

Turkish Court stops dam construction and defends world heritage

Title

A Turkish court has ordered an immediate halt to the construction of the controversial Ilisu dam noting that it is not in line with Turkish environmental law. The **Ilisu dam** is an **embankment dam** under construction on the **Tigris River** in South-eastern Turkey. The dam is meant to produce hydroelectric power, to control floods and to store water. When completed, the dam will form a 10.4 billion m³ reservoir inundating an area over 310 sq. kms in ancient Mesopotamia. The project, which was presented for the first time in the 1980s, immediately received strong reactions from local communities and from NGOs representing the environment, including **Doga Dernegi (BirdLife in Turkey)**, cultural heritage and human rights. The reason is that the completion of the dam would lead to relocation of the people living in the region and cause the flooding of the 12,000 year old city of **Hasenkeyf**, which meets nine out of the ten UNESCO criteria for World Heritage status. After a first Court ruling in 2011 the project was stopped when the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was bypassed.

EIAs are compulsory under Turkish law for the realisation of such projects. The Turkish government responded by introducing a new legislation exonerating the project works, including roads, power lines and other heavy infrastructure from an EIA. But the court stood firm and condemned the project a second time on January 7, ordering an immediate halt to its construction, thus highlighting that proceeding with the works without the legally required EIA, goes against Turkish Environment Law and EIA regulations. BirdLife Europe and BirdLife in Turkey warmly welcome the court decision as encouraging for the local communities and NGOs that have been actively denouncing the project since the beginning. The battle is still not won since the government can still object to the court's ruling within seven days or alternatively chose to pass new legislation to override the court's ruling.

?This time the world is watching. The ruling must stand in the interest of protecting our common natural and cultural heritage.? said Engin Yilmaz, Executive Director of Doga Dernegi (BirdLife Turkey).

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