Environmentalists are protesting a court decision that provided a green light for the construction of the Dariali Hydro power plant (HPP) on the Tergi River. The Green Alternative environmental NGO had previously appealed to the court demanding annulment of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources’ positive report on November 2011 that opened the way for the project.

A joint project by the energy ministry and Darial Energy Ltd., envisions the construction of a new hydro power plant in Dariali Gorge, close to the border between Russia and Georgia and includes an 8 km section of the Tergi River being redirected into a diversion channel and a tunnel. The HPP will have a capacity of 110 MW and will be connected with the energy grid linking Georgian and Russian electricity systems.

Green Alternative argues that implementation of this project will seriously damage Dariali and its ecosystem and cause irreversible changes in its landscape. “What is more important is that the construction of this plant may cause the complete extinction of a trout species included in the Red Book of endangered species,” Green Alternative representatives explained.

Deputy Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Georgia, Ilia Eloshvili, in his recent announcement, asked environmentalists to collaborate with the ministry in order to create a commission composed of reliable specialists who will thoroughly study this project. “This commission will re-examine the documents and make a decision,” Eloshvili commented.

“It’s possible that after the re-examination, the experts will conclude that the construction of the Darial HPP will cause irreversible environmental damage and will deem it unacceptable to continue the construction work; or maybe the experts will convince us that the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of Georgia has made the correct decision when they approved the project,” Eloshvili continued.

Controversy surrounding the Dariali project was discussed during a meeting between members of the Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee and representatives of NGOs on January 22 at the Vere Palace Hotel. The idea of the meeting was to hear the environmentalists’ concerns and to try to gain a consensus on future plans and cooperation going forward.

“We have established close contact with representatives of non-governmental organizations. There are a lot of problems within the environmental sector. The situation is already disastrous in many directions. The meetings with the members of the organizations working on these topics, their advice and their experience, will help us and our country”, said Giorgi Tsagareishvili, the Chairman of the Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee.

Apart from the Dariali project’s details, the meeting touched upon various problems, including the management and protection of Georgian forests, the management of natural resources and public’s involvement in the decision-making process. Tools of environmental management—legislative gaps and the problems related to their usage in practice, energy efficiency issues, energy projects and their impact on the natural and social environment, were also on the agenda.

“We see a lot of problems concerning the model of governance of environmental protection and we would like to draw the committee’s attention to those issues,” Manana Kochladze, Chairwoman of Green Alternative, stated.

Tsagareishvili explained that in terms of environmental protection a reorganizing project is currently underway and the first phase will be finished in about two months. “Under this project we will analyze all the contract obligations that the previous government took. Then they will be divided by the themes,” he said.
The Chairman of the Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee explained that 43 bills have been submitted to the parliament on environmental protection so far. These bills will be submitted to the President of Georgia in mid-March and will enter into force immediately after their signing.

By Lika Moshiashvili
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