

Danube dam is halted

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Susan Viets in Budapest

PUBLIC opinion has forced the controversial decision to build a hydroelectric dam at Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros in Hungary back on to Parliament's agenda for May or June. The Prime Minister, Mr Miklos Nemeth, said the government may consider a referendum after hearing from experts and the public.

Although Parliament voted in October to push ahead with the unpopular dam, the issue has refused to die.

People throughout Budapest wear blue and white badges that have become a solidarity symbol for those against the dam and worried about the environment.

Many of Hungary's alternative groups and independent scientific experts believe the dam will cause irreparable damage to the Danube Bend environment. The project is also criticised for burdening Hungary's already strained economy.

More than 130,000 people have signed petitions handed to Parliament demanding an end to construction.

Hundreds of people demonstrated earlier this week against Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros outside the Ministry of the Environment.

Until yesterday the government stood firm. Officials pointed to investment ties with Austria and Czechoslovakia and argued that to stop work would cost more than pressing ahead.

Independent MPs are largely responsible for translating public pressure into political action. Several MPs took the floor at yesterday's session of Parliament to demand that Gabčíkovo be put back on the agenda.

Last November members of the alternative youth club Fidesz used the dam issue to initiate the first recall of an MP in 40 years.

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