
EU Strategy for the Danube Region
Priority Area 1a – To improve mobility and multimodality: Inland waterways

RECOMMENDATIONS
for improved border controls
along the Danube and
its navigable tributaries

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1 Objectives

With the recommendations for improved border controls along the Danube and its navigable tributaries the Technical Secretariat of the Priority Area 1a of the European Strategy for the Danube Region addresses both the authorities involved in border controls and the shipping companies and vessel operators along the rivers.

It is a declared objective of the European Union to increase the modal share of sustainable transport means and especially inland waterway transport. However, shipping companies operate with low profit margins and administrative obligations have a negative effect on transport costs and travel time. Therefore a time-efficient and transparent border control system is an effective means to increase the competitiveness of Danube navigation and to actively support modal shift.

At the same time border controls at Schengen borders and EU borders recently gained importance due to the high number of refugees migrating into Europe. Thorough checks are required in order to guarantee the compliance with European law while at the same time avoiding adverse effects for the European economy through long-winded procedures and unnecessary bureaucracy.

But illegal migration is not the only threat to the security and safety of navigation from the control authorities' point of view. By initiating and strengthening cooperation in the identification of vulnerabilities on the Danube, cross-border crime can be significantly reduced. This cooperation should take place among control authorities of the riparian states as well as between the authorities and the shipping sector.

An increased effectiveness and efficiency of border controls is not only beneficial to the shipping sector but also to border control authorities in charge. As neither of the two groups of actors is interested in spending more time than necessary with inefficient procedures, they both may contribute to the improvements of the control mechanisms.

While control authorities along the Danube are advised to harmonize and simplify procedures as much as possible and allowed by European law, captains and ship crews are recommended to speeding up the control processes by preparing themselves better for the controls (e.g. timely preparation of required control forms, basic knowledge on control steps). Measures towards digitalisation of controls are to be introduced by both the authorities and the shipping sector.

Ideally border controls meet the following objectives:

- Effectiveness

“Border control should help to combat illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings and to prevent any threat to the Member States’ internal security, public policy, public health and international relations.”

Schengen Borders Code, Regulation (EC) No 562/2006

- Efficiency

“Control procedures should be merged or aligned and the number of procedures reduced to those that are economically justified, with a view to increasing the competitiveness of business.”

Community Customs Code, Regulation (EC) No 450/2008

The Working Group “Administrative Processes” of the EUSDR PA1a will set impulses for effective and efficient border control procedures. On this basis concrete measures will be implemented in cooperation with decision makers and responsible control authorities (see work programme in chapter 4).

2 Used information and data sources

The following recommendations are the result of joint activities carried out by Priority Area 1a (inland waterways) and Priority Area 11 (security) since April 2014. During the last months feedback from the Danube navigation sector was collected through following information channels:

- Regular **knowledge exchange and coordination meetings** with stakeholders from the inland waterway transport sector and the border control authorities provided an in-depth insight in the current control practices carried out along EU borders and Schengen borders along the Danube.
- A **survey on border controls** was carried out among skippers and ship crews between November 2014 and May 2015. The sector feedback was collected via an online survey as well as via paper based forms distributed at border crossing points and locks. In sum 177 validly completed forms were received. A summary of the survey’s results can be downloaded on the EUSDR PA1a website:
www.danube-navigation.eu/pages/working-groups-projects/wg6
- Participation in a joint operation organised in the frame of the **DARIF project** (Setting up the Structure of a Danube River Forum) allowed on-site visits at the border control point in Mohács. In addition control forms used at the different control points and information on the applied control processes were collected from the DARIF partners. The joint activities resulted in a practical manual on border controls published in August 2015.

In the implementation phase the provided data will be updated and extended whenever required. It will be supplemented by statistic data available on national and European level as well as by experience and know-how collected from practitioners.

3 General recommendations

In order to ensure the freedom of movement of persons and goods as foreseen in the EU treaties harmonised, simple and time-efficient control processes need to be in place at the EU borders and Schengen borders. The recommendations given in this chapter under the three headlines “Harmonize and simplify border controls”, “Establish time-efficient, service-oriented and transparent border controls”, and “Introduce new electronical tools to improve the efficiency of border controls” shall help to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of controls along the whole Danube whereas the recommendations in the next chapter provide recommendations for particular control points and country-specific control processes.

Within each sub-chapter control authorities and shipping companies or vessel operators are addressed separately. References are made to the work programme in chapter 4 which includes those recommendations which have been translated into measures (M 01, M 02, etc).

3.1 Harmonise and simplify border controls

Recommendations to control authorities

01. Reduce the number of different forms to be filled in and provide multilingual versions

Different authorities ask for the same data to be entered into different forms. A better coordination between the control authorities of one country or even between control authorities of different countries would lead to a reduced number of forms to be filled in by the skippers and the ship crews.

Control forms requested to be filled out by the skippers and ship crews are often not available in multilingual versions or request for different data and information. As the required documents are used in an international environment, they should be issued in multilingual versions (including an English version and the official languages of the Danube Commission). Improved language skills of the control authorities would be beneficial for communication to ensure an efficient control process.

By enabling the electronical submission and processing of control forms, explanations on the required data fields could be given in additional languages to the skippers and ship crews (see recommendation 3.3).

The following measures will help to simplify the control process while at the same time ensuring that all data required for effective controls will be collected:

- M 01. Draft a set of templates for selected forms to be unified and elaborate multilingual versions (1st phase: arrival- and departure reports, crew and passenger lists, list of supplies)
- M 02. Reach a stepwise agreement among control authorities to apply the unified forms
- M 03. Extend the preliminary set of unified forms with templates for the remaining ones (2nd phase: health declaration, dangerous goods declaration, etc)

02. Improve the collaboration between Border Control Points

Repeated in-depth controls of static information (e.g. time of validity of ship certificates, basic vessel data) seem to be without merit but are at the same time a source of annoyance. The seamless exchange of information among control authorities would help to reduce redundant checks along the Danube. The electronical means to facilitate this exchange are already available and can be easily implemented in a harmonised way.

A prerequisite for this exchange are consistent standards for the implementation of border controls, which according to sector representatives are currently still lacking. One practical example is that the absence of customs clearance in Batina (the last control point when exiting HR) repeatedly caused confusion in Mohács (the control point when entering HU) as Hungarian control authorities requested forms which are not issued on an obligatory basis in Croatia (checks are only required when entering HR). According to control authorities there is also a need to harmonise the declaration of radioactive waste transports on the Danube.

- M 04. Provide transnational training and know-how exchange for control bodies in order to ensure harmonised control mechanisms along the Danube (with a special focus on regulations regarding the transport of dangerous goods - ADN)

Recommendations to shipping companies and vessel operators

Skippers and ship crews are expected to fill in the forms more thoroughly in order to ensure effective and efficient control processes. Published in August 2015, the “Practical Manual on Border Controls along the Danube and its navigable tributaries” provides a comprehensive overview of control processes such as information on control forms applied in the different Danube countries (download version available on www.danube-navigation.eu). In addition improved language skills of the ship crews can help to speed up the controls additionally.

- M 05. Update and disseminate the “Practical Manual on Border Controls along the Danube and its navigable tributaries”

3.2 Establish time-efficient, service-oriented and transparent border controls

Recommendations to control authorities

03. Reduce waiting time and duration of controls

Long waiting times prior to the control, a long duration of the actual controls and a lack of information in the case of delays of the control authorities are the reason for annoyance and dissatisfaction which lead to a less cooperative behaviour of controlled persons. This means that besides the hard facts (actual duration of the control process) also soft facts (predictability of waiting times, transparent information on the reasons for delays) play an important role. In that sense an unexplained and long duration for the control of empty ships is hardly comprehensible to shipping companies and vessel operators.

- M 06. Monitor the observance of officially published opening hours at all control points (short term measure)
- M 07. Offer 24/7 opening hours at all control points by prior appointment (long term measure)
- M 08. Apply a transparent queuing system and inform about expected waiting times
- M 09. Use additional personnel or re-organise composition of control teams to carry out the controls of several ships in parallel (when necessary)

04. Conduct controls in a purposeful and service-oriented way

Skippers and ship crews wish to be treated in a respectful and polite way. Acceptance of controls increases if the purpose of the control is clear to the controlled persons. An insulting environment and arbitrariness in the interpretation of laws contradicts a service-oriented attitude and should be avoided in the interest of the control authorities and the controlled persons.

- M 10. Limit the number of officials entering the ship, as they intrude upon the privacy of the ship's crew
- M 11. Review control processes and forms to evaluate the purpose of all requested data and information

05. Prevent unjustified payments of fees and fines

In many cases the payment of fees and fines imposed by control authorities are perceived as unjustified by the skippers and ship crews. The lack of an independent complaints office causes dissatisfaction in the shipping sector.

- M 12. Install an independent complaints office which collects complaints and brings them forward to the responsible authorities
- M 13. Abolish landing fees during controls

Recommendations to shipping companies and vessel operators

06. Come prepared to the control points along the Danube and discuss difficulties directly with the control authorities

Arriving prepared may ease the control process. Obligations and requirements towards the transport companies should therefore be communicated in a transparent and service-oriented way to the skippers and ship crews in order to ensure effective and efficient control procedures. The recently published Practical Manual gives a good overview on the controls along the Danube. Shipping companies and vessel operators are encouraged to send feedback in case the practical implementation of controls differs to the processes stated in the Practical Manual, especially if these differences cause the payment of fees and fines.

- M 14. Review the information and data from the Practical Manual (e.g. control steps, control forms, duration of controls) and provide feedback to the Technical Secretariat of the EUSDR PA1a
- M 15. Discuss issues addressed by multiple/repeated complaints in the international working group (DRS PA1a working group)

3.3 Introduce electronical tools to improve the efficiency of border controls

The European Union's Community Customs Code already emphasizes that modern tools and technology should be used to ensure a profound basis for efficient and simple procedures. In line with these objectives and avoiding jeopardizing the efforts already made, paperless processes should be applied during controls at border crossing points and ports whenever practicable and purposeful.

Recommendations to control authorities

07. Enable the electronic submission and processing of data

Control authorities should facilitate the electronical submission and processing of ship, cargo and crew/passenger related data prior to the control. This would allow for targeted and more efficient controls as control authorities and controlled ships can organise the control process in advance and reduce the time needed for paperwork during the actual checks.

In a first step recent experiences in using a standardised message for reporting passengers and crews aboard of river cruise ships (PAXLST) at the control point in Mohács (Hungary) should be evaluated. Based on the conclusions derived from this pilot implementation and a comprehensive feedback round with boat masters and ship crews experienced in using the PAXLST message a transnational tool for the submission and processing of control data should be developed.

In addition, control authorities along the Danube should have the possibility to access a database which contains rarely changing standard information on vessels. Thus the multiple submissions of static data for each individual control process can be avoided. To avoid repeated controls, the database should also contain a list of authorities which previously accessed and validated the individual vessel data. Operated by the European Commission, the European Hull Database already includes standardised and officially validated vessel data. Possibilities for using this data in combination with the other information provided by shipping companies during the border control processes should be explored before setting up a new electronic structure.

- M 16. Enable the electronic submission of forms harmonised in M 01 and M 02 prior to the control (1st phase: arrival- and departure reports, crew and passenger lists, list of supplies)
- M 17. Implement database with standard vessel information for ships regularly passing certain border control points making use of existing systems (whenever feasible)

08. Schedule arrivals at control points via an electronic registration tool

River Information Services (RIS) and the Automatic Identification System (AIS) could be used to schedule the arrival of ships at the control points, in order to assign the control staff and control locations. Planning arrivals not only eases the work of control authorities but may also contribute to shorten waiting times. An electronic registration tool for shipping companies could integrate a functionality to submit the required control forms electronically (see M 16). The existing equipment for traffic monitoring can also be used to effectively carry out naval controls e.g. in Romania.

- M 18. Implement an electronic registration tool to schedule the arrival of ships at control points (precondition for 24/7 controls by prior appointment)

Recommendations to shipping companies and vessel operators

09. Provide accurate electronic data

Vessel operators need to make sure, that electronically submitted and stored data is reliable and up-to-date, in order to make the electronic submission to control authorities feasible. Electronic reporting requires the consent of vessel operators to submit information related to the vessel, its route and cargo as well as related to the crew/passengers on board.

- M 19. Publish and disseminate a user manual for the developed electronic tool used during the control process
- M 20. Participate as test user in a pilot regarding the electronic submission and processing of ship, cargo and crew/passenger related data

4 Work programme

The work programme lists the recommendations and measures from the previous chapter to be implemented starting in 2016. For measures where an agreement was reached prior to or during the PA1a working group meeting with the responsible stakeholders an implementing body and an indicative timeframe will be added.

[List of measures derived from recommendations, discuss with stakeholders prior to or during the working group meeting]

Recommendation and corresponding measures			Implementing body	Time frame
3.1 Harmonise and simplify border controls	M 01	Draft a set of templates for selected forms to be unified and elaborate multilingual versions (1st phase: arrival- and departure reports, crew and passenger lists, list of supplies)		
	M 02	Reach a stepwise agreement among control authorities to apply the unified forms		
	M 03	Extend the preliminary set of unified forms with templates for the remaining ones (2 nd phase: health declaration, dangerous goods declaration, etc)		
	M 04	Provide transnational training and know-how exchange for control bodies in order to ensure harmonised control mechanisms along the Danube (with a special focus on regulations regarding the transport of dangerous goods - ADN)		
	M 05	Update and disseminate the "Practical Manual on Border Controls along the Danube and its navigable tributaries"		

Recommendation and corresponding measures			Implementing body	Time frame
3.2 Establish time-efficient, service-oriented and transparent border controls	M 06	Monitor the observance of officially published opening hours at all control points (short term measure)		
	M 07	Offer 24/7 opening hours at all control points by prior appointment (long term measure)		
	M 08	Apply a transparent queuing system and inform about expected waiting times		
	M 09	Use additional personnel or re-organise composition of control teams to carry out the controls of several ships in parallel (when necessary)		
	M 10	Limit the number of officials entering the ship, as they intrude upon the privacy of the ship's crew		
	M 11	Review control processes and forms to evaluate the purpose of all requested data and information		
	M 12	Install an independent complaints office which collects complaints and brings them forward to the responsible authorities		
	M 13	Abolish landing fees during controls		
	M 14	Review the information and data from the Practical Manual (e.g. control steps, control forms, duration of controls) and provide feedback to the Technical Secretariat of the EUSDR PA1a		
	M 15	Discuss issues addressed by multiple/repeated complaints in the international working group (DRS PA1a working group)		

Recommendation and corresponding measures			Implementing body	Time frame
3.3 Introduce electronic tools to improve the efficiency of border controls	M 16	Enable the electronic submission of forms harmonised in M 01 and M 02 prior to the control (1st phase: arrival- and departure reports, crew and passenger lists, list of supplies)		
	M 17	Implement database with standard vessel information for ships regularly passing certain border control points making use of existing systems (whenever feasible)		
	M 18	Implement an electronic registration tool to schedule the arrival of ships at control points (precondition for 24/7 controls by prior appointment)		
	M 19	Publish and disseminate a user manual for the developed electronic tool used during the control process		
	M 20	Participate as test user in a pilot regarding the electronic submission and processing of ship, cargo and crew/passenger related data		

5 Additional difficulties, inconveniences and suggested improvements for specific border control points to be discussed in working group meetings

In addition to the issues covered in the general recommendations described in chapter 3 and 4, representatives of the shipping sector mentioned difficulties, inconveniences and suggested improvements for specific border control points to be discussed in the working groups organised by Priority Area 1a of the EU Danube Region Strategy. Issues that are already covered by the general recommendations are marked in green colour. All other issues which need to be discussed separately are marked in red colour.

5.1 Mohács (Hungary)

Location on the Danube/River-km: 1,447.00

Difficulties and inconveniences

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Unreasonably long waiting times prior to the control		M06, M07, M08, M09, M16, M18
Combined controls of several authorities lead to additional delays		M 09
Improper and incorrect treatment by the authorities, especially at night		M 12, M 15
Intimidating and insulting environment due to numerous control personnel entering the ship		M 10
Lack of knowledge of foreign languages (particularly English) causes difficulties in communication between control authorities and ship crews		-

Required documents are often mono-lingual and cause difficulties to the control authorities		M 01
Even if the ship, the certificates and other documents stay the same, repeated controls are necessary		M 17
Missing coordination between control authorities leads to a situation where the same document is accepted by one authority and declared invalid by another authority a few days later		M 04, M 15
Facial controls of passengers leaving the EU do not seem reasonable and cause dissatisfaction of tourists		-
Fines did not seem justified in several cases, written complaints at the Ministry did not show any effect		M 12, M 15

Suggested improvements

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Separate border revisions from controls by the water police, which could be done efficiently under way		-
Conduct controls time-efficiently and reduce the total idle time substantially		M06, M07, M08, M09., M16., M18.
Control also passenger ships by service boat in order to save time		-
Authorities should treat skippers respectfully and in a polite way		M 12, M 15
Reduce the number of control personnel entering the ship, six people should be sufficient		M 10
Use redundant personnel to inspect several ships at the same time		M 09

Develop harmonized forms for all authorities and countries		M 01, M 02, M 03
Enable the submission and evaluation of personal data from crew and passengers in advance (e.g. via RIS)		M 16
Reduce the time of controls by enabling the submission and processing of ship and freight related documents in advance		M 16
Documents and ship certificates should be issued in four languages at least (DE, EN, NL, FR)		M 01
Make use of the AIS system to schedule the arrivals and receive information on the ships		M 18
Store the validity of ships' certificates and other ship related data in a database in order to avoid redundant controls		M 17
The Pannonis website is not fully compatible with on-board systems, filling in the passenger and crew list is time-consuming		M 16
Construction of additional landing sites/pontoons for the control of motorized cargo vessels and small convoys		-

5.2 Bezdan (Serbia)

Location on the Danube/River-km: 1,425.00

Difficulties and inconveniences

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Unreasonably long control duration, also for empty ships		M06, M07, M08, M09, M16, M18

Abuse of power and arbitrariness in the interpretation of law and rules		M 12, M 14, M 15
Non-service oriented attitude and exaggeration of small administrative errors or ambiguities		M 12, M 15

Suggested improvements

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Reduce the time of controls by enabling the submission and processing of ship and freight related documents in advance		M 16
Engage additional personnel		M 09

5.3 Novi Sad (Serbia)

Location on the Danube/River-km: 1,255.00

Difficulties and inconveniences

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Restrictive opening hours for passport controls by the border police		M 06, M 07

5.4 Belgrade (Serbia)

Location on the Danube/River-km: 1,168.00

Difficulties and inconveniences

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Visitors are not allowed on board, while the ship is docked on a customs pontoon		-

5.5 Veliko Gradište (Serbia)

Location on the Danube/River-km: 1,059.00

Difficulties and inconveniences

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Unreasonably long control duration, also for empty ships		M06, M07, M08, M09, M16, M18
At times bribe money is asked to speed up procedures and the vessels' clearance		-

Suggested improvements

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Reduce the time of controls by enabling the submission and processing of ship and freight related documents in advance		M 06, M 07, M 08, M 09
Speed up the formalities and avoid bureaucracy		M 11

Minimize waiting times prior to the actual control		M06, M07, M08, M09, M16, M18
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5.6 Batina (Croatia)

Location on the Danube/River-km: 1,425.00

Difficulties and inconveniences

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
The absence of customs clearance in Batina causes confusion at Mohács. Customs control is only done when entering Croatia.		-

5.7 Vukovar (Croatia)

Location on the Danube/River-km: 1,333.00

Difficulties and inconveniences

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Controls in Vukovar take too long		M06, M07, M08, M09, M16, M18
Duration of passport controls seems arbitrary		M 08
Recently facial control became obligatory for incoming ships from Serbia		

Suggested improvements

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Install a database to store standard information on ships, which rarely change (e.g. validity periods of certificates)		M 17

5.8 Rouse (Bulgaria)

Location on the Danube/River-km: 505.00 – 480.00

Difficulties and inconveniences

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Revision on entrance and exit take far too long, even for empty ships		M06, M07, M08, M09, M16, M18

Suggested improvements

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Reduce the time of controls by enabling the submission and processing of ship and freight related documents in advance		M 16
Implement one document which can be used along the entire Danube		M 01, M 02, M 03

5.9 Orșova (Romania)

Location on the Danube/River-km: 954.70 – 953.50

Difficulties and inconveniences

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Very long waiting time		M06, M07, M08, M09, M16, M18
Filling in forms is inconvenient over a ships' railing		-

Suggested improvements

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Reduce the number of documents to be filled in		M 11

5.10 Giurgiu (Romania)

Location on the Danube/River-km: 496.80 – 491.00

Difficulties and inconveniences

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Extreme long waiting time due to restrictive opening hours		M 07

Suggested improvements

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Extend the working hours of control authorities to 24/7		M 07
Reduce the time of controls by enabling the submission and processing of ship and freight related documents in advance		M 16
Implement harmonized declarations and documents which can be used along the entire Danube		M 01, M 02, M 03
Abolish confirmation of empty cargo hold (additional waiting times after controls)		-

5.11 Galați (Romania)

Location on the Danube/River-km: 157.50 – 155.20 and 151.00 – 148.90

Suggested improvements

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Simplify the control process		M 11
Reduce the waiting time for the control team		M 08, M 09, M 16, M 18

5.12 Constanța (Romania)

Location on the Danube/River-km: Black Sea Port

Difficulties and inconveniences

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Time consuming customs clearance		M 08, M 09, M 16, M 18

Suggested improvements

Issues identified in the survey on border controls along the Danube (November 2014 - May 2015)	Covered by general recommendations	Measure(s)
Abolish confirmation of empty cargo hold (additional waiting times after controls)		M 11

6 Editorial

The recommendations contained in this document were developed and coordinated by EUSDR Technical Secretariat PA 1a (viadonau) and have been financed through the Austrian Action Programme Danube of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (bmvit).

7 Disclaimer

The Technical Secretariat of the EUSDR PA 1a – to improve mobility and multimodality: inland waterways compiled the information provided by various sources. It does not guarantee the accuracy of the information included in this document. Neither Technical Secretariat nor any person acting on the Technical Secretariats behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein. The recommendations do not constitute or overrule applicable law.

Please send your feedback on the recommendations to following address:

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