Georgian Villages Might Get Flooded – “Government Renewed the Projects Declined by Soviet Authority”

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“Archive of Sakhydroinstitute (Georgian Hydro Institute) was sold. The current government offered investors the projects, which were declined by the soviet governments,” said Manana Kochladze, chairwoman of the non-governmental organization “Green Alternative”. Are those projects dangerous and shall ancient Georgian villages get flooded?

Apparently, the governmental officials and investors discuss the issue behind closed doors. Manana Kochladze spoke about these and other issues with the Kviris Palitra.

-Projects of construction of Zhoneti, Namakhvani and Tvishi hydro-stations were declined during communist regime. The reason was unprofitability of the projects; however, one of the obstacles for implementing the projects was flooding of beautiful Georgian villages. Now, the government of Georgia intends to construct those hydro-stations in accordance to those old projects and nobody cares the impact on social environment.

We should be very careful about the construction of huge dams. For example, if they construct Namakhvani Dam, 8 000 families shall be resettled from the area; the same will happen in case of Khaishi. Part of family estates has already got flooded there; infrastructure is being destroyed; so the population will have to abandon the area. Melkvena and Namakhvani are big villages. One local resident of Namakhvani had his house burnt and the local authority warned him against building a new one; or they would not reimburse the damage. Namakhvani dam will flood villages of Sakire, Zeda Onchei and Kveda Onchei and other smaller villages too.

The construction of Zhoneti Dam will flood Mamatsminda. Tvishi hydro-cascade will threat Zodishi and Alpana. Another, smaller hydro station is planned to be constructed above Alpana village which was declined by the soviet regime.

-Do you know those projects? What is the size of those hydro-stations?

All three hydro-stations will occupy 28-kilometer zone in the Rioni River. There will be 200-300 meter distance between stations. Total size of each of them will not exceed 7 million cubic meters.

For example, Shaori Lake (in Racha region) contains 13 million cubic meters. Despite that, after the hydro-stations are constructed, the water will flood almost 1000 hectares of land. We should also foresee historical-cultural importance of those places. For example, famous vine-yards of Tvishi village will hide under water; Khvamli Cave will face danger of flooding as well. However, the project sponsor alleges, they will seal up the caves.

I wonder how they are going to do it. So, we have many questions. The height of Tvishi dam shall be 11 meters and it is too much. According to the project, Namakhvani dams shall endure 7-8 magnitude earthquakes. However, the zone is seismic and who else is constructing dams in seismic zones. They try to convince us that our country does not face seismic danger within next 1 000 years. Their allegations rely on the argument that first 9-magnitude quake in this zone occurred in 1350 and next in 1991 (which did not exceed 7 magnitudes); so the next quake is awaited only in one thousand years.

-Who will implement the projects?

-The sponsor is Building Company Nurol Holding which is building MIA office and Hotel Sheraton in Batumi. They have never constructed hydro-stations before. We cannot meet the representatives of this company to talk on this topic. However, we will start negotiations with the Ministry of Energy who has signed memorandums with Nurol Holding and Korean Company “CapCo” on the realization of those projects. “CapCo”, a company constructing hydro-stations, suddenly left the consortium with the Nurol Holding for unclear reasons. The minister of energy said the Company has similar policy. I think, CapCo studied the location of Namakhvani and supposedly, they had logic question why they should construct a dam in a seismic zone. It is my opinion and the Ministry of Energy does not make comments on it.

No scientific activities are carried out in the country nowadays that could change old technical conclusions. It requires huge financial resources and engineer-technical potential. It is a pity that there are few engineers in our country now because all well-experienced and skilled engineers have moved to work abroad. Only elderly scientists remained in Georgia but they have not had practice for the last twenty years. So, no new projects are designed and the government has only one choice – to offer old and declined projects to investors.
Besides, the river regimes have significantly changed for the last 20 years. The glaciers have started melting; humidity has increased that finally results into increased level of river levels. So, new constructions according to old parameters shall not start. In addition, corruption is usually observed during similar huge constructions; for example, when EngurHES was being constructed during soviet regime, construction materials were actively stolen. As a result, ten years later the HES faced danger of collapse and it was in fact re-constructed with financial support of the World Bank. Consequently, we are suspicious about the government’s interest in those projects. Georgia cannot have much income from it.

-What do you mean; will not produced electricity be sold abroad?

-The investor will sell the electricity and they will have the profit from it. If Georgia needs extra power, the investor will be entitled to sell the electricity to the country before selling it abroad. The tax for HES profit and property will not play key role in the state budget. It will be profitable only for the investor.

It is strange why the government creates new problems for meager profit? The main point is that investor will have right to use the water for free.

The civilized states deal with similar issues very carefully. The protection of public welfare is the supreme principle everywhere and governments do not act against the public opinion.