

Making Ends Meet

Mila 23, Danube Delta, Romania



Fyodor Butelkin

Fyodor Butelkin is the oldest inhabitant of the village of Mila 23. He's 82 years old. He lives with his son and daughter-in-law.

Fyodor was a fisherman from the age of eight until he became a pensioner. He gets a pension of 1,400,000 lei and a war hero's pension from the Second World War, taking his total income up to about 2,000,000 (about £50).

He has a son and a daughter. His daughter lives in Tulcea. His son used to live in Tulcea too, where he worked in a fish canning factory – but four years ago he returned to the village because the factory shut. Now he is a fisherman. His daughter in law used to work in Tulcea too, but she lost her job two years ago. They have two children, twins, but they are married and live in Tulcea.

Fyodor thinks that fishermen are close to nature, and they understand it. He told us that young fishermen traditionally learnt from older fisherman how to manage the Delta. The new specialists managing the Delta since it became a Biosphere Reserve (whom he calls `ecologists'), on the

other hand, don't know how to look after the Delta. They don't ask the old fishermen, who know how to manage the Delta, for advice. They have been dredging new channels, so that their motor boats can get through to check up on the fishermen and see if they are fishing when they shouldn't, and this is bad for the fish. They get pulled through to the sea and die. The new channels have also lowered the level of the water, which is bad for the fish. It's also meant that the cormorants are able to take more fish.

Nowadays, Fyodor told us, young fishermen don't respect the old rules about fishing. He gave us an example of what has been happening: in about 1999 German tourists introduced fishing by electricity and young fishermen have taken this up. This, Fyodor told us, is very bad for the fish, and will destroy the Delta. The problem is that it's become a kind of free-for-all – nobody is looking after the Delta properly any more.

He considers that things were better under Ceaucescu. He was a good manager of the Delta. He built channels for reeds, but they were shallower. Also, under Ceaucescu life, Fyodor thinks, was better – nobody was very rich but nobody was very poor. The State gave the fishermen all the fishing equipment they needed. They provided a fish collection point which would buy fish from the fishermen at a good price. Now, on the other hand, a few people are rich but many are poor.