

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0167/09
by Adam Gierek (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Threat of environmental and humanitarian disaster posed by poor condition of Wloclawek dam on the river Vistula

In 1970 a dam was built at Wloclawek on the river Vistula. It was to be the first of around ten dams planned for the Vistula. However, none of the other dams planned as part of the Lower Vistula River Cascade project was ever built, resulting unfortunately in the current threat of an environmental disaster.

The river bed downstream of the Wloclawek dam has suffered serious erosion, particularly at the foot of the dam on the side where the water passes. On the reservoir side, tens of millions of tonnes of silt, polluted by organic substances and heavy metals, have accumulated over the 39 years since the dam was built. The pressure built up by the current and the silt on the reservoir side is now immense and could cause the dam to break, particularly during the spring thaw. The risk of such a disaster is growing all the time. It would also have an international dimension, since the silt would pollute the waters of the Baltic Sea as a whole, while the effects on the population of the villages downstream of the dam would be unimaginably calamitous. The dam itself plays an important economic role, connecting the two banks of the Vistula, creating numerous jobs and enabling renewable energy to be produced thanks to a hydro-electric power plant.

Given the Commission's commitment to EU environmental issues, as reflected in its intervention in connection with the proposed building of a road through the Rozpuda valley, will it answer the following:

1. Does it have any plans to combat this threatened environmental and humanitarian disaster, and if so, what are they?
2. With reference to the 'climate and energy' package and in the light of global climate change, should the Vistula, as the last great 'wild' river of Europe, not be properly managed, for example in accordance with the plans previously drawn up as part of the river Vistula programme?