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

**9th Meeting of the Steering Group
(extended) for Priority Area 1a of the
EUSDR**
Vienna, Austria
22 April 2015

MINUTES

Author(s):
Joint Technical Secretariat of PACs 1a

Version (date):
Version 2 (final) | 08-06-2015

1. Agreement on the minutes of the previous meeting and adoption of the Agenda

The 9th meeting of the Danube Strategy's Steering Group (extended) for Priority Area 1a – *To improve mobility and multimodality: Inland waterways* was held in Vienna, Austria in the premises of the TechGate Vienna. The Coordinators of Priority Area 1a (henceforth: PACs 1a) of the EUSDR, represented by Mr. Reinhard VORDERWINKLER welcomed the participants, members of the Steering Group and the observer members - representatives of the European Commission (DG REGIO and DG MOVE), representatives of the river commissions and organisations. The participating countries were: Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania.

Having in view that the main topic of the meeting was the **implementation of the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan**, the partners of the proposed *FAIRway* project have been invited to attend the meeting.

The minutes of the 8th meeting, which was held in Vukovar (Croatia) on 29 October 2014, as well as the agenda for the 9th meeting of the Steering Group were approved unanimously and without amendments.

2. State of play in priority Area 1a on Inland Waterways and Work Plan 2015 – 2016

The Austrian Technical Secretariat of PA 1a provided an overview on the activities performed since the last meeting:

On the 13th of November 2014 within the NEWADA duo project was finalised the document **Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan (FRMMP)** which was submitted by the SG of PA 1a to the European Commission and endorsed by the majority of Danube Transport Ministers on the 3rd of December 2014. In their conclusions the ministers agreed on the further elaboration of national roadmaps which will identify individual actions, responsibilities, funding resources and intermediate milestones for the implementation of FRMMP and to communicate these roadmaps by **30 June 2015**.

A survey which was carried out in close cooperation with 24 major operators demonstrated that the most critical locations are centred on **around 11 hotspots** in the Danube waterway network. Notwithstanding the importance of the remaining critical locations, these hotspots should be treated with priority in the planned implementation phase of the Master Plan.

Also, for the implementation of the FRMMP, in March 2015, the project proposal *FAIRway* was submitted under the first CEF call. Within *FAIRway*, each country shall elaborate national roadmaps to implement the Master Plan. Having in view the deadline established the ministers of transport, viadonau took the initiative to draft the template for the national roadmaps and distributed the document to the members of SG for PA 1a and to the waterway administration of the EUSDR countries.

The PA1a Working Group on Administrative Processes, in cooperation with PA 11 – *Security*, has started a survey among shipping companies and vessel operators on border crossing procedures (still online on www.danube-navigation.eu). Results are being analysed.

The selected projects to be financed from the pilot initiative “START Danube Region Project Fund”, managed by the PA 10 – *Institutional capacity and cooperation*, were announced in January 2015. Of relevance for PA1a are 2 projects - *Training4Ports* and *POPEI*. *Training4Ports* deals with building competency for the port sector labour force and the *POPEI* project deals with further development of port performance indicator system.

The PA 1a Progress Report for the period 2012 – 2014, was accepted by the SG and then submitted to the EC (DG REGIO) early April 2015.

The Status quo of activities contributing to PA1a targets is published on the website www.danube-navigation.eu and updated permanently.

Furthermore a Work Plan for the activities of PA 1a in the period 2015 – 2016 was presented and agreement by the Steering Group. The proposed topics which will have a high priority on the agenda of PA 1a SG are:

- Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan
- Administrative Processes in Danube Navigation
- Innovative Danube Vessel.

The members of the Steering Group approved unanimously the proposed topics of the Work Plan for 2015 – 2016.

3. Decision on membership of ProDanube International as permanent observer to Steering Group

The members of the Steering Group were informed that on the 8th of April 2015 the organisation ProDanube International (PDI) sent an official request for becoming a permanent observer of the PA 1a Steering Group.

ProDanube International is a non-profit organisation and represents more than 130 private companies with a strategic economic interest in a better functioning of IWT in the Rhine-Danube Corridor. PDI became an important voice of the private sector and organised with the occasion of the last EUSDR Annual Forum (June 2014, Vienna) the first dialogue “Industry meets Policy”.

According to the article 4 of the Rules of Procedures of the Steering Group, adopted on the 28th of October 2011, there are three types of membership in the SG: a) Members nominated by the Partner States with a right to vote; b) Other regular members with an observer status and c) Invited members with an advisory capacity. The PACs asked for the agreement of the SG members for the PDI request. No objection was raised, so it was taken the decision that ProDanube International to be a permanent observer member of the Steering Group.

4. Information on START II and TAF Calls 2015

Mrs. Gudrun PABST, representing EUSDR PA 10a - *Institutional capacity and cooperation* made a comprehensive presentation of START II and TAF – DRP II Calls foreseen to be launched in May 2015. The PA 10 received from DG REGIO 900,000 Euro for identifying and financing project ideas with EUSDR relevance, which were split equally in two financing programmes: START and TAF - DRP. The maximum project value should be 25,000 Euro for TAF-DRP and maximum 20,000 Euro for START and the overall procedure will be quite similar with the first call of proposals.

For the second call of projects it was asked for each EUSDR priority area to establish until the 4th of May 2015 thematic focus, which mean that the projects having the objectives in those areas will receive better score. Mrs. Pabst informed the participants that the thematic focus areas will be included in the application forms and that other criterion which will be taken into consideration during evaluation process is the geographic balance. The geographic balance means that the evaluators will pursue to finance projects having lead partners from all EUSDR countries.

It was presented a detailed calendar and all the necessary steps in order to obtain funds from START II and TAF-DRP II. It is estimated that the final results of the evaluation will be communicated in October 2015. The START programme has a longer procedure because an additional step is the signature of the grant agreements with the lead partner. For TAF-DRP the experts are contracted by PA 10.

Mr. Vorderwinkler thanked for the presentation and asked the members of the Steering Group to approve that the three topics included in the Work Plan for 2015 – 2016 to represent the thematic focus areas for START and TAF – DRP. No objection received it was decided that

- Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan
- Administrative Processes in Danube Navigation and
- Innovative Danube Vessel

to be communicated to PA 10 and to be included in the application forms for STARTII and TAF – DRP II.

5. DANUBE 2014 – 2020 – Danube Transnational Programme

Mrs. Irina CRUCERU, responsible for Danube Programme 2014 – 2020 from DG REGIO, made an overview of the Danube Transnational Programme. The programme is under approval procedure and it is estimated to be launched in September 2015. The programme covers the entire geographical and thematic area of EUSDR. Mrs. Cruceru presented the all four financing priorities as well the specific objectives and results expected.

The financing priority no. 4 is a special one and has two specific objectives. First is to strengthen multilevel transnational governance and institutional capacities and provide viable institutional and legal frameworks for more effective, wider and deeper transnational cooperation across the Danube region in areas with major societal challenges. The second one is to improve the governance system and the capabilities and capacities of public institutions and key actors involved in complex transnational project development to implement the EUSDR in a more effective way. The last one will provide financing for PACs support, seed money for projects considering the TAF and START models and the financing of the Danube Strategy Point located in Bruxelles, in the premises of Baden-Württemberg Permanent Representation.

There will be open calls, but also there are foreseen targeted calls of proposals and restricted calls for the specific beneficiaries with regard to the support of EUSDR. The eligible applicants will be public and private enterprises and international organisations located in the eligible area. There could be applicants from outside the eligible area only if the project is in the benefit of the programme area.

The selection of the projects will be in two phases. First is envisaged to be a selection at the level of the project concept and partnerships and in the second phase the selected projects should be detailed. It is considered that this approach in two steps will be in the benefit of the project quality. The selection process will last around one year, so if the programme will be launched in September 2015 the contracting phase will start in October 2016.

Mr. Alexandru Capatu, from PDI, raised the concern that the financing will be available very late, at the end of 2016, having in view that the EUSDR started in 2011 and that it was expected the procedure to be more simple than from SEE programme. He also raised the question if is sure that the private companies will be eligible. Mrs. Irina Cruceru answered that the eligibility criteria are just drafted and that it is a strong support from the Member States to include the private companies into the programme. Mr. Olivier Onidi, DG MOVE, completed that the EUSDR is not financed only from the Danube Transnational Programme and mentioned that there are available non-reimbursable funds in Connecting Europe Facility, sectoral operational programmes and other transnational programmes which represents 97% of the total available funds. The Danube Programme represents only 3% and it is envisaged to give more visibility to the EUSDR projects and not to solve all the problems of the 11th Priority Areas.

6. Status of PA 1a Working Group on Administrative Processes

Mrs. Katja ROSNER from via donau gave a presentation of the activity of the Working Group on Administrative Processes. Administrative processes and paperwork are seen as a significant competitive disadvantage for IWT on the Danube and its tributaries and it was reported that sometimes for a journey a document should be filled in 14th different forms. This happens because not all Danube riparian states are in the EU or not all EU states are in the Schengen area, so there are necessary border checks for passengers & crews and customs clearance for imports & exports.

The Working Group started its activity in 2014 as a joint cooperation between PA 1a and PA 11 and has in plan to conduct a survey among shipping companies and vessel operators at border crossings, to elaborate a practical manual for border control procedures and to draft recommendations on improved control procedures along the Danube which are planned for autumn 2015.

Currently the survey is ongoing and can be filled in also online (www.danube-navigation.eu) until 31.05.2015 and it is available in 7 languages (DE, EN, AT, RO, HU, BG, RS, NL). There were received

until now 170 forms completed and a lot were received from Galați and Mohács. Generalised preliminary results show that the average waiting time is 1:25 hours and the average time for effective control is 1:25 hours. A large percentage (more than 80%) agrees that the controls are transparent, well coordinated, fair and just. From the interviewees that answered that they have to pay fees or fines 71% consider that the payment perceived was justified. Taken separately the feedback on the control processes in Mohács, 43% strongly disagree and 43% are neutral concerning the justification of the payment of the fees or fines.

The feedback received on suggested improvements shows that the skippers wish service oriented controls, enable e-submission of required data prior to the control, multilingual ship documents, forms and control personnel, less paper work and better coordination between authorities and 24/7 opening hours service.

Mr. Marco ONIDA (DG REGIO), proposed that the activity of this working group to be presented at the 4th Annual Forum of the EUSDR.

Concerning the subject of administrative processes, Mr. Vorderwinkler concluded that it is a sensitive issue which is not under the responsibility of the ministries of transport. The scope of this work is to bring results to the attention of the responsible control authorities and decision-makers at the EU-level. It is not intended to change the rules, but it is desirable to improve the practice and harmonize the procedures.

7. Implementation of the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan (FRMMP)

In its intervention Mr. Olivier Onidi, DG MOVE, mentioned that the use of the Danube River is very low in comparison with its potential. Last December the ministers of transport signed the Conclusions regarding the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan (FRMMP) and now it is the time to transfer it into national plans which will bring the next important steps for its implementation. A lot of Danube related projects were submitted under CEF that shows again the interest for good navigation conditions on the Danube River.

Mr. Andrea Mairate, DG REGIO, informed about the latest news concerning Danube Strategy. A Danube Strategy Point (DSP) was created in Bruxelles and the selection of the personnel was finalized. The Baden-Württemberg region prepared a proposal to have a rotating presidency of the DST and this proposal will be discussed in Zagreb, on the 23rd of April 2015, at the National Contact Points (NCP) meeting. DST should facilitate the regular exchange of information between all the parties involved in the coordination of EUSDR. Mr. Mairate underlined that the actual financing period 2014 – 2020 enhance the link between the EUSDR and the financing sources. As future important events concerning EUSDR there were mentioned the NCP meeting in Zagreb on 23.04.2015, PACs meeting in Bruxelles on 08.05.2015, the meeting of foreign ministers on 13.05.2015, the Danube Floating Conference in June 2015 and the 4th EUSDR Annual Forum in Ulm on 27 – 28.10.2015.

Mr. Gert – Jan Muilerman made an introduction into the history and the content of the FRMMP and proposed the following calendar in order to submit the national roadmaps at the EC:

- 22nd of April 2015 – agreement of the PA 1a Steering Group on the structure of roadmap template
- 15th of May 2015 - deadline for data provision by the waterway administrations;
- 19th of May 2015 - discussion on provided and lacking data at the NEWADA duo Board of Directors meeting
- Status update to PA1a Steering Group by e-mail
- 30th of June 2015 the final submission of roadmap document to DG REGIO and DG MOVE.

It was presented an overview of the FAIRway project proposal which have as main activities: the elaboration of coordinated national roadmaps, equipment procurement for hydrological services, execute and evaluate pilots for harmonized basic data on critical locations, for coherent monitoring of navigational status, for harmonized water level prognosis and for the potential of fairway relocation and floating ship

data. Also there will be prepared documentation for future implementation innovative approaches (aerial monitoring, AtoNs ...). The project is under CEF evaluation and in case of approval the activities will start in September 2015.

Concerning the template of national roadmaps, prepared by via donau, Mr. Muilerman introduced the participants into its structure and contents exemplifying with data from the Danube critical sectors in Austria. There were used graphs to present the number of days with fairway depths >2.50 m on East of Vienna sector and Wachau, water level registered by the gauge East of Vienna in 1981-2014, as well as detailed information about surveying and dredging activities in 2014 and next planned activities. The cost of the maintenance activities was 7.790.476 Euro in 2014.

Forwards the participants were asked for their feedback on the proposed template.

The representative of DG MOVE, Mr. Marc Vanderhaegen, made some suggestions to improve the template like: to include also the reference year 2013 with data related to the number of days with fairway depths >2.50 m, dredging and surveying activities; to include forecasts on water level on a longer timeline; a presentation of the monitoring activities and how and when it is decided to take action (dredging); to present a clear status on investments in 2013 and 2014 as well as the planned ones for 2015 and 2016, specifying the financial and human resources.

Delegation from Slovakia considered that the template is good and agreed to extend it with the suggestions of DG MOVE. Slovakia signed the Conclusions on FRMMP and it is committed for its implementation. The Slovak Water Management Enterprise was partner in NEWADA duo and the Waterborne Transport Development Agency will be a partner in the FAIRway project. The Agency will deliver the requested data in due time.

Delegation from Hungary mentioned that the template will be analysed and will send comments to the Technical Secretariat, if any, in time. The authorities will provide also the necessary data for the national roadmaps. Even if Hungary did not signed the Conclusions of FRMMP in December 2014, the Government of Hungary approved the participation of Orszagos Vizugyi Foigazgatosag and Nemzeti Infrastruktura Fejleszto Zrt as partners in the FAIRway project, submitted on CEF which shows Hungary's commitment for supporting and implementing FRMMP.

Delegation from Croatia stated that they agree with the template and that the AVP (Agencija za vodne putove) is in charge for providing data. AVP is also member of the FAIRway project consortium. The representative from Croatia informed the participants about the intention of the Croatian Ministry of Economy and Finance to cut some of state expenses and probably the waterway agency will merge with the water agency. In any case the continuation of the activities will be assured.

Delegation from Romania agreed on the template and proposed to include information about hydrological conditions which are very important for the Lower Danube. The representative of the Administration of the Lower Danube (AFDJ) explained that in 2014 in Romania there were assured 365 days of good conditions for navigation on the entire sector because the discharge was very good. Romania and Bulgaria are discussing about a common project for the improvement of hydrological database which will be submitted for financing on the operational programme dedicated to the cross border cooperation. AFDJ is a partner in FAIRway project and submitted on the first call of CEF another two projects: one for the revision of the feasibility study for the improvement of the condition of navigation on the Romanian – Bulgarian common sector of the Danube and one for the acquisition of two specialised multipurpose ships. AFDJ agreed also the suggestions of the DG MOVE, less with the water level forecast, which considers it is impossible to provide a real forecast for a long period of time. The reliable forecast that can be done is on maximum 3 days. The representative of Navigabile Canal Administration (ACN), also partner in FAIRway project explained that the administration must execute dredging at the confluence of Danube – Black Sea Canal with the Danube River and presented figures on quantities estimated to be dredged. The financing of this activity represent a problem for the company.

Delegation from Bulgaria had no objection on the proposed template and supported the proposal of Romania concerning the introduction of information related to the hydrological condition. The Executive Agency for Exploration and Maintenance of the Danube River is partner in FAIRway project and will fill and send the template in due time.

Delegation from Serbia agreed on the template and is supporting the Romanian proposal related to include also data on hydrological conditions. The Serbian waterway administration – PLOVPUT will fill in the information in due time. They expressed regrets that, although Serbia has a 600 km long stretch of the Danube River, Plovput is not a partner in FAIRway project because Serbia is not eligible on CEF, not being yet a EU Member State. The representative informed also that it was finalised the National Strategy for the development of inland waterways which is currently under public consultation.

The floor was given to the observers members of the Steering Group.

Danube Commission asked about the coordination of the FRMMP implementation and what are the mechanisms foreseen. The PAC of PA 1a, Mr. Vorderwinkler, answered that the work for the elaboration of FRMMP was coordinated by via donau as a lead partner of NEWADA duo project, as well the drafting of the template for the national roadmaps, but the real responsibility for the implementation of the measures belong to the countries. But, there is an opportunity for all interested parties to bring contributions to this process.

International Sava River Basin Commission stated that in Chapter 1 of the roadmaps are not included reports from the critical locations on the Sava River and that the information exists and can be provided in the requested format. The PAC of PA 1a concluded that the remark will be taken onboard.

Pro Danube International president, Mr. Alexandru Capatu underlined that for the industry is crucial to find depths of at least 2.5 m on the Danube River and it is a must for all the riparian states to fulfil it. A convoy with a draft less than 2.5 m lose money and as a consequence the cargo moves on the railway or roads and the traffic on the Danube will decrease even more. Mr. Capatu agreed with the suggestions of DG MOVE related to the water level forecasts, at least for one month, because the shipping companies need this kind of information in planning their voyages. PDI considers that a lot of information are provided on surveying issue but the forecasts of the industry is that in this September will be very low water levels. Countries like Bulgaria and Hungary do not allocate financing for dredging and the question is what we all can do.

Council of Danube Cities and Regions, underlined the importance of the Danube river navigation for the development of cities situated along the River and mentioned that in 2001 was signed *the Memorandum of Understanding on the development of the Pan-European Transport Corridor VII (the Danube)* in order to ensure 2.5m draught. Mr. Schwetz is on the opinion that all countries should allocate more money and time for repairing the fairway.

Danube Tourist Commission informed the participants that the season of the white ships already started and was extended this year, counting 250 days. Their forecast for the water levels in the summer period is not good and asked to the responsible waterway administration to do their jobs and to assure the minimum depths for a good navigation. Other problems raised were: the border controls, locks problems (at Iron Gates and Gabcikovo), lack of berthing pontoons and lack of experienced captains. Concerning the border control it was mentioned that it is hard to explain to the tourists coming from USA or Australia why they have to show their passports six times and that this is not a proper image to promote the United Europe. Concerning berthing places it was stated that this year the number of white vessels increased and they face problems in Passau, Budapest and Belgrade with the number of the available pontoons for berthing.

International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River stated that its cooperation with the waterway administrations is critical and it is crucial for future activities. ICPDR is interested to be part of the projects but is more interested in dealing with the sediment transport. Also ICPDR is interested to receive further information from PA 1a PACs related to the FRMMP implementation and considers that this dialogue should be continued.

8. Conclusions and decisions on next steps

In the Conclusions session, the Technical Secretariat of PA 1a made an inventory of the suggestions received on the template for the elaboration of the national roadmaps for the FRMMP implementation. It

was decided that a new template will be distributed to the SG members and waterway administrations in few days. The Technical Secretariat reiterated that the deadline for completing the template is 15th of May 2015. Also it was remembered the three topics that will be the priorities for the PA 1a work plan in 2015 – 2016 and that will be included in START II and TAF-DRP II applications for the second calls of proposals.

PDI representative, Mr. Alexandru Capatu, asked the European Commission to find a solution to push the Governments to take actions to assure minim conditions for navigation all over the year.

Mr. Cesare Bernabei, DG MOVE, stated that FRMMP is now the core of the activity of PA 1a and that should be first identified the differences between countries and then budgets evaluation is needed where each country must asses in a realistic manner the costs for its implementation. Mr. Bernabei stated that we need to finalize this data collecting process.

Mr. Olivier Onidi, DG REGIO, concluded that the work of this group is very coherent and the presence of the industry should increase the level of ambition. He finds the requests of the industry as normal ones, for normal standards, 2.5m depths being a must and not a luxury. He also suggested that together with Mr. Cesare Bernabei to prepare a Danube River dedicated session within the TEN-T days, which will be organised on 22 – 23 June 2015 in Riga, in order to present the work done for the preparation and implementation of the FRMMP and the final results of the survey on the administrative processes and the further steps to be taken. Mr. Onidi considers the SG meeting a real success, having at the same table all the parties involved ensuring this way the integrated discussions.

Enclosures

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

- (1) List of attendants
- (2) Presentations given during the Steering Group meeting
- (3) Final template for the coordinated national roadmaps for the implementation of FRMMP