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

**8th Meeting of the Steering Group for
Priority Area 1a of the EUSDR**

Vukovar, Croatia
29 October 2014
9.00-12.15

MINUTES

Author(s):

Technical Secretariat of PA 1a

Version (date):

Version 0.1 (draft) | 3.11.2014

The presentation slides of this SG meeting are integral part of the minutes. They are provided on www.danube-navigation.eu.

1. Welcoming of participants and status presentation of PA1a

The PAC1a, represented by Mr. Reinhard Vorderwinkler, welcomed the participants. The Romanian Representatives were not able to attend the meeting and transmitted their apologies on beforehand.

Gert-Jan Muilerman, member of the PA1a Technical Secretariat, presented a wrap-up of the WG sessions of 28 October and gave an overview of the activities of PA1a since the last SG meeting. He also pointed out the online database on www.danube-navigation.eu, where currently about 100 projects are being monitored and asked for continuous update by the riparian states. He pointed out that the developments around the shipwreck removal project presented during the WG on 28 October need to be monitored in particular.

2. Activities on administrative processes

The Technical Secretariat outlined the activities of PA1a on administrative processes. He presented the draft online questionnaire for waterway users on administrative barriers in detail and asked for feedback. The link will be online as of beginning of November on <http://www.danube-navigation.eu/pages/working-groups-projects/wg6>.

The Sava Commission underlined that the added value is seen and asked to add reference to the navigable tributaries.

TINA International enquired if there is also cooperation with PA1b on administrative processes. The Technical Secretariat explained that the focus is laid on IWT. Activities are focused in order to achieve progress. The aim is to promote the usage of digital forms, integrate RIS, to focus on EU border procedures and a limited number of barriers in order to get results. Transshipment problems with other modes were not mentioned specifically by the sector as a barrier.

3. EUSDR Financial Assistance Facilities

The Technical Secretariat explained that PA 10 provides 2 types of assistant facilities for small projects:

- 1) TAF – a support for the preparation and starting phase of projects; no money is provided, but support by consultants for elaborating project applications; 3 projects got letters of recommendation by PA1a and were granted such TAF support. Recently, the support for one of those, the project DANLOG, was stopped by PA 10 due to missing cooperation of the beneficiary.
- 2) START – financial support for small projects in their starting phase; the 1st call closed on 7 September 2014. 8 valid applications related to PA1a were submitted. Until 18 November, recommendations by PA1a on which projects shall receive support need to be sent to PA10. The decision will be taken by PA10. The projects as such will start beginning 2015.

A first assessment had been undertaken by the Technical Secretariat, which was also presented to the SG members. All documentation will be sent to the SG members after the meeting in order to allow feedback until 14 November. The Technical Secretariat will consolidate the feedback and submit it to PA10 in time. The Technical Secretariat recommended to the SG members not to provide assessments in case of involvement in one of the projects (conflict of interest).

Serbia requested to change the criterion „professionalism“ to „quality of proposal“.

Shipwreck Removal Project

The Technical Secretariat emphasized that the shipwreck removal project that gets support by TAF is not the same as the one presented on 28 October during the WG. The consortia and project scopes are different. The SG members stated that the presentation during the Working Group on 28.10. had not been convincing and too vague. Further contact with this consortium will not be sought.

4. Administrative Agreement Danube Commission/European Commission

The Danube Commission representative presented the status of the Administrative Agreement between the European Commission and the Danube Commission. The PA1a Technical Secretariat emphasized that close coordination between the activities of PA1a and the Danube Commission is needed. This should be integrated in the PA1a work plan 2015/2016.

The Sava Commission stated that in the agreement, reference should be made to the navigable tributaries.

The Port of Vokovar emphasized that these high level meetings are also important for end users as they illustrate the political will also towards national ministries.

5. Tour de table on national maintenance activities

Bosnia&Hercegovina reported that due to the protocol on fairway maintenance on the Sava, Bosnia&Hercegovina is responsible for maintaining the signalling system between rkm 343-218 on both river banks in Bosnia&Hercegovina and Croatia. On the river confluences between rkm 177 and 111, the responsibility only relates to the river side of Bosnia&Hercegovina. A comparable protocol is planned with Serbia.

There is a 3years framework agreement on maintenance (works and supervision) of the signalling system (2013-2015).

Due to the recent floods, more than 50% of the marking signs were destroyed and renewed.

In 2010, an IPA grant for maintenance of the fairway was signed. It was suspended by the EC in 2014. By then, 6 contracts had already been signed by Bosnia&Hercegovina (social and environmental studies, demining activities; the whole Sava was covered). 2 contracts on demining had to be stopped (including payment of penalties to consultants and constructors), also Croatia and Serbia were affected. Support of the Sava Commission is now sought to restart the project, at least the mining activities should be implemented, as they are the basis for using the river.

Moldova did not report any problems. A regulation on fairway maintenance will be approved end 2014, works on the Moldavian stretch will be started in spring 2015.

Serbia reported that activities on a new national strategy on inland waterway transport for the period 2015-2025 are in their final phase, adoption is expected soon. IWT is addressed from a comprehensive point of view.

Winter ports maintenance was executed by dredging 60.000m³ at entrances of 3 winter ports on the Danube River in Serbia (Ivanovo, Kovin and Novi Sad). Due to the flood year, no problems arose related to low water levels.

In 2015, river training and dredging works on 6 critical sectors on the Danube River between Backa Palanka and Belgrade - in line with the Luxembourg Declaration – will be started, co-financed by the EU. Regarding the common sector with Croatia, activities in line with the Bilateral Agreement on navigation on inland waterways and their technical maintenance have been performed. A Joint Commission approved the methodology for prioritization of critical sectors for technical maintenance, and prioritization process is in progress. Two agencies are exchanging results of hydrographic surveys.

Activities have been undertaken in order to update the status of the Tisza River from an interstate to an international waterway, as Serbia acceded the AGN in 2014.

A survey of the Iron Gate stretch from the mouth of Timok river to Belgrade is in the progress, cross-sections will be monitored (about 1000 cross section profiles). The waterway marking system in Serbia was partly damaged during the flood period.

ERI/RIS: In July 2013, a national regulation on types of RIS and the beginning of their mandatory use in Serbia was issued. Since January 2014, AIS transponders on board are obligatory in Serbia. Furthermore, harbour masters are obliged to issue Electronic Notices to Skippers (NtS). As of 01st of January 2015, electronic reporting (ERI) and usage of Electronic Navigational Charts (ENC) are becoming obligatory. As such, Serbia will be the first country with a real life test of ERI.

On the PLOVPUT website, registration forms in Serbian, English and German language for the access to the ERI system will be available soon, together with user manuals. Trainings of harbour masters and other stakeholders on ERI are in process.

In the first phase, it is foreseen that electronic and non- electronic data exchange will go in parallel. Concerning vessel types, cargo and commercial vessels are covered. The issue of RIS data exchange is still on the agenda 2015, with focus on legal and technical parts of data exchange.

Romania did not report on current activities, as the Steering Group representative was not present.

Croatia did not report significant maintenance activities. Information will be sent to the Technical Secretariat after the meeting. The national Transport Development Strategy is being prepared, planned adoption is 30. October. The main goal of the strategy is to foster intermodal and environmentally friendly transport. Croatia is in final stage of tendering RIS for the Sava river.

Hungary reported „business as usual“, especially on RIS and fairway signalling. Critical sections are being dredged like in 2012.

The Technical University of Budapest is working on a project on sediment movement, setting up a sediment balance model for the Hungarian Danube. Between rkm 1811 and 1768, erosion is worst. More measurements are being taken. From the 40 critical locations on the Hungarian section, just about four are “bottlenecks”. Due to the gravel river bed, traditional techniques are not effective and alternative are being sought. Results are expected soon.

Slovakia

Between April – October 2014, measurements of the river bed and bottleneck dredging (on the Slovakian/Hungarian section of Gabčíkovo) were undertaken

End 2014, a reconstruction of the upper lock gate including the control system of Gabčíkovo will be started, the tender is under preparation. Parallel maintenance works on both chambers is expected soon.

The Czech Republic mentioned that it would welcome to be included in the Fairway Maintenance Master Plan and emphasized the importance of being represented in the Steering Group. Currently, maintenance activities in the Czech Republic are financed by the Ministry of Agriculture. Budget restrictions and difficult coordination hamper implementation. The question to move these responsibilities to the Ministry of Transport is investigated.

Coordination with Germany is ongoing. The Elbe strategy is being prepared, having an integrative approach. Before its finalisation, no decisions can be taken.

Austria reported „business as usual“, the maintenance scheme has been adapted further towards a pro-active approach. Due to floods, about 50% of the boya were removed and have been renewed.

The Sava Commission underlined the viewpoint of Bosnia & Hercegovina, as mines are a major problem. The stopping of the financing is critical, new solutions need to be found.

6. The Fairway and Rehabilitation Master Plan for the Danube and its Navigable Tributaries

The Technical Secretariat presented the final draft of the Fairway and Rehabilitation Master Plan for the Danube and its Navigable Tributaries.

The PAC pointed out that from the beginning onwards, the Master Plan had been designed as a technical document and that legal aspects are not addressed. To emphasize this, a legal disclaimer had been added on page 2 and few paragraphs related to the interpretation of legal issues had been deleted.

The final document will be distributed to the Transport Ministers and the PA1a Steering Group within 10 days. The work of the Technical Secretariat and the Steering Group on the Master Plan is completed by then, the next steps are under the responsibility of DG Move and DG Regio. Changes need to be requested on political level. However the monitoring and updating of the document will be task of the Steering Group.

Irina Cruceru (DG Regio) reported on the transport attaché meeting in Brussels last week, where the draft ministerial conclusions on the Master Plan had been discussed. 8 out of 11 member states participated.

Ms. Cruceru appealed towards the Steering Group to liaise with channels in Brussels on the common understanding on the participative process of the Master Plan development. The necessary knowledge from the technical level needs to be provided to the attachés. The topic is high on the agenda of the new Commissioner.

The Master Plan shall be endorsed before the ministerial meeting in December, the text of the declaration is still under discussion with the transport attachés. It is very advisable not to touch the Master Plan any more – just editorial fine-tuning had been undertaken and the SG members are asked to reconfirm that to political channels. The outcomes of the negotiations with partner countries will be communicated.

The Danube Commission enquired if the German and Hungarian remarks on the Plan had been included.

Reinhard Vorderwinkler gave a positive answer to this request.

Serbia urged the Member States to communicate the figures in the Master Plan to national level in order to ensure coordination between the Master Plan and the national strategies.

The PAC emphasized once again that the implementation of the plan is task of the Riparian States, that it is no legal document and that it will be monitored regularly.

7. Studies on the Innovative Danube Vessel and Employment Effects of Danube Navigation

The results of the Innovative Danube Vessel study were presented during the Annual Forum in Vienna and uploaded to www.danube-navigation.eu afterwards. Concrete steps towards implementation – discussions on financing possibilities with the European Investment Bank and submission of a project proposal for Horizon 2020 by the Technical Secretariat - have been taken. News on this will be provided during the next SG meeting.

A study on employment effects of Danube navigation had been elaborated on the initiative of Johannes Hahn. The results proved a strong connection of Danube Navigation with GDP. The study will be forwarded to the Steering Group by DG Regio.

8. Any other business

DG Regio raised its concern on the fact that the Romanian Steering Group and Technical Secretariat representative was not present, which had also been the case in May 2014. This is particularly critical as Romania is part of the Priority Area Coordinating body. Ms. Cruceru called upon the Romanian National Coordination Office to investigate and improve the situation. Equal work of the PACs is necessary.

The Rumanian participant announced to deal with this issue.

Serbia emphasized that about a quarter of the Danube is situated in Serbia and no Danube waterway transport is possible without good conditions in the Serbian section. Nevertheless, the co-funding rate for Serbia is 50%, whereas Cohesion Countries receive 85%. Serbia should be treated with the same co-funding rates as Cohesion Countries when it comes to fairway issues.

Reinhard Vorderwinkler stated that he will communicate this issue to the European Commission

9. Next meeting

No next meeting has been fixed yet due to the fact that the contract with the Technical Secretariat will end in December 2014. However, a prolongation is expected.

10. Closing

The Technical Secretariat provided a wrap-up and closed the meeting at 12.15.

Enclosures

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

- (1) Presentations given at the Steering Group meeting
- (2) List of attendants
- (3) Project applications for the START Facility and pre-assessment taken by the PA1a Technical Secretariat