
WATER WAYS

20 YEARS OF CLOSE COOPERATION IN DANUBE REGION

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The marine environment is a precious asset. Oceans and seas provide 99% of the available, living space on the planet, cover 71% of the Earth's surface and contain 90% of the biosphere and consequently contain more biological diversity than terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. The marine environment is essential to life on earth (particular as the main source of oxygen) and plays a key role in climate and weather patterns. It is also an important factor in economic prosperity, social wellbeing and quality of life.

While water pollution is an environmental problem, it is also a serious threat to public health. Cleaner water and better sanitation could prevent over 30 million cases of water-related diseases each year in the region. The protection of human health and well-being by better water management includes the protection of water ecosystems.

THE DANUBE BASIN - VITAL FOR EUROPE

Since Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, the Danube has become an internal EU waterway. As one of the "Trans-European corridors" it represents a priority axis for inland waterway traffic across the Union. The "Rhine-Danube" corridor provides a direct link between the North Sea and the Black Sea. Improving navigability for cargo, in a more environmentally-friendly manner, is an important challenge. Two on-going projects supported by the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) work to improve the navigability of the river in Romania, and along its shared border with Bulgaria. A bridge is being built over the Danube linking Calafat (Romania) to Vidin (Bulgaria), with support from the EU totalling €120 million. Construction of the 1971-metre long bridge is due to be completed before 2010.

The Danube Basin is also rich in bio-diversity. Its wetlands host many breeds of wild birds and the islands provide rich habitats for many species. For instance, the Danube Delta is home to 70% of the world's population of white pelicans. However the

waters of the Danube are no longer quite as blue as the waltz suggests and pollution is a real threat to this wildlife. Efforts to establish new water treatment plants, with the support of cohesion policy, will contribute to the improvement of water quality. For 2007-2013, investments in 10 major wastewater treatment projects (EU contribution: €500 million from the Cohesion Fund) have been approved by the Commission in Hungary, a large part of whose territory lies in the Danube Basin.¹

The Danube area also offers strong potential for economic development with its good access to transport and availability of water resources representing attractive factors for businesses. Culture and tourism also present great opportunities. Tourism operators are considering developing a specific “Danube label”, which will increase the visibility and attractiveness of the region.

“The importance of the Danube Basin for the EU cannot be underestimated. Our policies and the investments we are making in the Basin through the EU’s cohesion policy in particular have an impact on the livelihoods of 20 million citizens. The Danube needs a specific strategy comparable to the strategy we are developing for the Baltic Sea Region. A one-size-fits-all approach doesn’t work in an EU of 27 Member States and 271 regions. We need a targeted policy for the Danube that meets its ecological, transport and socio-economic needs.” (Commissioner Hübner, European Danube Strategy Conference). Cohesion Policy programmes in the Danube Basin already focus on a number of these topics, through both national programmes and two transnational programmes, “Central Europe” and “South East Europe”. Regional decision-makers in the Danube Basin “to think and act as one” and will present in the near future “to set out a methodology to achieve a European Danube strategy, to define a wide partnership and to agree on an action plan”.

The river Danube is the second longest river in Europe (2,850 kilometers) connecting ten countries in Central Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, the Ukraine and Moldavia). It is the only major river that flows eastward from Western Europe and connects very heterogeneous territories of the continent. The river Danube is not only a geographical notion but also a transport corridor and has been in the focus of several ecological, political and economic conflicts. Its economic importance, its role in waterway transport has always changed in the course of time but the river itself has always had a minor role in the international division of labour.

¹ <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction> : The website of the European Institutions.

In a geopolitical sense the landlocked character of the Danube Basin was emphasized by the fact that it was surrounded by political (imperial) borders and the river's area turned into a site the rivalry for the great empires. Granting the right of free shipping was a fundamental pre-condition for the navigation on the river Danube. This was granted by international treaties signed by the representatives of the Danube region's great empires and by the Danube states. The Paris Treaty of 1856 and the Versailles Treaty of 1919 declared the river Danube an international waterway and set up the Danube Committee, which was authorized with administrative competences related to Danube navigation. With the election of the Danube Committee an international organization was created to guarantee free rights for shipping on the river Danube.²

MARINE ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE

Shipping is fundamental to our well being, with around 90% of EU external trade being moved by ships and more than 3.7 billion tonnes of freight a year being loaded and unloaded in EU ports. Ships produce a significant amount of waste during their operation and this is disposed of in emissions to water and air and some is landed onshore for disposal. It is estimated that some 80 per cent of the total pollution from ships originates from operational discharges (such as discharges of waste oils or tank cleaning operations), and that much of this is deliberate and in violation of international rules. To prevent and control pollution from ships a wide range of legislation has been developed at the international level.

The reduction of pollution from shipping has formed an integral part of EU maritime safety policy. To reduce the risk of marine pollution from ships, the European Marine Safety Agency (EMSA) provides technical assistance to the European States must realize environmental protection from pollution in the internal water ways in country is the protection of global water resources.

When the Iron Curtain was finally raised in 1989, no one had a clear idea of the state of Europe's environment. Environmental protection and restoration emerged as new issues for pan-European cooperation.

The region's Environment Ministers launched the "Environment for Europe" process in 1991 at Dobris Castle near Prague. Their aim was to improve the region's

² Ranki, Gy. (1983). *Economic and Foreign Policy: the Struggle of the Great Powers for Hegemony in the Danube Valley, 1919-39*. Columbia University Press: New York.

environment and to work towards the convergence of environmental policies throughout the continent. The “Environment for Europe” Conferences are convened every three to four years. The sixth Ministerial Conference will take place in Belgrade in October 2007. The Conferences have reflected the priority concerns of countries in the region and struck a balance between subregional and regional issues. The “Environment for Europe” process has evolved into “the major long-term pan-European political framework” to discuss key policy issues, develop programmes, prepare legally binding instruments and launch various initiatives, including new institutional structures for the environment.

WHAT WILL THE RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT PLANS DELIVER?

2009 is an important year for European water policy. The Water Framework Directive (WFD)³ requires that Member States establish the first River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) for all

110 river basin districts across the EU by the end of the year, including specific measures to ensure that all EU waters reach good status by 2015. The Commissioner for the Environment pointed out the focus of the Water Framework Directive on river basins, rather than arbitrary administrative or political limitations, as a key innovation. This facilitates a coordinated management of water resources and is particularly important where river basins cross national borders. (Mr. Stavros DIMAS, European Commissioner for Environment)

The question of “what the river basin management plans will deliver” is an important one. The river basin management plans should not be considered only as a paper outcome but be accepted as a platform for action. The significance of these plans is underestimated. Some think that the plans will remain on paper, thus this conference is great opportunity to address such scepticism. We need integrated water management and a place to solve sectoral conflicts. There is a need to invest in raising public awareness despite the economic crisis. Some European countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary) also face major challenges in the field of water management, among others the challenge of climate change and the fact that most of its river basins are transboundary. (Ms Lubka KATCHAKOVA, Deputy Minister of Environment and Water of the Republic of Bulgaria).⁴

³ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy.

⁴ <http://water.europa.eu/participate> Summary report of the European Water Conference (2009).

A more water-body-specific approach is needed to make citizens understand what is going on and how it might affect them. It was asked how the process could be influenced to ensure information is presented locally/at water body scale. Governments can be persuaded to give more information at the water body scale if they realise that this will help the public to understand the problems better and it is possible that stakeholders bring forward measures. We need to be realistic on what we are able to achieve and to ensure that we work together with other downstream countries.

VITAL ENVIRONMENT COMPONENT OF FUTURE MARITIME POLICY

Water is attracting a lot of attention at present, with many related events taking place on the international level. Our understanding of water and also regulation in this area is growing. The main issue is what kind of regulation to use, how much regulation and in which direction it should go. Despite multiple directives on water, if there are no answers on the soil issues, society will suffer from the impacts of climate change since proper soil management is expected to play a key role in this respect. Water management is indeed affected by many other policies and needs to be coordinated with them. It is important to look at the impact of a number of other economic activities on water, e.g. agriculture, and coordinate with a number of other sectors as well, such as industrial sectors, tourism etc. Policy implementation in the field of water management will only be successful if all different levels of administration across Europe work hand in hand and understand what subsidiary means. We should first understand properly what we would like to do jointly and then we should decide how to achieve it. Within the different draft river basin management plans, the level of ambition differs a lot, from some Danube region countries that have developed relatively comprehensive strategies and have already started pricing them and are beginning to identify the means to implement them, to other countries whose plans remain a lot more general and often attached with a lot of exemptions. We need to focus on a more coherent level of ambition throughout the EU.

Specific efforts have been made to improve national systems for monitoring the environment and collecting, processing and managing data, particularly in economies in transition, and to make these systems compatible throughout the region. Special attention will be paid to the development and investigation of the own Marine Strategy of countries in the Danube region.

Part of what follows in this study aims at analyzing the perspective of development of the Water strategy of Danube region countries.

The aim of Strategy is to protect more effectively the water environment across Europe. It aims at achieving good environmental status for the EU's marine waters and to protect the resource base upon which marine-related economic and social activities depend. The water Strategy constitutes the vital environmental component of the future maritime policy, designed to achieve the full economic potential of oceans and seas in harmony with the marine environment.

The Water Strategy must establish European Marine Regions on the basis of geographical and environmental criteria. Each member state is required to develop strategies for their marine waters. The marine strategies to be developed by each member state must contain a detailed assessment of the state of the environment, a definition of "good environmental status" at regional level and the establishment of clear environmental targets and monitoring programmes.

Each member state must draw up a programme of cost-effective measures. Prior to any new measure an impact assessment which contains a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the proposed measures is required. Where Member States cannot reach the environmental targets, specific measures tailored to the particular context of the area and situation will be drawn up.

The reviews have three main objectives:

- to help countries in transition to improve their management of the environment by establishing baseline conditions and recommending better policy implementation and performance;
- to promote continuous dialogue between member countries by sharing information about policies and experiences;
- to stimulate greater involvement of the public in environmental discussions and decision-making.

This strategy establishes common principles on the basis of which European States have to draw up, at the level of designated marine region and in cooperation with the European States and third countries within those regions, their own strategies to achieve a good ecological status in the marine waters for which they are responsible.

This strategy meets a twofold objective:

- to protect and restore Europe's seas;
- to ensure the ecological sustainability of economic activities linked marine environment.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE (CONCLUSION)

Concerns relating to the prevention and reduction of pollution from ships have grown constantly over time within the EU institutions, the international maritime community and among the general public, and they look set to continue doing so in the future. Even during the relatively brief existence of close cooperation of European countries, it is clear that tasks in this field have widened significantly, and there is no sign of a reversal of the trend. Shipping cannot afford to be (or even be perceived to be) an industry which fails to take its environmental responsibilities seriously. As land-based industries implement stringent environmental requirements and policies, shipping's proportional share of the total output of pollutants increases and pressure for further action grows. Keeping up with these tasks includes several different types of action, both in relation to implementing rules that already exist and complementing them with new stands.

In addition to continuing and intensifying the above-mentioned tasks, the Strategy will provide Danube region countries with the opportunity of continuously assess the need for further action in the environmental field, with a view to contributing to cleaner Danube.

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