

Dr. Dietmar Woidke  
Coordinator for German-Polish Cooperation  
Federal Foreign Office

**The expansion of the Oder threatens the destruction of a unique river landscape along the German-Polish border and an exacerbation of the risk of flooding**

Dear Dr. Woidke,

As citizens of Germany and Poland, we are following the expansion projects on the Oder with great concern. We are addressing you today in your role as the German government's Coordinator for German-Polish Cooperation.

The Oder river flows freely, without dams along the German-Polish border. The diversity of species and the scenic charm of this river landscape is due to the great closeness to nature of the Oder and its floodplains. Germany's only alluvial national park is located in the Lower Oder Valley, and numerous European Natura 2000 protected areas are lined up on both sides of the Oder.

This river landscape is acutely threatened because the Oder is to be expanded into an international waterway. The Federal Republic bears joint responsibility for this, as the expansion of the Oder is planned on the basis of the German-Polish Waterway Agreement of April 27, 2015. The justification for the expansion is that a sufficient driving depth must be guaranteed for the use of the icebreaker fleet. However, this desired shipping channel availability with a depth of 1.80 meters is only necessary for inland vessels, but not for ensuring the passage of icebreakers. There are also alternatives for ice breaking.

We therefore fear that the flood protection will only serve as a pretext to expand the Oder and Klucz-Ustowo ditch as waterways. The consequences of expanding the Oder would be serious:

1. The expansion measures violate European environmental and nature conservation law.
2. The expansion increases the risk of flooding for the Oderbruch in Brandenburg.
3. The expansion leads to a rapidly decreasing water retention in the landscape and increases the risk of drought with negative effects on land use and damage to groundwater-dependent ecosystems.

The Brandenburg Ministry of the Environment also issued a statement in 2019 warning against an expansion of the Oder due to the increasing risk of flooding. As early as 2014, the Federal Institute for Hydraulic Engineering stated with regard to the flow control concept for the Border Odra river that all expansion variants increase the water level in the event of flooding. This is particularly noticeable at Hohenwutzen with a 12 cm higher water level - and thus exactly at the point where the dike could only be held with great difficulty during the flood of the Oder in 1997, thus saving the Oderbruch from flooding.

The Regional Environmental Authority in Szczecin (Poland) approved the expansion measures in March 2020 despite a lack of modeling of the environmental impact. Public participation in the cross-border environmental impact assessment was only possible to a limited extent.

As the Coordinator for the German-Polish Cooperation of the Federal Government, we therefore have the following requests for you:

- Make sure that this irrelevant project is transformed into an actual flood protection project that complies with EU law.

- Advocate that a study be carried out on the most effective ways to break ice on the border or by independent experts.
- Educate the public about how you assess the increased flood risk due to the expansion of the border river Oder or which countermeasures Brandenburg will take.
- Inform us about the measures taken by the Federal Republic of Germany to comply with the EIA Directive within the framework of the agreement on cross-border environmental assessments with the Republic of Poland.

Yours sincerely,