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

**15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Steering Group  
for Priority Area 1a of the EUSDR**

Vienna, Austria  
09 October 2018

**MINUTES**

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## 1. PA 1a Welcome and introduction

The 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Danube Strategy's Steering Group for Priority Area 1a – *To improve mobility and multimodality: Inland waterways* was held in Vienna, Austria, on the 09<sup>th</sup> of October 2018.

The meeting was chaired by Ms Vera Hofbauer, head of inland navigation department within the Austrian Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology (PA1a Austrian Coordinator) and Mrs Cristina Cuc (on behalf of PA 1a Romanian Coordinator), counsellor for European affairs within the Romanian Ministry of Transport, henceforth: PACs 1a. PACs 1a welcomed the participants, Member State representatives of the Steering Group and the observer members - representatives of the European Commission - DG MOVE, INEA, DSP - Danube Strategy Point, representatives of the international organisations (Danube Commission, ICPDR) and professional associations (Pro Danube International, AAOFPFR - Romanian Association of Inland Ship Owners and Port Operators). FAIRway project partners were present as well. The participating countries were: Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania.

In the opening of the meeting PACs mentioned that the working session is dedicated to the discussions on the future of the inland waterways, new targets and new actions that could be implemented after 2020 within the cooperation under EU Danube Region Strategy. The **agenda for the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Steering Group** was approved.

## 2. Status of Danube Ministerial Conclusions on the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan

**Mr Gert-Jan Muilerman, viadonau**, provided a brief history of the Danube Ministerial Conclusions, process that started in 2012, following a catastrophic year for navigation and when the countries decided that more efforts in the maintenance and the political support could improve the level of service. In 2012 the Declaration of Luxemburg was signed, which put the fairway maintenance on the political agenda. A lot of "homework" had been done until 2014, when the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan was published and endorsed by the Danube Transport Ministers. In 2015 the FAIRway Danube project started with financing from the Connecting Europe Facility. In 2016 and 2017, PA1a monitored the progress of the maintenance works in the Danube riparian countries through the National Action Plans (delivered by FAIRway Danube), and which are updated twice per year.

Currently Austria has the EU presidency and takes this opportunity to gather the ministers of transport and to prepare renewed Danube Ministerial Conclusions, which are currently being negotiated under the lead of the European Commission/DG MOVE. The ministerial conclusions are necessary to stress that the fairway maintenance is/remains national responsibility and the political attention as well as coordination on international level remains necessary.

Based on the National Action Plans, the top-20 bottlenecks have been monitored since 2012 and several bottlenecks significantly improved since 2014. 10 bottlenecks remain to date (primarily DE/HU/BG/RO). It is considered that the problem is generally manageable, provided that all countries involved take the necessary actions. On free flowing sections, fairway maintenance maintenance/rehabilitation (surveying, fairway marking, dredging) is an ongoing activity that will never be "ready". The availability of fairway depths between 2012– 2017, compared to hydrological conditions, were presented in a graph.

The core messages that can be included in the ministerial conclusions are:

- National administrations have stepped up their efforts since 2012/2013;
- EU financing (mainly CEF, Cohesion Funds, IPA) and EU-coordination has been essential for the realization of Master Plan;
- National Action Plans monitor fairway conditions, measures and budgets and are an important management tool;

- FAIRway Danube realizes important elements of Master Plan in a coordinated approach;
- Maintenance and rehabilitation show positive effect on navigation conditions, but continued attention is needed;
- Further investment, possibly supported by EU-funds, to complement equipment for monitoring, marking, dredging (where required);
- Ensure sustainable operation of EU-funded equipment (gauging stations, vessels, management systems, etc.) also after the end of the projects;
- Some navigational bottlenecks remain, initiatives need to be continued/started, possibly also in the proven coordinated approach;
- Deal with environmental requirements in an integrated way (Good Navigation Status, Good Ecological Status, Favorable conservation status) and make reference to Joint Statement Process.
- Continue the efforts to remove administrative barriers (TEN-T Flagship project, cooperation of PA 1a and PA11);
- To continue with lock rehabilitation (where required), possibly supported by EU-funds
- Include a reference to the ongoing negotiation on Cohesion Funds and CEF II.

The members of the SG of PA1a agreed on the possible core messages to be included in the Ministerial Declaration.

**Mrs Désirée Oen, DG MOVE**, thanked the AT Presidency for bringing again the issue of the inland waterway transport and mainly fairway maintenance on the high political agenda. DG MOVE stresses that fairway maintenance is a national responsibility and asks the member states to do their job. For many years there have been discussions at DG MOVE about insufficient maintenance on the Romanian – Bulgarian common sector and now the both states are doing dredging on the sector. Mrs. Oen asks the PACs to continue their involvement in the preparation of the ministerial meeting and conclusions and to participate to the meetings that will be organized by DG MOVE.

**Mr Petar Margić, Danube Commission**, raised the fact that on the Danube there is still a problem with the minimum required depths for navigation and also with the dredging. He gave an example related to the Bala branch and that the alternative route provided by Romania does not have the same class and that the convoys have to be dismantled. The Danube Commission identifies two possible solutions: continuously dredging or building new locks. Building new locks is a sustainable solution and the Danube countries made such plans since 1984. Locks are a source of green energy and will assure a stable fairway for a long period of time.

**Mrs Cristina Cuc, PACs**, added that since the EUSDR started, the shipping companies raised the issue of the navigation conditions and asked the states to take urgent measures and to intervene fast. This was also a target of Priority Area 1a. That's why the *Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan on the Danube River and its tributaries* was developed and focused on fast and soft solutions, as well as a good equipment of the waterway administrations (surveying vessels, measurement vessels, dredgers) in order to perform better their job. Large infrastructure projects are not included in the Master Plan.

### 3. Brief introduction of the new Danube Strategy Point (DSP)

**Mr Robert Lichtner, DSP Office Vienna**, provided useful information on the newly established DSP.

In 2018 the Danube Transnational Programme organised a call for "DSP new" and the application submitted by Austria (City of Vienna) and Romania (Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration) was accepted. The DSP activities started on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2018, in three weeks the structure of DSP was functional and the contract will end at 31 December 2021.

The DSP mission is to be a supportive body for all stakeholders involved in the EU Danube Region Strategy. It will encourage cooperation between stakeholders and other actors (funding facilities, administration, civil society, local / regional / national authorities), make the Strategy visible for as many people as possible and document the added value of the strategy for countries and people. The DSP will – in close cooperation with National Coordinators (NCs), Priority Area Co-ordinators (PACs), the Presidency and DG REGIO – stimulate the process of evaluation of EUSDR and – according to the results of the evaluation – make proposals for adapting the Strategy's Action Plan and its structure to make the EUSDR fit for the forthcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The tasks are clearly specified in the Application Form and in line with the mission of DSP.

DSP activities are carried on by 8 people (4 based in RO and 4 based in AT) and a lot of effort will be put in the increasing of the visibility of the EUSDR. The activities planned to be performed until the end of 2018 are: the evaluation and revision of the Action Plan, monitoring and elaboration of Annual EUSDR Report, EUSDR Calendar and the Communication Strategy.

**Mrs Barbara Bernardi, INEA**, asked for a close cooperation between DSP and INEA on the following issues:

- the preparation of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), especially on CEF II;
- the Work Plan for the Rhine-Danube Corridor, which is actually a study and contains many projects with relevance for EUSDR, in order to not duplicate the efforts; INEA has a comprehensive list of the projects dealing with the inland waterways;
- activities in the neighbouring countries, projects in Serbia and more support for development of projects and the involvement of the Republic of Moldova.

She also encourages the DSP to work on increasing the visibility of EUSDR and mentioned that this is a permanent concern for INEA, as well as for EC how to increase the visibility and how to be closer to the EU citizens.

**Mr Serban Cucu, AAOPFR**, asked DSP to discuss more directly with the real stakeholders of the EUSDR, priority area inland waterways, meaning port operators, shipping companies, forwarders, etc. The PACs and the DSP answered that the discussions with and the involvement of the stakeholders is the task of PA1a coordinators and more attention will be paid on this issue. The DSP offers support to all the priority areas coordinators and make the connections between PACs and EC services and institutions and other macro regional strategies.

#### 4. Introduction on the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan

**Ms Viktoria Weissenburger and Mr Gert-Jan Mulleman, viadonau**, introduced the process of revision of the EUSDR Action Plan and the Gap Analysis, a working document prepared by the PA1a Technical Secretariat and which has been sent to the participants before the meeting.

The main documents establishing the cooperation within EUSDR are the EC Communication COM(2010) 715 and its accompanying Action Plan SEC(2010) 1489 final also from 8 December 2010. The Action Plan defines targets and actions that require interventions (projects, policies, etc.). Currently a process of the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan is ongoing and until the end of December 2018 PACs plan to discuss the proposals for the revision within the Steering Groups of PAs. PA1a should submit a consolidated and accorded proposal for revision of the action plan in spring 2019.

The 5 existing targets and the 10 actions laid down in Action Plan were presented. Within this existing structure, 6 thematic working groups were set up:

- Waterway infrastructure and management;
- Ports & sustainable freight transport;
- Fleet modernization;
- River Information Services;
- Education & jobs;
- Administrative processes (with PA11).

A Gap Analysis and a summary for the strategic reorientation of PA 1a were prepared and distributed. The documents represented the background for discussion and the participants were split in two groups. The small-group discussions were moderated by Mr Gert-Jan Muilerman and Ms Vera Hofbauer/Ms Viktoria Weissenburger.

Key questions for discussion were:

1. Reflection on the existing PA1a targets until 2020
  - Any other key topics or challenges for PA1a for the next 10 years, which would require own Target/Working Group?
  - Reflection on proposed Actions within each Working Group (see handout)
  - Any horizontal topics within PA1a?
2. Topics or challenges to be addressed together with other Priority Areas?
  - Proposal for integrated project(s) covering more than one Priority Area

## 5. Group discussion on revision of the EUSDR Action Plan for PA1a

The main issues raised by the participants during the group discussions were clustered into the 6 working group themes:

Working Group	Possible themes/ideas
WG1 Waterway infrastructure & management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waterway infrastructure development &amp; management</li> <li>• Port infrastructure development (propose needs for port infra development, based on Core Network TEN-T)</li> <li>• Investments in public docking/mooring facilities: equipment, security, safety, waste water, power, sanitary, dolphins, pontoon, vertical/inclined river bank, analysis capacity use (e.g. identify hot spots, AIS, surveys) (“Berthing strategy/network”? Cooperation with PA3?)</li> <li>• Allow a modern system of monitoring water levels and water forecasts</li> <li>• Address “unfair competition” related to public infrastructure investments</li> <li>• Communicate on implications of water levels below LNWL</li> <li>• Analyse effects climate change</li> <li>• Monitor possible structural infrastructural interventions (e.g. dams)</li> <li>• Connections to tributaries/missing links (e.g. Vah)</li> <li>• Sustainable waterway development (Cooperation with PA6): development of “ecological masterplan for the Danube”?</li> </ul>
WG2 Ports & sustainable freight transport (business development)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address high port charges in some ports</li> <li>• Insufficient equipment of port facilities and personnel resources (Cooperation with PA1b?)</li> <li>• Development of IWT as multimodal mode (Cooperation with PA1b)</li> <li>• Address bureaucracy in ports</li> <li>• Address much dependency on basic industries as shippers; identify promising alternative market segments</li> <li>• Continue good practices in transport development projects</li> <li>• Contribute to adequate ship waste treatment incl. financing models</li> </ul>
WG3 Fleet modernisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address lack of investments in new fleet</li> <li>• Insufficient knowledge on best available technologies</li> <li>• Need for research projects</li> <li>• Need for funding opportunities/cooperation among SMEs to develop bargaining power (e.g. joint EIB loans)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth data on emission values of IWT area lacking</li> <li>• Retrofit solutions for greening often not profitable</li> <li>• Exploit alternative electric auxiliary power sources (e.g. solar panels)</li> <li>• Exploit alternative fuels for propulsion</li> </ul>
WG4 River Information Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of logistics services and applications based on RIS</li> <li>• Further digitalisation</li> </ul>
WG5 Education & jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient availability of qualified nautical personnel for commercial shipping; support for training programmes</li> <li>• Insufficient availability of qualified nautical personnel for waterway administrations</li> <li>• Bad image (low prestige) for future workers</li> <li>• Improve working conditions (cooperation with PA9?)</li> </ul>
WG6 Administrative processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unnecessary border formalities</li> <li>• Too much bureaucracy</li> <li>• Not only focus on border procedures</li> <li>• More efficient port procedures required (e.g. harmonized IT-supported port services)</li> <li>• Combat criminality on/along the Danube (Cooperation with PA11)</li> </ul>
Possible horizontal topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Image, communication, targeted dissemination</li> <li>• Project development &amp; support (project capacity building, inform on funding opportunities, investigate opportunities for blending)</li> <li>• Digitalisation</li> </ul>

The PA1a Technical Secretariat will consolidate the above long list of possible themes and will add single targets and actions to each working group cluster.

## 6. Next steps

PACs underlined that the documents presented and discussed with the SG are the first draft versions. The SG members are invited in an open dialogue to contribute to the revision of the Action Plan for PA 1a. Following time plan is proposed (adapted and updated after the meeting):

- **20<sup>th</sup> December 2018:** consolidated proposal for revision of the Action Plan
- **30<sup>th</sup> January 2019:** final review of proposal by SG members
- **Spring 2019:** submission of proposal for PA1a revision of Action Plan

Given that the first discussion on the revision of the action plan already took place on 9<sup>th</sup> October during the Steering Group meeting, there should be sufficient time for reflection and discussion with the Steering Group until Spring 2019.

The PACs PA 1a thanked to all the participants for their involvement and cooperation.

## Enclosures

*Please note:* All documents are available for download at the website of EUSDR PA 1a  
→ [www.danube-navigation.eu](http://www.danube-navigation.eu)

- (1) List of attendants
- (2) Presentations given during the Steering Group meeting
- (3) EUSDR PA 1a Gap Analysis