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by María Josefina Arce

For months, the attention of various sectors of Uruguayan society has been focused on the controversial Neptuno project to build a water treatment plant in the area of Arazatí, which would supply water to the capital, Montevideo, but which they see as an attempt by the government of Luis Lacalle Pou to privatize the service of the precious liquid.

Recently, the courts ordered a halt to the work and asked the state-owned OSE, Obras Sanitarias del Estado, not to sign a contract with the private consortium Aguas de Montevideo until the constitutionality and environmental viability of the initiative is verified.

Social and scientific organizations welcomed the court's ruling against the project to extract water from the La Plata River and then purify and transport the precious liquid, which they say will have social, economic and environmental consequences.

Carmen Sosa, member of the National Commission for the Defense of Water and Life of Uruguay, pointed out that the Constitution, reformed in 2004, establishes that drinking water and sanitation must be provided exclusively by public services.

She also recalled that it also stipulates that the management of water resources must necessarily involve the participation and control of citizens.

But the project puts almost the entire process in private hands; the state company would only be in charge of distribution and the collection of tariffs, which could increase due to the large investment of around 200 million dollars and the quality of the water of the La Plata River.

Specialists have warned about the high salinity of this tributary and the high presence of cyanobacteria, which complicates the purification processes, and they have also pointed out that, from an environmental point of view, the Neptuno project would entail, among other things, a loss of biodiversity, damage to protected areas and contamination of groundwater. The government has stated that it will appeal the court decision on the Neptuno project, without taking into account the opinion of various sectors of society on its consequences in various areas.

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