

Press release

## Implementation of Ecosystem Approach to Hydropower Development in the States of Eastern Partnership

Kyiv, December 23, 2019

Hydropower in the Eastern Partnership countries is currently an important part of national energy systems and plays a leading role in ensuring the energy security of countries. Hydropower has certain advantages among which: generation of electricity without fossil fuels, zero air pollution from combustion products and carbon emissions during the operation of hydropower plants; the use of domestic renewable energy sources and no dependence on imports of fossil fuels; possibility to cover peak loads in the power system.

However, river regulation, due to the construction of hydroelectric power stations, has led to a significant degradation of ecosystems, the restoration of which is virtually impossible. This applies in particular to rivers such as the Dnipro, Dniester, Kura, Razdan, Vorotan and others. The modern plans for the construction of hydroelectric and hydroelectric pumped storage power plants, in the wake of countries' transition to renewable energy sources, threaten the destruction of river ecosystems, which, by contrast, require careful attention to their conservation, count the increasing value of water resources and ecosystems. The situation is complicated by the lack of a mechanism for objectively assessing the environmental impact of hydropower plans and projects.

Within the framework of the project "Ecosystem Approach to Hydropower: Promoting the Implementation of European Requirements for the Development of Hydropower in the Eastern Partnership Countries", with the support of the European Union, proposals have been developed to implement the ecosystem approach in the procedures of strategic environmental assessment and environmental impact assessment of hydropower plants, programs and projects. Project participants - NGOs from 4 EaP countries - Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine, prepared **an analytical document** dedicated to the implementation of ecosystem approach and assessment of ecosystem services. The project attracted the attention of civil society and was recognized as the best project of 2019, which is being implemented within the framework of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum activities.

**Ruslan Havryliuk**, Head of the National Ecological Center of Ukraine, project coordinator, emphasizes: "The status of the waterways is the key question for most regions of the world today. The EaP countries are no exception. Regulation plays the decisive role in the deterioration of surface water quality, including hydropower purposes. Therefore, the further development of hydropower requires a careful assessment of the environmental impact that is currently absent in the EaP countries, and in Ukraine in particular. Existing strategic environmental and environmental impact assessment practices focus mainly on the impacts on particular species of living organisms within certain habitats and do not provide an objective environmental impact assessment in view of ecosystem impact. In the EaP countries, there is no legal and methodological basis for the application of the ecosystem approach in the environmental impact assessment of hydropower plans, programs and projects. The ecosystem services of rivers remain largely undervalued, leading to their losses in the implementation of hydropower projects. Applying the ecosystem approach – identifying and evaluating of ecosystems and their services, preventing their

changes and losses due to hydropower impacts – is a tool for creating a balanced hydropower industry".

**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."*

**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. Research shows that birds can serve as a good indicator of aquatic ecosystem efficiency, and this instrument is low-cost, doesn't require sophisticated equipment and further lab work"*.

**Oksana Stankevych-Volosianchuk**, NGO Ecosphere (Uzhgorod): *"The rivers of the Ukrainian Carpathians are threatened with mass construction of small hydroelectric power plants. 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. The ecosystem services, which are still considered free of charge, should be identified and monitored in monetary terms to adequately assess the environmental impact of any activity"*.

Expert of the National Ecological Center of Ukraine **Galyna Protsiv** stresses that we lost most of the small rivers due to the significant anthropogenic influence (lining and overregulation of river beds, deforestation in water protection zones, construction of coastal shelter belts, pollution by raw sewage, construction and operation of hazardous facilities, hydropower, etc.), which has only grown in recent decades. The degradation of small river basins through the construction of hydropower facilities and existing hydropower facilities cause the death of a large river. If the small rivers – capillaries of the whole stream flow, are healthy, then the big river, like the circulatory system of the whole basin, will be healthy. Rivers are the blood of the Earth! Our task is to protect the smallest river basin from hydropower construction.

Also, one of the NECU experts **Dmytro Ivanov** rightly noted that the environmental impact assessment report of Kahovska HPP-2 is a clear example of ignoring the ecosystem approach.

The press-conference was held by the National Environmental Center of Ukraine within the framework of the project "Ecosystem Approach to Hydropower: Promoting the Implementation of European Requirements for the Development of Hydropower in the EaP Countries".



The project is being implemented through the Scheme of the 2019 Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Re-granting Scheme, with financial support from the European Union in support of civil society in the region. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the National Environmental Center of Ukraine and the project partners and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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