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

**9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Working Groups  
for Priority Area 1a of the EUSDR**

Vienna, Austria  
15 November 2016

**MINUTES**

Author(s):  
Joint Technical Secretariat of PACs 1a

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**Time:** 15.11.2016; 15:00 – 17:00 hrs

**Venue:** Tech Gate, Room 3.2, Donau-City-Straße 1, 1220 Wien, Austria

**Attendants:** 37 attendants representing public authorities, the private sector as well as non-governmental organizations and representations of interest in the field of inland navigation (see attached list of attendants)

## 1. Welcome and introduction to the 9th Meeting of Working Groups of Priority Area 1a

Mr. **Gert-Jan Muilerman**, the representative member of the Technical Secretariat for Priority Area 1a, welcomed the participants of the 9<sup>th</sup> Working Group meeting of the EUSDR PA1a. He thanked the participants for their interest in the activities of PA1a and informed the audience that the staff of the Austrian Technical Secretariat will change. As of 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016, Ms. Viktoria Weissenburger from viadonau will replace Ms Gudrun Maierbrugger in the Technical Secretariat.

Afterwards, Mr. Muilerman gave a short overview of the agenda and the six thematic areas of PA1a: Infrastructure, Ports, Fleet, River Information Services, Education and Jobs and Administrative Processes. Within these thematic areas projects are conducted that contribute to the realisation of the PA1a targets.

## 2. Working Group 1: Waterway infrastructure & management

**THEME: Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan for the Danube and its Navigable Tributaries – Action Plan Update October 2016**

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**Speaker:** Mr. Gert-Jan MUILERMAN (viadonau / Technical Secretariat Priority Area 1a)

**Mr. Muilerman** described the background of the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan and key facts of the resulting project FAIRway Danube. The implementation status of the Master Plan is continuously being monitored by means of the regular updates of the National Action Plans within the FAIRway Danube project. The Action Plans allow the Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) to keep fairway maintenance on the political agenda. The next Action Plan Update is due in May. Mr. Muilerman also pointed out that dredging cannot be part of the project (national responsibility) and that the aim is to improve data quality, data coherence and coordination of actions along the Danube waterway corridor. On the basis of these improved data sets, operational measures can be implemented.

Mr. Muilerman then presented the fairway situation during the first three quarters of 2016 for the countries that take part in the project FAIRway Danube (as well as for Serbia). The data was provided by the respective waterway administrations and will be reported in the update of the National Action Plans. Hungary did not yet provide data for the year 2016.

To summarise, during the first nine months of 2016 the following fairway conditions were registered:

- January was critical due to the bad situation in winter 2015
- good navigation conditions based on good hydrological conditions from February – August
- severe drop of fairway depths on critical sections as of September, mostly on the Lower Danube
- critical navigation conditions as of September, most critical sections 2016: Cochirleni (RO) and Belene/Milka/Coundur area (BG)

Mr. Muilerman welcomed remarks and feedback regarding the fairway conditions and the location of critical sections from the audience.

**Discussion:**

**Mr. Alexandru Capatu** (Pro Danube International) voiced his disappointment concerning the absence representatives of DG Regio, the Romanian Ministry of Transport and Hungary/Germany at the present meeting. He also criticised that there was no data on fairway conditions available for Germany. Mr. Capatu also voiced his anger at the idleness of the Bulgarian waterway administration regarding their maintenance and fairway marking obligations. Despite official promises, no budget is provided by the Ministry for serious measures.

**Mr. Bozhidar Yankov** (EAEMDR - Executive Agency "Exploration and Maintenance of the Danube River") responded by explaining that the waterway administration owns only one marking vessel which is traveling every week for marking the fairway and maintaining the signalisation along the Bulgarian stretch of the Danube, which is done in compliance with the marking rules. Beside this, he added that over 130 mln. euro were assured for the Bulgarian side within OPT 2007-2013 for removal of the bottlenecks in the mentioned critical sector, which however were distributed to other projects due to the fact that the feasibility study carried out within ISPA project by the Romanian Ministry of Transport was not completed. Now both Bulgarian and Romanian river administrations implement the FAST Danube project to deliver the feasibility study.

**Mr. Muilerman** explained that since waterway maintenance and rehabilitation is a national responsibility, neither DG Regio nor the Technical Secretariat of the EUSDR have the operational means to change the situation on the Lower Danube. Mr Muilerman expressed full understanding for difficult situation Mr Muilerman explained that the EUSDR Technical Secretariat exploits all opportunities to improve the situation and framework conditions within the given institutional setting. Any real political means of exerting pressure are mostly connected to funding by the EU.

**THEME: Projects implementing the Master Plan**

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**Speaker:** Ms. Katja ROSNER (viadonau)

**Ms. Rosner** gave a short overview of the activities undertaken within the FAIRway Danube project:

- Procurement of equipment (surveying vessels and gauging stations, transnational Waterway Management System, Water level forecast, marking vessels)
- Pilot operations over three years
- Two studies done by Slovakia (Pre-feasibility study to upgrade the Gabčíkovo lock, Feasibility study to upgrade the Lower Váh) (Rehabilitation of locks project has started)

Ms. Rosner then presented other projects implemented by Danube riparian states, following a downstream order. She noted that the project FAIRway and the co-financing of the European Union is a crucial enabler for the presented projects but also stressed that national budget and active measures on the part of the riparian states are just as important.

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**THEME: Selected transnational initiatives – The Danube STREAM project**

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**Speaker:** Ms. Barbara KÉRI (viadonau)

**Ms. Kéri** presented the Danube STREAM project which is about to start in January 2017 by giving a review on previous projects and the framework of Danube STREAM. The project was developed in the INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme and will end in June 2019. The overall budget is 2.1 Mio. EUR. 9 partners from 7 countries are cooperating to implement measures in three thematic objectives:

- Up-to-date fairway information services to users (IENC, public berth availability, FIS portal mobile application)
- Harmonized and Innovative Waterway Management (raised effectiveness of waterway management, innovative tools, environmentally sound waterway management)
- Cooperation (Danube PR, Interconnections)

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**THEME: Selected transnational initiatives – TEN-T Corridor Work Plan for the Danube**

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**Speaker:** Ms. Katja ROSNER (viadonau)

**Ms. Rosner** gave an introduction of the framework around the Corridor Work Plans. The TEN-T Regulation obliges the corridor coordinators to set up a Work Plan, in order to reach compliance with the TEN-T regulation by 2030. The Work Plans are based on comprehensive studies on:

- Status of the Infrastructure (key performance indicator)
- Transport volumes and modal share
- Projects (project list)
- Financial instruments
- Critical issues (expected non-compliance with the TEN-T Regulation by 2030)

The Second Work Plan of the Rhine-Danube Corridor will soon be published. Ms. Rosner then presented a map showing parts of the Rhine-Danube inland waterway that will not comply with the regulation in time. The Danube section Straubing-Vilshofen as well as the Romanian/Bulgarian border stretch of the Danube are very critical parts of the corridor.

Ms. Rosner finished her presentation by giving an account of the recommendations by Karla Peijs (the Corridor Coordinator for the Rhine-Danube Corridor) who stressed that political will and national budget is crucial in order to comply with the TEN-T regulation by 2030.

## **THEME: Navigation and River Ecology**

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**Speaker:** Mr. Ulrich Schwarz (FLUVIUS Vienna, IAD AT)

**Mr. Schwarz** stated that biodiversity is part of the EU political agenda and provided information on the ecosystem services provided by biodiversity. Freshwater species are the most endangered species on earth and river channelization impacts the riverine ecosystem.

Afterwards, he stressed that hydraulic engineering measures and fairway management need to be conducted environmentally friendly. He gave positive examples of the "Integrated River Engineering Project on the Danube East of Vienna (FGP)" in Austria as well as some projects implemented by Plovput in Serbia. The hydromorphological conditions along some Danube stretches are still in a favourable shape and over half of the river course fall into the Natura 2000 network. There is a high river restoration potential in moderately altered river stretches to mitigate some negative impacts while removing bottlenecks for navigation.

Mr. Schwarz also pointed out the importance of digital maps of actual river depths and their availability to ship captains. The maps allow for the co-existence of riverine morphodynamics and navigation.

**Mr. Muilerman** agreed with this message and repeated that the integrated approach to enhance both fairway and ecological conditions is both important and manageable. Mr. Muilerman thanked the audience for their participation and concluded the meeting.

### **Enclosures**

- (1) Agenda
- (2) List of attendants
- (3) Presentations