

Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive

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To:

Mr. Dr. Wolfgang Schüssel

Chancellor of the Austrian Republic

Austria

Copy to:

Mr. Grasser

Minister for Finance of the Austrian Republic

Austria

ÖKB - Österreichische Kontrollbank

Mr. Scholten

Don't finance the ILISU DAM – letter of concern from 71 regional NGOs, local authorities and affected communities

26.09.2006

Dear Mr. Schüssel,

As we have learned, your government is about to grant export insurance for the Ilisu Dam in the South-East of Turkey. As a widely supported local platform that represents the vast majority of people who live in the region and who will be affected by this Austrian-engineered dam, we call on you urgently not to finance this highly destructive and unsound project.

If your government should decide to give a public guarantee, it is clear that the Ilisu project will directly result in:

- the destruction of the livelihoods of over 50.000 people;
- increased social problems in the region and Turkey;
- in a possible violation of international law;
- and in loss of unique archaeological sites.

We, the people who live here and who will suffer from these consequences, do not want this dam.

As we will highlight, your government had the chance to make a first hand observation about the flaws in this irresponsibly planned project, particularly through a fact finding mission in the region, led by the Austrian Ministry of Finance between 21 and 25 August 2006.

The fact finding mission of your government¹ was highly appreciated by all locally affected people, because it gave the ECAs the chance to get unfiltered impression of the social reality in the region and the highly defective state of the planning of this project.

The social reality in the region:

We are confident that your delegation was able to make the following observations:

1. **The majority of the people (55.000) will face the severe danger of losing their livelihoods, income and the very social basis for living.** Since the majority of locally project-affected people do not own land but earn their income by working for the big land owners, they will receive NO compensation but loose their job, their home, social ties, local culture and the basis for living. A good example which was also investigated by the members of your government was the village Sinan (province Diyarbakir, district Bismil). The Turkish law and the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) do not foresee compensation for them. This means that the majority of the affected people will go to the slums of the bigger cities like Diyarbakir and Batman, face social and economic breakdown and additionally increase the social and economic problems there.
2. **Over 80% of the affected people do not want the dam (specific reasons follow).**
3. **The vast majority of mayors, as the democratically elected representatives of the affected people, are clearly against the dam.**
4. **Almost all NGOs in our region are very critical against the Ilisu dam and the current dam project.** They reject the Ilisu dam project because of its many negative impacts on the social structure, cultural heritage and environment.
5. **The ancient 10.000 years old city of Hasankeyf has an overriding importance for the population in the region and in Turkey generally. Similar to the old parts of Heidelberg, Salzburg and Bern, it is not simply an archaeological site!** For the local population, Hasankeyf not only represents their culture and history but also their shared past and cultural heritage within the world history. At the same time, local people associate Hasankeyf with its big tourism potential (in combination with the other historical cities and monuments) and thus as an invaluable opportunity for a regional socio-economic development. Hasankeyf is not only one of the many hundred archaeological sites. Furthermore, the Hasankeyf site is unique in its unity with the natural landscape and it has been a social settlement since its foundation. There is no other archaeological site with so many caves. The bridge in Hasankeyf was also the biggest stone bridge of its time, and thus has a unique place in the history of architecture.
6. **Such a severe destruction of culture would never be acceptable in a European state.** The proposed “archaeological rescue plan” for the project completely ignores the public importance of the cultural heritage sites that will be affected by the dam. The plan is technically unfeasible and will result in the destruction of culture. First of all, there are excavations in only 14 of the determined 289

¹ Between 22 and 24 August, 2006 the delegation was in the Ilisu dam region with the provinces Batman, Diyarbakir, Siirt, Mardin and Sirnak. During this visit, a big group of employees of the ECAs, different ministries etc. had meetings with many non-governmental organizations (NGO) in the cities of Diyarbakir and Batman, the mayors of the most affected cities (Diyarbakir, Batman, Hasankeyf), the governors of the provinces of Diyarbakir, Batman and Mardin and several affected villages in the provinces of Diyarbakir and Batman. Furthermore the delegation looked after some important flora and fauna locations and visited the antique city of Hasankeyf.

archaeological sites which will be affected by the Ilisu dam project. The whole region is full of archaeological sites which have not yet been excavated at all. It should be noted that the project region, upper Mesopotamia, is one of the first settlement sites of humanity. With every new finding at the excavations, the history of the Neolithic period, the history of humanity is rewritten. Yet, so far, only one third (or even less) of the Ilisu area's archaeological survey has been completed. We even do not know what details of history, what traces of humanity, what pieces of humanity's collective memory will be lost with the construction of the dam. We cannot allow such destruction to be committed against the past, present and future of humanity. Is the Austrian government willing to bear this heavy responsibility? We know that if we do not spend enough effort to stop this project right now, tomorrow we will be seen as criminals, as socially irresponsible and insensitive people in the eyes of our children and grandchildren. Is the Austrian government willing to bear such heavy accusations that will be raised by future generations? Would the Austrian government want to be remembered and written into world history for the damage it would create for the world heritage? Is it possible that Austria's main historical sites and values can be flooded by a dam? Imagine this for Salzburg, Heidelberg, Bern! None of the Austrian citizens would ever accept it, if those places were to be flooded and some historical monuments were to be put into a museum! These are living cities! They are significant for the people – and so is Hasankeyf. Such a cultural and historical damage is unacceptable, not only in Turkey or Austria, in anywhere else on the earth.

7. **The big cities of Diyarbakir and Batman are neither socially nor economically prepared for receiving in tens of thousands of people.** The project survey of the DSI (State Water Works, 2005) shows that 77 % of the locally affected people want to resettle in these two cities if they are forced to leave their homes. Although this is hardly believable, the Ilisu Consortium or the DSI have not consulted properly with the local dynamics (municipalities and NGOs) in these cities. There was never a meeting with the mayors in Diyarbakir. Even when meetings were held with the local NGOs, the opposing views they expressed were distorted and changed in the pages of the RAP. Local dynamics also reported these distortions in the official letters they sent to the Austrian ECA. Furthermore, in the RAP, there is no mitigation plan to deal with thousands of unskilled landless displaced people. Already in the 1990s, due to the social conflict in the region, these cities received huge numbers of displaced people. These cities are still unable to solve their social, economic and infrastructural problems due to insufficient local finances, technical and human capacity and the still ongoing social tension in the region.
8. **There have been no proper and free consultations with the affected people.** In the villages, the villagers could not speak freely with the ECA representatives when there were security forces nearby. This was the case for example in the village Suceken (province Batman), when in a courtyard an older woman stopped to answer questions of the delegation members when a policeman came. Due to the ongoing social tension and conflict in the region and the accompanying persistence of the “village guard” system, freedom of expression is something very precious, yet, unfortunately, something very rarely enjoyed in the region. As you could also follow through the media, the political and social situation has recently become extremely fragile in the region, as civilians and children are being killed by bullet shots, bombs and etc. amidst the city centres in the region. Under these conditions, it is impossible to expect democratic participation and involvement

from the locally affected people and to ensure proper implementation of such a sensitive project.

9. **There is no land for those to be resettled on the basis of a land-to-land agreement!** The only relocation site that was argued to be feasible was the state farm near to Ceylanpinar (province Sanliurfa). First of all, it is not secured that this land will be available – but even more important, it is very far away and it is still very unclear how the people will be able to live and provide for their living in a half desert region. Ceylanpinar is more than 200 km to the southeast of Ilisu region!
10. **The dam counters regional sustainable development. There will be less access to water (only at 3 places) and the quality of the water will presumably derogate severely,** because it will be very difficult to maintain the water quality of the planned Ilisu dam reservoir. Already today the water quality suffers from the waste water of the cities like Diyarbakir, Batman, Siirt, Bismil. It seems very difficult that any city can have a waste water treatment plant (WWTP) with three treatment steps because of financial restraints. There is no support by the public institutions or the government. Even if the WWTPs are built in time, the eutrophication is unavoidable because of the waste water coming from the irrigation fields. Take into account that the area of irrigation is already not less and it is increasing through the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP). *How will this problem be solved?* This is not mentioned in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR).
11. **The Ilisu dam will destroy the very rich ecosystem of the Tigris valley.** After all the dams built on the Euphrates, the Tigris is one of the last remaining intact ecosystems for water bound species. This ecosystem will be destroyed and there are no adequate mitigation measures in the EIAR. The rich biodiversity will disappear irretrievably. The Tigris valley is one of the last ecosystems in Southeast/East Turkey which is intact.

On your future plans: possibility of going ahead with “conditions” would be fatal

During the site visit we had the possibility to discuss these aspects with some members of the ECA delegation. They asked us several times whether we would accept the Ilisu dam project if the resettlement is assured socially and the water quality of the Ilisu dam reservoir can be maintained by conditions given by the ECAs. For that they proposed external monitoring.

Our answer was explicitly **NO** because of the following specific reasons:

- a) The cultural heritage will disappear. The methods for the proposed relocation of some monuments in Hasankeyf are unclear, not planned out in details and seriously misleading. Does Turkey have any experience with relocation of any monument comparable to Hasankeyf. Furthermore, the planned 25 Million € will never suffice to cover costs of such a heavy and arduous task. And how is it possible to excavate the hundreds of archaeological sites with a budget of 50 Million € within seven years?
- b) The wonderful ecosystem of the Tigris valley will disappear forever. In the valley live (many) hundreds of flora and fauna species which are not determined. The EIA has not undertaken any real research in this area. In terms of environmental heritage, we do not know what will be lost.

c) Turkey has an internationally well known poor record of resettlement procedures, particularly in the project region. As also reported by foreign observers, including the UN, the experiences of recent years also did not show any improvement. The current form and terms of the DSI's and the Ilisu Consortium's engagement with the local dynamics and people do not signal any possible improvement for the future.

d) The Ilisu dam has many alternatives. If the aim is to produce energy, there are always alternatives like sun, wind, geothermal energy or saving energy in the transport lines. The latest figures suggest that the energy lost in transmission is approximately 23 % and the OECD average is only 6 %². If the aim is to develop the region, the key for a regional development without any social, cultural and ecological loss is the development of culture (and nature) tourism. And Hasankeyf is very important in this regard.

e) Turkey foresees only 100 Million € per year to support all projects in its budget. This will be never enough. How can this contradiction be solved?

Approval “under condition” is against international standards and would be highly problematic:

1. Small things can be smoothed out after approval – but this project lacks the very fundamentals. To start with the most basics: no land for resettlement has been found after months and years of planning. How could you give approval with knowing that such fundamental issues are unresolved? What we know indicates that there is no land. The very basic questions of this project are unresolved and plans non-existent and unsound. Knowing this, it is absolutely unacceptable to go on and give approval. “Conditions” will only express the naive hope, that all that must have been done in the last years and months of planning would amazingly now be resolved at the very last minute after approval, when actually, once the money has been secured, there is no pressure on the government anymore.
2. It violates both the OECD and the Worldbank standards – which you confirmed and promised repeating to comply with, if this project gets an export guarantee “approval under conditions”. There is a reason why international standards demand the basic questions to be resolved before approval.
3. There is no time to fix what has not been fixed for years after the project gets your approval. If one believes there is still time after approval - **according to the RAP expropriations already should have started in 2005!**

Doubts about the process

Three members of the ECA delegation did not come to the Ilisu region, and stayed in Ankara. Why? This poses questions for us. From several sources we heard that – as their colleagues tried to get their own impressions of the social reality in the region, these three people negotiated and already signed a contract with the DSI. Please confirm. **Is this true?** If yes, why did you visit the site while at the same time you signed a provisional agreement with

² Greenpeace Turkey also give this number in a meeting with them on 12th September in Istanbul.

DSI? What was the content of this provisional yet secret agreement? Is it already a 'yes' for the project? If this was the case, unfortunately, we have to believe that the site visit was only a farce.

As you know, the decision needs to be taken on the basis of social, environmental and cultural assessment of the Ilisu project, which the ECAs are conducting, and not because of political reasons and relations.

Will you keep your word to comply with international standards?!?

The delegation mentioned that the OECD guidelines will be the basis of decision. We believe that WCD guidelines must be applied in such a controversial and problematic project, as they provide a framework for dealing with this conflicts and problems, but **even only under OECD guidelines – which have been confirmed so often as a minimum condition, your government must say NO to this project.**

This project is in clear violation of these standards!

Furthermore we heard that in the first week of October there will be a **workshop** between the DSI/Ilisu consortium and the ECAs/European governments in order to negotiate the ‘last’ conditions for a export credit guarantee. Who will participate in this workshop, also independent people or experts? And any NGOs? Will you approve the export credit guarantee directly after the last workshop?

Do you believe really that Turkey will fulfil the terms of the negotiations and conditions which you would like to impose the DSI/Turkish government? After approving the export credit guarantee and enabling the loan, it will be very unlikely that the Turkish government will implement the conditions. This can be concluded from the experience of the last years of expropriation.

On the notion of Chinese companies:

Already during our visit to Europe in May 2006, we have been informed that the Chinese companies stepping in instead of the European consortium is a strong argument for the consortium to promote this project. As we already stated, this can not be a reason for you to violate your own guidelines, criteria and rules concerning such big projects. We expect you to decide on the basis of your own guidelines. A possible involvement of the Chinese companies is irrelevant in this respect.

With this blunt argument, European companies try to justify damaging the region and be a part of human rights violations.

Let this be our problem. We will continue to struggle against the Ilisu dam in every case.

The point is: it is equally bad if you build this dam. Don’t think of yourselves as helping the region? This project is so flawed that it makes NO difference if you will do it or any other company. Only if you do it – it will happen for sure and destroy every chance to prevent the damage. What you can be sure is that that human rights violations and damage to the people and the region are CERTAIN if you do this project.

Please be also aware that it is always (!) possible (equally to exporting weapons in violation to sanctions, dealing with plutonium, drug trafficking, support nuclear energy) to claim that others would do it in your place. **This logic is unacceptable. So it is with Ilisu.**

We must add that even if it was sure that other companies would try to build this dam after it is dropped by the European states – you would still need to act responsible for yourselves and avoid acting as an accomplice in cultural destruction, destabilization and damaging the livelihoods of thousands of people. You will be co-responsible for the damages. **It is always**

possible that someone else might do the same damage and injustice – but this can be no argument for you to do the same.

Conclusion:

What we know is: if you support this flawed project, you undermine any chance of improving this situation and obstructing this damage.

In the light of the damage that will be created by the Ilisu dam and the violation of those standards that your government promised to comply with, we urgently appeal to you not to finance this project. Through an export risk guarantee approval you would be co-responsible for the enormous social, ecological and cultural loss and destruction, and the violation of basic human rights and social values. We want to believe and see that you respect international standards on law, society, culture, history and nature.

Best regards

On behalf of the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive

Ercan Ayboga

Attachment:

Background Information - Ilisu dam

Members of the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive

Background information:

If the ILISU dam will be built, it will

- flood the ancient city Hasankeyf and hundreds of several other historical-cultural assets in the Tigris Valley where the first cultures of the humanity were cultivated.
- displace up to 55'000 people in the dam region which will intensify the economic, social and psychological problems in the cities where the majority of these people will migrate to.
- flood the wonderful, unique and irreplaceable nature in the Tigris valley, with its very rich habitat and wildlife.
- fail to improve the socio-economic living conditions in the region, as had been the case with the other dam projects in the region as well.
- not be based on a participatory framework that takes into account the views of the local stakeholders, e.g. the affected people.
- aggravate the conflicts over water with our neighbouring states. An escalation of this conflict will directly affect the people in our region.

We campaign to stop this project and for alternatives to be developed with the input of all relevant stakeholders at all stages with the aim of improving the socio-economic situation of the people in the region, developing the cultural heritage and saving the environment.

There is widespread protest in the region against the project. The Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, founded in January 2006, currently brings together a coalition of **71** organisations: Municipalities (particularly Diyarbakir and Batman, the two biggest cities in our region, and the three most affected district towns Hasankeyf, Dargecit and Kurtalan), Union of South East Anatolia Region Municipalities (GABB, with 64 member municipalities), Local Agenda 21 structures, local NGOs working on environmental, cultural and human rights issues, and professional associations – such as the Bar Associations, Unions, Chamber of Architects, Electric Engineers, Civil Engineers, Geologists and so on. Many other organisations in the region have sympathies with us. Indeed, there is hardly a sector in the region which does not have representation in the Initiative. Thus this initiative is the broadest initiative or platform in Southeast Anatolia.

Members of the “Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive”:

Union of South East Anatolia Region Municipalities
Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality
Batman Municipality
Hasankeyf Municipality, Batman
Dargecit Municipality, Mardin
Bismil Municipality, Diyarbakır
Kurtalan Municipality, Siirt
Besiri Municipality, Batman
Gercüs Municipality, Batman
Kozluk Municipality, Batman
Yenişehir Municipality, Diyarbakır
Sur Municipality, Diyarbakır
Kayapınar Municipality, Diyarbakır
Bağlar Municipality, Diyarbakır
Sırnak Municipality
Nusaybin Municipality, Mardin
Kızıltepe Municipality, Mardin
Surgücü Municipality, Mardin
Yalim Municipality, Mardin
Idil Municipality, Sırnak
Ergani Municipality, Diyarbakır
Silvan Municipality, Diyarbakır
Viranşehir Municipality, Urfa
Varto Municipality, Mus
Bulanık Municipality, Mus
Malazgirt Municipality, Mus
Rüstemgedik Municipality, Mus

Local Agenda 21, Diyarbakır
Local Agenda 21, Mardin
Local Agenda 21, Batman
Diyarbakır Immigrants’ Association for Social Cooperation and Culture (*GÖÇ-DER*)
Batman Immigrants’ Association for Social Cooperation and Culture (*GÖÇ-DER*)
Human Rights Association (*IHD*)
Foundation for the Protection and Promotion of the Environmental and Cultural Heritage (*ÇEKÜL*)
Diyarbakır Association for Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets
Association of Archaeology, Culture and Art, Diyarbakır
Selis Women’s Consultation Centre, Diyarbakır

Dikasum – Research and Application Center for Women’s Problems, Diyarbakır
Bahar Culture Centre, Batman
Eastern Scientific and Cultural Research Cooperative, Diyarbakır
Mulburry Scientific and Cultural Research Cooperative, Diyarbakır
Volunteers for Environment Association, Diyarbakır (*ÇEV-GÖN*)
Volunteers for Hasankeyf Association
Diyarbakır Democracy Platform (32 member organizations)

Batman Petroleum, Chemical, and Rubber Workers’ Union (*PETROL-İŞ*)
Union of General Laborers (Genel-İs), Batman
Union of Education, Batman
Tuhay Association, Batman
Chamber of Pharmacists, Mus-Siirt-Batman
Chamber of Turkish Doctors, Batman
Union of Food Workers, Batman
Union of Installations Laborers, Batman
Association of Nomads, Batman
Association of All Local Sub-governors (*muhtarlar*) in Batman
Union of Health and Social Service Workers (*SES*)
Union of Energy, Industry and Mining Public Laborers (*ESM*)
Union of Food Workers, Diyarbakır

Chamber of Doctors, Diyarbakır
Diyarbakır Bar Association
Batman Bar Association
Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (*TMMOB*), Diyarbakır
Chamber of Architects, Diyarbakır
Chamber of Civil Engineers, Diyarbakır
Chamber of Electric Engineers, Diyarbakır
Chamber of Environmental Engineers, Diyarbakır
Chamber of Geologists, Diyarbakır
Chamber of Urban Planners, Diyarbakır
Chamber of Mechanical Engineers, Diyarbakır
Chamber of Agricultural Engineers, Diyarbakır
Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (*TMMOB*), Diyarbakır
Chamber of Mechanical Engineers, Batman