



Press release

The implementation of the ecosystem approach should be a priority in states of Eastern Europe Partnership

Kyiv, October 04, 2019

The active development of hydropower in states of Eastern Europe Partnership carries significant risks of inevitable changes in ecosystems. Current practices of environmental impact assessment of hydropower projects do not allow for objective results. Without proper consideration of environmental impacts, the construction of new hydropower plants will only deepen the current critical state of regulated rivers and ecosystems related to them. The solution to the problem is possible by implementing the ecosystem approach in the procedures of strategic environmental assessment and environmental impact assessment.

At the conference "Ecosystem Approach to Hydropower: Prospects for Implementation in states of Eastern Partnership" held on October 4, 2019 in Kyiv, the representatives of 4 Eastern Partnership countries - Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine - as well as the European Union, analyzed the situation and the prospects of implementing an ecosystem approach to the assessment of hydropower plans, programs and projects. Special attention has been given to the problem of identification and economic assessment of river ecosystem services, their consideration for transboundary basins, as a key to successful transboundary cooperation. A thematic brochure on the ecosystem approach to hydropower, prepared with the support of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, was also presented at the conference. Except the representatives of civil society, the Conference was attended by leading Ukrainian experts in the field of water policy, scientists, representatives of large and small hydropower.

Volodymyr Bilokon, an expert from the Ministry of Environment Reforms Support Team, in his welcoming speech, emphasized the priority of water management issues in the current environmental policy and noted the lack of progress in the implementation of the ecosystem approach in Ukraine since 2010.

The ecosystem approach implemented by the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) aims at striking a balance between the three objectives: conserving biodiversity, its sustainable use and the equitable sharing of benefits from the use of natural resources. **Ruslan Havryliuk**, Head of the National Ecological Center of Ukraine: *"An ecosystem approach, unlike the classic one, has significant environmental benefits. In assessing the environmental impacts of hydropower facilities, it allows us to assess not only impacts on particular species of living organisms or territories, but also impacts on their grouping, establish relationships in ecosystems and evaluate in proper way not only direct but indirect impacts, the consequences of which may be even more significant for aquatic, coastal and wetland ecosystems. The EaP countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine – are parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, but the use of ecosystem approach remains sporadic. There is no necessary legal framework and methodological support. The European experience in ecosystem mapping and assessment of their services (MAES) is not used."*

The invited expert from Slovakia, **Ivan Matushek**, shared his negative national experience in hydropower development. The construction of the hydroelectric power station under the communist regime of the country's largest river Váh has led to its actual destruction. However, plans for the

construction of numerous hydropower plants on the second longest river in the country – the Hron – are now being carried out. The country's ecosystem approach is optional, and an objective assessment of the environmental impact of the construction of hydropower plants is impossible given the contracting and financing of such assessment by the developer. Ivan Matushek: *“In order to objectively evaluate the environmental impact of hydropower projects, it is necessary to exclude the financial dependence of the authors of the assessment on the project initiators. This can be ensured by financing such a state-mediated assessment - when the investor pays the assessment for the benefit of the state, and the state, with the help of authorised body, designates independent contractors for the environmental impact assessment.”* The expert also presented the modern possibilities of exploring the hydrological cycle of individual territories with the use of lysimeters, which opens up new opportunities in the management of river basins.

Ilya Trombitsky, Executive Director of the Eco-Tiras International Ecological Guards Association: *“Successes in transboundary management of the Dniester River basin have become possible through the active and collaborative work of NGOs of Ukraine and Moldova. However, managers still do not understand the impact of hydropower facilities. It has not only ecological but also economic nature as a result of the destruction of ecosystems and the loss of their ecosystem services. Applying an ecosystem approach as a tool for assessing the environmental impact of hydropower facilities in the context of transboundary cooperation will increase trust between the parties to the basin, deepen and enhance cooperation.”*

Armenia has pledged to implement the ecosystem approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Armenian NGOs have proposed to apply an ecosystem approach to determine the modes of environmental indulgences at hydropower facilities. **Aram Gabrielyan**, Ecological and Cultural NGO Khazer: *“In Armenia, thanks to the small hydropower development program, there are 188 small hydropower plants that produce about 11% of the country's electricity. However, because of such a surge in their construction, natural river ecosystems in Armenia have been lost. The small hydroelectric power station is guaranteed a high tariff for the sale of electricity, but in no way compensates for the loss of ecosystems. Hydropower entities must pay for the cost of ecosystem services lost as a result of their activities.”*

Deep changes in ecosystems under the influence of hydropower have been investigated on the example of Azerbaijan. **Elchin Sultanov**, Director of the Azerbaijan Ornithological Society: *“The thoughtless management of water resources in Azerbaijan, the regulation of rivers such as Kura and Araz have led to the loss of a number of valuable wetlands in their floodplains. As a result, the ornithological environment has been changed dramatically, the populations of wintering bird species decreased considerably.”*

The rivers of the Ukrainian Carpathians are already under the influence of hydropower, but, for the last decade, the plans for mass construction of small hydroelectric power plants in region have been emerging. The implementation of the environmental impact assessment procedure in accordance with European standards allowed the public to have free access to the materials of such assessment. Their analysis confirmed the absence of even minimal consideration of ecosystem impacts when designing small hydropower plants. **Oksana Stankevych-Volosianchuk**, NGO Ecosphere (Uzhgorod): *“The term “ecosystem services” is new for Ukrainian legislation. However, in order to adequately assess the environmental impact of any activity, it is necessary to identify and evaluate the ecosystem services in monetary terms that are still considered free of charge.”*

Expert of the National Ecological Center of Ukraine **Galyna Protsiv** stresses the need to preserve the ecosystems of small rivers, which, in particular, form the ecosystem of large rivers: *“The main part of the Dniester drainage, up to 4/5, is formed at the top of the basin. Many small hydroelectric power plants are located here on its tributaries, and plans for the construction of new small hydropower facilities are being pushed. It is necessary to impose a moratorium on such activities, to carry out a strategic environmental assessment of the small hydropower development plan in the Dniester basin, taking into*

account the ecosystem approach with the calculation of losses of ecosystem services and comparison with the benefits declared by developers."

The participants of the conference are preparing proposals to the governments of their countries for the implementation of the ecosystem approach in the assessment of hydropower plans, programs and projects.

The National Environmental Center of Ukraine as part of the project held the conference "*Ecosystem approach to hydropower: facilitating the implementation of European requirements to development of hydropower sector in states of Eastern Europe Partnership*".



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