

Problems with the Danube River in Bulgaria

by Eugenia Marinova

According to data of the U.N. Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Bulgaria is the lowest European country in per capita water supply. Not only is there a quality problem but a problem of water quantity as well. The quantity of surface waters is often inadequate due to the rapid urbanization and much industrial and agricultural activity.

For years there has been a major problem of water purity in the Danube. All statistics point to the fact that the Danube is the most heavily polluted river in Europe. Bulgaria makes its "contribution" (about 3 per cent) to this river's pollution. Since Bulgaria is located at the lower course of the river, it is bound to suffer the consequences of all the pollution coming downstream.

Degradation of the Danube comes from pesticides, heavy metals, and substances discharged with the waste waters from the towns along the river banks. The main problem, however, is the nitrates which are estimated to total 1.2 million tons annually. The river water is unusable, not only for domestic purposes but for irrigation of arable lands as well.

Since one problem almost always leads to another, the Danube pol-

lution automatically contributes to Black Sea pollution. During the last few years, eutrophication (and resultant plankton flowering) has risen. This is caused by the high level of nitrates. The sulfur dioxide content from the bottom level also has been increasing. If urgent measures are not taken, this situation will threaten tourism and the very preservation of the Black Sea ecosystem.

This situation causes particular anxiety for the citizens of Bulgaria. We feel justified in saying that international measures undertaken so far are far from sufficient. The Commission of the Danube Riparian Countries, set up at the end of the 1940s, has been dealing predominantly with problems of navigation. Within the framework of the EC, a number of studies have been completed and many guidelines have been adopted pertaining to water resources, but they are not internationally mandatory, so the "polluters pay" principle adopted by many countries doesn't apply to the Danube.

The issue of transboundary watercourse pollution and the responsibility of the states was included, at the initiative of Bulgaria, on the agenda

of the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) in October and November of 1989. However, the lack of interest on the part of some governments is quite obvious and the cost for clean-up or prevention is high. We need more active involvement of the public and the NGOs in order to fight the pollution of the Danube. More activity has been noticed lately among ecological organizations. The most popular one, ECOGLASNOST, has been prominently ranked first for some time in polls of parties and organizations.

One woman in particular who has been active in pollution problems in Bulgaria is Mrs. Neshka Robeva. Currently a member of Parliament and a senior coach of the Bulgarian rhythmic gymnastic team, she has alerted the public to major air pollution problems in the town of Ruse on the Danube. In fact, she is very popular both as a coach of world champions and as a prominent environmental activist in her country.

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All of the countries which share the Danube River.