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Free Munzur Initiative¹ If dams destroy completely a whole province...

The Turkish state plans to build totally 20 dams and hydroelectric power plants (HEPP)² in the Kurdish province Dersim (Tunceli) which would have many negative ecological, social and political impacts. All projects, which have the only objective to produce energy, would have benefit only for large industrial centers in West-Turkey, but no any positive affect for the local people and are therefore rejected by the population of Dersim for ten years. The filling of the reservoir of the Uzuncayir Dam, the second implemented project, in fall 2009 has raised big protests. 15-16 km of the Munzur, the main River in Dersim, has been shifted into an artificial lake which flooded several villages, one important religious location, an ecologically crucial river stretch and divided the provincial capital Dersim into two parts. So on the 10th of October 2009 in Dersim a demonstration has been organized with the participation of over 20.000 people; the biggest dam critical demonstration ever done in the Turkish Republic.

The dam and HEPP projects implemented and planned in Dersim are a subject of discussions and **campaigns for around ten years**. The construction of the smaller Mercan HEPP project started in the end of 80ies and of the Uzuncayir dam in 1994, but when the plans for totally eight projects became public and the armed conflict stopped more or less in 1999/2000, protests started in Dersim and in the big cities of Turkey where hundred thousands of people from Dersim live. In the following years till 2005 several campaigns, even in Europe, have been organized. When last year the Uzuncayir dam started to impound, the issue of the dams in Dersim became again an important agenda.

As mentioned above the dams will have huge problematic impacts for the province Dersim which is populated by Kurds of the Alewi belief. It would make the life almost impossible for the biggest part of the population and would destroy the whole nature in the valleys which are

¹ "The Free Munzur Initiative has been founded in March 2010 in Europe, in order to campaign against European company and finance involvement in the dam projects in Dersim. See website: www.freemunzur.org, email: freemunzur@gmail.com "

² Response of State Hydraulic Works (DSI) to the Municipality of Tunceli (Dersim) in January 2010 and website of DSI, <http://www.dsi.gov.tr/ska/ska.htm>

crucial of the natural and human life in Dersim. Almost all people of the province reject the projects as a whole because they consider **these projects as political means** by the Turkish state against the people and nature of Dersim which was throughout the history always rebellious. Dersim is described often as region which refused to pay taxes and to send soldiers to the central state power. This oppositional behaviour of people is based on the mountainous and cliffy geography and wild nature that made and makes it very difficult for invasory army to control the province, till to date. The opinion of many people and activists is based on different former documents of the Turkish state, the first is from the 19th century, the last from the beginning 30ies of the 20th century. All these documents propose to fill the valleys



with water through the construction of dams in order to displace as much as possible people and to control better militarily the remaining population³. As it is known in 1937-1938 in Dersim after a rebellion a genocide with 50.000 to 80.000 killed people has been done by the Turkish state⁴. Many years later in the beginning-middle of the 90ies the Turkish army displaced forcily the people of around half of the villages and burnt down the most forrests in Dersim which was also one of the centers of the ongoing Kurdish rebellion led by the Kurdistan Worker's Party PKK. As a result the population number decreased from 150.000 to 80.000⁵. These two destruction waves over Dersim is the fundament for this argumentation.

However, the dams and HEPP's will flood or dry out the valleys in Dersim which are the main area of human activity and of highest **biodiversity**. The projects will flood the most part of 165 km Munzur River and its main tributary Pülümür (Harçik) River, the remaining channel will have no or significantly limited flowing water. The importance of these forested valleys can be understood when it is said that here exist 1518 plant species of which 43 are endemic⁶. Despite the biodiversial importance the Munzur valley is destroyed hardly, big

³ The head of the Turkish military Fevzi Cakmak proposed this in 1930; see following article in the newspaper: *Günlük Gazetesi*: 134 yıllık sürgün plan, 13.10.2009

⁴ These figures are estimations by many people of Dersim and their organizations. See for example Press Release of the german situated association „Dersim Wiederaufbau Gesellschaft“, 14.10.2008 before the „Dersim 38 Conference“ in the European Parliament on the 13.11.2008. See further recent report of Mehmet Bayrak in *Yeni Özgür Politika*, page 10, on the 30th of December 2010. Official statistics mention around 13.000 dead civil people during 1937 and 1938.

⁵ See Annual reports of the Human Rights Association (IHD) from 1993 to 1995: www.ihd.org.tr

⁶ Tunceli İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü (Tunceli Provincial Culture and Tourism Directorate which belongs to the Culture and Tourism Ministry);

forest areas are existent and is of a unique beauty which attracts thousands of people every year from outside the province. That's why the most part of the Munzur valley between the provincial capital and the beginning of the river has been declared in 1971 as a national park (42.000 ha) which is today the 6th biggest in the Turkish Republic. Despite a loss of this richness it is feared that a climate change would have additional negative impacts – like less snowfall, less water in summer and dry out of the region – on the ecology.



The **social impacts** will be very catastrophic, also because the most people, which have not to be „resettled“, will be affected deeply. The projects will displace several thousands people in several dozen villages which should not be regarded as low because the whole population of the province Dersim lies today around 90.000. Almost all directly affected people are small land owners. The expropriation amounts (there are no plans for the construction of new settlements as it should be according international standards) in Turkey are low and there is no legal guarantee that the life standart will be ensured after the resettlement process.

If all planned dam reservoirs are built, the connection between the provincial capital with 30.000 inhabitants and its district cities will suffer a lot. It is unsure whether the state will build sufficient new roads to all cities and villages as there live not so many people. The result would be the fragmentation of a province whose provincial capital has bad connection with its cities. This and the flooding of important agricultural areas would affect also the economic activities in the province which are after the destructions in the 90ies on a very low level. The

<http://www.tuncelikulturturizm.gov.tr/BelgeGoster.aspx?F6E10F8892433CFF4329F0A36BFEFBCD2AE88F745E500DEF>

agriculture in Dersim is not so developed like the stockraising, but the valleys and the southern regions are suitable for agricultural activities. The state never compensated displaced people and very few people returned to their villages after 2000. The main activity in Dersim, the stockraising, has the same problem because it is still partially forbidden for nomads and half-nomads to use the higher plateaus and mountains for their animals. So the number of animals never could be raised again after the limited condition improvements 2000.

Due to the Turkish law on Environment Assesments from 1997 it is not necessary to have an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the large dam projects in Dersim although the expected impacts are large. So officially there is not the opportunity to have objections against these destructive projects. But here it should be mentioned that the opportunities for changes in the project designs through the EIA process are limited. Despite of that the affected people, the local authorities or other civil organizations were never asked whether they want the dam and HEPP projects. There was never a discussion about the dam and HEPP projects in Dersim.



In general the Turkish state and the responsible institution for water resources, the State Hydraulic Works (DSI), never shared sufficient information about the projects. So the population and the campaigns do not know always exactly which companies are involved in the different projects. Particularly the involvement of the international companies is unknown.

If the **cultural impacts** are regarded, the first aspect is the destruction of Alewi religious locations by dams. Dersim is the only province where the Alewis are in the majority and where are some important belief locations. The most Alewi belief locations are along the flowing waters. The most famous are the Munzur River sources and 'Gole Çetu' which has been flooded by the Uzuncayir dam reservoir in last fall. The second negative cultural impact would be on the Kurdish culture which is under general repression in Turkey. The Kurds in Dersim speak mostly the smaller Kurdish dialect „Kirmancki“ (also called Dimili, Zazaki)

which is more under threat than the bigger dialect Kurmanci. So the dams would degrade both the Kurdish and Alewi culture. In general it can be stated that the culture at rivers is mostly more diverse and is specific than in other regions.

All HEPPs in Dersim shall have a **capacity of 534 MW** which corresponds to 1 % of the electrical energy of Turkey. Compared with the expected **budget** of 1,4 Bio. Euro⁷, the projects are very expensive. Even the criticized Ilisu Dam and HEPP shall have a capacity of 1200 MW and costs of relatively low 1,2 Bio. Euro.

The different campaigns against the projects demand the development of **alternative renewable energies**, which do not include hydropower, instead of construction the dam and HEPP projects in Dersim. When the costs and benefits are compared, the costs outbalance the benefits extremely. The benefits will be experienced only by large cities and industry in West-Turkey. It is for Dersim people not acceptable that others benefit while a whole province shall suffer deeply in social, cultural and ecological way from these projects. Even the investment cost is still high, Turkey has to develop solar energy which could have a very high effectivity rate in this geography. This country has, like in Dersim, many big areas which have continuously enough wind for wind power which is not expensive any more. Unfortunately in the last years Turkey rejected the most applications for investments in solar and wind energy. First of all the electric energy transport translines, which loose around 21 % of the energy due to bad maintenance and technic conditions, have to be overhauled. There is also a big potential for saving energy in the consumption. It can be concluded that Turkey needs a new energy concept based on developing renewable energies, savings, overhauling of existing lines and limiting demand.

If the question is the development of the province, which will not be ensured with the dam and HEPP projects in any way, the displaced people should be compensated and supported to return to their villages. So the agricultural and stockraising production would increase significantly. Additionally a ecological eco-tourism could be developed in Dersim which is known for its amazing geography, not only among Kurds.

However, since the flooding by the Uzuncayir dam the **protests** are raising again. While before fall 2009 there were only two associations in Istanbul working on that issue, today we have a different situation. In Dersim a broad coalition of over two dozen organizations, including municipality, unions, social, women and political organizations, have established the „Dersim Environmental Initiative“. This initiative has worked together with municipalities and organizations in the Pülümür district when there was the hearing for the Pülümür Regulator and HEPP on the 20th January 2010. Together with the local population they refused any cooperation with the company which wants to build this project. The Dersim Environmental Initiative is in the stage of establishing and stays in close relation with groups in large cities and engaged people in Europe.

As the undemocratic Turkish state does not listen to its citizens opinion it is very urgent to establish a countrywide coalition of dam and HEPP affected movements. If the voices come together, the public will listen to the people who struggle for their existence. Today the conditions for such a development is suitable. To build up a strong coalition the first step was done on the 12th January 2010 in Istanbul where 13 dam and HEPP affected campaigns came together for the first time. They criticized the ongoing dam and water policy, presented criterias for developing a democratic-ecological water policy and described a possible way to

⁷ Turna, Celal: The Munzur Valley and the Problem of Dams, Tunceli Solidarity Commission and Dersim Initiative, Istanbul 2009

start and develop a new water policy. Now it is important continue with that work. In that network the campaign against the dams in Dersim could play a crucial role.

Note: Between 2001 and 2002 and since 2005 I am involved in the different campaigns in Dersim, Turkey and Europe against the dams and HEPP's in Dersim and therefore i know the argumentation of the campaigns very well.

