EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Priority Area 1a – To improve mobility and multimodality: Inland waterways

20th Meeting of the Steering Group of Priority Area 1a of the EUSDR

09 December 2021

MINUTES

Author(s):

Joint Technical Secretariat of PACs 1a

Version (date):

V 0.1 (draft) | 20-12-2021

EUROPEAN UNION
European Regional Development Fund

Federal Ministry
Republic of Austria
Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology

viadonau

Ministerul Transporturilor

1. PA 1a Welcome and introduction

The 20th 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 09 of December 2021.

The meeting was attended by representatives from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania and Ukraine. The European Commission (DG REGIO, DG MOVE) and DSP participated and the following professional associations and international organisations: Danube Commission, EBU and PDI.

The agenda included only the update of the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan (Master Plan), after a series of bilateral meetings conducted by the PA1a Technical Secretariat for discussing the national chapters of the document.

The meeting was chaired by **Mrs. Vera Hofbauer** (Austria) and **Mrs. Cristina Cuc** (Romania).

2. Update of the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan

Ms. Vera Hofbauer (Austrian Ministry of Climate Action) welcomed all participants.

Ms. Viktoria Weissenburger (viadonau) explained why the update of the Master Plan is needed after roughly 7 years of implementation. In 2014, it was jointly identified and systematically demonstrated that the individual Danube riparian countries have an urgent need for the very basic fairway maintenance equipment. In almost all countries there was a lack of basic equipment (surveying vessels, gauging stations, buoys, etc.). In the last financing period, a large part of the necessary investments listed in the Master Plan were made. Of course, the European co-financing within the framework of transnational projects such as FAIRway Danube, but also many national projects, was a massive driver for that. About 70mn. EUR were invested in such projects since 2014.

Some of the key issues in the Master Plan were thus resolved, but in the meantime new topics have emerged. In particular transnational trends that concern all waterway managers one way or another, namely the entire field of digitalisation, which in 2014 did not play such a prominent role and of course climate change, which simply cannot be ignored by waterway administrations. Several topics will have to be addressed jointly. Last but not least, the update of the Master Plan it is also necessary in light of the next financing period 2021 – 2027.

The table of content of the updated Master Plan was presented to the participants. The main aim and structure remain the same; the country sections are the core of the Master Plan. What is new is that each country chapter includes descriptions related to the ecological status/potential and ecological compatibility of maintenance measures. In addition, a transnational chapter and an environmental chapter have been included. Almost all the country sections were updated in a draft version and the maps of the critical locations are under design.

Mrs. Weissenburger continued to explain the issues that will be treated at the transnational level:

- Centralised platform for harmonised waterway-related data: this initiative is already ongoing, as in the FAIRway Danube project a platform was developed – the WAMOS system – with which hydrological and hydrographical data is collected from almost all waterway administrations along the Danube for the first time in harmonised format and quality. The instrument is used by the waterway administrations in their daily activities for analysis and reporting. In the future, the analytical functionalities should be enhanced.

- Harmonised Fairway Information Services: User information is provided in very different quality and frequency and on a large variety of different national and transnational user information platforms. Maintaining and updating many platforms is translated in costs and human resources for the waterway administrations. At the same time the situation is not transparent for the waterway users that have to pick and choose information from different portals. The efforts of the waterway managers should be pooled in order to keep the information of the users at a high level of service.

- Concerted approach to managing the impacts of climate change: There is still a great uncertainty in the assessment of climate change impacts on waterway management and a lack of adaptation strategies for dealing with extreme events and changed flow regimes. In the future, first the knowledge gap needs to be closed at a transnational level and the maintenance approach should be adapted. One project proposal dealing with exactly such adaptation strategies was recently submitted to Horizon Europe.

Participants were asked to provide comments or other inputs to the content of the transnational chapter or the structure of the document.

Mr. Robert Rafael (PDI) reminded the participants of the blockage of navigation in the area of Belene in September 2021 and emphasised how important it is to keep the industry informed about the (planned) maintenance activities, considering the forecasts and to take concerted action. He proposed to include in the transnational chapter a reference to coordinated stakeholder management which is an important transnational task (regular meetings / fora to be established).

PA1a Technical Secretariat agreed with the proposal and will include a key issue on "stakeholder management" in the Master Plan's transnational chapter. The industry should be involved not just when it concerns user information platforms.

The discussions continued with the presentation of the country chapters, as they contain the priorities of each Danube riparian country for the coming years, the key issues and measures to be included in the updated Master Plan as well as the necessary operational budgets. It was underlined that the country chapters follow the fairway management cycle and that a comparison between the operational budgets of the different countries is not relevant as each waterway administration is organised differently, which means that in some cases different tasks are carried out. Some presentations were given by country representatives, others were given by Ms. Weissenburger, in case of absence of the respective representative.

Germany: Mr. Grewe (Ministry of Transport and digital Infrastructure) and **Ms. Weissenburger** stated that the update is still in progress. What remains valid throughout the entire document is the fact that the maintenance target of Germany is at 2.00m, as 2.50m fairway depth are not achievable by maintenance measures alone.

Austria: Ms. Weissenburger explained that in terms of monitoring the system for remote monitoring of the buoys' position is not performing reliably since 2017 and will have to be upgraded. In terms of planning, the possibilities of analysis of key parameters of the interface between waterway infrastructure and operating vessels need to be exploited. This can be done by further development of the existing waterway asset management system (WAMS). In terms of execution, two priorities were identified: the need of creating a redundant and more effective waterway marking system (as one of the pushers operated during marking operations is outdated) and exploiting the possibilities of flexible and climate resilient infrastructure elements (as a supplement to fixed hydraulic engineering structures). In terms of user information, the water level forecast is not very accurate and must be improved. The estimated yearly operational costs needed are 5 million EUR/year.

Slovakia: Mr. Polhorsky (SVP) informed the participants that when it comes to the monitoring of the fairway the biggest issue is the insufficient number of skilled staff to perform surveying operations. In terms of planning, the further development of the existing waterway management tool (WAMS) is envisaged and with that the improvement of internal procedures. Additionally, different coordinate systems used for the measurements in border stretches (AT-SK and SK-HU) are an impediment to efficient planning. The exchange of data needs to be facilitated. In terms of execution, fleet and equipment for marking remain old and it is an impediment for quick reaction. There is an insufficient number of floating and costal signals, including AIS AtoNs and no automated system available for the monitoring of buoy position and the dissemination of marking information. Recently, a study for the modernisation of marking and navigation equipment was finalised in order to keep the marking at the state-of-the-art standard. Also, the available

dredging equipment is outdated and needs to be renewed. Under the national operational programme for transport SVP is currently preparing the procurement of such equipment. The lack of staff trained to operate dredging equipment is another identified key issue. In terms of information provision, in particular the clearance under bridges should be communicated to the users. The estimated yearly operational costs needed are 2,560,000 EUR/year, current allocations being approx. 2,300,000 Euro.

Hungary: Ms. Weissenburger explained that the following presentation was agreed on with the Hungarian authorities. She further reminded the participants that the Hungarian waterway administration is divided into three branches that are responsible for three stretches of the Danube, each with their own equipment. In terms of monitoring, surveying vessels are available but the echo-sounder sensors are outdated. Weekly marking trips are not sufficient to monitor the fairway marking, so AIS AtoNs technology with remote monitoring of the fairway marking needs to be deployed. In the ongoing project "Upgrade of Hungarian marking system" such a remote monitoring tool will be procured. In terms of planning the existing waterway management tool (WAMS) will be developed further in the coming years. In terms of execution, the outdated icebreakers constitute a particular problem, as icebreaking cannot be performed at low water levels but Hungary is responsible for icebreaking until Belgrade (based on respective agreements with Croatia and Serbia). Furthermore, the budget for dredging activities is insufficient and has been for many years. Currently, a study to improve the navigability on the entire Hungarian sector of the Danube is ongoing which will be finalized in September 2022. This study will provide information about the quantities to be dredged at certain locations or other measures that need to be taken. Concerning user information, the clearance under bridges must be calculated and communicated, as Hungary has many bridges across the Danube. The first estimation for needed yearly operational costs is approx. 1,500,000 Euro (without dredging budget).

Ms. Theresia Hacksteiner (EBU) mentioned her appreciation that shortcomings are addressed openly in the Master Plan and today's meeting. She stressed the importance of timely user information, amongst others the publication of NtS, an issue that has been taken up by PA1a recently in a dedicated workshop. EBU would also support a well-structured stakeholder involvement from the side of the waterway administrations. With regard to the Hungarian Danube stretch, Ms. Hacksteiner explained that the lack of dredging makes navigation conditions more severe every year and asked for an estimation when dredging could next be implemented on the Hungarian Danube.

Mr. Imre Matics (Hungarian Ministry for Innovation and Technology) explained that the waterway administration is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior, not the Ministry of Innovation. He explained that dredging is difficult to justify to environmentalists and the respective ministry as long as the navigation conditions upstream and downstream (in Germany and Croatia) are worse than on the Hungarian section. This situation is a political fact.

Ms. Vera Hofbauer pointed out that one has to orientate oneself towards the best stretches of the Danube and not downwards. The downgrading of levels of service is not an option.

Mr. Herfried Leitner (PDI) pointed out that the Hungarian stretch has a large impact on the entire transport route on the Danube, due to the geographical location of Hungary right in the middle of the Danube. Almost all cargo needs to pass the Hungarian sector.

Mr. Manfred Seitz (Danube Commission) reminded the participants that all Danube riparian states have agreed to adhere to the standards set by the GNS (Good navigation status) and the Danube Commission recommendations which means 2.5 m fairway depth remains the objective.

Ms. Weissenburger expressed her appreciation that the country representatives are open about certain shortcomings, so that they can be included in the Master Plan and the process of raising political awareness through the Danube Ministerial Conclusions can continue.

Croatia: Ms. Lidija Hubalek (Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure) explained that in terms of monitoring there is a need for specialised equipment to monitor also shallow sections which are unreachable with the current surveying vessel, due to fairway depths. For the future, aquatic drones could possibly be

used. The biggest issue, however, is the lack of sufficient number of skilled staff to perform monitoring. In terms of planning, insufficient and hardly predictable financial backings and inefficient internal procedures, insufficient data storage and analysis facilities were identified. Further development of the existing WAMS is needed. In terms of execution, a high number of critical locations remains on the Croatian rivers and high maintenance costs for capital dredging hinder physical interventions. Concerning user information, the priority will be to extend the existing water level forecast to more bottlenecks. The yearly needed operational budget is estimated at 4,000,000 Euro (including dredging).

Serbia: Ms. Weissenburger explained that the limited budget for all kinds of waterway management activities and the number of skilled staff (resulting also from this lack of budget) is the biggest issue in Serbia. Furthermore, the number of automatic gauging stations on the Tisza is insufficient and the gauging equipment along the waterways is generally outdated. A new surveying vessel is currently under procurement. In terms of planning, most activities are coordinated based on bilateral agreements on surveying and maintenance between Croatia and Serbia and Romania and Serbia within the Interstate Commission for the Iron Gates. In terms of execution, the further absence of budget for dredging activities will lead to the deterioration of navigation conditions on the border section with Croatia, while the cost – benefit ratio of this activities would be very favourable. Solving this issue will be a priority in the future. When it comes to marking, the marking system on the Danube was previously modernised (including AIS AtoNs) but there is room for improvement of the marking system on the Tisza River. For the Sava river a new multifunctional marking vessel and AIS AtoNs are under procurement. In this area of the management cycle, too, the lack of qualified personnel has an impact on the tasks to be carried out. The improvement of the water level forecast will be the biggest topic regarding user information. Estimations for the needed operational budget still have to be done.

Bosnia and Hercegovina: Ms. Weissenburger explained that there is still no specialised agency that is responsible for fairway management. Marking operations on the Sava are executed in collaboration with Croatia, basic marking equipment is thus available. More information might be included in the Master Plan at a later stage.

Romania: Mr. Romeo Soare (AFDJ) explained that in terms of monitoring the problem of the partly outdated surveying equipment still remains, as does the insufficient number of automatic gauging stations. ACN will need equipment for the monitoring of the canal banks (at Danube Black Sea and Poarta Albă – Midia Năvodari Canals). In terms of planning, the further development of the WAMS is necessary which was procured in FAIRway Danube and is already a very comprehensive system. Just as important is the extension of the existing digital terrain model as to make it comprehensive for the entire Romanian stretch (as a basis for services like weather forecast calculation or LNWL). Based on such a model the methodology for the calculation of the LNWL for all major gauges can be improved, taking into account effects of the climate change. The methodology for the calculation of the LNWL should be validated by the Danube Commission. In terms of execution, the technical capacities for dredging, in particular for the maritime Danube, should be enhanced. Overall, the issue remains to have sufficient specialized personnel to operate the dredgers (including fluvial dredgers). In general, the number of dredging interventions should be reduced in the future (also to reduce stress on the environment), dredging must be conducted more efficient and proactively. One modern multifunctional marking vessel was purchased in the FAIRway Danube project, but special equipment for marking is still missing (e.g. specialised vessel for the maintenance of the coastal signalisation) and the number of buoys, including AIS AtoNs, is insufficient and there is no automated system available for the monitoring of buoy position and the dissemination of marking information. The user information must be provided more user-friendly; the communication of a comprehensive water level forecast is one priority. The estimated needed operational costs are estimated at 16,000,000 Euro yearly.

Bulgaria: Ms. Weissenburger presented that in terms of monitoring, some of the sensors used for bathymetric measuring are outdated, or the equipment is no longer produced by the manufacturer, making repairs in the future nearly impossible. The automatic gauging network is old with a high number of still not automated gauges. In general, the biggest issue is the limited number of skilled personnel. In terms of planning, the WAMS should be further developed. In terms of execution, dredging equipment is currently being delivered to APPD (financed from the Operational Programme). This equipment can be used for capital

dredging and larger interventions, but there is a lack of dredging equipment for quick interventions (self-propelled dredger). The biggest issue is still the insufficient budget for dredging interventions, whether they are outsourced or conducted with own personnel (which is also not available in sufficient number). Furthermore, it was identified that the number of buoys, including AIS AtoNs, is insufficient and no automated system is available for the monitoring of the buoys' position data and the dissemination of marking information. One multifunctional marking vessel was procured in FAIRway Danube, but the other vessel needed to cover the entire BG stretch is outdated. The needed yearly operational costs are estimated at 4,275,000 Euro per year (including enough money for dredging interventions).

Ms. Hacksteiner referred to what had been said about reducing the number of dredging interventions, wherever feasible, in favour of capital dredging. She reminded the participants that this topic has been discussed for some years now and asked what would be needed to actually implement such measures and for governments to allocate enough budget to avoid the critical locations from getting worse.

Mr. Soare mentioned that in his experience the blocking of traffic can be avoided for sure, if the river administrations have sufficient budget for planned activities and if the intervention (dredging) are performed in the proper time (proactively) and if there is the will and experienced staff to do it. An improved cooperation between public authorities and the end users is necessary, also in order to receive feedback from the industry.

Mr. Leitner expressed his concern about the long-term statistical discharge, having seen statistics from Sava and Drava rivers. He is therefore glad that this topic is taken up in the Master Plan. He expressed his frustration that the comparatively low costs for proper maintenance can not be allocated for fairway maintenance since many years. Bringing this topic to a higher political level would be needed.

Ms. Barbara Bernardi (CINEA) mentioned that during the negotiations of the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF), only Romania put inland navigation as a topic into the RRF. The political willingness to retrieve the funding offered would be needed. 3.8 billion EUR are available for the Rhine-Danube Core Network Corridor and CEF funding for IWT of 237 million EUR. The money is there but countries must retrieve it. Studies are still not resulting in works and in the next years the money will go to different modes of transport if it is not retrieved. In particular, projects on the border sections often involve many administrations and ministries, which should not be used as an excuse. She expressed her support for the Master Plan and the useful data that is gathered with the National Action Plan updates, to be used on the political level. She expressed her wish that the next CEF call in 2022 will be used by the countries.

Moldova: The Danube stretch of Moldova is only about 500 metres long and is restricted to the port area of Giurgiulesti. Fairway management of the Danube waterway in Moldova is carried out by the Romanian AFDJ on the basis of a bilateral agreement. The Moldovan chapter will thus remain the same.

Ukraine: Ms. Oksana Cheval (Ministry of Infrastructure) introduced also her colleagues from the State Enterprise «Ukrainian Sea Ports Authority» (USPA) functioning under the Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine. **Ms. Anneta Ohanesian** (USPA) explained that USPA is responsible for maintenance of the existing waterways and is providing regular dredging works by means of its own dredging fleet as well as for the implementation of the new project for the reconstruction of a deep-water navigable route. Dredging in the Ukrainian Danube in the Delta is suspended; the deep – water navigable route is conducted in line with the ESPOO convention and in 2020 consultations with Romania were conducted. Therefore, only maintenance dredging is currently conducted. In terms of monitoring, surveys are performed regularly by the state institution "Derzhhydrographiya" establishing the status of the riverbed and the water levels. The information is used to update the river navigation charts. 6 gauges are located on the Ukrainian part of the Danube River and are monitored by the Hydrometeorological Centre of Ukraine. In terms of execution, maintenance dredging activities are conducted to ensure the safety of navigation. Aids to navigation are installed and maintained in proper conditions as required by the Danube Commission. In terms of information of the end users, Notice to Mariners of Ukraine are published and transferred on NAVTEX system.

After the presentations of the national chapters of the riparian countries the content of the **Environmental Chapter** was briefly presented. It will contain references to the EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC), on the non-deterioration principle and article 4(7) of particular relevance in this context. Also, it will contain references to the implications of NATURA 2000 areas and the application of the *Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube River Basin*.

Ms. Hacksteiner suggested to include in the introductory part of the Master Plan a reference not only to the cargo shipping industry but also to the passenger transport on the Danube. She thanked all participants for the comprehensive overview about the future priorities of the different Danube countries. She further suggested to include in the transnational chapter the structural exchange of experiences between the waterway mangers.

Ms. Weissenburger stated that these suggestions will be included in the Master Plan and will be included in the next draft.

Mr. Dejan Trifunovic (Danube Commission) mentioned that progress is visible, with some critical locations, particularly on the Serbian Danube and Sava, already resolved.

Mr. Seitz expressed his gratitude to PA1a and all waterway administrations for providing the valuable information. He assumes that some of the mentioned gaps will be closed with the help of a FAIRway Danube 2 project. He referred to a statement written by **Ms. Désirée Oen** (DG MOVE) in the chat, that member states seem to forget that maintenance is their obligation. He reminded all participants of this obligation and mentioned that Danube Commission will no longer accept any excuses to not meet that obligation. Raising political awareness that funds are needed for fairway maintenance is also on the agenda of DG MOVE and the Danube Commission.

At the end of the meeting, the next steps were presented as follows:

- Until 07.01.2022 a new draft of the Master Plan will be sent to the Steering Group members and observers;
- Until 31.01.2022 feedback from the PA1a SG and the observers is expected;
- February 2022 - Final approval of the new FRMMP by PA1a voting Steering Group members in a written procedure

The PA1a PACs thanked all participants for their active participation.

Enclosures

(1) List of attendants

(2) Presentation given during the Steering Group


GoToMeeting
Talking: RoMT - Cristina Cuc
View Everyone
RoMT - Cristina Cuc
Viktoria Weissenburger
Claudiu Dutu - SCN Giurgiu
UIIP
Istomin Oleksandr
Dejan Trifunovic
Vera Hofbauer, AT
СУБ СУЯ
Grewe, Markus
Robert Rafael
OEN Desiree (MOVE)
Kseniia Sokolova (MIU)
Nadija Afanasieva
Gert-Jan Muilerman
Romeo Soare
Aleksey Panasiuk
Lidija Hubalek
Silvia Csöbóková MoT SR
Katharina Lenz | Danube Strategy Po...
Cheval Oksana
Adrian MAIZEL
Yuriy Bondiuchenko SE USPA
Anneta Ohanesian (USPA)
Monica Patrichi
Johan Magnusson
SDC, Marijana Cindric
Stefan Polhorsky
Andreas Bäck - viadonau
BERNARDI Barbara (CINEA)
Mihaela IRIMIA
Mic
Camera
Screen
Leave


GoToMeeting
Sprecher: RoMT - Cristina Cuc
Alle anzeigen
Gert-Jan Muilerman
Viktoria Weissenburger
Claudiu Dutu - SCN Giurgiu
UIIP
Istomin Oleksandr
Dejan Trifunovic
Vera Hofbauer, AT
СУБ СУЯ
RoMT - Cristina Cuc
Grewe, Markus
Robert Rafael
OEN Desiree (MOVE)
Kseniia Sokolova (MIU)
Nadija Afanasieva
Romeo Soare
Aleksey Panasiuk
Lidija Hubalek
Silvia Csöbóková MoT SR
Katharina Lenz | Danube S...
Cheval Oksana
Adrian MAIZEL
Yuriy Bondiuchenko SE U...
Anneta Ohanesian (USPA)
Monica Patrichi
Johan Magnusson
SDC, Marijana Cindric
Stefan Polhorsky
Andreas Bäck - viadonau
BERNARDI Barbara (CINEA)
Mihaela IRIMIA
Mikro
Kamera
Bildschirm
Verlassen
Zur Suche Text hier eingeben
DEU
13:02
09.12.2021