



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

Luxembourg, 7 June 2012

Danube Strategy: Transport ministers to cooperate on navigability

On the initiative of the Commission, the transport ministers of the riparian states of the Danube met for the first time today in Luxembourg and agreed on a declaration setting out a number of commitments to avoid a repeat of last autumn's navigation standstills on the river. The declaration reasserts existing obligations to maintain the fairway to a good standard and undertakes measures to tackle problems like low water or ice. The ministers of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Moldova, Romania and Slovakia signed the declaration, while Serbia and BiH have sent letters of support for the declaration. Hungary has not yet signed the declaration. The ministers agreed to meet again, and to co-ordinate actions through the structures of the Danube Strategy and the Trans-European Transport Network Coordinator for Inland Waterways.

Vice-President and Commissioner for Transport Siim Kallas said: *"Last year's navigation blockages caused more than €6 million worth of losses. Interruptions to shipping on the Danube can be avoided by better maintenance, better communication and better monitoring. Today's declaration is an excellent step forward. We look forward to Hungary adding its signature in due course."*

Commissioner for Regional Policy Johannes Hahn added: *"The Danube is a vital artery through the region, with the potential to help boost jobs and growth. Predictable conditions for shipping are essential to build confidence in this competitive and environmentally friendly form of transport. The agreement reached so far shows the added value of the Danube Strategy. I hope to meet the Hungarian infrastructure minister later this month to discuss Hungary's outstanding concerns."*

In September and October 2011, navigation on the Danube came to a complete standstill due to low water levels on the lower Danube for the more than 38 days. Similar problems occurred in November 2011 on the Hungarian, Serbian and Bulgarian section of the Danube. Apart from the losses incurred by the navigation companies, these standstills undermined trust in Danube navigation as a reliable and cost-effective mode of transport, risking a shift of freight to less environmentally friendly modes of transport.

The signatories to the Belgrade Convention and those who have ratified the European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance (AGN) commit to maintaining good navigation status through the joint declaration. They will put in place by next year national and cross border co-ordination procedures to respond to extraordinary conditions and re-establish optimum and safe navigation conditions. They will also ensure continuous communication on the fairway situation; monitor implementation and report regularly, meeting once a year or as necessary to follow up.

Background

Inland navigation is the most energy efficient and environmentally friendly mode of transport. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region¹ aims to exploit the full potential of the Danube navigation by removing obstacles to navigability and to increase transport volumes on the Danube River by 20% by 2020. The Danube is also an integral part of the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T)².

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¹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/danube/index_en.cfm

² http://ec.europa.eu/transport/infrastructure/index_en.htm