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

**22nd Meeting of the Steering Group of
Priority Area 1a of the EUSDR**

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MINUTES

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1. PA 1a Welcome and introduction

The 22nd 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 05 of December 2022.

The meeting was attended by representatives from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Croatia, Serbia, and Romania. The European Commission (DG REGIO) and DSP participated as well as the following professional associations and international organizations: Danube Commission, EBU and PDI.

Mr. Markus Simoner, nominated as Austrian Priority Area 1a Coordinator since 1st of September 2022, introduced himself and briefly presented highlights of his 20 years of experience in the field of inland waterway transport while working for viadonau. Currently he is leader of department of Navigation – Technology and nautical science within the Austrian Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology.

Mrs. Monica Patrichi, Romanian Technical Secretariat for PA1a, Romanian Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, welcomed the participants and informed Mrs. Mihaela Mocanu remained unchanged as RO PAC

Mr. Johan Magnusson, DG REGIO (Team Leader Danube and Baltic Sea Regions) informed the participants on the EUSDR Annual Forum, which took place in Kosice (SK) 19-20th October 2022 where the EUSDR presidency was passed from Ukraine to Slovenia. He also informed about the status of the 4th biennial report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies. This report is prepared by the European Commission and will be distributed to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. . The report will be published on the 9th of December 2022 and submitted in January 2023, under Sweden presidency of the Council. The report includes input of all priority areas from all the macro- regional strategies. The report and the following Council conclusion on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies will be the base for the future work. End of April 2023 the *EU Macro-Regional Strategy Week* will be organized in Brussels, he invited all participants.

2. Main developments in the field of waterway transport in the EUSDR countries

Mr. Gert-Jan Muilerman, Austrian Technical Secretariat for PA1a, viadonau, informed that prior the SG meeting bilateral meeting with the SG Members were organized. Main issues in the countries and the work plan for the upcoming project period 2023-2028 where discussed. He invited the participating countries to briefly present their main current and planned.

Czech Republic, Mr. Vojtech Dabrowski. The funding programme for fleet modernization will continue in the next years. Assuming the state budget is still available, as the Czech Republic won't have a Sectoral Programme for Transport in the future financing period (until 2027). The execution of modernization of port infrastructure will continue as well and a system of subsidies for port superstructure is under preparation.

Germany, Mr. Markus Grewe. The current focus is on continuing regular fairway maintenance, including systematic dredging, and the project for improvement of navigation conditions at Straubing - Vilshofen sector of the Danube. A grant agreement was concluded for the critical sector Deggendorf – Vilshofen, this project is currently implemented. He introduced two important ideas for the future focus of the project. First, a more profound consideration of the topic climate change, respectively the adaptation measures for the periods with low waters. Second, enhancing modal share of IWT. He elaborated on the identified opportunities of IWT in Germany on Heavy Load transport on all navigable rivers.

Austria, Mr. Markus Simoner. The Action Programme Danube (APD) 2030 was elaborated and approved. The APD 2030 is a national integrative implementation strategy which aims at a balanced development of diverse functions of the Danube River. The APD 2030 contains specific measures in the field of inland navigation and ecology for the purpose of implementing the Mobility Master Plan. He further presented the newly established Austrian funding programme for fleet modernization (2022 – 2026). The total budget is €3.500.000 , the eligible applicants are all natural and legal persons, partnerships under civil and commercial law (OG, KG), from the member states of the EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland, who have a branch in Austria and regularly operate commercial inland navigation on Austrian waterways.

He highlighted the very low water period during Summer 2022, especially on the Lower Danube. A graph of the water levels at the Wildungsmauer gauge (AT) of the years 1997-2022 was presented. Almost 9 metres difference between min-max values was observed.

The solutions (*tool kit*) identified are:

- Strong partnership and cooperation among waterway administrations and stakeholders;
- Definition of common levels of service and work plans;
- Pro-active waterway maintenance;
- Joint implementation projects.

Transnational projects like FAIRway works!, including the rehabilitation of the Serbian Iron Gate 2 navigational lock (Djerdap II) and the preparation of the FAIRway Danube 2 project (2023 – 2028) were mentioned. Furthermore, this project will also introduce an Innovative approach in waterway management, so called flexible infrastructure elements. The advantage of this is a dynamic low water regulation. Barges can be placed in shallow sections at low water levels acting as a dam, a climate resilient solution without negative influence on habitats. The barge will be removed before floods, so no influence here either.

Slovakia, Mr. Robert Kadnár. The focus has been on the ensuring full navigability of the fairway. A tender is under preparation for a feasibility study to explore alternative measures. A meeting is planned with the Slovakian waterway administration (SVP), to discuss the initiative of the securing reservoirs. In the next period there are plans for implementing intelligent buoys and mooring places.

Hungary, Mr. Imre Matics. Hungary is involved in the same project with Slovakia on the common sector and feasibility.

Croatia. Fleet improvement and solving the issue of shortage of the qualified personnel will be a priority for the next period. Scholarships for the waterway sector will be granted in order to attract people for navigation purpose but also for the connected activities (ports).

Serbia, Mrs. Jasna Muskatirovic. River training work on 6 critical sectors on the Danube River in Serbia were finished in Summer 2022. The overhaul of Serbian Iron Gate 1 navigational lock (Djerdap I) is completed, the overhaul work on the Serbian Iron Gate 2 navigational lock (Djerdap II) are planned to start in 2023. At the same time, works on the removal of the German sunken fleet from the World War II, near port of Prahovo, are planned to start, the estimated duration of these works is 5 years. Three ports (Bogojevo and Prahovo on the Danube river, and Sremska Mltrovica on Sava River) have been improved. As the AtoNs are already implemented on the Danube River, a new project to extend the AtoNs application to the Sava River is planned. Other projects planned (financing secured), for next period are: introduction of VTS and hydro-meter stations on the Danube River (works will start in 2023), new lock on the Tisza River (Pre-feasibility study with General Design already finished), as well as hydraulic modelling of the Danube River.

Romania, Mrs. Monica Patrichi. Focus is on the insurance of the proper conditions of navigation. Every year financing is allocated from the state budget for performing the maintenance activities. Dredging works in Belene, Vardim and Batin, which are under the responsibility of Bulgaria, were performed and financed by Romania. Work was carried out in the period end of July 2022 until end of August 2022. AFDJ will be partner in FAIRway Danube 2 (currently under preparation) and will continue the capacity improvement of the river administration. Port development is the next priority, the main projects ongoing are in the Port of Constanta (extension and improvement of road network), Galati, Braila and Isaccea. CEERIS system is operational since June 2022, and from 1st of January 2023, RORIS system will be closed and CEERIS will remain the single system for the arrival / departure ships formalities. In 2022 the Directive no 2017/2397 regarding the recognition of professional qualification in inland waterways was implemented in Romania. This provoked disturbances in the sector, but currently things are on the path.

Bulgaria. Mr Gert – Jan Muilerman presented inputs provided before the meeting by Mrs. Elena Shishkova. The focus is given to the port development, improvement of the capacity of the river administration, including the salaries of the staff and dredging equipment. Two projects are in the preparation together with the Romanian administration: DISMAR (development of an integrated system for signalization on the common RO – BG sector and FAST Danube 2 project which will be submitted on CEF in 2023.

Ukraine – was not present. Input from the bilateral meetings is that they are committed to continue the cooperation under EUSDR, including PA1a.

3. Work Programme until 2028 Update of the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan

A new contract between Austria and Romania will start in 2023. Bilateral phone calls were used for the preparation of the workplan, respectively the activities under PA1a for 2023 – 2028. The thematic fields remain the same and the priority measures are:

3.1 Waterway and port infrastructure & management

Under this thematic field the main issues until 2028 will be:

- Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan (FRMMP), updated in 2022, respectively monitoring of implementation status by means of National Action Plans, project support and organization of political support by Danube Ministerial meetings and conclusions every 2 years;
- Port entrances as obstacles to navigation (draught restrictions). Problematic port entrances will be identified in conjunction with waterway users and will be approached the responsible port authorities/infrastructure owners or Ministries of Transport. It is necessary to define the necessary measures to resolve bottlenecks and responsibilities for the provision of user information.
- Develop good practices for integrated / holistic river management (possible cooperation with PA6 Biodiversity). ICPDR investigate to update the *Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube River Basin*, which was launched back in 2007.
- Expert exchange regarding climate change adaptation options towards more resilient waterway management: continuous adaptation to changing discharge patterns: optimization for navigation, environment (reduced sediment transport), flood protection (reduced infrastructure elements during high water leads to better water distribution).
- Monitor implementation of “Fairway Danube 2” project, respectively the pilot activities for flexible low water regulation methods like the flexible infrastructure elements.

EBU, Mrs Theresia Hacksteiner, agreed to the priorities. She suggested a letter of support for the currently prepared Fairway Danube 2 project. EBU encouraged all member states to cooperate on NAIADES III topics and to develop concrete national plans which are the key for success.

PDI, Mr. Robert Rafael, highlighted that there are port basins on the Danube where depths are less than on the fairway, It can happen, that the authorities of port and waterways, shift the responsibility to each other. PDI stressed to better involve the business sector and to define 5-6 critical sections. PDI issued as well a Letter of Support for the FAIRway Danube 2 project. PDI is committed to support CEERIS in practice, with marketing actions to its members.

Mr. Gert-Jan Mulierman responded, that better involvement of business stakeholders will be focused in future projects e.g. FAIRway Danube 2, RIS COMEX 2.

3.2 Business development

Priority measures until 2028 will be:

- Organization of B2B events/platforms, possibly focusing on certain goods. Opportunities for heavy and oversized cargo on the Danube will be investigated, possible cooperation with PA1b.
- Harmonized cost/tariff structures for oversized transports on roads in Danube countries. Lately an increase in transports of wind turbines were recognized in the Danube Region, it could be investigated as a promising market for IWT.
- Coordination of legal procedures for international oversized transports with origin/destination in Danube riparian countries

3.3 Fleet modernization

Priority measures until 2028 will be:

- Danube-specific technology pathways. Development of technology path specific for Danube navigation is necessary in order to increase investment security. Actions needs to be in coordination with CCNR (which developed already its pathway) and the business sector. Commitment from responsible national ministries for the proposed pathways must be attained. No one will be capable to invest in technology that is not fully recognized.
- Investigate potential of alternative fuels as short-term solution for environmentally friendly Danube navigation. RED 3 (Renewable Energy Directive) can be facilitated for its implementation. The Development of a network of bunker stations along Danube can be monitored. For a short-term solution in order to decrease the ships emission alternative solutions must be found, e.g. hydrogen.

PDI considered that will be very hard, maybe impossible, to have zero emission vessels in the vessels. We should learn from CCNR. They are considering categories and subcategories of vessels (pushers, craft vessels, technical vessels, etc.) and will adapt them step by step. It will be necessary to connect ships technology to bunker stations and infrastructure. Other macro region programs should also be included to prevent the development of different forms of propulsion and infrastructure for each region.

EBU added, that financing is a main challenge and should be supported under national programmes, as after years of urging no funding at EU level was possible. State aid block regulation helps countries to prepare national action programmes. She emphasized that at this point, every communication should be technology neutral.

3.4. River Information Services

Priority measures until 2028 will be:

- Continuation of workshops with focus on Notices to Skippers (NtS) in the Danube Region, in order to improve timeliness and coding quality.
- Pursue the consolidation of national user information platforms and Fairway Information Services (Danube FIS) Portal in EuRIS. Business users must be informed about the benefits of EURIS, respectively that the voyages can be planned for the entire route, and that is not necessary to access every national platform for formalities.
- Further digitalization of DAVID forms.
- Strong coordination with RIS COMEX 2 project (currently under preparation).

3.5 Education and jobs

Priority measures until 2028 will be:

- Systematic identification of reasons for the shortage of qualified nautical personnel in the Danube region.
- Cross-sectoral analysis of similar action programmes in other business sectors
- Development of a stepwise action programme for Danube navigation. A review of the implications of Directive (EU) 2017/2397 on the recognition of professional qualifications in inland navigation can be done. Cooperation opportunities with PA9 – *Education* and PA10 – *Administrative capacity* will be investigated.

PA1a will participate at the Workshop on how EUSDR & EUSBSR can help Ukraine on 8th December 2022. Given, that currently about 40% of Danube nautical staff originates from Ukraine, PA1a will investigate if support is needed to retain/strengthen educational structures.

EBU expressed strong concerns related to the shortage of qualified personal. This was a discussion also at the river cruise industry meeting held in Melk. Strategies for campaigns to attract people are under preparation by the private sector.

3.6 Administrative processes

The introduction of DAVID forms was completed.

Priority measures until 2028 will be:

- Continuation of cooperation with PA11 (Security)
- Development of TERM - Trans-national Electronic (Registration and) Time Management Tool for Border Controls. The joint PA1a & PA11 Working Group on Administrative Processes identified need for development of this tool, which will enable users of inland navigation to (register and) schedule a time for border control electronically. Also, it will facilitate the border control authorities to manage and to plan their controls based on incoming registrations. This will be an additional service to currently existing registration procedures (no obligation to use by inland navigation)
- Further digitalization of DAVID forms, mainly through CEERIS. The preparatory activities are ongoing, such as conclusion of contracts (which are not fully in place yet), configuration of national reporting obligations, user training, management of introductory phase, etc..
- Update of the Practical Manual on Border Controls (4th edition).

The further development of the TERM-Tool is ongoing within the existing CEERIS system, which will be contained in the RIS COMEX 2 project application

4. Requests for letter of support

Letters of Recommendation for some projects will be prepared by PA1a and then sent for approval to the members of the Steering Group.

Letters of Support will be requested for FAIRway Danube 2 and RIS COMEX 2

5. Update on recent developments from the NAIADES Expert group

Mr. Gert-Jan Muilerman informed the participants, that on the 12th December 2022, DG MOVE will organize the 8th meeting of the NAIADES implementation group, together with the 6th DINA expert group (digital inland navigation). All countries of the EUSDR were invited to attend the meeting, in order to better represent the Danube region at these meetings.

6. Update on the Revision of Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulation incl. Good Navigation Status

Mr. Gert-Jan Muilerman highlighted the main milestones of the revision of the TEN-T Regulation, which is now on the stage of the 1st reading in Council and in European Parliament. Revision of the TEN-T Regulation, in the field of inland waterways was based on Good Navigation Status study. The current draft of the TEN-T Regulation envisages to ensure minimum waterway requirements and levels of service (good navigation status). Good navigation status consist of:

- Minimum requirements
 - navigable channel depth of at least 2.5 m and a minimum height under non-openable bridges of at least 5.25 m at defined reference water levels defined by implementing acts (for comparison of prior version: 2,5m draught all year round)
- prohibition of deterioration of minimum requirements;
- exceptions defined in case of force majeure (e.g. exceptional low water)
- complementary specific requirements per river-basin (corridor) by implementing acts
- compliance with EU environmental law
- takes into account hydromorphology.

The TEN- T Regulation is scheduled to be voted in the European Parliament in the first quarter of 2023 and to entry in force in January 2024.

7. Next steps

The Letters of Support will be distributed to the SG members. If no objection will be received, the PA1a coordinators will sign the Letter of Recommendation of PA1a.

the next meeting will most likely take place on-site in June 2022. Detailed information will follow in due time

Enclosures

Please note: All documents are available for download at the website of EUSDR PA 1a
→ <https://navigation.danube-region.eu/steering-group/>

- (1) List of Participants
- (2) Presentation