

Hungarians get parliamentary green light to scrap hydro-electric dam

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Roundup

THE Hungarian Prime Minister, Mr Miklos Nemeth, yesterday got the go-ahead from parliament to scrap a multi-million-pound hydro-electric dam being built on the river Danube north of Budapest, and renegotiate an agreement with Czechoslovakia, *Susan Viets report from Budapest*. The Nagymaros dam, designed to be twinned with a largely-complete barrage at Gabčíkovo in Czechoslovakia, had come under heavy fire from environmentalists.

The MPs were presented with colour-coded charts explaining how damming adversely affects the environment by changing water levels in the Danube. Nagymaros also threatened to pollute Budapest's supply of drinking water.

Mr Peter Hardi, head of a government committee on the barrage system, said that the project was so absurd from an economic and environmental point of view that it was rejected by the hard-line Gero government in Stalinist times. Government estimates say Hungary would have to pay 90 billion forints (£900 million) for Nagymaros, but the opposition insist costs would be closer to 150 billion forints.

Nagymaros has unified the opposition and brought citizens into the streets before demonstrations were legalised.

At the eastern extreme of the barrage system stands the Dunakiliti reservoir, which forks at

its mouth into the river Danube, dividing Hungary from Czechoslovakia, and into a recently built channel on Czechoslovak territory.

The Hungarians have been talking to the Czechoslovaks since building was stopped in May.

Parliament, meanwhile, also accepted January 7 as the date for the presidential election, and set November 26 as the day for a referendum initiated by the opposition group, the Alliance of Free Democrats.

In the referendum, Hungarians will be asked to vote on whether they want the president elected before multi-party elections — and therefore elected directly by the people — or after multi-party elections.

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