



Report on the current status of the Ilisu Dam and Hydroelectric Power Plant Project and the counter campaigns

Destruction and Resistance in Hasankeyf and at Tigris

Since its initiation the Ilisu Dam and Hydroelectric Power Plant Project is highly controversial both at the ground at the Tigris in the Kurdistan region of the Republic of Turkey and in whole basin up to the Mesopotamian Marshes in South Iraq. Recently the Turkish government announced recently that on 10th June 2019 it will start filling the Ilisu Dam reservoir which is nearing completion. This paper gives an overview about the expected grave social, cultural and ecological impacts and the ongoing counter struggles at local, regional and international level which have the hope to stop it.

Introduction

The Ilisu Project on the river Tigris is the largest hydroelectric power plant and/or dam planned or under construction by the Turkish government. Initiated in 1997, it is a key part of the large scale 'Southeastern Anatolia Project' (GAP) in the mainly Kurdish populated Southeast of the Turkish state. GAP consists of 22 large dams with a capacity of 8000 MW and the planned irrigation of 1.8 Mio. Ha. land. The 1,200 MW and 2 Billion Ilisu Euro project with a height of 138 m would flood the Tigris on a stretch of 136 km and an area of 313 km².

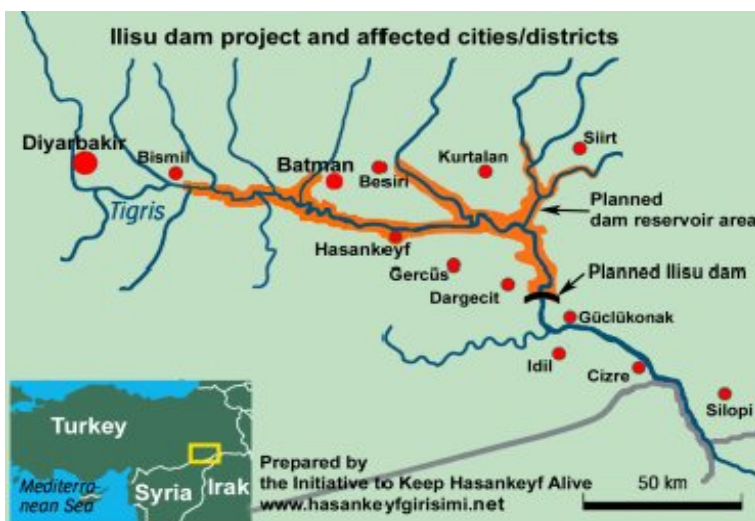


Image 1: Map of the area affected by the Ilisu Project; source: Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive (HYG)

The first Ilisu Consortium collapsed in 2002, but was revived in 2005 with the involvement of German, Swiss and Austrian companies which applied for export credit guarantees in their states. In the following years, the involvement of European companies, banks and governments was highly contested until, in July 2009, the Export Credit Agencies (ECA) of Germany, Austria and Switzerland made an unprecedented step by suspending the credit guarantees due to the Turkish failure to comply with required environmental, social and cultural heritage conditions accompanied by strong international

protests. However, the Turkish government organized new financing with loans from three Turkish banks and started the construction of the project in March 2010. In the Ilisu consortium remained only one international company: Andritz from Austria.

Impacts on people, culture and nature

According to official statements in 2005, the Ilisu dam reservoir would completely or partially flood 199 villages and the ancient city of Hasankeyf, with a population of 55,000 people. 23,000 people are not counted because they were forced to leave in the 90s when 80 of the affected villages have been evacuated forcibly by the Turkish Army. Additionally up to 3,000 nomadic families, who use the Tigris River, would suffer directly. Thus in fact around 100.000 people are affected. The vast majority is Kurdish, while half Hasankeyf's population is Arabic. Until the Armenian-Syriac genocide during World War 1 an important part of Hasankeyf and some villages were Syriac. More than 40% of the affected people do not own land and do not get any compensation; they will lose almost everything. For the other small villagers the expropriation rate is low and there is neither

proper land for resettlement nor are there other income compensation measures that have been set in place as yet. The affected people face the loss of their livelihoods and culture, the disruption of their homeland and family structures and a future in poverty in cities. Considering that Kurds – actually all non-Turks - are still facing systematic assimilation by a nationalist Turkish state policy, the Ilisu Project will intensify assimilation of the Kurds. The Turkish government’s centralist behavior has no space for any participation for the affected people, civil organizations and affected municipalities. Everything has been planned and implemented in Ankara by the DSI (State Water Works), the project owner on behalf of the Turkish government. At local/regional level only some big land owners and some local companies would benefit financially.

The Ilisu Project is situated in Upper Mesopotamia, the ‘cradle of civilization’ where the first human settlements developed. The Ilisu Project would affect more than 400 archaeological sites – the whole affected area has not yet been surveyed completely. To date only in around 20 sites excavations have been done. The 12,000 year old town of Hasankeyf that uniquely merges a rich and historic cultural heritage with an important biologically diverse environment would be flooded by the Ilisu reservoir. Also due to the fact that it has been inhabited uninterruptedly it is why Hasankeyf has become the symbol of the struggle against the Ilisu Project. Hasankeyf was on the Silk Road for centuries, one of the larger regional cities in medieval times and includes traces of 20 different eastern and western cultures, several hundreds of monuments and up to 5,500 human-made caves. It is a large area and needs careful excavation for dozens of years. Hasankeyf and the surrounding Tigris Valley fulfill nine out of ten UNESCO world heritage criteria according to independent expert research¹, but no application to UNESCO has been done by the Turkish government. Rather the fact that Hasankeyf is declared a First Degree Archaeological Site by Turkey’s Supreme Board of Monuments in 1978, is used by the government to impede any urban development or investment for planned and sustainable tourism. While in the 70s up to 10,000 people lived in Hasankeyf, today Hasankeyf is with 3000 inhabitants is officially one of the poorest districts of Turkey.

The Ilisu Project is a large intervention into the geography of Upper Mesopotamia and would flood up to 400 km of precious riverine habitat which is home for many species like the endangered Euphrates Soft-Shell Turtle. The Tigris river stretches are ecologically still very valuable and very crucial for the whole ecology of the region. For example Hasankeyf is home to at least 123 birds. The regional climate would also change as it happened with the Euphrates River Basin where after the construction of five large dams also the traditional agriculture experienced some serious negative impacts. As only some researches have been done in the Tigris Valley up to the present time we do not know really what would be lost. The water quality of the reservoir is expected to be extremely low, leading to massive fish extermination, and threatening people’s health. Further downstream the decreased water flow will have a negative effect upon the Mesopotamian Marshes in Iraq – the largest wetland of the Middle East and an UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Images 2 and 3: Soft Shell Turtle, source: HYG; Marsh Arabs in the South Iraqi Marshes, source STC

¹ See report: <http://www.dogadernegi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Outstanding-universal-value-of-hasankeyf-and-the-tigris-valley.pdf>

Syria and particularly Iraq rely on the water of the Tigris River, which is the vital source for agriculture and water supply to urban centres for thousands of years. International conventions (like 1997 UN Convention on the Law of Non-Navigable Use of International Watercourses) and law require mutual agreements between Turkey, Iraq and Syria; but Turkey has not signed them. Rather Turkey imposes bilateral agreements like it is the case with Iraqi government in these years. The needs of people and nature are not considered and it gives no guarantee that Turkey will not use water as a weapon against the people of Iraq.

How Turkey uses dams as a weapon can be determined currently in the case of Democratic Federation of Northeast Syria which has been liberated by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) during the ongoing Syrian War. Because Turkey is hostile to Northeast Syria, since 2016 it cuts regularly the Euphrates flow which decreases significantly power generation, irrigation and drinking water supply. Thus Turkey violates a bilateral Turkish-Syrian agreement from 1987 in which it committed to release at least 500 m³/s at the border.

Developments since the start of construction in 2010

Four Turkish companies (mainly Cengiz and NuroI) and Andritz as consortium leaser received loans from the public Halkbank and the private Akbank and Garantibank. It is assumed that the Turkish government has taken the role of the export credit agencies and covers the financial risks. A campaign against the two private Turkish banks in 2010 was the first bank campaign conducted by civil society against banks, but was not successful in changing their support for the dam project.

In the summer 2010, the construction of New-Hasankeyf, a new town located 2 km north of Hasankeyf, has started. In the summer of 2012, the three tunnels for the diversion of the Tigris were completed and the conditions for beginning of the construction of the dam body were fulfilled.

In January 2013, as a result of a file suit initiated by the Union of Chambers of Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) the administrative court of Ankara decided to halt the Ilisu Project until the missing Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was conducted. However, the government changed the laws in such a way that after three months the construction could continue – until today no EIA exists. In the summer of 2014, the Kurdish PKK Guerrilla kidnapped two heads of workers companies, which stopped the construction for four months. In June 2015, the workers organized a strike at the dam site after they had been attacked by private security forces during negotiations on their working conditions, which lasted until November 2015. In order not to have protests at the dam construction site again, since end of 2015, the vast majority of the workers comes from far away provinces, they live at the construction site and have no connection to the local people.

The renewed armed conflict in Turkish-Kurdistan in 2015 allowed the government to suppress all forms of protests. The increased repression also limited the campaign against the Ilisu Project, which was revived in beginning 2015 by the HYG and Mesopotamian Ecology Movement, a new umbrella ecology movement, and had its peak in the first Global Hasankeyf Action Day on Sept. 20, 2015. In 2015 in total six demonstrations have been done in and around Hasankeyf, legal cases have been filed and activists as well affected people raised hope for a strong resistance.

The government employed hundreds of additional people as ‘village guards’ and armed them for the ‘security’ of the Ilisu Dam site which is situated close to areas contested since the 1980s between the Turkish Army and the PKK Guerrilla. Thousands of ‘security forces’ around the dam site are involved in ongoing military operations; since 2015 many areas around Hasankeyf and Ilisu have been declared as military no-go areas. The militarization has reached such a level that it has become impossible to visit the site as independent researcher. The state of emergency declared in July 2016 has made it almost impossible to express critic via manifestations or other actions in the public.

Since 2016 Turkish government officials declare regularly that the Ilisu Project had achieved 97², 98 or 99 % completion and the start of filling the dam reservoir would start “in some months” or “next year”. But until now it has not happened and it is unclear whether after the construction of dam body the hydroelectric power plant is ready to operate. Also the last of the three diversion tunnels can be closed soon – an act of challenge which is also necessary before impoundment.

² See news in the newspaper Star: <http://www.star.com.tr/politika/hasankeyfe-tarihi-dokunus-haber-1251112/>

Another point is that the large bridge 2 km east of Hasankeyf town - crucial for the regional traffic – has been completed only for two-thirds. Other pre-conditions for impounding are resettlement issues and relocation of monuments from Hasankeyf.

Another important issue is the position of the Iraqi government which could bring the issue to the global agenda. While in the past sometimes the Iraqi governments criticized openly Turkey because of Ilisu and other Tigris related issues, since 2016/2017 the approach seems to change. After several meetings on the Tigris River in the last years³ the Turkish government has declared several times that Iraq would not suffer when the filling of the dam reservoir takes place⁴. It seems that the Iraqi government seeks for an agreement with Turkey which ensures a bit more water flow during filling process and regulation of minimum water flows afterwards. This is done without any discussions with the Iraqi society because the rights of Iraqi people will be violated when the Ilisu project starts to impound whatever measures are taken. In this sense in June 2018 the Turkish embassy to Iraq declared that Turkey will increase the minimum flow to Iraq from 60 to 90 m³/s which is very low considering that the average flow is around 500 m³/s at the Turkish-Iraqi border⁵.

In beginning of June 2018 in Iraq a big debate started when the water levels of the Tigris River fell to an historic minimum. Turkey was accused as it had started the filling of the Ilisu dam reservoir. This was not the case. But the first main reason is that in winter 2018 in the mountains of Kurdistan was a low snowfall and in general a low precipitation for two years. This is part of a development since end of 90s when the climate change has become experienced directly in the Mesopotamia basin. The second reason is the wrong water policies of Turkey and Iraq which favor big water infrastructure projects. Another cause is the deforestation of the mountains of Kurdistan, particularly after World War 2.



Image 4: Ilisu Dam Site; source: Dogru Haber 6.3.2019,

During the campaign for the local election in Turkey the Turkish president announced the start of the filling of Ilisu reservoir on June 10, 2019⁶. Normally it does not make sense to start filling of dam reservoirs in June because the main water flow is in the months March and April. But in winter 2019 the precipitation achieved extreme numbers and still in end of May the flow levels are very high. According to official statements the filling will take between 6 and 24 months, depending on the water flow.

³ See for comment on one meeting in March 2017: <http://www.savethetigris.org/the-iraqi-minister-of-water-resources-comments-on-ilisu-dam-a-positive-or-negative-development/>

⁴ See DSI website: <http://www.dsi.gov.tr/haberler/2017/06/22/bakan-ero%C4%9Flu-medeniyetler-diyar%C4%B1-hasankeyf-te-ifar-a%C3%A7t%C4%B1>

⁵ See Milliyet, 10.06.2018: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/komsu-susuz-birakilmayacak-siyaset-2685846/>

⁶ See DHA, 07.03.2019: <https://www.dha.com.tr/politika/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-su-anda-avukatlarimigorevlendirdim/haber-1630600>

Expropriation and resettlement

While the construction of the Ilisu project officially costs 1.2 Billion Euros, the resettlement (expropriation, resettlement, new infrastructure etc.) roughly requires another 800 Million Euros. The expropriation in the 200 affected settlements started mainly in 2012. Apart from the Ilisu village, resettled in October 2010, and Hasankeyf there is a planned resettlement for two more villages. All other people – except the landless people - get cash and select their new residence. The chamber of Agricultural Engineers of Batman declared that 80 % of the paid compensation went to investments outside of Batman which confirms the long expressed concern that people will seek work and live far away.⁷ In spring 2019, there are still a few hundred households which have not accepted the proposed compensation amount and have appealed the court. In Hasankeyf, in 2012 and 2013, the population twice organized demonstrations for their rights in the expropriation and resettlement process because it is based on laws which do not much consider rights, it has not been transparent and promises were not held.

Those inhabitants who have agreed to New-Hasankeyf are faced with huge debts. The prices for the new apartments are two to three times higher than expropriation amounts received for their current homes. The mayor of Hasankeyf stated on this issue that less than 5 % of the people have the money to pay the new apartments in once step with the expropriation amount. The DSI has excluded two third of the applicants from Hasankeyf for the new apartments in New-Hasankeyf. Inhabitants from a village at the river directly in front of Hasankeyf have been refused to get new apartments in New Hasankeyf. There are rumors that in New Hasankeyf additional hundreds apartment could be build and sold to richer people from other regions. This may lead to a new social composition in New-Hasankeyf and thus social conflicts.

The residents of Hasankeyf claim that the quality of the new buildings is very low and already now the deficiencies can be observed at the buildings in construction. The concerned residents state that the reason for these damages is the high speed of the construction. It is obvious that with the poor construction the socio-economic risks for them will raise significantly.

However, the situation exploded in 2018. In end of 2017, government officials announced that the shop owners of Hasankeyf should move to new shop buildings constructed New Hasankeyf in March 2018 while the inhabitants were still living in Hasankeyf. Because the new houses in New Hasankeyf were far from completion an expected protest has been organized by shop owners and family members. Although carrying Turkish flags for being not accused as terrorists the people have been attacked by police. Due to big public interest the government stepped back and confirmed to resettle shops together with residents. The houses, which actually should be completed in summer 2018, are still under construction and it is unclear whether the resettlement could be done in June 2019 as announced recently by officials in beginning of May.

The villagers of Suceken, 12 km west of Hasankeyf, protested for years to get land at an upper location of their current village in order they can build new houses there instead to move to big cities. After years of protests and trials recently they could achieve a certain success. But the construction has not started yet. Another village close to Hasankeyf, called Urganli, does not accept the location of the new conditions for start of construction of their new village⁸.

Destruction and relocation of Cultural Heritage

The significance of the cultural heritage of the region largely stems from the unique natural environment in which it resides. For many years the Turkish government claimed that with the creation of a cultural park adjacent to New-Hasankeyf, the cultural heritage of Hasankeyf would be rescued. This was criticized since beginning by civil campaigners. But the “rescue” projects done in Hasankeyf in last years have clearly revealed however that this claim was nothing but empty words. In 2015, the three pillars of the antique bridge over the Tigris was started to be covered with new stones. This has been described as a restoration and conservation measure in order it can be conserved for the time of under water and after dam operation period it could be exposed. This is not clear whether it will work, but already this act is an irreparable damage of the bridge.

⁷ See: <http://www.batmancagdas.com/gundem/batmana-800-milyon-tl-istimlak-parasi-2-h51500.html>

⁸ See Batman Cagdas, 15.04.2019: <http://www.batmancagdas.com/gundem/koyluler-kuraya-katilmadi-h62959.html>

The official claim of rescuing Hasankeyf consists mainly in the relocation of seven monuments to the ‘Hasankeyf Cultural Park’. The preparation for the relocation of the first one, the Zeynel Bey Tomb, started in 2015. The whole process of the relocation was hidden from the public and had no participation by stakeholders, violating existing laws, particularly the tendering and contracting process. With the participation of the Dutch company Bresser Eurasia, the Turkish Er-Bu Insaat could finally relocate the Zeynel Bey Tomb on May 12, 2017. Considering that there is globally no similar relocation experience of a monument of such an age (550 years old) with binding agent technology and the monument is very fragile and in poor condition (there are splits in the cupola) it was a very risky action. Still the monuments stays in its new location, but as no independent experts could examine the monument it is unclear what kind of damage it experienced.



Image 5: Zeynel Bey Tomb during relocation in May 2017; source: DSI

The National Geographic French journalist Mathias Depardon was working on the case of the Zeynel Bey Tomb, but arrested in Hasankeyf on 5th May 2017 when he was working on a long story on the cultural heritage of Hasankeyf. He was expelled by the Turkish government to France some weeks later.⁹

A new step in the physical intervention and destruction of the cultural heritage of Hasankeyf has started around August 10, 2017. The DSI commissioned a company with the demolishing of rocks using explosives. Bringing down rocks from the Castle Rock and its surrounding valley has started with the official aim to consolidate them for the time after the planned impounding of the dam reservoir and subsequent development of tourism. Other planned combined measures are the filling of 210 human-carved caves in the rock castle area as well as the construction of a filled and concrete embankment dam around the Castle Rock, which would stick out from the planned dam reservoir. This destruction, documented by videos and pictures, has sparked ire from people and organizations from the region and all over Turkey¹⁰. Because of broad public criticism, the governor of Batman province and DSI stated that no explosives have been used and the objective is to protect civilians from falling rocks. Furthermore locals stated that the explosives created fear among the population of Hasankeyf, particularly children. They hold that the alleged ‘constituting danger by rocks’ has the real aim to drive out the people and artisans of Hasankeyf and particularly to have enough debris for the planned ‘antique’ harbour which would be central for the planned tourism of the Castle Rock. This approach shows once more how thousands of years of human ingenuity is being destroyed for a short-lived power project.

In 2018 the relocation of more monuments from Hasankeyf to New Hasankeyf continued for what a special bridge has been constructed which led to fish extinction in the Tigris. In August 2018 the Artuklu Bath has been relocated, again with Bresser’s contribution. In the following two months the Imam Abdullah Tomb and Middle Gate to Castle Rock have followed. In April 2019 officials said that until July 2019 the Kızlar Mosque, the minaret of the Sultan Süleyman Koç Mosque and the El

⁹ See statement of several civil organizations on the arrest of M. Depardon: <http://www.hasankeyfgirisimi.net/?p=449>

¹⁰ See statement of Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive: <http://www.hasankeyfgirisimi.net/?p=512>

Rizk Mosque would be cut and relocated to the cultural park area in New Hasankeyf¹¹. Apart from the bridge one more monument has been covered by stones as a ‘restoration and rescue’ work. However, despite these so called ‘rescue projects’ several hundred monuments would be submerged and with time under water destroyed. Now the relocated seven monuments are situated close to each other what they have not done for hundreds of years and disconnected from the original environment. That is why it is a museum and nothing more.



Images 6+7: Destruction of one rocks piece in mid of August 2017; Heavy equipment working with debris; source HYG

In 2019 the dam around the Castle Rock has been completed and rises into the landscape of Hasankeyf. Its official aim is to ‘consolidate’ the Castle Rock which would be destroyed by surrounding water by time as it is composed by chalk. This chalk was the reason for the fascinating morphology of the Tigris Valley.



Image 8: The new dam around the Castle Rock; source Hasankeyf Matters

The excavations in Hasankeyf date to the 80’ies. All excavating experts highlight that several dozen more years are necessary for a sufficient and scientific research in order to understand the outstanding universal value of Hasankeyf in a comprehensive way. Excavations from the last few years – obelisks have been founded - indicate that Hasankeyf is the twin of Göbeklitepe, 225 km westwards close to Urfa, the oldest temple/settlement of human history.¹² Like Göbeklitepe Hasankeyf could contribute to a better understanding of first human settling in history.

¹¹ See Batman Cagdas, 14.04.2019: <http://www.batmanacagdas.com/gundem/diclede-su-duracak-h62930.html>

¹² See news in the newspaper Evrensel: <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/263606/hasankeyf-hoyugu-tartismalari-devam-ediyor>

Campaigns against the Ilisu Project

Founded in January 2006, the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive (HYG) currently brings together a coalition of 88 organisations: Activists, local ecological, cultural, women and human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs), professional associations, trade unions and affected municipalities. The aim is to stop the Ilisu Project and pursue the aim of improving the socio-economic situation of locals, developing cultural heritage and saving the nature through the direct and democratic input of all relevant stakeholders at all stages. Since the first days of its foundation, the initiative has worked on different dimensions like informing affected people, public actions, camps, conferences, surveys, reports, trials and coalitions with other civil society organizations in Turkey and abroad. In 2015, the activities were again spreading, but the ongoing war has limited actions and impacts. The initiative is the longest and strongest campaign against the Ilisu Project.

Between 2007 and 2013, the Istanbul based environmental organization 'Doga Dernegi' (www.dogadernegi.org) carried out a Hasankeyf campaign. For several years, the campaign could achieve serious interest, also in Western Turkey. In 2009, the famous Turkish singer Tarkan joined some activities for Hasankeyf and in 2012/2013 dam activists from Brazil and South Iraq came to Hasankeyf and Ilisu in order to join activities and protests.

Between 2006 and 2010, there was a strong cooperation between the campaigns in Turkey and a number of organizations in Europe, mainly organized as the Ilisu Dam Campaign (www.stopilisu.com), particularly targeting the European financing of the Ilisu project. In at least six states of Europe several action days were organized against the governments, banks or companies with the involvement of dozens of civil organizations and hundreds of people. The media coverage was high over several years.

Between 2009 and 2011, there were several initiatives, which the HYG joined, to form a Turkey wide coalition on dams, rivers and water of local struggles. Several common demonstrations were organized in Ankara and Istanbul and common actions days have been initiated.

In 2011, the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive joined the session of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and presented the Ilisu case. The critical recommendations by this UN Committee have not been taken into account by the Turkish government. Turkey showed the same behavior when in 2015 the Save the Tigris and Iraqi Marshes Campaign submitted the Ilisu case from an Iraqi perspective.¹³

The Save the Tigris Campaign (STC; www.savethetigris.org) was created in July 2012 with a focus on Iraq by Iraqi and other organizations including the HYG. The focus is on the right to water in Iraq which includes rejection of the Ilisu Dam as well as other destructive large dams in Turkey and Iran. The campaign aims to raise awareness all over Iraq and pressure on the Iraqi government which acts weakly against dams violating the water rights of Iraqi people.¹⁴

Since 2012, Hasankeyf Matters (www.hasankeyfmatters.com), a group of volunteers from Istanbul and Batman, is involved in the campaign. It focuses on the conservation of the cultural heritage of Hasankeyf.

In 2015, the Mesopotamian Ecology Movement, a new broad movement of ecological oriented activists and organizations in Turkish-Kurdistan, joined the campaign against the Ilisu Project. In 2015 only, more than five demonstrations were organized together with the HYG, two of them in Dargecit, the town next to the dam site. On September 20, 2015 the 1st Global Hasankeyf Action day was organized.¹⁵ The 2nd Global Action Day took place on September 23, 2017.

In March 2016, with the important role of Hasankeyf Matters and the support of the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, Europa Nostra selected Hasankeyf as one of the 7 threatened cultural sites of Europe. With the declared state of emergency Europa Nostra decided to step back from any action and statement for Hasankeyf.

¹³ See statement of the STC: <http://www.hasankeyfgirisimi.net/?p=303>

¹⁴ See for example this statement from 2015: <http://www.hasankeyfgirisimi.net/?p=167>

¹⁵ See statement on the actions: <http://www.hasankeyfgirisimi.net/?p=284>



Images 9+10: 1st Global Hasankeyf Action Day, 20.09.2015, Hasankeyf; source: Hasankeyf Matters and HYG

In May 2016, an international symposium was organized in Batman by the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive. Apart from raising public interest, the discussions centered around the questions whether and how the struggle can be intensified and how an UNESCO process could be initiated. Both this initiative and the Europa Nostra process came to a standstill when in July 2016 the state of emergency was declared in Turkey just after the failed military coup.

In the days after the military coup attempt in July 2016, a counterforum meeting was organized by dozens of civil organizations (including HYG) in Istanbul where the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (WHC) held its 40th session. Critic was raised in a state where the state systematically destroys cultural and natural heritage.¹⁶ Paradoxically, at this session the Marshlands in South Iraq were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List without questioning the Ilisu Project.

In spring 2017, in Iran several environmental groups started a signature campaign directed to the UN General Secretary with the request to act against the Ilisu Project¹⁷. The petition, signed by more than 150.000 people, brings forth the argument that the drying out of the marshes in South Iraq will increase the sand storms in South Iran which increased in the last three years.

On June 28, 2017 several organizations based in the Netherlands and the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive conducted a protest against the Dutch company Bresser, a small to medium-size Dutch enterprise, at its headquarter close to Rotterdam¹⁸. Just one month later a complaint has been initiated at the Dutch NCP for the OECD Guidelines which in August 2018 has concluded that Bresser has not fully met the expectations and satisfied the due diligence criteria of the OECD Guidelines.” in the project to relocate the Zeynel Bey Tomb, in Hasankeyf, in Southeastern Turkey. Unfortunately this has not changed in a positive way the involvement of Bresser in Hasankeyf. It continued to contribute to destruction in Hasankeyf.

On September 20, 2017, in the 2nd Global Action Day for Hasankeyf in more than 15 cities actions have been done, only four actions in Iraq. This was the result of the growing struggle in 2015, it raised again the hope to stop the Ilisu Dam. But political repression impeded it.

On April 28, 2018 a new action day has been conducted, but this time in the focus was also Sur, the old city of Diyarbakir (Amed). Actions in almost 20 cities have been realized which include 6 Kurdish and Turkish cities.

In Spring 2018 a new network of ecology struggles has been created with Ecology Union where the the HYG plays a vital role.

On April 6-8, 2019 after long preparation the 1st Mesopotamian Water Forum has been done in Silemanî, in Iraqi Kurdistan. The HYG, MEM and Hasankeyf Matters and dozen of other civil organisations came together to discuss and develop principles for a new democratic and ecological water policy in Mesopotamia.

¹⁶ See call for the Unesco Counterforum: <http://www.hasankeyfgirisimi.net/?p=391>

¹⁷ See Link for campaign: <https://www.change.org/p/mr-ant%C3%B3nio-guterres-secretary-general-of-the-united-nations-safeguarding-hoor-al-azim-lagoon>

¹⁸ See statement and pictures for protest against Bresser: <http://www.hasankeyfgirisimi.net/?p=470>



Images 11+12: Actions days for Hasankeyf, 2017 and 2018, source: HYG

Trials on Ilisu

Since 1999, a number of court trials have been initiated against the Ilisu Project. None were successful in canceling the Ilisu Project and almost all have been completed. Within Turkey the first large trial started in 1999 and included the right of access to cultural heritage. It came to an end in 2010 and allowed the continuation of the project based on the reason that Ilisu is a project of high public interest although significant cultural heritage would be damaged. Another legal process was issued by the Union of Chambers of Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) because of the lack of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). After some achievements in some trials, the administrative court of Ankara decided to halt Ilisu due to the lack of an EIA in January 2013; but three months later the construction continued. The government has not complied with this ruling though. In 2006 and 2007 under the coordination of the HYG several small lawsuits have been filed by locals contesting the expropriation of their lands on grounds of state of emergency, which became the standard for Ilisu. They have been refused.

In 2015, suits were filed against a decree on the planned relocation of the people of Hasankeyf. It led to a new and partly improved decree in 2016. In 2016, the complaint by the HYG against the relocation of the Zeynel Bey Tomb was rejected within a few months.

In 2006, a complaint at the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) by four individuals has been initiated. 13 years later in February 2019, the ECHR has rejected the appeal for conserving the archaeological site Hasankeyf and the surrounding Tigris Valley with the argumentation that there is not a universal individual right of access to cultural heritage in the convention of the European Convention on Human Rights agreed between the member states.

Final words

The 20 years long struggle against the Ilisu Project has achieved a critical status after the Turkish government could complete most construction works. Despite announcement for filling the dam reservoir, the counter campaign has not lost the hope and will to stop one of the world most controversial dams. We do not know whether the filling will start in June 2019, but what we know is that it is a duty to fight until the last moment against this project of destruction, exploitation and conflict. Indeed in the world there are a number of completed large projects – some were more expansive than Ilisu - which never have become operated due to public and civil protest. This is also possible in this case!

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