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

**25th 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 25th 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 13th December 2024.

The meeting was attended by representatives from Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Bosnia & Hercegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Romania. The meeting was attended as well by the representatives of European Commission (DG REGIO), Danube Commission (DC), Danube Youth Council (DYC), Pro Danube International (PDI) and Danube Strategy Point (DSP).

The PA1a coordinators **Mr. Markus Simoner** (Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology of Austria) and **Mrs. Monica Patrichi** (Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of Romania) welcomed all and expressed their gratitude for joining the online meeting. They gave a short overview of the meeting's agenda and topics to be discussed.

Mrs Katarina Lenz (DSP) presented activities carried out by DSP in 2024. The EUSDR Implementation Report 2022-2023 was prepared and will be published until the end of 2024. The report provides an overview of the progress per each action of the revised EUSDR Action Plan. The Report from the European Parliament was prepared and will be published in 2025. For communication purposes, DSP manages a social media campaign to promote Flagships projects which started on 15th October 2024 and will continue in 2025. A relaunch of the EUSDR website (including 12 PA websites) is foreseen for early spring 2025. The EUSDR Presidency 2025 will be chaired by Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main event, the EUSDR Annual Forum, is planned for 5th & 6th November 2025, in Sarajevo.

Mr. Philip Tudor (DYC) gave a short overview of the Youth Council's role and their commitment to supporting the Danube Region's growth and development.

Mrs. Monica Patrichi (RO) informed the participants about the priorities in the inland waterways in Romania, namely the improving the conditions for navigation, developing of ports and digitalisation and decarbonisation of transports. Romanian waterway administration (AFDJ) is participating in a few EU co-funded projects, e.g. "FAIRway Danube II" or "COMEX²". The project "FAST Danube 2" will launch three public tenders (for environment monitoring, for execution of works and for supervision of works) until the end of 2024. The deadline for the project implementation is December 2028. The "DISMAR" project aims to develop an integrated signalisation system on the Romanian – Bulgarian common sector (470 km) and it is financed from Interreg RO – BG European funds (2024 – April 2027). Besides, subsidies from the state budget were ensured in 2024 for the maintenance activities on the Danube. Works for the modernisation of port infrastructure are ongoing in the main TEN-T core ports (Constanta, Galați, Brăila, Tulcea, Giurgiu, Basarabi, Ovidiu). The Romanian Ministry of Energy assigned the role of the intermediate body for the management of modernisation funds to the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure. Furthermore, a state aid scheme for fleet modernisation is under preparation.

Mr. Markus Simoner (AT) informed about the start of the pilot implementation of flexible infrastructure elements in Austria (east of Vienna) in August 2024. Other pilots will be tested in 2025, the SG will be informed on the results.

2 EU Policy: Summary of NAIADES Implementation Expert Group

Mr. Gert-Jan Muilerman, AT Technical Secretariat for PA1a, viadonau, informed the participants about the NAIADES Implementation Expert Group meeting which took place in Brussels on 7th November 2024 and encouraged the members of the SG to dedicate their resources, to follow and to provide input on the actions included in NAIADES.

A short overview of the ongoing legislative initiatives followed. Concerning EUCountEmission the need to ensure that IWT will not have any disadvantage was emphasised. The Combined Transport Directive is under discussion in European Council and Parliament (EP). RIS Directive reached the General Approach within the EP and the EP report is expected in spring 2025. Smart and Flexible Crewing Requirement proposal is as well expected in 2025 and the input of the EU Member States is welcomed. For the Market Access the fitness check is ongoing and the consultation deadline extended to end of December 2024.

Regarding the greening challenges there is a lack of demand and proposals under CEF for zero-emission vessels and OPS (onshore power supply) in inland ports. Concerns are raised over ETS2 (Emission Trading System) implementation, which is applicable to a lot of sectors, including maritime transport. Each country has the option to extend it as well to the IWT. Currently, only Netherlands intends to introduce ETS 2 for the inland waterway transport.

Concerning emission label, a more standardized CO₂ and pollutant methodology for inland navigation vessels is being developed under the PLATINA 4 project. The emission label is not seen only as a marketing activity, but will be important for next programs of financing, post 2027. The multiannual financial framework of the EU is under preparation, there are changes in the allocation of funds expected.

3 Waterway and port infrastructure & management (WG 1)

The revised TEN-T Regulation is in force since July 2024. Member States have to ensure compliance by 31st December 2030 so that rivers, canals, lakes, lagoons, inland ports, and access routes have a minimum navigable channel depth of 2.5 m and the minimum height under non-openable bridges of 5.25 m, based on reference water levels, statistically exceeded a defined number of days per year.

Reference Water Levels will be defined at corridor level or per waterway section. For the Danube an Implementing Act (as the provision of TEN-T Regulation) is being prepared. Webinar on implementing acts for members of Inland Navigation Europe were organized on 10th June and 12th November 2024. Currently the template for reporting reference water levels is under discussion. Data collection will start in March 2025, the Implementing Act for the Danube is expected to be finalised until end of 2025. It is being prepared in consultation with European Coordinators and relevant river navigation commissions and approved by Member States. The Act has to align with international conventions and agreements between Member States, including river navigation commission regulations.

Mr. Manfred Seitz, DC, mentioned that in the last 3 years DC progressively modified the DC expert group on hydrotechnical matters, bringing together the representatives from the waterway administrations and IWT sector. The expert group, which meets in spring each year, is discussing the annual maintenance plans and provides the IWT companies the possibility to comment on it. Last meeting was in March 2024 at the DC headquarter in Budapest, next meeting is planned for 5th March 2025.

Feedback to Good Navigation Status also is provided by the DC working group on ports. During last meeting in 2024, specific info on digitalisation, greening and other issues of the EU policy regarding ports was discussed. The next meeting is planned for 26th March 2025, jointly with the SINERGY project. In March 2025, the Sinergy project meeting will focus on two key topics. The first is creating more practical and effective guidelines for greening ports, as previous efforts have proven less useful. The second is developing guidelines to improve security for both vessels and ports.

Mr Seitz provided an update regarding the Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability 2.0 (JS 2.0 process). A first stakeholder meeting was organized in Vienna in September 2024 back-to-back with the regular meeting on the follow-up process organized by ICPDR, DC and Sava River Commission. A new version of JS 2.0 was distributed on 4th December 2024, feedback is expected until end of December 2024. On 30th January 2025 a second stakeholder workshop for the JS 2.0. process will be held in Budapest. After this meeting the 3 commissions will adopt the JS 2.0 and will continue with the preparation of the “Manual”, including as well a consultation process.

4 Fleet modernization (WG 3)

Mr. Markus Simoner (AT) provided an overview of the implications of RED III Directive. RED III represents a legal framework for the development of clean energy across all sectors of the EU economy. The sector specific target for transport is: 29% renewable energy **or** a 14.5% greenhouse gas (GHG) intensity reduction target until 2030. Every EU country has to come up with an own implementation road map. RED III entered into force on 20th November 2023 and the deadline for the national transposition is until 21st May 2025. Danube navigation has to contribute to RED III objectives, a short-term solution to achieve the targets until 2030 could be Hydrotreated Vegetable Oils, HVO, as alternative fuels. SG members were asked to be in close contact with the ministries responsible for the implementation of RED III (in many countries the ministries responsible for the energy sector), to make sure that inland navigation is adequately incorporated in the RED-III roadmaps.

A joint initiative of PA1a and the Danube Commission is to develop a “*Roadmap and actions towards zero-emission Danube fleet*”. On 8th October 2024 a workshop in Budapest was jointly organized by the DC an PA1a, in order to prepare such a roadmap. PA1a prepared a questionnaire and prepared the interactive part of the workshop.

Questions addressed:

1. Which of the presented technologies do you consider to be most promising and cost-effective?
2. Which main barriers will have to be overcome to achieve full scale implementation of these promising technologies?
3. If these barriers could be overcome, which of the presented technologies do you realistically expect to become dominant over time:
 - 2030
 - 2050

The feedback of the participants of the workshop demonstrates, that biofuels are seen as the most promising and cost-effective technology, even more so than could have been expected under the conservative pathway.

The economic barriers are high and the focus should primarily be on economic instruments (complemented by regulatory measures) in order to achieve cost reduction for technological solutions/fuels and creating business cases and expanding financial incentives/subsidies.

A draft roadmap will be discussed at the next workshop (PA1a & DC) on 12th May 2025.

5 Administrative Processes (WG 6)

Administrative Processes represent the 6th target of EUSDR Action plan with the aim to achieve a notable improvement of administrative procedures, especially border controls in inland navigation on the Danube and its navigable tributaries.

Sector interviews were conducted by viadonau in summer 2024 and the feedback received from people working in the field is very valuable. The main findings received from the sector are: DAVID forms are used and highly appreciated by the sector. CEERIS is being used, but still under development. Currently at most border crossing, it requires simultaneous printouts and digital forms, thus time expenditure doubled for crew and/or agents. Network / Internet coverage is seen as big hurdle.

Furthermore, a workshop with the water police representatives was jointly organized with PA11 and the Danube Commission on 2nd October 2024 in Budapest. The main challenges identified are: same data is collected by different authorities; data is scattered across multiple systems/databases; inefficiencies in repetitive inspections; cross-border information sharing through secure platform (e.g. IBISweb); lack of legal base for data exchange. Those topics will further be explored by PA 11 and be integrated in the development of an overview (map) of control procedures along the Danube.

A working group meeting was organized online on 13th November 2024. Main topics were the working priorities for the upcoming years. Focus will be on 3 areas: further monitor digitalisation of DAVID forms; implementation of TERM tool; support PA11 in development of an overview (map) of control procedures along the Danube.

6 Next steps

After the meeting the SG members will receive a document representing a dedicated work programme (priorities) for 2025 – 2026 for all the six thematic areas of PA1a. SG members are kindly requested to provide feedback until end of December 2024.

An outlook on upcoming events was presented.

The next PA1a Steering Group is scheduled for 29 April 2025 (online).

7 Enclosures

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

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

