Mura Rivers into a canal!

### 60 000 hectares

of natural riverine areas of the Danube, Drava and Mura, including Nature Park “Kopački Rit”, Special Nature Reserve “Gornje Podunavlje” and Natura 2000 sites, are in danger due to outdated river regulation

On 25 March 2011 Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia have committed to protect the Danube-Drava-Mura Rivers, home to an amazing biodiversity as a Trans-Boundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserve “Mura-Drava-Danube”. However, at the same time the river system is threatened more than ever before. Croatian Water Management Authorities<sup>1</sup> are currently **pushing for three major river regulation projects along the Danube, Drava and Mura in the heart of “Europe’s Amazon”** in the border area of Hungary and Serbia. According to their plans the natural river stretches of the three rivers should be fixed with stones and transformed into a uniform canal, free of side arms, sandbanks and river islands. These plans are **against national and EU environmental law and international standards** plus **Croatia’s commitment and efforts** to protect these areas.

#### Danube regulation

In April 2010 Croatian Water Management Authorities have issued an extensive plan for **regulation of 53 km of the Danube** between the Hungarian border and the confluence of the Drava into the Danube at Osijek. This should be achieved by the implementation of about 75 new river regulation structures (groins) and by building of 16 km long new embankments to fix the natural river banks. This includes also some works on the Serbian part of the Danube. Currently an Environmental Impact Assessment is being carried out in Croatia and is expected to enter into the public hearing process soon.

#### Drava regulation

Beginning of 2008 Croatian Water Management Authorities have issued an extensive plan for **regulation of 56 km of the lower course of the Drava**. This should be achieved by the implementation of about 112 new river regulation structures (embankments and groins) and by cutting off natural river banks. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was carried out. Beginning of 2009 the European Commission has sent an international Fact Finding Mission to the Drava, unparalleled in Croatia’s history. Two independent

#### Facts “Danube regulation”

**Impacted river length:** 53 km

**Planned Structures:** 75 groins, 16 km new embankments

#### Facts “Drava regulation”

**Impacted river length:** 56 km

**Planned Structures:** 112 (groins and embankments)  
**Costs:** € 20. Mio.

<sup>1</sup> Croatian Ministry of Regional Development, Forestry and Water Management; Croatian Waters; Ministry of Sea, Transport and Infrastructure; Agency for Inland Waterways

EU experts were hired to investigate the project and the Environmental Impact Assessment. Their report concludes the project to be outdated, environmentally destructive and not according to international standards and EU laws and should therefore not be implemented. Nevertheless, the Croatian Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Construction has approved the project during the expert's investigation and the Water Management Authorities still keep holding on and executing the project.

### Facts “Regulation of Drava-Mura mouth”

**Impacted river length:** 2 km  
**Planned Structures:** groins



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### Regulation of Drava-Mura mouth

Croatian and Hungarian Water Management Authorities have started to regulate the **confluence of the Drava and Mura Rivers** at Legrad and are planning more major interventions to transform the natural river courses into a canal. The Croatian Ministry of Culture has given negative opinion to the project in 2010. However, Croatian Waters has claimed overriding public interest to the project. The final decision needs to be taken by the Croatian Ministry of Culture.

### Outdated projects threaten natural values

According to the project studies the main purpose of these plans is to improve navigation and flood protection. However, no justification of the need is given. In contrary there are **no settlements or infrastructure being threatened by floods as well as there is no navigation on the Drava River upstream of Osijek**. Also no modern and sustainable navigation on the Danube asks for such measures. The main purpose of the plans is part of to maintain the system of **outdated water management** practise in Croatia and its profiteers. The plan to regulate the Danube, Drava and Mura Rivers is part of the overall strategy by Croatian Waters to **regulate all natural river stretches across Croatia**, incl. the ecologically important Sava River.

### Environmental Impacts

These river regulation plans would negatively affect one of the best preserved floodplain areas of Europe-wide importance. It would **stop the natural river dynamics, destroys natural habitats as floodplain forests and negatively impacts on species** populations such as White-tailed Eagle, Black Stork, Sand Martin, Kingfisher, Little Ringed Plover and Otter. It also would lead to **economic damage** caused by the decreasing groundwater level and negative impacts on drinking water, forests and agriculture in the region. The new regulation plan is in clear conflict with national and EU environmental legislation, as the Water Framework Directive and the Habitats and Birds Directives as well as the Nature Conservation and Water Act in Croatia. It is against the efforts by the Croatian Ministry of Culture to protect the Danube, Drava and Mura Rivers as it would profoundly **affect more than 60000 hectares of the unique river** including the Nature Park and Special Zoological Reserve “Kopacki Rit” and the Regional Park “Drava-Mura” both planned Natura 2000 sites. Furthermore it is against the governmental agreement of Croatia from March 2011 to establish a Trans-Boundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserve „Mura-Drava-Danube” together with Austria, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia.

### NGO complaints

**12 international and national NGOs** have sent a complaint to the European Commission as well as the Croatian government and appealed to stop these outdated plans which are environmental destructive and not fulfilling international standards and EU law.



**Photo credits:** A. Mohl, WWF Austria