

## Letter to the Editor

### *On the Danube water project*

*Prof. Igor Mucha, with Groundwater Consulting Ltd. in Bratislava, Slovakia, sent us the following letter in response to our National Economy section on Jan. 6.*

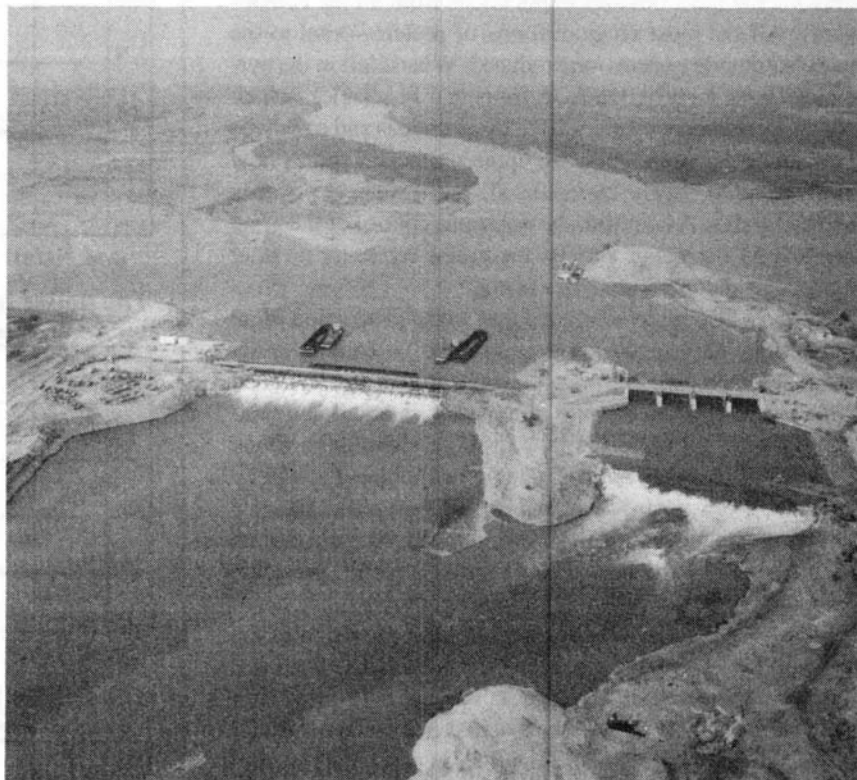
Dear Sirs:

I would like to add some remarks and clarifications to Mr. Hartmann's article on the Gabčíkovo water power plant and the World Wide Fund for Nature.

First of all, it is not quite true, that the proposals of the International Monitoring Commission, of which I was a member, are identical to what the Slovakian and also Hungarian engineers proposed. These engineers have always proposed, and still do, that Hungary agree to use the structures at Dunakiliti, Hungary, which have been completed and left idle ever since the Hungarian Parliament decided to stop its cooperation in the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros project, at least partially for the water supply of the inundation area on the Hungarian side.

These structures include facilities for the inundation of the Danube floodplain on the Hungarian side of the river, which, in addition, would allow the river branches to interconnect with the Danube at several locations. Such operation of these structures would have similar and even better effects on the floodplain and river branches on the Hungarian side of the Danube than the operation of the structures at Dobrohost has on Slovak territory. They simply have not been put into operation. Doing so would enable Slovakia to use the provisional structures in coordination with the Dunakiliti facilities.

The proposals made by the International Monitoring Commission are premised on the fact that it is impossible to use the Dunakiliti structures, unless Hungary agrees to it, which, unfortunately for the time being, is unlikely. Therefore, we had to look for a compromise. We still hope that the Hungarian side will, at some point, agree to what we believe is the better solution, i.e., to complete the construction of the Gabčíkovo and Nagymaros complexes and then join Slovakia in their management. This includes management of the water regime, which already now is handled flexibly by



*The lock and dam on the Danube at Gabčíkovo, Slovakia. The benefits of the completed elements of the project are making themselves felt in all realms: flood control, more plentiful water for household and agricultural use, hydropower, and increased shipping.*

Slovakia. The amount of water passing through the Old Danube presently is about four times greater than was planned before Hungary withdrew from the treaty.

This proposal is, in fact, not only supported by Slovakian engineers, but also by many Hungarian engineers and hydrologists. In fact, the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros project was designed jointly by Hungarian and Slovakian engineers. The International Monitoring Commission's report of December 1993 has proven the competence of these engineers. Already, Hungary is profiting from the operation of the Gabčíkovo structures: Its territory is protected from floods, shipping conditions have been improved for vessels of all nationalities, and the Moson Danube is now continuously supplied with water. We are therefore confident that the design will serve both peoples, if completed as originally planned.

We do not think that construction and operation of Gabčíkovo and the lateral canal create problems for the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. It is true, that an ethnic Hungarian minority of 500,000 lives in Slovakia. But, in the vicinity of the project, there live only 50,000 persons, and these include many ethnic Slovaks, too. For most of the affected, living conditions have been or will be improved by the project. The water table has risen to more optimal depth and irrigation canals are better supplied with water during time of low discharge in the Danube, and therefore, farmers in the area need less irrigation water or have better access to it; operation of the Gabčíkovo structures provides jobs for the local population; increased tourism will provide additional income for the area. If the project were detrimental to the population of the area—Hungarian or Slovak—we would not support it.