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

**4th Meeting of the Steering Group for
Priority Area 1a of the EUSDR**
Belgrade, Serbia – 8 November 2012

MINUTES

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1. Welcome to the participants, adoption of the Minutes from the previous meeting and adoption of the Agenda

The 4th meeting of the Danube Strategy's Steering Group for Priority Area 1a – *To improve mobility and multimodality: Inland waterways* was held in Belgrade, Serbia. The Coordinators of Priority Area 1a (henceforth: PACs 1a) of the EUSDR, represented by Mr. Reinhard VORDERWINKLER of Austria and Ms. Monica PATRICHI of Romania, welcomed the members of the Steering Group to the meeting and invited them to shortly introduce themselves and the organisation they are representing.

The Minutes from the 3rd meeting as well as the Agenda for the 4th meeting of the Steering Group were approved unanimously and without amendments.



2. Introduction of current status of work by PACs 1a

The PACs 1a, represented by Mr. Reinhard VORDERWINKLER and Ms. Monica PATRICHI, started their overview on the current implementation status of Priority Area 1a of the Danube Strategy with the status quo on **projects** which are in line with the targets and actions of the Strategy. Thus far, 91 projects were received or identified by PACs 1a of which 16 are in their definition phase, 41 under preparation and 29 currently being implemented. Projects and project ideas can be forwarded any time to PACs 1a by means of a project data sheet which is available for download of the PA 1a website at www.danube-navigation.eu. In terms of funding for projects, attention was specifically drawn to a planned new transnational cooperation programme for the Danube region which will be available for the EU programming period 2014–2020 as a follow-up to the SEE programme. The PACs informed the participants that out of the nine projects which received a **Letter of Recommendation** by the Steering Group, four have in the meantime been approved by the respective managing authorities.

At the end of May 2012, the **first Annual Stakeholder Conference** on inland waterways in the Danube region took place in Bucharest in the premises of the Palace of Parliament. The main intention of the Conference was to enable a dialogue between the public and the private sector of

inland waterway transport along the Danube. The Minutes for the Conference are available for download under the "Conferences" tab of the PA 1a's website.

Next in their introduction, the PACs 1a provided a short flashback to the **3rd Steering Group meeting** in May 2012 which was held in Bratislava and which was attended by EU Commissioner Johannes HAHN of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional Policy (henceforth: DG REGIO). Discussions were targeted to the effective waterway maintenance and measures that could be implemented by each riparian country in order to avoid the negative effects of low water periods.

In June 2012, the transport ministers of the Danube riparian countries met in Luxembourg and agreed on a **Declaration** concerning effective **waterway infrastructure maintenance** on the Danube and its navigable tributaries, reasserting existing obligations to maintain the fairway to a good standard and to undertake 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 Bosnia and Herzegovina have sent letters of support. Hungary and Ukraine have not yet signed the Declaration. The PACs 1a, through their Joint Technical Secretariat, support the monitoring and implementation of the Declaration's objectives in the frame of the capabilities. To this avail, a **questionnaire** on waterway maintenance had been sent out to the signatory states prior to the 4th meeting of the Steering Group (cf. section 4 below).

The PACs 1a informed the members of the Steering Group about the submission of the **first Annual Progress Report** to DG REGIO in June 2012. The report specifies the progress made regarding the first year of implementation of the Danube Strategy in PA 1a. The Report had been approved by the members of the Steering Group and was sent to the European Commission in due time. It is available online on the PA 1a's website together with its annexes.

In addition to coordinating PA 1a of the EUSDR, the PACs 1a are also responsible for coordinating the implementation of the "flagship project" **Innovative Danube Vessel**. This project consists of a study which was commissioned by PAC 1a on behalf of DG REGIO with the following overall objective: Elaboration and development of innovative vessel and technology solutions with a high potential for implementation on the Danube. The winning consortium started work in July 2012, results are to be made publicly available by the end of 2013.

3. Presentation of conclusions from the 3rd meeting of the Working Groups

Mr. Markus SIMONER, representative of the Joint Technical Secretariat for implementing PA 1a of the EUSDR, presented the main outcomes of the 3rd meeting of the Working Groups which took place one day prior to the Steering Group meeting. At that session, the Working Groups of PA 1a were thematically clustered as follows:

- Waterway maintenance & waterway infrastructure
- Ports & fleet modernisation
- Administrative procedures

Mr. SIMONER stressed the importance of an enhanced **horizontal and integrative approach** for the implementation of the EUSDR and its relevant projects. He mentioned the examples of coordination between Priority Areas 1a and 6 (biodiversity) as well as the stakeholder participation model which was set up for the waterway infrastructure project in Serbia.

Ms. Irina PLOEG CRUCERU presented her conclusions from the 3rd Working Groups meeting on behalf of DG REGIO. She suggested to take more advantage of the participation of WG members as they attend these meetings at their own expenses. A common view or common proposals on resp. for certain actions should be developed which can then be pushed on the side of the European Commission in order to move from "thinking" to "doing". To this avail, a dialogue could be established in between WG meetings and concrete proposals with a structured content and proposed solutions should be developed.

4. Declaration on effective waterway infrastructure maintenance – status reported by countries

Mr. Thomas HARTL, representative of the Joint Technical Secretariat for implementing PA 1a of the EUSDR, gave a short introduction on the **Questionnaire** on effective waterway infrastructure maintenance which had been sent out to the members of the Steering Group prior to the 4th meeting. According to the Luxembourg Declaration, the implementation of the actions foreseen in the Declaration is to be monitored through a common regular monitoring and reporting mechanism in the framework of the EUSDR's PA 1a. The Questionnaire had been drafted in order to enable Danube riparian states to provide specific information on the execution of regular fairway maintenance works as agreed on in the Declaration.

The deadline for returning the filled-in Questionnaire to the Joint Technical Secretariat was set with October 30th, 2012. To that date, eight questionnaires had been received. The density and quality of information provided by the Danube countries in some cases varied considerably, and the PACs thus announced a round of feedback in order to fill the gaps and to be able to compare the data provided.



Austria reported on its proactive approach in waterway maintenance – in order to provide good fairway conditions to the users of the waterway in low water periods, which statistically seen mostly occur on the Austrian stretch of the Danube in the fall and winter months of a year, the dredging of shallow sections was proactively started in September this year.

Slovakia pointed to the fact that the Slovakian Ministry of Environment is responsible for waterway maintenance, while the Declaration was signed by the Ministry of Transport. Slovakia sees dredging

as an option which is not sustainable and considers the costs created by these measures as damages caused by the non-completion of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros project.

Hungary stated that it will provide answers to the Questionnaire within the forthcoming weeks.

Croatia reported on the plan for a better cross-border coordination in extraordinary circumstances in order to improve cooperation, exchange of information and the joint measures taken with Serbia.

Serbia informed the members of the Steering Group that it has officially signed the Declaration. No dredging measures were taken in 2012 due to the lack of money for such interventions. For 2013, Ploput as the competent waterway maintenance authority will be faced with a very strict budget.

Bosnia and Herzegovina pointed to the fact that it had sent a letter in support of the Declaration with a future option to sign it. Maintenance of the Sava river necessitates close cooperation between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the entire waterway stretch forms the border between the two countries. In addition, national rules on maintenance issues need to be developed.

Romania stressed the importance of riverbed surveying as sediment transport has a high influence on navigation on the lower Danube. The Declaration has had a positive impact on national procedures, it is considered as an important political document. In the wake of the Declaration, a Memorandum of Understanding between Romania and Bulgaria on the sustainable development of inland waterway transport on the common sector of the Danube was signed, on the basis of which an Interministerial Committee has been set up.

Bulgaria reported that the signing of the Declaration has not yet led to any changes in the country. No financial support for waterway maintenance has been made available by the Bulgarian Ministry of Transport.

Ukraine stated that it has no objections to the contents of the Declaration and that signature to it will be achieved in the future.

The **Sava Commission** pointed out the possibility of a PPP model in waterway maintenance based on the concrete example of a big refinery which would be ready to invest in waterway maintenance for the better use of the Sava river for navigation. Unfortunately, the legal framework for such a solution is currently missing, as waterway maintenance lies within the competence of the riparian countries.

5. Letter of Recommendation (LoR) for selected projects

Prior to the 4th meeting of the Steering Group, the Joint Technical Secretariat sent out data sheets for projects which had been received by the PACs 1a from project promoters and which are suggested to receive a Letter of Recommendation as these projects comply with the criteria for issuing a Letter of Recommendation for PA 1a. The following three projects had been received:

1. Preparation of Necessary Documentation for River Training and Dredging Works on selected locations along the Danube River in Serbia
2. Unification of the reference systems used in Romania and Bulgaria on the Danube river and introduction of the European systems
3. Train for Ports

All three projects were approved by the members of the Steering Group entitled to vote (Art. 6 (1) b. of the Rules of Procedure of the Steering Group) to receive a Letter of Recommendation by the PACs 1a; projects 1 and 2 were approved unanimously, while project 3 was approved by unanimity minus one (Germany) (Art. 6 (1) d.).

Serbia noted a mistake in the designation of their project. It will be corrected to "River Training and Dredging Works on selected locations along the Danube River in Serbia". The members of the Steering Group consented to this change of name which will not negatively affect the issuing of a LoR for this project.

A few days prior to the meeting of the Steering Group, **Slovakia** forwarded a data sheet for the project "MreNa – Recreational Navigation on the Morava River (Feasibility Study)" to the Joint Technical Secretariat of PA 1a. Due to the short time-frame, which did not allow for checking the compliance of this project with the criteria for issuing a Letter of Recommendation for PA 1a, the PACs 1a decided to start "decision-making by written procedure" after the meeting according to Art. 6 (2) a. of the Rules of Procedure of the Steering Group – provided that the mentioned criteria are fulfilled by the project.

6. Obstacles in achieving targets/implementing actions of PA 1a

Ms. Cristina CUC, representative of the Joint Technical Secretariat for implementing PA 1a of the EUSDR, gave an overview of obstacles in achieving the targets resp. implementing the actions of PA 1a as identified by stakeholders and presented possible solutions.

Regarding the topic of financial means to be made available in the upcoming EU **financing programming period** 2014–2020, Ms. Irina PLOEG CRUCERU of the European Commission's DG REGIO pointed out that the Commission has prepared country position papers which include the targets of the EUSDR. These papers are an integral part for the discussions between EU countries and the Commission on the future outline of national operational programmes. In addition, DG REGIO is also part of the country teams which are involved in the respective negotiations.

Mr. Philip WELLER, Executive Secretary of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River's Permanent Secretariat, suggested that the PACs might send a letter to those country teams (chief negotiators) as well as to DG REGIO stressing the most important issues as identified by the Steering Group in implementing the EUSDR's PA 1a. Mr. Željko MILKOVIĆ, Deputy Secretary for Navigation of the International Sava River Basin Commission, referred to the importance of including the topic of the legal framework for ship's personnel and boatmasters in the programming.



7. Discussion on targets and actions of PA 1a

Mr. Reinhard VORDERWINKLER, in his role as PAC 1a, asked the members of the Steering Group about the possible need for a revision of one or more of the five targets and the related actions of PA 1a. None of the Steering Group members expressed a need for a revision of targets and actions.

Ms. Irina PLOEG CRUCERU mentioned a reflection paper on the implementation of the EUSDR which was drafted by DG REGIO in preparation of the first annual EUSDR report to be published by the Commission in 2013. Among the challenges ahead is to ensure that actions are contributing to the overall goals and targets of the Strategy. Steering Groups and PACs have a key task in further facilitating policy coordination and concrete project development.

Mr. Florian BALLNUS, representative of the Coordinators of PA 6 on biodiversity, pointed to the fact that concrete actions have already been started which are aimed at enhancing horizontal policy coordination, specifically coordination between different PACs. One example for this is a panel discussion on the integrative approach as a key success factor for improved mobility and sustainable river basin management which is scheduled for the 1st Annual Forum of the EUSDR in Regensburg at the end of November 2012.

8. Country reports on implementing PA 1a's actions and roadmaps

As a last agenda item, the members of the Steering Group were asked to report on their contribution to the implementation of the EUSDR's Action Plan and Roadmaps and to provide information on their plans and priorities for the year 2013. These presentations have been made available for download at the website of EUSDR PA 1a, i.e. www.danube-navigation.eu, under the "Steering Group" tab.

Next steps

- **27–28 November 2012:** 1st Annual EUSDR Stakeholder Conference, Regensburg (Germany).
- **Spring 2013:** 4th meeting of Working Groups of PA 1a + 5th meeting of Steering Group of PA 1a

Enclosures

Please note: All documents are available for download at the website of EUSDR PA 1a
→ www.danube-navigation.eu

- (1) Presentations given by the participants at the Steering Group meeting
- (2) List of attendants
- (3) List of contact details for members of the Steering Group