

Warsaw, September 19th, 2020

**To the President of the European Commission
Ursula von der Leyen**

STOP the destruction of the Odra River

We oppose the use of Polish and European taxpayers' money to implement the program of the Polish government and the World Bank to regulate the Odra River for the development of inland navigation under the pretext of flood protection.

Despite objections from scientists, Polish and German environmental organizations, complaints to the European Commission, letters to the Prime Minister of Poland and to the World Bank authorities financially involved in this matter, the Odra Regulation program for the development of inland navigation is being carried out.

In order to receive \$ 1.3 billion in 2015 from the agreement with the World Bank and the loan for this project, which aims to ensure the class III waterway for Odra River, Polish officials have "declared" the project as a flood protection project as they admitted in conversation with journalists.*

The project budget includes EU funds of approximately US \$ 220 million and a loan from the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) of approximately US \$ 330 million.

The river is currently being destroyed under the pretext that recently newly built, oversized, and not for the river adapted icebreakers (named after the officials named above) are to be used.

The Save the Rivers Coalition, which has opposed plans to destroy the Odra River since it was founded, points out the following aspects of program implementation:

- a. Increase in the flood risk on the Border Odra, shown by Polish and German experts;
- b. Destruction of the priceless nature and ecosystems of the restored Odra River, including numerous Natura 2000 sites, contrary to the environmental goals of the EU Water Framework Directive;
- c. Economic nonsense by creating artificial conditions of competition compared to cheaper and more environmentally friendly rail transport, which offers more development potential;
- d. Converting the Middle Oder into a class III waterway will cause additional emissions of around 0.9 to 1 million tons of CO₂, which will exacerbate the climate crisis.**

Nature and people make up the Odra River. We need sensible support for the tourism and recreational infrastructure, taking into account the requirements for the protection of the priceless and unique nature of the Odra Valley, as well as international cooperation that takes into account climate change and the increased risk of flooding and drought in the entire Odra basin.

We appeal to the European Commission to withdraw financial support for the Odra River regulation. That would be in line with the Green Deal policy for Europe and would also be a response to the climate and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This petition is a Polish response to a detailed petition on the subject prepared by residents of Brandenburg and addressed to German politicians.*** The inhabitants of Poland are also against the destruction of the Oder River and its valley.

* "Zbudowaliśmy dwa za duże statki, więc orzemy całą Odrę, żeby mogły pływać..." ["We have built two ships that are too big, so we will plow the entire Oder so that they can sail ..."]

<https://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/7,127290,26133979,zbudowalismy-dwa-za-duze-statki-wiec-orzemy-cala-odre-zeby.html>

** Estimation of the carbon footprint of the upgrade of the waterway in the middle section of the Odra River (from Brzeg Dolny to the mouth of the Lusatian Neisse), Dr. hab. Inż. Zbigniew Karaczun, Dr. Andrzej Kassenberg, Dr. inż. Piotr Siwicki; <http://praworzeki.eko-unia.org.pl/imgturysta/files/ekspertyzy/E20.pdf>

*** Stop the Plans to Upgrade the Oder!

<https://www.change.org/p/ministerpr%C3%A4sident-des-landes-brandenburg-dietmar-woidke-stop-the-plans-to-upgrade-the-oder>

The petition is supported by:

/ On behalf of the Save the Rivers Coalition: /

Fundacja Greenmind – Jacek Engel, President of the Management Board

Fundacja WWF Polska – Piotr Nieznański, Director for Environmental Policy

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Związek Stowarzyszeń Polska Zielona Sieć – Izabela Zygmunt, Specialist in energy transformation

The Save the Rivers Coalition (Koalicja Ratujmy Rzeki) was founded in 2016 as a platform for cooperation between social organizations, informal groups and private individuals, including experts and scientists, for the protection of rivers and their natural values, for the protection of natural retention, for comprehensive restoration of watercourses, for the protection and restoration of ecological continuity of rivers and for the adaptation of development plans of the economic sectors (including navigation) to the rivers. Currently (October 2020) Save the Rivers Coalition consists of 49 organizations and 35 representatives of informal groups (<http://www.ratujmyrzeki.pl/o-koalicji/koalicjanci>).