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

**3rd Meeting of the Working Groups for
Priority Area 1a of the EUSDR**
Belgrade, Serbia – 7 November 2012

MINUTES

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Version (date):
V 0.3 (draft) | 19-02-2013

1. Opening, welcome to the participants

The 3rd meeting of the Danube Strategy's Working Groups for Priority Area 1a – *To improve mobility and multimodality: Inland waterways* was held in Belgrade, Serbia, on the premises of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce. The meeting was opened by **Ms. Ana ILIC**, representing the European Integration Office of the Government of the Republic of Serbia who welcomed the participants and stressed the involvement and support of the Serbian Government for the EUSDR.



2. Progress of the EUSDR / of Priority Area 1a

Ms. Irina PLOEG CRUCERU (DG REGIO, European Commission) mentioned that there is a real progress in the implementation of the EUSDR because transnational projects and actions have emerged, e.g. the *Declaration concerning effective waterway infrastructure maintenance*, signed in Luxembourg (July 2012), or the *Memorandum of Understanding between Romania and Republic of Bulgaria on the establishment of the Interministerial Committee for sustainable development of inland waterway transport on the Romanian – Bulgarian common sector of the Danube, Innovative Danube Vessel*. Progress has also been made with regard to a stronger cooperation between policy makers and technicians.

On the 22nd of October 2012 an informal meeting of the foreign ministers from the Danube riparian counties was held in St. Pölten (Austria). The event was organized by Austria in close cooperation with Romania and the European Commission. The scope of the meeting was to discuss the implementation of the EUSDR at the national and regional level, flagship projects and financing as well as the role of Danube cities and regions in the development of the Danube region.

Ms. Ploeg Cruceru also informed the audience that a new transnational Danube programme for the period 2014–2020 is under preparation and will be available at the end of 2014. The European Commission is also preparing a Reflection Paper prior to the Annual Progress Report on the implementation of the EUSDR. The latter will be based on the reports submitted by the PACs and should be adopted by the Council in the first half of 2013. The Reflection Paper will be presented during the Annual Forum in Regensburg (27 – 28 November 2012). The representatives of the European Commission paid a visit to the Ukrainian authorities in order to discuss the RIS integration.

The Coordinators of Priority Area 1a (PACs 1a), Austria and Romania – represented by **Mr. Reinhard VORDERWINKLER** and **Ms. Monica PATRICHI** as well as their Joint Technical Secretariat – also welcomed the participants and provided an overview on the current implementation 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 on 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 the future.

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.

The PACs 1a informed the participants of the Working Groups 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" called **Innovative Danube Vessel**. This project consists of a study which was commissioned by PACs 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.



For more information on these issues, the presentation is available online under the "Working Groups & Projects" tab at www.danube-navigation.eu.

3. Plenary discussion of the Working Groups for the implementation of EUSDR's Priority Area 1a on inland waterway

The plenary session consisted in presentations of key stakeholders who had been invited by the PACs and Q&As on the following topics:

- Effective waterway maintenance (the importance of a well-maintained waterway infrastructure)
- Integrated waterway infrastructure projects (Serbian Danube waterway infrastructure project, Sturgeon 2020 Strategy)
- Modernized Danube fleet and ports (dedicated Western European funding programmes & requirements for the Danube region, *Innovative Danube Vessel* project)
- Facilitated administrative procedures (administrative challenges for the better usage of the Danube Waterway)
- River Information Services (implementation of IRIS Europe 3 project and status of international data exchange)
- Education and jobs (implementation of HINT project and status quo of STCIN)

The session was moderated by **Mr. Markus SIMONER** from the Austrian Technical Secretariat for PA1a.

Mr. Edward Catalin ȚIGĂNUS, commercial director of the CNFR NAVROM SA Galati, the largest river transport company in Romania, having an active fleet of over 450 vessels, said that the company registered 2.2 million Euros losses only during August-November 2011 due to the low water levels on

the Danube which was followed by a long period with ice. He presented critical points for navigation on the Romanian-Bulgarian common sector of the Danube waterway and stressed that the authorities should take all measures on the short term (dredging) and long term (technical works) to provide optimal conditions for navigation. The assurance of the condition for navigation is important also for the safety of navigation. The most significant loss in the opinion of Mr. Tigănuș is the decline of the customers' trust in inland waterway transport.

Mr. Ivan MITROVIC, from PLOVPUT (Serbia), together with **Ms. Irene LUCIUS** from the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme presented the integrative approach of the project for improving the navigation conditions on the Serbian section of the Danube waterway which is financed from pre-accession funds from the European Commission. In order to integrate the navigation requirements with those for environmental protection a Multi-disciplinary Stakeholders' Forum was created in which different fields of interests are represented, such as: navigation, environment and nature protection, economy and archaeology. Thus, the basic principle of the Joint Statement on Guiding Principles for the Development of Inland Navigation and Environmental Protection in the Danube River Basin is met.

Mr. Florian BALLNUS, German coordinator of the EUSDR's Priority Area 6 - *Conservation of biodiversity, landscapes and air and soil quality*, presented the actions that take place at European level to protect the sturgeons. The Danube is the only EU river basin which is still sheltering five sturgeon species. Sturgeons represent "flagship species", are considered an ecological, economic and social heritage of Danube Basin and Sturgeon Conservation is explicitly mentioned as target in PA6 of the EUSDR. In January 2012, an international *Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF)* was established which is in charge of the elaboration of an (Sub)-Strategy Sturgeon 2020 (Reinforcement of "Sturgeon Action Plan" under Bern Convention 2006). Mr. Ballnus mentioned that Sturgeon 2020 program and DSTF work provides sound expertise to combine inland navigation needs with environmental needs.

Mr. Manfred SEITZ, General Secretary of Pro Danube International (PDI), presented examples of state aid schemes applicable in Western European countries (France, Germany, Flanders, Wallonia, the Netherlands) for transshipment facilities, construction of loading and unloading facilities, combined transport terminals, for inland waterway transport and low-emission diesel engines He mentioned that the Czech Republic included funds dedicated to the modernization of inland vessels in the current SOP Transport (2007–2013).

Concerning inland ports, there are approx. 70 ports along the navigable stretch of the Danube (2,414 km), meaning an average distance between them of 175 km, in comparison on Rhine with an average distance of 35 km. The majority of the Danube ports lack modern infrastructure, storage facilities and efficient equipment, show a high diversity of ownership/administrative and operation models, face inefficiencies in public port administration and have shortcomings in access infrastructure (roads and rail). For these reasons, PDI suggested to develop and prepare a strategy for Danube region ports with the help of a flagship project, namely PROCEED = *Danube Ports as centres for sustainable regional development*. (see: www.prodanube.eu)

The on-going study *Innovative Danube Vessel* could be the basis for determining eligible expenditure of EU funds for private investment in fleet modernization.

In his conclusions, Mr. Seitz stressed the need for back-financing of state aid schemes via structural funds in the period 2014-2020 in EU member states with Operational Programs. The development of Danube ports and the modernization of the Danube fleet needs an active IWT policy of all Danube states under the co-ordination and with the help of the European Union programs. The new financial period of the EU offers unique opportunities to include public port and fleet funding schemes into ERDF funding.

Regarding the presentation on the *Innovative Danube Vessel* project, **Mr. Reinhard VORDERWINKLER** informed the participants that the consortium responsible for carrying out this study will make a presentation in the next WGs meeting when more data will be available.

Mr. Martin VAN DIJK and **Mr. Gerard VAN WINNSEN**, representing Koninklijke Schuttevaer (professional promotion of interests for European inland shipping entrepreneurs, respectively captain having Danube navigation experience) made a comprehensive presentation about the nautical, technical and administrative challenges that captains face during their voyages on the Danube. They

presented a series of documents that are required by the authorities in the Danube states, such as border police and customs forms which delay ship voyage as well as examples of port tariffs which are different from country to country.



Mr. Michael FASTENBAUER of via donau (Austria), presented the state of play of the IRIS Europe 3 project and of RIS data international exchange. IRIS Europe 3 started in September 2012 and has as specific objectives: demonstration/evaluation of new RIS technologies and services, the elaboration of quality levels for RIS data exchange, provision of transition support from pilot implementation to regular operation and enabling countries to tackle national priorities by involving logistics.

Regarding international RIS data exchange, some Danube countries elaborated and signed RIS-related agreements:

- Service Agreement for Hull Data Exchange: administrative agreement for exchange of hull data between certification authorities, in force for 10 countries (PL, CZ, AT, SK, RO, BG, NL, BE, FR, LU);
- Service Agreement for Traffic Management: administrative agreement for exchange of ERI and AIS data (in common border sections) between RIS authorities, signed by one country (AT);
- Contract among RIS Providers: contract according to private law to enable data sharing with logistics stakeholders, in force for 5 countries (AT, BG, HR, HU, RS).

Together with **Mr. Gabriel BENGĂ**, professor at the University of Craiova (Romania), **Ms. Ana LEGĂNEL**, from CERONAV (Romania), presented the activities planned in the HINT (harmonization of education and information technology in transport by inland waterways) project and the progress

made on the development of standards for training and certification of personnel involved in inland waterways transportation (STCIN). HINT is one of the “flagship projects” of the EUSDR which is financed by the SEE Programme. The project is foreseen to start in February 2013 and the specific objectives are to support and promote the emergence and implementation of STCIN, to develop new IT tools to support trainees in the learning process, to develop concepts for on-board and simulator practical training and to carry out a transnational IWT jobs campaign.

Regarding the STCIN, a Joint Working Group was organized within the EDINNA platform and already drafted the core competencies in inland navigation on operational and management level for (a) navigation; (b) cargo handling, stowage and passenger transport; (c) controlling the operation of the ship and care for persons on board; (d) marine, electrical, electronic and control engineering; (e) maintenance and repair; (f) communication; (g) safety, health and environmental protection. Further work is needed for the methods for demonstrating the competence and criteria for evaluating the competence.

4. Discussion of the topics in four parallel Working Groups at round tables

After the plenary session, Mr. Markus Simoner provided an introduction to the thematic discussions which took place in three different working groups, i.e. effective waterway maintenance & integrated waterway infrastructure projects, ports and fleet modernization, facilitated administrative procedures.

The main conclusions of the discussions are:

1 | Waterway maintenance & waterway infrastructure

The Working Group for *Waterway maintenance & waterway infrastructure* was moderated by **Ms. Cristina CUC** from the Romanian Technical Secretariat of PA 1a and **Mr. Thomas HARTL** from the Austrian Technical Secretariat of PA 1a and was attended by approx. 20 participants, representatives of the European Commission, ICPDR, representatives of the public and private sector and environmental NGOs.



Concerning the topic of **integrated waterway infrastructure projects**, Ms. Cuc provided a brief presentation on the activities carried out from the previous meeting of the Working Groups, emphasizing the importance of the Declaration signed in Luxemburg in June 2012. The participants were asked to provide information on the status of the infrastructure projects submitted within Priority Area 1a and also information on new project proposals.

Mr. Vladimír NOVÁK from Slovakia presented the status of the project for the realization of water works of Gabčíkovo as part of the designed common Slovak-Hungarian complex solution for the Danube stretch downstream of Bratislava (*Water Structure Gabčíkovo–Nagyymaros*), which is considered as a very important water work from the point of view of navigation conditions. Mr. Novák also informed the participants of the newly proposed MreNa project for which Slovakia will also request a Letter of Recommendation from PACs 1a.

Regarding the involvement of environment and industry stakeholders during the preparation phase of waterway infrastructure projects, **Ms. Žaneta OSTOJIĆ BARJAKTAREVIĆ** from Serbia explained the organizational layout of the Stakeholders Forum by PLOVPUT and presented the main objectives and results of this Forum.

Ms. Irene LUCIUS of the WWF's Danube-Carpathian Programme underlined the importance of including the restoration of ecosystems in the planning for infrastructure projects especially taking into account that the budget allocated for transport projects is much higher when compared with the allocation for environment. Ms. Lucius suggested the possible use of infrastructure project money for the establishment of baseline values and to counteract the lack of ecological data which is one of the main problems regarding the evaluation of infrastructure project.

Ms. Cristina CUC agreed that environmental aspects should be considered within infrastructure projects, but it should be kept in mind that people responsible for transport often do not have the necessary expertise to develop projects on the environment. She presented the example of the project for improving the navigation conditions on the Romanian stretch of the Danube between Călărași and Brăila where a comprehensive monitoring program has been implemented and where people from the transport sector are in the position to analyse and approve reports which are beyond their expertise.

Mr. Markus SIMONER noted that he sees a need at the European level to provide a certain equilibrium between ecology and navigation regarding its budget in one and the same funding scheme, creating an integrative approach also in this respect. To date, infrastructure projects are co-funded from dedicated transport-related sources while ecological projects receive funding from dedicated environment-related financial sources.

Regarding the topic of **effective waterway maintenance**, Mr. Hartl informed the participants about the status of the Roadmap for implementing the EUSDR's targets and actions in this regard and touched upon the relevant political activities as follows:

- February 2012: Letter by EU Commissioners Hahn (DG REGIO) and Kallas (DG MOVE) to Danube countries asking for status of waterway maintenance and short- and mid-term measures foreseen
- May 2012: Attendance of Commissioner Hahn at 3rd meeting of EUSDR PA 1a Steering Group; discussion and responses provided by Danube riparian states to EC letter by Commissioners Hahn and Kallas
- June 2012: "Declaration on effective waterway infrastructure maintenance on the Danube and its navigable tributaries" signed by 7 of 10 Danube riparian states in Luxemburg (no signature yet by Hungary, Ukraine, Serbia)
- October 2012: Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by Bulgaria and Romania to set up an "Inter-Ministerial Committee for sustainable development of inland waterways transport on the Romanian-Bulgarian common sector of the Danube"
- October 2012: Questionnaire by PACs of EUSDR PA 1a to members of the Steering Group and waterway management authorities asking about the measures taken in 2012 and measures foreseen for 2013; issues of the questionnaire include surveying of the fairway,

dredging interventions, readjustments of the fairway, signalization/markings, provision of fairway-related information to users as well as procedures in the face of extraordinary circumstances (low water period, ice formation etc.)

- November 2012: Discussion of results from questionnaires in 4th meeting of EUSDR PA 1a Steering Group; 8 of 10 Danube riparian states provided responses; status of and further steps foreseen for implementing the MoU between Bulgaria and Romania

The next steps in implementing the roadmap on waterway management and maintenance are planned as follows:

- Monitoring of implementation of the Luxembourg Declaration on waterway maintenance within the structure of the EUSDR's PA 1a (with the involvement of the European Commission): Creating comparability of information provided by Danube riparian states in returned questionnaires (filling gaps; asking for additional responses)
- Selected activities in EU co-funded project NEWADA duo (10/2012–09/2014):
 - Performance indicators for waterway management and maintenance
 - National Strategy Plans on improved surveying & maintenance
 - Ecological experts exchanges (cooperation with DANUBEPARKS project)
 - Needs assessment regarding investments in equipment and infrastructure for surveying & maintenance (preparing for investments by means of EU funded projects in new EU funding period 2014–2020)
 - Improvement of Fairway Information Services (FIS) web portal in terms of usability and provided data
 - Pilot for remote and virtual Aids to Navigation (AtoNs)
 - Improvement of existing WLAN services

Representatives of **Serbia** and the **Ukraine** which participated in the Working Group informed the participants that both countries will sign the Declaration on effective waterway maintenance in the near future, while Bosnia and Herzegovina has pronounced its support of the Declaration. There is no news available from Hungary concerning a possible endorsement of the Declaration.

Mr. Philip WELLER, Executive Secretary of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, proposed to provide some sort of pool of expertise on ecological issues in order to support waterway administrations in the preparation and implementation of infrastructure projects as well as in waterway management.

2 | Modernisation of Danube fleet and ports

The Working Group on *Modernisation of Danube fleet and ports* was moderated by **Ms. Monica PATRICHI** from the Romanian Technical Secretariat of PA 1a and was attended by approx. 25 participants, representatives of the public and the private sector.

The subjects proposed for discussion were in line with the Roadmaps of PA 1a which were approved by the members of the Steering Group. The main conclusions from the discussions are:

- Updating of online promotion and information tools: The participants were informed that the website www.danubeports.info, which is administrated by via donau (Austria), provides detailed information on Danube ports, but that there is still a lot of data missing. The participants, especially from the private sector, agreed that the website is an important information tool and that the involvement of the SG members will be necessary for a completion of the available data.
- Defining ports benchmarks: The participants of the Working Group were asked for their opinion on the preparation of Terms of Reference for a study in which port benchmarks will be defined (like handling equipment, port dues, opening hours, services available like customs, phytosanitary control, supply of utilities (electric energy, drinking water), fuel supply, waste facilities). The participants noticed that there are some projects on-going like INWAPO and

DaHar and that it would be better to have an inventory of already existing projects, to invite project leaders to present the objectives and results of these projects and only in a next step to analyse the opportunity of a study for defining port-related benchmarks.

- Needs for financing of ports and fleet modernisation in the Danube Region: Provisions to be included in the EU programming period 2014 – 2020; proposals for the areas of interventions in the national operational programmes. It was noticed that European funds in the Danube Region countries are not available for the private sector in order to modernise their port facilities and fleet. The Czech Republic has foreseen funds in the current Sectoral Operational Programme for Transport 2007 – 2013 (SOPT) for fleet modernization, based on a state aid scheme. The participants suggested that for the next EU financing period efforts should be concentrated in order to develop in different financing programmes (SOPTs, transnational programs, cross-border programs, IPA and ENPI policies) funds dedicated to the public investments in port infrastructure and funds dedicated to the private investments for fleet and port modernization, based on the elaboration of state aid schemes. The modernization of public infrastructure should be accompanied by investments in the modernization of port facilities. The "Innovative Danube Vessel" study could be a base for defining the eligible cost for fleet modernisation.



3 | Facilitated administrative procedures

The Working Group on *Facilitated administrative procedures* was moderated by **Mr. Harald BEUTL** from the Austrian Technical Secretariat of PA 1a and was attended by approx. 15 participants, representatives of the public and private sector. This Working Group session provided a discussion platform for debating the current situation regarding administrative conditions for inland navigation on the Danube and its navigable tributaries and yielded first steps for possible improvements.



Obstacles:

Background information about administrative barriers in the Danube region was given by a captain from the Netherlands navigating on the Rhine and on the Danube. Together with the results from discussions in the Working Group, the following administrative burdens have been identified:

- Complex border formalities;
- Complex customs formalities;
- Too much paperwork in order to forward information about crew, ship, cargo, waste etc.
- Not harmonized certifications/patents for captains in the Danube and Rhine region
- Immoderate different port tariffs

Reasons:

The consequences of these obstacles could be summarized in TIME loss (e.g.: 3.5 day per journey) and higher COSTS for the shipping sector. It was common sense that these disadvantages have to be improved, but the tasks are quite multifaceted. As reasons behind the administrative burdens were mentioned / found out:

- Different legal frameworks: EU member states and EU non-member states; Schengen states and Non-Schengen states;
- Different government structures of the Danube riparian countries;
- Different responsible ministries/authorities providing different requirements e.g. transport ministry, ministry for finance, ministry for interior, ministry for foreign affairs etc.

- Less cooperation between authorities on the organisational level, state level, transnational level;

Improvements:

- RIS (River Information Services) are/could be a tool for the implementation of the concept of paperless data exchange;
- Necessary could be some “pressure” or an impulse from a higher political level (maybe by the European Commission) or a common agreement between the Danube riparian countries in order to set a first step to improve the situation

5. Report to the plenum on results of Working Groups, conclusion and closure of the meeting

Following the discussions on the round tables dedicated to one specific thematic action field of PA 1a, the moderators presented the results of the discussions (presented above) in the plenum.



The PACs and the representative of the European Commission thanked the participants for their active participation at the meeting of the Working Groups and announced that the next meeting will be in the spring of 2013. The exact date and venue will be communicated by the PACs in due time.

Enclosures

Please note: The following documents are available for download at the website of EUSDR PA 1a
→ www.danube-navigation.eu (visit tab "Working Groups")

- (1) Agenda of the meeting
- (2) Meeting Minutes (i.e. this document)
- (3) Presentations held at the meeting
- (4) List of attendants

A selection of photos taken during the meeting is also available online on the website under the tab "Photos".