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

**18th Meeting of the Steering Group and
Final Event of the project Coordination of
Priority Area 1a of the EUSDR**
19 May 2020

MINUTES

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1. PA 1a Welcome and introduction

The 18th meeting of the Danube Region Strategy's Steering Group for Priority Area 1a – *To improve mobility and multimodality: Inland waterways* was held online, on the 19th of May 2020.

Mrs. Vera Hofbauer, PA1a Austrian Coordinator and Mrs. Cristina Cuc, counsellor for European affairs within the Romanian Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure and Communications (deputy of PA 1a Romanian Coordinator) welcomed the participants, Member State representatives of the Steering Group and the observer members - representatives of European Commission – DG REGIO, Danube Commission, Danube Tourist Commission, EBU, DSP, Pro Danube International. The participating countries were: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine. Romanian PAC for PA 3 - "To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts" was invited as well to attend the meeting.

Mr. Johan Magnusson, DG REGIO, provided an update on recent developments in the EUSDR. The revised Action Plan for EUSDR became officially final on 06.04.2020. It was transmitted to the European Parliament, the Council, the EESC and the Committee of the Regions. The revision of the Action Plan was a process that took more than a year in which all the stakeholders worked and were involved. The revised Action Plan should be an important document for the future work and the next steps to bring the EUSDR forward, including embedding it into the post-2020 programmes.

2. COVID-19: National provisions and conditions

As the pandemic with COVID-19 affected the entire world and led to unprecedented measures and restrictions, the subject was included on the agenda of the meeting and discussed with all the participants. At the level at the European Union, for the transport sector the concept of Green Lanes was introduced (*Communication from the Commission on the implementation of the Green Lanes under the Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services - C(2020) 1897 final from 23.03.2020*) which helped and facilitated the transport of cargo and of the workers from the transport sector, including the crews on-board of the vessels.

The pandemic hit the cruise industry on the Danube. On 13.05.2020 the European Commission presented a package of guidelines and recommendations to help EU countries gradually lift travel restrictions and allow tourism businesses to reopen. The Commission's Tourism and Transport package includes:

- an overall strategy towards recovery in 2020 and beyond,
- a common approach to restoring free movement and lifting restrictions at EU internal borders in a gradual and coordinated way;
- a framework to support the gradual re-establishment of transport whilst ensuring the safety of passengers and personnel;
- a recommendation which aims to make travel vouchers an attractive alternative to cash reimbursement for consumers;
- criteria for restoring tourism activities safely and gradually and for developing health protocols for hospitality establishments such as hotels.

Prof. Gerhard Skoff, Danube Tourist Commission, thanked the participants for the opportunity to address the PA 1a Steering Group and asked the competent authorities from the Danube riparian countries to look on the issue of the cruise industry. 2020 was supposed to be an excellent year, some companies started the cruise season in March, when the business suddenly closed. Now the sector is waiting to restart, but there are still a lot of questions that nobody can answer at this moment. On 29.05.2020 the cruising industry in Austria is expected to reopen and on 15.06.2020 the German border is expected to be reopened again. For the countries downstream Austria there is no information available regarding the reopening of borders and the possibility to restart de cruising business.

On 18.05.2020 the Danube Tourist Commission finalized with the industry a set of general rules for the cruise industry that can be applied and fulfilled by the industry, in order to reopen the business safely for crews and passengers. The industry will promote these rules at the PA1a level, European Commission and all interested parties. The reopening of cabin transport on inland waterways should be approached in a

harmonised manner within Europe but also should take efficiency into account. Generally 80% of a cruise vessel should be occupied otherwise operations are not economically viable. The measures and general rules discussed now can help as well on long term, for the preparations for the next season that starts in March-April 2021.

Theresia Hacksteiner, European Barge Union, stated that the barge operators were not so much affected, but the cruise industry collapsed within this period. EBU thanked the river commissions and DG MOVE for the support received, especially after the EU issued the Green Lanes Communication. The Danube Commission provided a lot of support to the industry by approaching the governments from Danube riparian countries to implement the concept of Green Lanes. Also the Danube Commission provided updated information on the special measures imposed by countries during the pandemic. The Commission's Tourism and Transport package will guide the industry in establishing the future strategies. The safety of crew members remains an important issue.

In the upcoming months a low water season is expected on the Danube, so the support of governments and Danube Commission will be needed further on to keep the sector going. EBU prepared a position paper related to the implementation of the EU Green Deal, which will be sent as well to the SG members.

Róbert Rafael, Pro Danube International, agreed and confirmed as well what the speakers from the industry already said regarding the transport on inland waterways during the pandemic with COVID-19. PDI's perspective is that the EU should act united and even if some countries are not EU-members, the sector expects same rules and guidelines in the inland waterway transport to be applied, regardless of the flag of the vessel. Nowadays it is an exceptional situation and for the industry it is important to have a schedule on how the business can be reopened, for instance a schedule for lifting the additional border controls. The industry currently has the question if the additional border control will be kept further on. The cruise sector raises a lot of questions on how a trip, for example between Vienna and Budapest, can be organized with 140 passengers on board and how the busses serving these ships can be organized as well.

Manfred Seitz, Danube Commission, stated that the Danube Commission was very active in collecting the information on the exceptional measures that the DC member states introduced when the COVID-19 pandemic appeared. The updated information was and is being published on the DC website. When the restrictions were imposed by countries they were not very well coordinated and there were some blockages, like lost times in operating the ships or changes of crew members. The DC was in close contact with DG MOVE and CCNR and advocated the extension of certificates, to ease the work of the transport operators. Multilateral agreements, like ADN/ M025 and ADN/M026, were signed.

In the last months the DC interacted a lot with inland ports and operators and it is a fact that in April-May 2020 the dry volumes transported on the Danube were at approximately the same levels like in the same period in 2019. For the months May-July a clear forecast cannot be made because many other economic activities were closed.

For the safe operation of river cruise vessels the DC had some discussions with the European Commission, but there are still some issues to agree on, for example what should be done if a person onboard of vessel has symptoms or is infected with COVID-19. It is an issue that has to be agreed at the international level. Also many talks with the CCNR have taken place, on how the river cruise industry can return in business at a significant level, in terms of efficiency.

An overview of applicable COVID restrictions on the Danube was provided by the representatives of the countries in the SG of PA 1a:

Germany – the substitution of missing crew members by others is permitted with special measures on board. The extension of the validity of vessel certificates, qualification certificates and service record books is recognized. Starting with 01.04.2020 is a temporary suspension of lock operations between 22:00 hrs and 06:00 (night shift) on the Danube and the Main-Danube Canal was introduced. It is unclear when the passenger transport will be allowed again and when lock operations will return to the 24/7 mode.

Austria – the infrastructure is working 100%, in public places 1 m distance has to be kept, in public rooms masks have to be worn. The exchange of crew members is possible through the implementation of the green lane concept. The extension of the validity of documents is recognized. Passenger shipping, in liner service is allowed, charter is forbidden. Passenger transport is expected to restart on 29.05.2020.

Slovakia – international shipping in transit is allowed without restrictions. Also cargo vessels with destination in a port or a berth in SK for the purpose of carrying out loading, unloading and transhipping have no restrictions. Changing of crew members and replenishing of food supplies is possible only in the ports of Bratislava and Komárno (implementing Green Lanes). No exams for obtaining certificates are organized at the moment. Passenger transport, landing, berthing and anchoring of all passenger cabin vessels is prohibited (exception: replenishing of fuel and water supplies). Sightseeing cruises is permitted from 15.05.2020.

Hungary – the reporting obligation for all ships entering HU is in place, meaning a declaration sheet for passenger/cabin vessels (incl. port of departure, port of destination, whether in transit mode, crew members and passengers as well as their nationalities). Cargo vessels in transit mode may use anchorages to comply with the working time regulations for the crew. Disembarkation of the vessel's crew is prohibited. Cargo vessels with destination in a port or a berth in HU for the purpose of carrying out loading, unloading and transhipping have no restrictions. Changing of crew members prohibited; return and disembarkation of HU nationals is permitted. Landing, berthing and anchoring of all passenger cabin vessels as well the sightseeing cruises is prohibited.

Croatia – crew change is possible (EU citizens) with prior submission of a request to the Civil Protection Headquarters and the Border Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior, which make the final decision on the crew change. Crew members may not disembark. Passenger transport is suspended in Vukovar, Ilok, Batina and Aljmaš starting with 16.03.2020. All the decisions related to special measures are coordinated with the ministry of the interior.

Serbia - exchange of crew members is possible in some situations or in case of emergency. At inbound and outbound border crossings (Bezdan, Veliko Gradiste and Prahovo), based on their country of origin (according to crew list) individual crew members might be prohibited from entering RS. Change of crew members who are foreign nationals is not permitted, while change of crew members who are domestic nationals is permitted if quarantine measures are complied with. Transit navigation on the Danube waterway is limited to certain travel durations upstream and downstream (for ship formations and for self-propelled ships) from the moment of entering the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Passenger transport at inbound and outbound border crossings (Bezdan, Veliko Gradiste and Prahovo) based on their country of origin (according to passenger list): individual passengers might be quarantined if they want to disembark in RS or the passenger vessel might be prohibited from entering RS.

Romania - special measures are in place with regard to the extension of the validity of documents for nautical personnel (certificates of medical fitness, qualification certificates, special certificates and service record books). Access of vessels to Romanian ports, inspection and operation of vessels are carried out without any restrictions (in compliance with all measures ordered by the Ministry of Health). The exchange of crew members is possible in light of the green lanes. Public passenger transport in the Danube Delta is allowed under special conditions established in coordination with the Ministry of Health.

Bulgaria – special measures for protection are in place and are established by the Ministry of Health. Upon entering Bulgarian territory, the captain of the vessel and the shipping agent are obliged to fill in the *Captain's Declaration of Health* and submit it via the BULRIS single window system. Before entering ports under the territorial jurisdiction of the Directorate of Navigation Supervision of Lom/Ruse the radio control centre for navigation shall be notified by radiotelephone whether there are persons (crew members or passengers) on board who show flu-like symptoms or pending the medical examination of any sick person, the disembarkation of the crew, the embarkation of third parties and the transfer to other ships is not permitted.

The exchange of crew members is possible in Bulgaria through the implementation of the green lane concept. Passenger transport is banned.

Moldova – no impediments for ships calling the Giurgiulesti Port Complex (disembarking crew has temperature taken and has to wear masks). The passenger terminal is closed. The crews must present the latest information about possible infection with COVID-19.

Ukraine – the substitution of missing crew members by others on board is permitted under special measures and the validity of vessel certificates, qualification certificates and service record books is extended. Disembarkation of all crew members is prohibited at border crossings (in the port area) with the exception of nationals of UA for repatriation. The measure of self-isolation is in place. There are no restrictions for loading, unloading or transshipment operations at the seaports of Reni, Ismail and Ust'-Dunajsk. The access to the vessel can be made only with individual protection equipment. The temporary closure of border crossings at Ismail, Vilkovo and Kilia for passenger ships is in place. Landing, berthing and anchoring of all passenger cabin vessels is prohibited. For them navigation is permitted only in transit mode (exception: replenishing of fuel and water supplies).

Irina Cozma, PAC PA3, informed that the cruise transport and the special measures imposed are an important issue also for PA 3 - *Culture & Tourism* and invited the PACs of PA1a and the cruise industry to attend the next PA3 Steering Group meeting which will be organized online on 03.06.2020. The meeting will be a good opportunity for presenting the guidelines and general rules related to tourism and transport in the future. The PACs of PA3 are willing to cooperate to develop a common approach related to tourism.

In conclusion of these discussions it was proposed and agreed at the level of PA1a that PA1a will facilitate information exchange and will monitor developments regarding international cabin shipping in the Danube area together with PA3 (Culture & Tourism). The Danube Commission will continue to collect updated information and publish it on the DC website. PACs PA 1a will distribute to the Steering Group members the documents provided by EBU and Danube Tourist Commission.

3. Status of further PA1a activities

Désirée Oen, DG MOVE, informed about the status of the Danube Ministerial Conclusions 2020. The text of the Danube Ministerial Conclusions 2020 was finalized in March 2020 with the contribution of PACs PA1a and member states. They conclusions were scheduled to be signed in the frame of the TEN-T Days (13 – 15.05.2020, Šibenik, Croatia). As the TEN-T Days event was cancelled, the second option is the Transport Council meeting in June 2020, subject to possible cancellation. The third and most probable option is a written procedure by addressing a letter to the ministers of transport and asking an electronic signature. DG MOVE asked the SG members from Bosnia & Herzegovina and Ukraine, if they will sign the conclusions having in view that they did not contribute during the drafting and negotiation process. DG MOVE also informed that it is closely monitoring how the navigation conditions will develop in the upcoming dry season.

Viktoria Weissenburger, Technical Secretariat PA1a, presented the situation concerning the national Crew Databases as required by Directive 2017/2397. According to the Directive 2017/2397, Member States shall bring into force the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with this Directive by 17.01.2022 at the latest. Article 25 provides that Member States shall keep registers of the:

- Union certificates of qualification
- service record books
- logbooks

issued under their authority

The logbooks will be linked to the European Hull Database.

Union certificates of qualification and service record books will be linked to the European Crew Database (ECDB) which does not exist for the moment. The data for the European Crew Database shall be provided by the National Crew Databases. The standards for the National Crew Databases are set out in Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/473 of 20 January 2020 supplementing Directive (EU) 2017/2397. All national data must be accessible via the ECDB, but are not stored there. National Crew Databases and the

European Crew Database should be implemented by summer 2021 which is quite a tight deadline.

A joint development of the database could provide benefits for the states, mainly in terms of shared costs for the procurement process, shared costs for the implementation of the database and lower costs for continuous maintenance. Discussions and coordination with EUSDR states will be done in the framework of Working Group 5 “Education & Jobs” and the EUSDR states are kindly invited to participate and to express their points of view on technical matters.

Viktoria Weissenburger, Technical Secretariat PA1a WG 6, also presented the status of the implementation of the Danube Navigation Standard Forms (DAVID). The DAVID forms represent a common vision to simplify, to harmonise and to digitalise the border controls. A consensus on the content of three forms (Arrival and Departure Report, Crew List and Passenger List) was reached in April 2018. These forms are being introduced in phases (forms have been introduced in spring 2020 in the first phase countries HU, HR and RS). All other relevant countries are expected introduce these forms no later than December 2021. The subject will be discussed at the next PA1a WG 6 & PA 11 meeting planned on 03.06.2020 and on the workshop on the social dimension of the transition to automation and digitalisation, focusing on the transport labour force, organized by DG MOVE on 12.06.2020.

The main objectives of the digitalization of DAVID forms is to have a single entry of data (even if different reports are required by receiving authorities, the reporting party enters each data field only once). The choice of report-receipt for authorities could be within an electronic reporting system (overview, print, create PDF, respond, forward, etc.), per e-mail (e.g. as pdf attachment) or via webservice. The embedding of forms in River Information Services is investigated within RIS COMEX project.

4. Embedding process for the financing period post 2020

The so called embedding process appeared in 2020, to anchor the priorities of the EUSDR and the revised Action Plan into the future European programmes. It is a process in which we have to choose the most strategic actions from the Action Plan.

Johan Magnusson, DG Regio, stated that embedding process is a crucial exercise in which each Priority Area is asked to identify its priorities from the Action Plan. In the embedding process all parties have an important role to play, SG members have the role to work in this task by establishing the priorities and by contacting management authorities and promoting the strategic actions. PACs and NCs have the same role.

Gert-Jan Muilerman, Technical Secretariat PA1a, informed the participants that PACs have been asked to propose a shortlist of up to three strategic topics to be included in the relevant national/regional operational programmes. The three strategic topics for 2021–2027 were sent to the SG members in advance, before the meeting. PACs had to choose a maximum of 3 topics (from 6) having urgent needs and having a macroregional relevance. The topics had to include digitalisation or climate change and sustainable development as horizontal themes.

The proposed PA1a strategic topics are:

1. **Contribute to improved waterway and port infrastructure & management.** Improve the compliance of the Danube and its navigable tributaries with the minimum requirements for class IV waterways within the European TEN-T waterway network and establish and preserve a Good Navigation Status (according to Art. 15 (3) a) and Art. 15 (3) b) of Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013) are a priority for PA 1a and for the Danube riparian countries. This shall also be done in line with the PA1a Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan and ensuring that operations are carried out compatibly with environmental law and are aimed at achieving climate resilience. The topic include also GNS.
2. **Facilitate fleet modernization.** Facilitate the transition of the Danube inland fleet towards innovation and zero emission navigation is part of the Green Deal and it is investigated by years in EUSDR projects. A non-coordinated approach between the Danube riparian countries on the modernisation of the Danube fleet could reinforce undesired trends like: patchwork of different modernisation and investment measures without exploiting synergies of the different national

programmes; continued operation of old and non-compliant Danube vessels in countries with less stringent emission targets.

3. **Contribute to the enhanced quality of education and jobs.** Under this topic can be promoted projects and actions related to: the implementation of the provisions of Directive (EU) 2017/2397 and Delegated Directive (EU) 2020/12 in all Danube riparian states; increased availability of nautical personnel (e.g. through the improvement of working conditions) as well as personnel in ports; the increasing of the attractiveness of the inland waterway transport sector and promoting jobs and career opportunities, with a clear focus on access to quality employment of categories currently underrepresented in this labour market, that is, young, elderly, women and vulnerable groups from rural areas.

The SG members were asked to provide their comments in 10 days, otherwise the topics will be introduced in the embedding process. The Danube Strategy Point informed that the deadline to send the strategic topics is almost passed and asked the participants to express their opinion as soon as possible. On 25.05.2020 the HR EUSDR PCY with support of the DSP will organise an online NC Meeting where the embedding process and the strategic topics will be discussed.

The Danube Commission proposed to include in the topic no. 2 "... and greening of port operation" having in view that the European Green Deal has a wide applicability including ports. Danube ports have a big potential for production and can contribute here. PACs PA 1a explained that ports are included in the topic no. 1, named "... port infrastructure & management". The topic of green ports will be included under topic no. 1.

Sava Commission proposed that topic no. 2 to include Danube **region** fleet, not only Danube fleet. The proposal is accepted.

5. Conclusions of PA1a Steering Group meeting and next steps

The conclusions of PA 1a Steering Group meeting are:

- PA1a will facilitate information exchange and will monitor developments regarding international cabin shipping in the Danube area together with PA3 (Culture & Tourism);
- Information received from EBU and Danube Tourist Commission will be distributed to SG members;
- SG members are asked to react on the embedding process, precisely on the 3 priority topics in 10 days from the date of the meeting (29.05.2020).

The PACs PA 1a thanked all the participants for their participation for exchanging views, experiences and for providing updated information.

Enclosures

Please note: All documents are available for download at the website of EUSDR PA 1a

→ <https://navigation.danube-region.eu/>

- (1) List of attendants
- (2) Presentations given during the Steering Group