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## Sky blue stream

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An article about struggle against Blue Stream gas pipeline in  
Black Sea rim. Written for SchNews yearbook 2002.

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Arrest of Yury was the most difficult one as he escaped from the workers and climbed up, but in some time he was arrested as well. The blockade lasted for 1.5 hours.

The activists were transported to the shore and than, together with arrested earlier Roman Levchenko, transported to Archipo-Osipovsky border patrol station. It took a day to decide what to do with the activists. Initially the border guards intended to incriminate them illegal border crossing (in Russia it can be prosecuted by up to 2 years in prison). However the attention of media and NGOs to the problem and to the arrest of activists, it was decided not to complicate life of the border patrol station and guys were released without pressing charges on them. That was the only possible reasonable decision, since the Blue Stream-project itself has broke plenty of laws about Environmental impact assessment, public hearings and sanitary protections zones of the health resort, which is located in Gelendzhik.

## **Protest action on Castoro Otto ship**

On September 20 in a bay connected to Drovyanaya Schel tract, 4 activists from Socio-Ecological Union of Western Caucasus, Autonomous Action and Rainbow Keepers movement blocked pipe placing ship Castoro Otto, which started placing pipes for Blue Stream pipeline on September 18<sup>th</sup>. The boat belongs to Italian company Saipem, however it goes under Liberian flag.

At the dawn, at 6 AM, activists Yury Tertichny, Roman Levchenko, Natalia Yakovleva and Artem Shlenov started to swim to the ship, which was located in about 600–700 meters from the shore. Every activist carried on his back a package with food and spare clothes because they were going to hold a blockade for a few days. Strong wind forced one of the activists, Roman Levchenko, to turn back, to the shore, where he was arrested by border guards. The rest made it to the boat, where the work has already started and the workers spotted them. Nonetheless, the activists managed to lock themselves to gangways right on the middle of working area, using chains and locks.

The spot for pipes releasing contented of two gangways going from the boat to the sea and a pipe hanged between the gangways with a net under the pipe. Behind these, at the deck was a place for welding the pipes before placing them to the sea. Natalia Yakovleva staid locked all the time, Artem Shlenov and Yury Tertichny have chosen another tactics: they were locking and unlocking themselves, moving on the gangways, the pipe and the net. They managed to place a big banner with a text “No Blue Stream!” on it.

The activists were shouting “Saipem go home!”, “Ya basta!”, “Saipem killed Black Sea!” etc. Foreign workers tried to stop the activists, but succeeded only when a reinforcement of Russian border guards arrived. First Natalia was arrested: the chains she used to lock herself with, were cut using a huge cutters. Then 6 men managed to tear away Artem from the net.

Black sea rim is one of the main arenas of geo-political intrigue in the world. Battle for the control of the transfer routes of the natural resources has been one of the reasons behind all of the bloody conflicts of the troubled area during the 90’s – five wars of the Balkans, civil war of Turkey, two wars of Chechenya, civil war of Georgia, two wars of Abkhaziya, war of the mountainous Karabah and wars of Southern Ossetia and Dagestan.

NATO would hardly have been as eager to bomb Yugoslavia, if there were other oil transfer alternatives to snarled up Bospor strait than building a pipeline through Balkans. Also Russia maybe would not have been as uncompromising in regards to Chechnya, if originally most important transfer route of the Baku oil did not went through this small piece of land. USA, Russia and Iran have all taken their sides in every power struggle of the Caucasian countries, where power has seldom during the last 15 years been passed from hands to another without blood spilling.

## **If we do not build it, we will not know if it works!**

Construction of a huge gas pipeline to 2150 meter depth in a seismically very active area would sound like madness in any other region of the world. “Blue Stream”-pipeline, in construction from Nadym-Pur-Tazovsko-region of Russia to Ankara of Turkey, is however reality of the geo-political game in the Black Sea region. Pipeline is a common project of Russian government and gas monopoly Gazprom, policies of whom are often difficult to differentiate. Gazprom owns access rights to a larger amount of natural resources than any other transnational corporation on the planet. Practical construction work in the 390 kilometre part below the sea level is done by Saipem, branch of Italian transitional ENI.

Saipem-7000, a huge artificial island, builds two parallel pipelines in the deepest parts of the sea, so supply will be guaranteed even if an earthquake happened to blast other pipe (corporate version of the precautionary principle!).

Russia and Gazprom believe that transferring gas through any of the Black Sea rim is politically so much more risky that taking huge risks will pay back. Ukraine has announced, that with an investment of around 700 million USD to development of Ukrainian network, Russia would reach same transfer capacity which it reaches in the first phase of Blue Stream with some five times bigger investment. Plan is to transfer some 2 billion cubic metres through Blue Stream in the end of the year 2002, and up to 16 billion in 2007. Original deadline of the project was in the end of year 2000, but Gazprom has passed it several times announcing different reasons — it is clear that fitting the financial and infrastructure requirements of the projects has been a huge task for the company, and project might have been in edge of financial catastrophe a couple of times since company has to pay billions of fines to Turkish state if it fails to meet the deadlines. The final deadline of the project is October 2002.

In the beginning of the 80's, an Earthquake which destroyed completely an undersea cable took place in marine area of Indokopas some 30 kilometres North-west from the Blue Stream Speciality of Black Sea is almost completely dead zone below 150–200 meters, with high concentration of hydrogen sulphide. According to testimony of Russian state committee of environmental specialists, there is a completely possible scenario where an gas leak in enormous pressure would with hydrogen sulphide cause an enormous explosion, which would destroy much of the sensitive marine ecosystem and cause an avalanche.

## Uncompromising resistance

During the summer of 2001, inhabitants of the city of Smolensk blockaded twice the main road, through which Gazprom trucks which participate to construction work ride each 3 or 5 minutes, seriously disturbing life in the city. Local activists from Socio-Ecological Union and Autonomous Action participated to second of these actions 4<sup>th</sup> of August, and were beaten up by the police. Police attempted to charge arrested for disobeying the police orders to disperse, and they tortured Andrei Rudomaha, who has been very active participator of the campaign in the police station. Arrested went to a hunger strike, and due to wide pressure they were released without charges.

6<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> of August grassroots activists, mostly from Rainbow hippie-network and Autonomous Action organised “a Caravan of peace for a clean Black Sea”. March was launched in the beginning point of the undersea part of Blue Stream in Cherkesskoy Schel, and was finished to terminal which is the endpoint of CPC (Caspian Pipeline Consortium) oil pipeline in Yuzhnoe Ozereyka. CPC pipeline was a target of active campaigning in the middle of the nineties, and was also targeted with a Rainbow Keepers protest camp, but in summer of 2001 when the construction work was already almost finished, the resistance had mostly given up well.

Caravan was organised with a subsistence budget, and faced many adventures — food was about to finish, about everyone of the participators got sick after having drunk from a polluted river, and some of the participators were beaten up by gopniks (violent unpolitical youth subculture known with the same name in the whole East Europe) on the way. In the end, only 70 most hard boiled were left from the original 120 participators. However hippies were not disappointed for these setbacks, and immediately announced that a new Caravan will take place the next year!