

SPEECH

by Deputy Director General of the Danube Commission Secretariat

Mr. Pjotr Suvorov

on the 3rd Meeting of the Steering Group for Priority Area 1a of the EUSDR

(Bratislava, May 3-4, 2012)

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Danube Commission (DC), in accordance with its status, presents in the international programmes and initiatives only a common position of its Member States. Reaching this common position on certain professional matters is a complicated process, since it requires mutual coordination of national rules and consideration of views of other international organisations dealing with the international inland water transport. Therefore, documents, adopted at the Sessions of the Danube Commission, reflect exactly this position, primarily, on professional matters of navigation – safety of navigation, development of navigation infrastructure and fleet, environmental issues and etc.

From 2011 the Danube Commission has launched project on market observation for the Danube navigation.

It is known that the existing market of the Danube transport is considerably inferior to the Rhine navigation in volume and traffic density. The main reason is a traditionally weak economic base of the Danube region and weak navigation infrastructure. This infrastructure is based on the Danube navigable waterway, characterized by a large number of critical sections where main parameters, stipulated by the key recommendations of the Danube Commission, are not ensured, especially in a particular seasonal period.

Furthermore, the Danube navigable waterway is extremely sensitive to the seasonal fluctuations in water levels. A rapid increase in number of fords is thereby evidenced during the critical shallow water period.

At the 77th Session of the DC President of the DC made a special statement concerning the situation on the Danube, namely, interruption of navigation on the Lower and Middle Danube from August to December 2011 caused by critical shallow-water and depth loss at fords.

Since the end of August 2011 navigation has been halted or limited on the certain Danube sections, because operating draught didn't allow safe passage of vessels through these sections. Especially, it was typical for the sections on the Middle and Lower Danube, where at fords the depths were 1,6-1,2 m, therefore cargo vessels and convoys (even unloaded), as well as passenger vessels operating on "long" routes couldn't pass through.

For example, on the joint Slovak-Hungarian and Hungarian sections 42 critical fords have occurred; on the joint Romanian-Bulgarian section between 645 – 374 km more than 30 critical fords have also emerged. Additionally, the situation with depths was difficult in the Apatin sector. On these sections more than 300 loaded vessels, including vessels carrying dangerous goods, were stopped.

In general, interruption of navigation on certain sections ranged from 40 to 70 days.

Since the limitation of navigation on the Middle and Lower Danube shipping companies of the DC Member States have experienced real losses from undelivered goods and fleet downtime, running into 10 mln.euro; furthermore, they lose cargo base.

The Danube Commission has done a great deal of work on systematization of bottlenecks and critical sections, however, by its legal status it can't directly influence on the implementation of projects related to their elimination - it requires considerable financial resources and European Community's absolute belief in the need of the development of the Danube navigation.

In this respect, it should be particularly stressed that projects of the DC Member States aim mostly on the improvement of infrastructure by maintenance and traditional regulation works, which can essentially refine navigational conditions on the Danube. First of all, among these are TEN-T Projects on improvement of

navigational conditions on the Danube, which by the Decision of the 75th Session have been sent to the European Commission as a part of the package of proposals by the Danube Commission for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR).

It is obvious that lack of progress in the implementation of these projects not only causes real losses for the DC Member States, but most seriously reduces confidence in transport on the Danube as well.

Goals declared in the EU Strategy will require significant financial resources and from the technical point - effective project decisions, in the development of which the Danube Commission intends to take an active part.

Therefore, the Secretariat of the Danube Commission forwards to the Steering Group two documents, adopted by the 77th Session in December 2012, to be addressed to the Thematic Working Group "Waterway Infrastructure":

1. Plan for major works on the achievement of recommended fairway parameters, hydrotechnical and other facilities on the Danube.
2. Recommendations on minimum requirements for standard fairway parameters, hydrotechnical and other improvements on the Danube.

I'd like to underline that both documents reflect the common position of all DC Member States.

The DC Secretariat considers that both documents can be used as a basis for the activities of Working Group "Waterway Infrastructure", therefore we, upon request of the Danube Commission, are ready for active cooperation.

It must be stressed that the Danube Commission, when considering infrastructure projects for the Danube navigation, takes draught of stationary loaded vessel of 2,5 m as the main quality parameter for the fairway.

Over the past 10-15 years the Danube fleet hasn't been practically replenished with the new vessels, except passenger vessels. This factor has caused significant movement of highly skilled fleet personnel from the Danube countries of Eastern and Central Europe to the river basins of Western Europe.

Successful work undertaken by the Danube Commission on the establishment of the system of harmonized requirements for the certain professions of river transport workers, primarily for the boatmasters, can facilitate movement of potentially highly skilled personnel into the Danube navigation from the other transport areas, first of all from maritime transport.

In this regard, I'd like to bring to your attention that document "Recommendations of the Danube Commission on boatmasters' licenses" has been approved by the Decision of the 77th Session that is recommended to enter into force on January 1, 2013. This paper could be used by the Working Group "Education and jobs".

The activity of the Danube Commission is based both on a general and a specialized pool of knowledge on all aspects of the Danube navigation. It should serve for the development of the Danube navigation, strictly orienting on the provision of high safety standards and economic interests of the DC Member States.

Now my colleague, Mr. Horst Schindler, will present to your attention two documents related to the activities of the Working Group "Waterway Infrastructure".

Thank you!