

Conclusions

on effective waterway infrastructure rehabilitation and maintenance on the Danube and its navigable tributaries

Danube Ministerial meeting

Lyon - 29 June 2022

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations responsible for Transport from the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia, the Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Serbia and Ukraine reached the following conclusions:

HAVING REGARD TO:

- “The European Green Deal” Communication 2019/640 final and the “Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy” Communication 2020/789 final of the Commission which stipulates the designing of policies to accelerate the shift to sustainable and smart mobility;
- Article 15 §3. (b) of the Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T), including its potential extension towards the neighbouring countries, obliging EU Member States to achieve a good navigation status by 2030 at the latest, while respecting the applicable environmental law in the framework of the NATURA 2000 network and the Water Framework Directive;
- the NAIADES III Communication¹ of the European Commission of 24 June 2021 "Boosting future-proof European inland waterway transport", which includes infrastructure as one of its key areas of intervention;
- the “Council Conclusions on Inland Waterway Transport of 3 December 2018”² ;
- the Commission Staff Working Document on “Digital Inland Navigation” of 18 September 2018³;
- The European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance (AGN) – for those countries who have ratified it;
- the provisions of the Belgrade Convention of 1948 establishing the Danube Commission and the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin of 2002;

¹ COM 2021/324 final

² Council of the European Union, 13745/18 TRANS 489 MAR 156

³ SWD(2018) 427 final

- the European Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the related objective to optimally manage and improve navigability conditions as well as landside infrastructure in a harmonized and environmentally sustainable way, as stipulated in the revised Action Plan concerning maintenance and rehabilitation measures;
- the Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube River Basin adopted by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the Danube Commission and the International Sava River Basin Commission in December 2007;
- the "Declaration on effective waterway infrastructure maintenance on the Danube and its navigable tributaries", signed at the Danube Ministers Meeting in Luxembourg on 7 June 2012 by the Ministers and Heads of Delegations responsible for Transport from the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and the Slovak Republic and supported by the responsible Ministers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Serbia as well as Ukraine;
- the "Conclusions on effective waterway infrastructure rehabilitation and maintenance on the Danube and its navigable tributaries", signed at the Danube Ministers Meetings in Brussels on 3rd December 2014, in Rotterdam on 20th June 2016, in Brussels on 3rd December 2018, as well as in a written procedure in June 2020 by the Ministers and Heads of Delegations responsible for Transport from the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia, the Federal Republic of Germany, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Moldova, as well as the Republic of Serbia and Ukraine;
- the "Agreement between the People's Republic of Romania and the Government of the People's Republic of Bulgaria concerning the maintenance and the improvement of the fairway on the Romanian-Republic of Bulgarian sector of the Danube", signed in Sofia on 29 November 1955;

HAVING TAKEN NOTE OF:

- the recommendations by the NAIADES II Implementation Expert Group on "An Inland Waterway Transport Agenda for Europe 2021-2027";

CONSIDERING that inland waterway transport needs a reliable, safe, cost-effective and climate-resilient infrastructure network.

CONSIDERING that inland waterway transport remains an energy-efficient, safe and sustainable alternative to other modes and contributes to decongesting overloaded road and rail networks.

WE, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations responsible for Transport:

REAFFIRM our strong commitment to ensuring safe and efficient transport links by stepping up shipping on the Danube, given the blockade of ports of Ukraine in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov as a result of Russian aggression;

RECALL the importance of the "Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan of the Danube and its navigable tributaries" as prepared within the framework of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region by Priority Area 1a on Inland Waterways in November 2014 and updated in spring 2022 (see Annex A);

ENDORSE the updated "Master Plan implementation progress summary report" presented in the Annex B;

NOTE that the Master Plan shall not affect in any way the determining and marking of the state borders;

REITERATE the need for national action in implementing the Master Plan, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity;

ACKNOWLEDGE the progress made in the majority of Danube riparian states also through the contribution of EU-funded projects towards reaching the respective Target Levels of Service, as set out in the Master Plan";

WELCOME the progress made in the allocation of resources as indicated in the Master Plan for a number of Danube riparian states, as reflected in the “Master Plan implementation progress summary report” presented in the Annex B;

RECOGNISE the positive examples, including the rehabilitation of bottlenecks in the Republic of Austria and the Republic of Serbia by means of river engineering measures, the general intensification of fairway marking activities and maintenance dredging activities in the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Croatia, Romania and the Republic of Bulgaria;

NOTE however that the navigation status has still not improved in all Danube riparian states compared to 2014, as reflected in the “Master Plan implementation progress summary report” presented in the Annex B;

FULFIL the legally binding obligation to preserve "Good Navigation Status" (GNS) of the Danube River and its navigable tributaries that are part of the TEN-T network, as far as this is possible with maintenance and rehabilitation measures, and Fulfil the legally binding obligation of reaching a "Good Ecological Status/Potential" (GES) and a "Favourable Conservation Status" (FCS) as legally required by the Water Framework Directive and by the Birds and Habitats Directives;

RECOGNISE the importance of the Rhine-Danube Core Network Corridor and WELCOME the successful completion of the CEF co-funded project FAIRway Danube and the joint efforts of all its beneficiaries (Republic of Austria, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia, Hungary, Romania and the Slovak Republic) to preserve a good navigation status, as far as this is possible with maintenance and rehabilitation measures;

REAFFIRM the will to cooperate with the relevant coordinating bodies such as the European Commission, EUSDR and River Commissions to establish joint initiatives for the efficient and effective implementation of the Master Plan, such as cross-border and transnational projects;

UNDERLINE the need to execute them in an integrated manner in order to ensure that applicable environmental legislation is respected as well as the Guiding Principles of the Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube River Basin;

AGREE to maintain this high level of activity and - where still needed - to step up fairway rehabilitation and maintenance efforts in 2022 and beyond in order to improve the fairway conditions according to the maintenance objectives in force;

RECALL the importance that Member States and third countries pay attention to the maintenance and rehabilitation of the fairway in order to ensure the preservation of a good navigation status and that the appropriate funding sources are secured to reach these goals;

CALL ON all Danube riparian states to ensure the sustainable operation of EU-funded equipment and systems (gauging stations, systems for water level forecasts, vessels, national and transnational waterway management and monitoring system(s), etc.) as well as information services to waterway users even after the end of the related projects;

STRESS the need for further research to reduce the knowledge gaps regarding the impacts of climate change on navigability for all parts of the Danube and its navigable tributaries and SUPPORT the development of flexible adaptation strategies in waterway management (here: rehabilitation, maintenance and operation) to address the changing conditions on the waterway;

UNDERLINE the importance of easily accessible and up-to-date fairway information services, in particular topical fairway depth and width data in shallow sections and water level forecasts, as provided by the national administrations respectively River Information Services providers;

CALL ON all relevant riparian EU Member States and non-EU countries to further support effective and timely progress monitoring regarding the Master Plan and thereby UNDERLINE the importance of the annual National Action Plans as one of the monitoring tools for individual actions, responsibilities, budgets and resources for rehabilitation and maintenance measures in line with the Master Plan and ENCOURAGE the exchange of good practice between Member States on planning and monitoring mechanisms;

ENCOURAGE efforts towards further digitalisation of waterway management operations as well as monitoring by means of both national waterway management and transnational monitoring systems, as for example developed in the framework of the concluded FAIRway Danube project;

ACKNOWLEDGE that the availability of adequate national financial means for the implementation of the Master Plan, in particular the sustainable allocation of a sufficient yearly operative budget, is fundamental and thus a key success factor;

UNDERLINE the importance of the European Union co-funding, notably within the framework of the Connecting Europe Facility, the European Structural and Investment Funds, the Instrument for Pre-Accession and Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe as well as the EU coordination for the realisation of this Master Plan especially with regard to procurement of additional equipment for monitoring, marking, dredging and information services to fairway users;

STRESS the need to also pursue the implementation of important flanking measures, such as the reduction of administrative barriers in cross-border Danube navigation, the development of land-side infrastructure (in particular mooring places) as well as the further greening of the inland fleet in order to reach the ambitious targets of “The European Green Deal” and Naiades III;

RECALL that inland ports are an essential part of the EU’s transport backbone along the Danube, acting as significant logistics and transport nodes in the supply chain and contributing to socio-economic development in those regions. In this context, ENCOURAGE EU Danube Member States to promote inland ports as zero emission nodes as well as crucial multimodal hub and CALL on them to foster innovative solutions for port’s infrastructure, resilient to climate change;

ACKNOWLEDGE the importance of ensuring that the Danube river is maintained so as to preserve good navigation status and ENGAGE in supporting a sustainable and efficient integration of inland navigation with all other modes of transport;

WELCOME the results of the joint Working Group of EUSDR PA 1a and PA 11, which are aimed at the simplification, harmonisation and digitalisation of administrative processes in Danube navigation;

ACKNOWLEDGE the successful introduction of a first set of harmonised border control forms (arrival and departure report, crew list as well as passenger list) in Hungary, the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Bulgaria, Romania, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine;

ENCOURAGE the further digitalisation of border control processes, amongst others with the help of the CEF co-financed projects that also facilitate cross-border control procedures;

ENCOURAGE all Danube riparian states to engage in the development of digitalised waterway infrastructure and traffic management systems in line with the Digital Inland Navigation endeavour;

UNDERLINE the importance of a needs analysis and the development of good-practice concepts for mooring places on the Danube and its navigable tributaries, in order to raise the safety of mooring operations as well as to reduce external effects of mooring;

MEET every two years or as necessary to follow up on the present conclusions and make sure that they are implemented as agreed.