

# The Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Project Dispute: Why Isn't EVERYONE Having Fun?



1 The image above is from a web site telling things you can do for fun at Cuvono, Slovakia – things like horseback riding, biking, golfing, and camping. Since Cuvono is on the Danube River, fishing, boating, and even river cruises are other great activities.

2 Slovakia has made some major changes to the Danube River around Cuvono. These changes include a major dam and two whitewater courses for kayaks and rafts. These courses are used for international competitions. But YOU can also “play” on the whitewater courses if you visit!



<http://www.penzionmargareta.sk/en/surroundings/gabcikovo-hydroelectric-dam/>

3 The Danube River is huge! The map on this page shows that ten different European countries share the river. It has been important to the people of central Europe for thousands of years. We are going to look at why the countries Hungary and Slovakia have been in an argument since the 1980s about the Danube River.

4 What's the problem? Do the people of Hungary NOT LIKE water sports? ☹️ Are they jealous that the Slovaks are having more fun? Or maybe the people of Hungary are mad because Slovakia is getting electricity from the dam on the Slovakia side of the river.

5 It goes back to 1977, when the two countries decided to build dams on the Danube along their shared border. Both countries hoped the project would control dangerous floods on the river and also provide lots of electricity for their people. The project would also create a higher water level between the two dams, which would improve ship traffic. Both countries signed a treaty agreeing on the project.

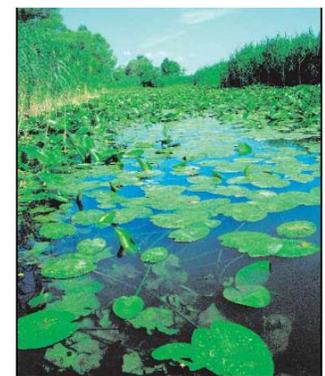


<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/96/Danubemap.png>

6 Here's another twist to the story. Back when the treaty was signed, these two countries were controlled by the communist Soviet Union. As a matter of fact, "Slovakia" wasn't even a country when this was signed! It was actually part of a larger country called

"Czechoslovakia." After the Soviet Union fell apart in 1994, Czechoslovakia split into two countries – "the Czech Republic" and "Slovakia." So it's important to understand that the free governments of Hungary and Slovakia today are NOT the same as the Soviet-controlled governments that signed the treaty for this project back in 1977.

7 But still, controlling floods and getting electricity seem like great things. So what went wrong with the plan? In the 1980s, scientists started talking about how dams for the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Project might cause major damage to the environment. A large floodplain is along the border of Slovakia and Hungary – an area where the river often overflows onto the land. This river water is full of nutrients, which feed the forest and farm land in the floodplain. It also brings nutrients to area wetlands, which are important habitats for fish and migrating birds. Some of this wildlife is endangered. In addition to being habitat for wildlife, the wetlands are also natural filters, cleaning out pollution that washes down the river from countries up north.



<http://projects.inweh.unu.edu/inweh/display.php?ID=222>



<http://budapestretro.weebly.com/the-end.html>

It too dangerous for citizens to protest the treaty when the communist governments were in total control of both countries. But in 1988, when the Soviet Union was losing control of Hungary, Hungary's people held huge protests against the project. Protesters said the old communist government made a bad decision. They demanded that Hungary's government cancel the treaty and cancel the project. The leaders of Hungary gave in

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to concerns about damage to the environment. They had been helping Slovakia build the first dam, but the Hungarian government stopped their part of the project in 1989.

By that time, Slovakia had already spent a lot of money on the project, and **they wanted Hungary to keep their part of the deal.** Hungary refused, so Slovakia adjusted the plan and continued the project on their own. Slovakia

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<http://footage.framepool.com/en/shot/552198540-saving-electricity-gabcikovo-gabcikovo-nagymaros-dams-environment-friendly>

completed the Gabčíkovo dam in 1992. Along the northeast side of the Danube, Slovakia also built a huge canal with a concrete bottom and concrete sides. Using the dam and the canal, they diverted 80%-90% of the water away from the Danube River and into the canal (the Danube Channel), which is totally in Slovakia. This sends most of the river water through Slovakia and through their power plant on the canal. Only about 15% of the Danube's water still flows on the border with Hungary in this area.

**Hungarians are ticked off about several things.** First, Hungarian with farms near the dam don't have enough water to irrigate their crops. This is because Slovakia is sending 85% of the water away from the river and through the Danube Channel (canal). Hungarian fishermen in the area are upset because the low river water levels don't support many fish anymore. Environmentalists say wetlands on the Hungary side of the river are disappearing. Many Hungarians resent that Slovakia gets all the money from ships that use the canal – and all the electricity produced by the hydroelectric plant. Hungary's government complains that Slovakia has changed the border by taking control of the whole river in the Gabčíkovo area.

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**11** Slovakia argues back that Hungary broke their agreement to build the other dam in the project, the Nagymaros dam. That dam would have raised the water level between the two dams. On wetlands issues, Slovakia proved that wetlands on their side of the border were actually improving. This is because Slovakia has regularly sent river water into wetlands that



<http://www.slovakia.org/history-gabcikovo.htm>

had dried up 30 years ago. They say Hungary could do the same thing. (Hungary has explained that doing this costs more money. If Slovakia had left the river along, Hungary's wetlands would have been fine without spending extra money on them.) Slovakia says the only reason they have so much control over this section of the river was that Hungary refused to do their part on the river project.

**12** After several years of arguing, the two countries asked the World Court to help them solve their dispute. In 1997, the World Court said that Hungary was at fault because they backed out of their legal agreement with Slovakia to do the river project. But the court also said that the original project plan didn't do enough to protect the environment. Instead of telling the two countries exactly how to solve the problem, the Court said it was up to the two countries to find a way to work it out. Today, many years later, the two countries still have not agreed on any solutions.

**13** Rivers have been important to humans for thousands of years. Rivers have been borders between tribes and countries. They gave freshwater for drinking, for watering crops, and for animals. Rivers were the "highways" long before we build actual roads.



<http://footage.framepool.com/shoting/qf/294929057-saving-electricity-gabcikovo-gabcikovo-nagymaros-dams-environment-friendly.jpg>

Today, they are still transportation routes, and they still provide freshwater. In addition, modern humans use river power to produce electricity by building hydroelectric dams. And because many rivers flow through more than one country and many rivers still mark boundaries between countries, sharing rivers is a challenge for many countries.