

#3havalimanınaDireni



Photo : 3rd airport project area – February 7, 2016

Probing the 3rd Airport Project vis-a-vis Life, Nature, Environment and People

By Cihan Uzunçarşılı Baysal / KOS Medya – February 7, 2016

Introduction

Countries do have boundaries; but “ the environment does not”! As Prof. John Knox, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment has concisely pronounced, “environment has no boundaries” and this seems to be the major challenge of the age of the anthropocene when global warming and climate change have reached such levels that the very existence of the anthropo, the human, is under threat. Hence, the degradation of the environment or its destruction in one part of the planet, is not confined to its locality but has repercussions globally, impacting the existence of human beings all over the planet.

Against this framework, the three mega-projects, popularly labeled as “Crazy Projects” - namely the 3rd Bridge, the 3rd Airport and the Canal - targeting the Northern Forests of Istanbul need to be analyzed in depth and brought to the attention of the international community and international human rights mechanisms because of their devastating impacts on the environment, nature, humans and all living beings. These three projects comprise a package; each one interdependent on the other while the main objective of this package is to open the hitherto pristine lands of Istanbul to global capital for other construction and infrastructure projects, plundering the lungs of the city. If finished these insane projects ,with their multiplier effects , will not only sweep Istanbul from the map but by inducing an irreversible destruction on ecological systems in the area, mainly through deforestation and depletion of water resources- the two major issues discussed in Paris Conference -will inevitably contribute to climate change and global warming. Underlining once more, if environment has no boundaries and if climate change and global warming are planetary issues, then those projects which have the potential of creating fatal effects on the environment need to be scrutinized by the international community and should not be left solely to the responsibility of the relevant states.

Leaving aside the Canal and the 3rd Bridge, here we will focus on the 3rd Airport Project. Since it is not possible to encompass all facets of the project in a short article, first and foremost, in the age of climate change, the devastating effects of the project on ecosystems and environment will be analyzed. Airworthiness risks, human dimension and adverse effects on the economy are other issues in this context. All references are from the 3rd Airport Project Report of Northern Forests Defense (NFD / KOS) titled “**The Third Airport Project Vis-a-Vis Life, Nature Environment, People and Law**” (March 2015) (henceforth NFD Report). A detailed analysis of all facets of the project can be found in the NFD Report.

Where is the 3rd Airport Project?

The area intended for the 3rd Airport project falls within the Northern Forests of Istanbul. The project area spans a field of 10km by length and 7.5km by width amongst the Villages Yeniköy, Akpınar and Ağaçlı in the north of Istanbul. In this region skirting along the coast of Black Sea are woods, forestlands, lakes, ponds, brooks and sand fields. The side-effects to emerge both during the construction and operation processes and after the launch taken into account altogether, the opening of the North that has so far remained the most intact area in the city to infrastructure and construction projects means that the sustainability of the city is under threat.



The location of the project: Right in the heart of Northern Forests and Water Basins



The Mega-Crazy Package : 3rd Airport-3rd Bridge- The Canal



Side-effects. New projects sprouting in the vicinity, destroying the remaining preservation areas; lungs of the city.



The 3rd Airport Project: Its Fatal Impacts on the Environment and Ecosystems

The topic is detailed and analyzed in depth in the NFD Report (pp. 23-42). Here, we will refer shortly only to the main points:

The magnitude of the ecological destruction can be revealed even by citing from the inadequate and biased Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports (this is why 3 consecutive reports were prepared!):

- "The project area bordering on the villages of Akpınar, İhsaniye, Odayeri, Baklalı, Zafer and Karaburun which are within the Arnavutköy and Eyüp districts of the European side is 7.650 hectares , 6.172 hectares of which is forests" . **(81% forest area)**

- When the 3rd Airport project is considered **together with the 3rd Bridge**, the total acreage of the forests to be directly cut down for the link roads of both projects is **8.215 hectares, which equals to nearly 8.000 football fields**. Mega-projects will also pioneer the transformation of the region into new usage areas; therefore much more of the Istanbul forests will be damaged.

-As for the rest of the project area, EIA reports express that " 1.180-hectare part of this land is an area of utilization for mining and other uses". Referring to mining activities in the field, EIA reports refute the official statement that the 3rd Airport project area comprises unqualified lands ruined by mining activities: "...the project area has regained its natural quality as a result of the restorative work undertaken for the regain of mother nature of the fields that were ruined by mining activities'.



Kulakçayırı Lake – Before and After

- "Its 660 hectares (9%) include large and small lakes and ponds ..." There are 70 such lakes and ponds in the region which are being filled with cement at a time when we need water the most!

– "Its 236 hectares contain meadows, its 60 hectares contain dry (no-fallow) farming lands and 2 hectares contain heathlands". Most of these lands have either been taken under eminent domain or devastated by construction activities in such a way as to render them useless. **The livelihoods and villages of communities in the area are under threat of extinction. Forced displacements await these communities.**

– The EIA reports signal alarm: "The natural ecosystem (forest lands, lakes and ponds that contain 70 living species, running and dry streams, agricultural lands, meadow lands)

will be destroyed with the excavation work to be held in the area... natural vegetation and natural characteristics of the area will be removed... lakes, small lakes and ponds will lose their wetland qualification and the life in them will end... “

- All these acreages mentioned in the EIA Reports do not yet include the area of impact of the project. When considered together, it can be predicted that the 3rd Airport project will substantially demolish Istanbul's forests, basins and great divides by either the direct impacts (during the constructional and operational phases of the projects) or the indirect impacts (new development areas and the population increase that the project will cause) of the mega-projects that include the 3rd Airport.

- Istanbul has almost depleted its water resources and has been consuming the water of neighboring cities violating the right of these cities to access to their own water. To mitigate water shortages in the future, a new dam which will devour 18 villages is planned to be built in Sungurlu, Kandira, a nearby town to provide water for Istanbul. Demonstrations and protests from the villagers who do not want to lose their living spaces and livelihoods were on the headlines: **Kandıra'da 18 köyü yutacak Sungurlu Barajı'nı halk istemiyor**. On the other hand, while Istanbul is under threat of future water shortages, irrationally, the 3rd Airport project causes, as underlined by EIA Reports, “ **...decrease in water catchment amounts at Terkos Lake, Alibeyköy and Piriñçi Dams that supply an important amount of the drinking water need of Istanbul and increase in contamination loads with surface flows**. Due to an almost 120% increase in vehicular traffic stemming from the project on the main arterial roads in the region, it is expected that there will be an increase in the current pollution load of the region and with the destruction of the forestlands and the decline in the flow rates of the rivers that provide water for the dams in the region, there will be a decrease in the water levels of the dams...that the pollution will be carried into the dams along with the rivers will be in question too... “

- Istanbul that will lose its Northern Forests will thus not only be deprived of the clean air and coolness that come with the winds blowing from the north but also it can be expected that the winds coming from the north, on the contrary, will now **pollute the air of the city**. We can say that we will be facing multiplied amounts of air pollution because during the days when the Northeaster that is one of the two main winds of the city blows, the gas emissions of the airplanes will spill over the city via this wind. **The emissions diffusing from the airplanes will spread all over the southern region of the city and especially Bakırköy district and its vicinity**. EIA Reports on the other hand have not focused on this grave issue. Besides that, when the pollution and the exhaust fumes to spill over the city from the 3rd Bridge -which would qualify as a giant 10 lane highway rather than a bridge -are taken into account, let alone to live in a healthy environment, people's right to life will have been breached.

- While air travel today accounts for just a small percentage of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions, scientists claim that **the carbon dioxide (CO2) and other pollutants from jet exhaust contribute disproportionately to increasing surface temperatures below because the warming effect is amplified in the upper atmosphere**. “ The **Intergovernmental Panel**

on Climate Change (IPCC), a scientific intergovernmental body set up by the United Nations (UN) to provide comprehensive scientific assessments of the risk of human-induced climate change, reports that CO2 emitted by jets can survive in the atmosphere for upwards of 100 years, and that its combination with other gas and particulate emissions could have double or four times the warming effect as CO2 emissions alone.” IPCC has also noted that airplane emissions can lead to the formation of acid rain and smog , as well as visibility impairment and crop damage down on the ground (see **Earthtalk: Airplane emissions and climate change**)

The inefficiency of EIA reports of the 3rd Airport project becomes more visible here as this most critical issue of our era has not been taken into account vis-a-vis a project that targets 150 million passengers / year. There has been no scientific research on the issue.

- Flora, endemic plants, fauna and wildlife in the project area are under threat of extinction as is detailed in the NFD Report (pp. 37-38) and as confessed by EIA reports “ ... in the case of the fulfillment of the project, **there will be a huge habitat and biomass loss in floristic terms**”.

- As for birds, **the area is a field where many bird species live and carry out their vital activities and is on a route through which one of the bird migration paths goes.** The construction of an airport in the region and the damage to be done on the wetlands and forests will threaten the lives of these bird species.



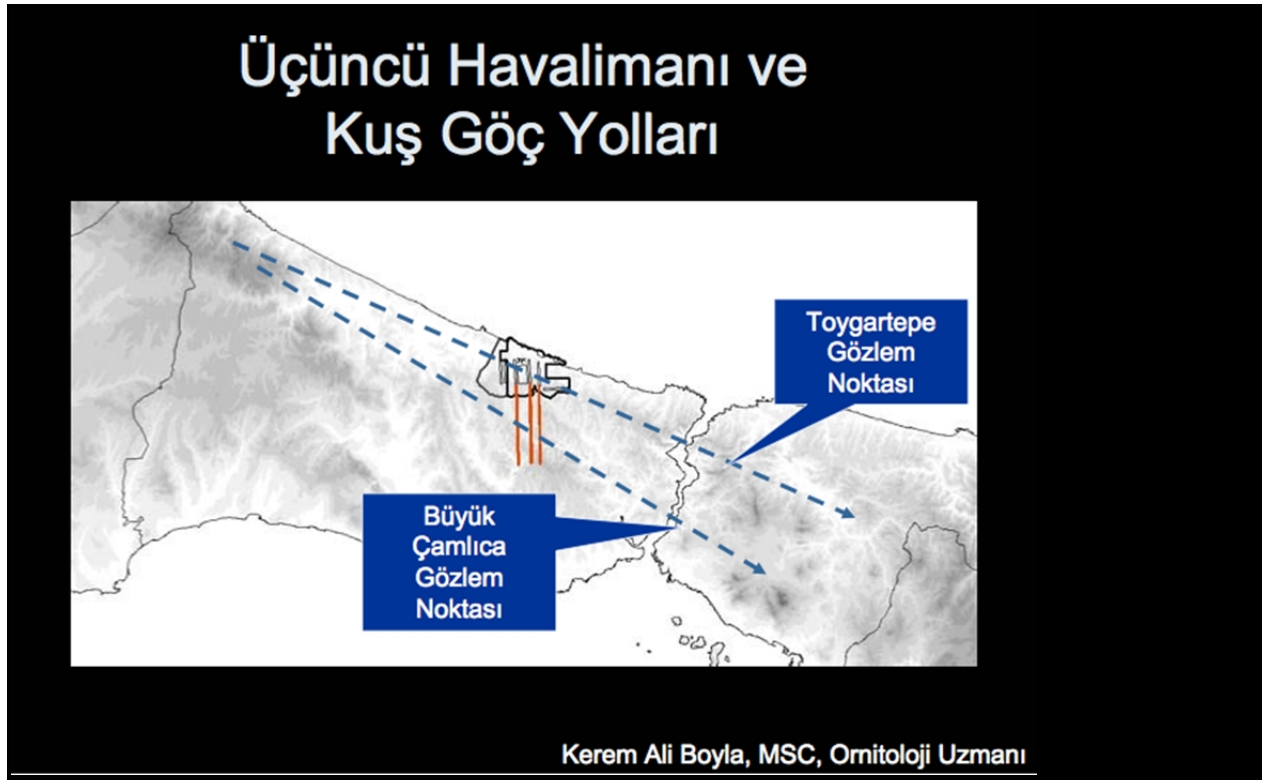
3rd Airport Project Area – 2015 – Turning ages old forests into deserts

Airworthiness Risks Not Taken Into Account in the EIA Process:

- In conjunction with **bird populations, and migration routes**, airworthiness risks need also be considered; for, the project site is not only on major migration routes as documented in the NFD Report (pp:42-45) but also only 6km away from a garbage disposal plant which receives 3 million tons of garbage annually, and in summer 30.000 - 50.000, in winter 100.000 – 200.000 seagulls feed in this field.

On the other hand, both the EIA reports and the statement by the CEO of the Consortium show very clearly that this serious issue has not been taken into account while choosing project area. **Even though the EIA Reports of the project doesn't trouble itself much with the future of the bird species, it has to touch on the problems that might arise in terms of flight security. In the EIA reports where it is understood that the required countings and determinations to establish the bird strike threat haven't been performed, a promise is made that these researches will be conducted in the future while scientists warn that research should have been conducted at least for 2 years before starting the project.** Similarly, in his press meeting, the CEO stated that the company has put together a team to record the bird types migrating over the construction site and the "required systems are being established to overcome the negative effects on bird migrations" —

Migration routes and the 3rd Airport



3rd airport project and bird migration routes

Another airworthiness risk stems from **the special character of the land in the area**. The field where the 3rd Airport has been decided to be built on the shore of Black Sea, right next to the Durusu (Terkos) Lake is covered with lakes and ponds that have been formed by craters dug by old coal and sand pit operations and with these abandoned craters being filled with water over time.

The report by Chamber of Geological Engineers (JMO) draws attention to the fact that the acceptable grade limit for the runways of international airports has to be low, even close to zero with regards to flight security and also points out that the location chosen for the 3rd Airport remains between a hillside reaching up to roughly 130 m height in the south and the Black Sea shore in the north and in order to ensure this kind of grade, there is an obligation to fill the area in large amounts as well as to remove the tops of the hills. According to the JMO report, **“Among the dangerous characteristics of the soil are that there is mud in the lakebeds whose thickness reaches up to 6.5 m especially in big lakes; waterlogged sediments with large surface areas and bulks of mining waste composed of loose material. Because of the reasons stated above, a solid ground couldn’t have been reached**, even though tens of meters of muddy-clayey layers were cut during the drillings performed in the construction field”. As a matter of fact, the CEO’s press statement substantiates this interpretation: **“After our consortium won the tender, we saw that the land was much more challenging than we had earlier thought**. So we have made more than 3,000 test drillings on the site in the two years since the tender”. On the other hand, this comes as a confession as well, a confession revealing the reality that EIA reporters have failed to analyze airworthiness risks of the project area. There are news that the Consortium has still been struggling with the muddy ground! (Detailed examination can be found in the NFD Report, pp. 47-50)

– **Airworthiness risks stemming from meteorological conditions** are other issues that have not been taken into consideration seriously. The meteorological stations used for EIA for weather conditions are quite far from the project area and are located in a milder area in terms of climate, making the data questionable. As is emphasized in the NFD Report (pp. 45-47), based on the opinions and studies of the relevant experts, the data from the meteorology stations used in the EIA reports do not reflect the values of the project area and it is also underscored that the decision whether an airport should be built here or not has to be made by first establishing a meteorology station in the project area and performing a 5-year measurement.

The Adverse Impacts of the Project on the Economy

The relevant institution that has the main responsibility for this project is the General Directorate of State Airports Authority (DHMI). Naturally, it is required for DHMI who bears the biggest responsibility for such kind of a project to be trustworthy and have a sound administrative, legal and economic structure that can run this process. However, DHMI is far from drawing such a portrait and as has recently been disclosed by the relevant report of the State Institution of Public Accounts (Sayıştay) DHMI is almost at the edge of bankruptcy. What is explained in NFD

Report is worth attention in that it realistically explains the seriously bad state of DHMI directly responsible for the project (pp. 62-69). Consequently, as indicated by economist Mustafa Sönmez eventually the cost of the project will be financed by tax payers and in the long run Turkey might become another Greece since “ Greece has got into trouble because of such uneconomical public investments and infrastructure projects”. Taking into consideration the fact that the Turkish economy has become one of the most vulnerable and fragile economies in the world, the negative impacts of the project will be felt by every citizen of the Turkish Republic who will incur future debts due to the incremental costs of the project.

Human Rights Violations of the Project

Because of the construction work going on in the villages within the 3rd Airport project and its impact area, stockbreeding is about to end, fish species die out and landslides occur. The villagers have lost their beaches, shores, meadows and green fields to side projects furnishing the needs of the mega project such as sand quarries, dumping grounds, new roads, dynamite storages. The security of the villagers cannot be provided because of the 24-hour heavy traffic of the trucks and work machines while young students cannot go to their schools in their villages by foot. Frequent power outages make life difficult for the villagers and have become an element of oppression for the villagers to migrate from this region. On the other hand, based on the news reflected in the press at different times and the interviews held with the villagers, various oppressions are practiced; even astronomical fines are issued to the villagers because of the goats entering the project field!



Destruction caused by 3rd airport construction reaching to outskirts of village Yeniköy – June 2015

Even those whose houses have not been expropriated find it hard to stay in their villages where the ponds have been filled and living creatures inside these ponds killed; where lands has been turned into a desert with millions of trees cut down, where the agricultural lands and meadows have been opened to construction activities, sand quarries... Thus life has been rendered unbearable because of all the dust, noise, vehicle traffic and much more.

Eminent domain but mostly urgent expropriation, a legal tool to be employed only at times of war and during natural disasters have been frequently applied by relevant authorities to evict and displace villagers easily. Rule of Law does not apply in the project area! Law has been turned into a mechanism for running the project smoothly and easily, losing its very essence, that is justice and thus legitimacy.



Protests of villagers from affected regions with banners of NFD " We will not let Northern Forest be Swallowed"

Labor deaths or rather murders, mainly of truck drivers, are another issue. We call it "murders" because, in order to finish the project on time, trucks are filled over weight and drivers are forced to drive fast in dangerous roads, risking their lives. Even though Akcayoglu, the CEO, states that they apply maximum labor safety standards to avoid any accidents, there have been many accidents and fatalities yet very few of them were able to be heard due to the untransparent nature of the project. In fact the following words of the CEO may be taken as a valid assessment of the situation, if not a confession:

“The ideal working conditions have actually not yet been reached, but we are taking all measures to continue our works. There is public road just next to the construction site, in which hundreds of trucks and other construction vehicles are moving around every day. The moving of this road to somewhere else will take around a year-and-a-half.”

Conclusion

Inter alia, with its irreversibly destructive impacts on the ecosystems and environment, with its adverse effects on the Turkish economy, with its flight risks and human rights violations in almost all spheres the 3rd Airport project poses threats to the well-being of every living both within and out of the scope of its impact. The insane project is a planetary issue which undoubtedly will contribute to climate change and global warming.

Hence, alongside Istanbulites, the international community need also oppose this project against life. Those firms undertaking projects within this mega project need to be protested, named and shamed in their own countries as perpetrators contributing to global warming, ecological ruin, economic destruction, labour murders, human rights violations of village communities.

Thus we need the support of human rights defenders, advocates, activists and organizations from all around the world. If human rights are interrelated and interdependent and if climate change is *THE* issue of the era, such insane projects need to be probed and stopped.

Source: Kuzey Ormanları Savunması (KOS), Northern Forest Defense, Istanbul/Turkey

<http://www.kuzeyormanlari.org/2016/02/07/probing-the-3rd-airport-project-vis-a-vis-life-nature-environment-and-people/>