

Final Document of the Second Ministerial Conference of the Danube Co-operation Process
(Bucharest, 14th of July 2004)

The Danube as a European Lifeline

The ministers of foreign affairs or their representatives from Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine, the European Commission and the Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe convened in Bucharest, on the 14th of July 2004, for their Second Ministerial Conference of the Danube Co-operation Process. They have conducted a review of the Process established at their first Conference in May 2002 in Vienna and confirmed that it had a valuable role to play in fostering co-operation in the interest of stability, prosperity and a better economic and social cohesion of the region.

In spite of their different historic experiences, the different stages of economic development and positions in the European integration process, these countries share the same democratic principles, values and objectives. The DCP, as a political process, offers an instrument to develop understanding and solidarity between them in the process of forging a European identity and promoting European integration in the whole region.

I. The Danube and the European integration process

The current and future enlargements of the EU, as well as the participation of some DCP countries in the Stabilisation and Association Process or the European Neighbourhood Policy, will bring the Danube region as a whole closer to the European integration process. Within a relatively short time span a large stretch of the Danube river will be located within the European Union. This will increase the importance of the Danube within the European Union.

The European Community is a member of the International Commission for the Protection of the River Danube (ICPDR) of which it is holding the Presidency in 2004. In addition, the European Commission is recommending that the European Community become a member of the Danube Commission. It is also an observer in the process of revising the Belgrade Convention. An increased involvement of the European Community should have a positive impact on the further sustainable development of the region.

Special attention should be devoted to the further liberalisation of transport, by evaluating the compatibility of existing bilateral regulations pertaining to international transport in the region with European Union rules. A multilateral approach to the regulation of traffic rights vis-à-vis third countries should be considered and efforts to establish a harmonised European inland navigation system open to all Danube countries be further pursued.

The introduction of the New Neighbourhood Policy concept through the Commission communications on Wider Europe (March 2003), "Paving the way to a New Neighbourhood Instrument" (July 2003) and "European Neighbourhood Policy - Strategy Paper" (May 2004) opens up possibilities to address a number of issues of relevance for the Danube. The New Neighbourhood Initiative aims at addressing the new challenges on the EU external borders following on enlargement, through the following objectives: promotion of sustainable economic and social development, working together to address common challenges, border issues and people to people actions. Until a New Neighbourhood Instrument is in place in 2007, Neighbourhood Programmes operating in the border areas are being set up, providing increased co-operation opportunities through co-ordination of structures and funding from Cards, Tacis, Phare and Interreg.

By devoting greater attention to Danube related matters, the European Union will contribute to strengthening links between all countries in the Danube region and thus bringing the European Union member states and the countries beyond the European Union borders closer together.

II. The role of the Danube Co-operation Process

The Danube Co-operation Process shall continue, as established in the Vienna Declaration of 27 May 2002, to broaden and deepen present Danube co-operation taking stock of and using the existing

structures and develop further the various initiatives already launched in different fields of present Danube co-operation. The Process has a multi-dimensional character, whose main feature shall be its political dimension which will establish priorities for action in order to address common concerns, interests and objectives of all the Danubian countries. The Process shall highlight issues related to Europe and the European integration process, which are of great importance to the Danubian countries. The process shall ensure integration between its various dimensions in order to establish synergies leading to the overall aim of sustainable development of the Danube Region.

A number of organisations and initiatives are active in the Danube region, and addressing issues of paramount importance to the region, such as:

- Diplomatic negotiations related to the revision of the 1948 Belgrade Convention on the Regime of Navigation on the Danube;
- The Danube Commission's endeavours to promote the use of the Danube as an inland European waterway;
- Co-operation between Ministries of Transport within the framework of the Pan-European Corridor VII Steering Committee;
- Activities initiated by Austria as lead partner relating to the "development of sustainable transport solutions in the Danube region";
- Efforts by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) to develop a coordinated river basin management for improving the ecological status of the waters and to enhance co-operation to prevent accidental pollution and to prevent, reduce and mitigate flood damage;
- Efforts undertaken by the DABLAS Task force to prioritise environmental projects in the region and thus increase their funding;
- Co-operation between Ministries of environment in connection with the "Lower Danube Green Corridor";
- The wide ranging activities of the Central European Initiative;
- The activities of SECI related to trade and transport facilitation;
- Promotion of tourism on and along the river Danube by the Danube Tourist Commission;
- Efforts by the Working Community of Danubian Regions ("ARGE-Donauländer") to promote sub-regional co-operation.

The internet based information and communication portal "Danube Portal", which is about to be operational, makes information accessible to all interested parties about the process, its members, international organisations and initiatives and their activities in the region and provides a platform for dialogue to support the objectives of the Process. At the same time, the establishment of a direct link between the Portal and the electronic data-base of the Danubian entrepreneurs, to be finalized this year, will facilitate business within the region.

III. The priorities under the Dimensions of the Danube Co-operation Process

1. Economic development, navigation and sustainable transport

The Danube region offers considerable potential for economic co-operation within the region. It is essential that such co-operation is based on sustainable development to ensure a long-term prosperity including a high level of social and environmental protection.

Sustainable transport solutions will be pivotal for the economic development of the region and the well being of its population. The development of new traffic concepts, improved and combined transport systems and the better use of the Danube as a transport mode will contribute considerably to the alleviation of traffic problems brought about by the growing economic integration of the European Union and the countries of the region and will encourage the flow of investment and the transfer of capitals in the region.

The DCP Participants welcome the initiative of addressing the development of sustainable transport in the Danube Region with a view to establishing an integrated approach and coherent policies of all Danubian States in this field, including by considering holding a meeting of ministers of transport of Danubian States.

Danube Region Business Conference

The DCP Participants welcome the organisation of the Fourth Danube Region Business Conference in Bucharest (8-9 October 2003) with the participation of more than 600 participants from all Danubian states, as well as from countries from outside the region. It covered a wide range of fields, such as transport and ports, finance and insurance, development and support of SMEs, tariffs and trade, environment, public/private partnership, infrastructure, e-society and e-Europe, tourism, water and health, investments, education and culture.

The Conference proved to be a useful tool, by formulating conclusions and recommendations transmitted, as inputs from the Danube business environment, to all Danube Co-operation Process participants for analysis and endorsement.

The DCP Participants endorse these conclusions and recommendations, which should be given particular attention and opportunities should be taken, so that the contribution of the business community to the development of the region be as effective as possible.

They welcome the invitation of Serbia and Montenegro to host the next Business Conference in Belgrade in 2005.

The DCP Participants welcome the organization of the Danube Summit 2004 incorporating South East European Ports, Shipping and Logistics Conference and Exhibition, to be held in Belgrade, on the 13th-15th of October 2004, as a follow-up to the similar event organized in Constanta in 2002.

Belgrade Convention of 1948

The DCP Participants support the revision of the 1948 Belgrade Convention Concerning the Regime of Navigation on the Danube, the work of which is well under way in the following direction:

- Strengthening free navigation and non-discriminatory policies with the view to facilitate closer co-operation and future integration of inland navigation in Europe.
- Developing the Danube as an efficient and competitive waterway, in order to play its appropriate role within the framework of a sustainable European transport policy.
- Improving the institutional aspects of the Convention and reforming the Commission with a view to adapt it to the present realities and in order to provide it with the tools needed for dealing with the challenges of the future.

Given the growing importance of the Danube to Europe as a whole, the European Commission is recommending the accession of the European Community to the Belgrade Convention.

Traffic rights and regulations

The DCP Participants emphasize the importance of examining the current bilateral agreements in force pertaining to international transport, especially with a view to identifying means of reducing barriers to transport and creating an efficient system of European inland navigation, including under a multilateral approach.

EU Trans-European transport networks and their external dimension

The DCP Participants confirm their support for the further development of the EU Trans-European transport networks as well as their external connections, with particular attention being given to the following aspects:

- Taking full account, outside the EU, of the provisions of the TEN-T guidelines, including approximation to EU standards in particular Environmental Impact Assessment;
- Re-examining the existing Pan-European transport network, paying special attention to sustainable transport modes;

- Implementing measures which could enable Corridor VII to function as an important international waterway, including Corridor VII Management structures;
- Promoting the development of Pan-European Transport Corridor VII connections to Corridors IV, V, VIII and X;

In this context, the Participants also underlined the particular relevance of:

- Supporting measures related to the tributaries of the Danube and in particular to the Sava river;
- Supporting activities which could contribute to the networking of Danube ports, as a pre-condition for intensifying trade and traffic in the Danube region
- Supporting the future development of co-operation of the Black Sea Transport Area and the relevant sections on the TRACECA corridor;
- Encouraging close co-operation between the Danube Commission and the ICPDR in the development of these projects to ensure that the expansion of the Pan-European waterways is sustainable in its economic, social and environmental dimension.

Transport safety and border management

The DCP Participants support an enhancement of transport safety and a harmonisation of border procedures, with particular attention being given to the following aspects:

- Introducing a harmonised system of River Information Services (RIS) along the Danube, in order to support the planning and management of traffic and transport operations. The implementation of RIS will not only improve safety and efficiency in traffic but simultaneously enhance the efficiency and security of transport operations.
- Harmonising and streamlining customs and border procedures.

2. Environment and River Basin management

The DCP Participants support the efforts undertaken in the framework of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). They welcome and support the agreement of their countries co-operating in the framework of the ICPDR to jointly develop a co-ordinated River Basin Management Plan, protecting water and related ecosystems for the whole Danube River Basin – structured into a roof plan and more detailed national or sub-basin plans – in accordance with the requirements of the European Unions Water Framework Directive.

The DCP Participants support the efforts undertaken by the Danube-Black Sea Task Force (DABLAS) and call upon the Danubian countries and other partners to give their full support to the funding of priority projects in the region, with the aim of remediation of the Danube and the Black Sea. Ministers also support action aimed at fully valorising the Danube Delta and other unique ecosystems along the river as part of humanity's international patrimony, which has to be preserved.

They note with appreciation the initiative of the riparian countries to establish the Sava River Commission to work jointly on a respective sub-basin management plan for the Sava River Basin, as well as the initiative on the Tisza/Tisa River Basin co-operation development, including sustainable spatial development, sustainable flood management and integrated river basin management, which can be models for other sub-basins in the Danube Region.

The DCP Participants welcome the celebration along the Danube of the first edition of the Danube Day, on the 29th of June 2004, the tenth anniversary of the signature of the Sofia Convention on the co-operation for the protection and sustainable use of the Danube river and express their hope that this event will contribute to a better implementation of the objectives of the ICPDR.

The DCP Participants take note of the considerable progress already achieved in improving the waste water treatment infrastructure in parts of the region and stressed the need for further enhancing the co-operation between International Financial Institutions, the European Community, donors and the countries

in the region to identify and prepare relevant projects and to match available funds with the regional environmental priority projects.

They underline the importance of trans-boundary co-operation on prevention, reduction and mitigation of damage caused by floods, and supported the preparation of an international Action Program for the sustainable flood protection in the Danube River basin by the ICPDR.

A mechanism related to the management of draughts which can affect the Danube region should also be considered.

The DCP Participants welcome the Ministerial Meeting of the ICPDR on the 13th of December 2004 that will address future environmental challenges in the Danube region.

3. Tourism

The DCP Participants take note of the existing co-operation structures in the development and marketing of tourism, particularly on the river Danube, and encourage the expansion of such co-operation to other parts of the region not immediately adjacent to the river. Ministers support the endeavours of “Die Donau”, the Danube Tourist Commission (DTC), with particular attention being given to the following aspects:

- Securing the accession of all Danubian countries to “Die Donau”, the DTC;
- Seeking observer status for the DTC in organisations and activities dealing with tourism along the Danube;
- Publishing the Danube Sales Manual (containing comprehensive tourism related data and tourist amenities on offer along up to a 70 km wide strip on both river sides);
- Completing the cycle track along the Danube (Donauradweg) from Budapest to the Danube Delta;
- Organizing regular sessions of the Danube Region Tourism Stock Exchange; and
- Harmonizing landing fees at a reasonable level and taking steps aiming at simplifying customs and boarding procedures.

It is also expected that the co-operation activities of Danubian cities in the context of the Donauhanse project will focus, inter alia, on the tourism sector, and could thus contribute to an expansion of city tourism within the Danube region.

4. Cultural co-operation

Close cultural co-operation in the Danube region does not only have a long and vibrant history – which is worth to be studied and documented - but also the potential to contribute to overcoming mental barriers between peoples in the region, which have so often been divided by history.

Thus the DCP Participants welcome and support the activities of the Danube Rector’s Conference and encourage all universities involved to continue activities especially in the fields of quality assessment, common study programmes and other measures increasing student and faculty mobility.

The DCP Participants support an idea to publish a Danubian encyclopaedia.

The DCP Participants further stress the importance of institutions for higher education in the region which contribute - by their academic profile, their student intake or by multilingual teaching – to strengthening the specific tradition of cultural diversity in the Danube region.

The DCP Participants welcome and support the efforts to create an international literary research centre in Russe/Bulgaria, the birthplace of Nobel Price winner Elias Canetti.

The DCP Participants support plans to produce bilaterally or for the whole Danube region specific history teaching materials which help to overcome undifferentiated national stereotypes and to make common cultural traditions and lifestyles better known.

The Danube Culture Festival, which took place in 2003 in Belgrade, gave ample proof of mutual interest in cultural co-operation in all sectors of artistic life. Ministers encourage the planning and organisation of similar events.

5. Sub-regional co-operation

The DCP Participants take note of the Working Community of Danubian Regions (“ARGE-Donauländer”) comprising over 30 member regions from 10 Danubian countries, established in 1990 with the aim of contributing to the promotion of co-operation among its members and of achieving sustainable development of the Danubian basin.

The DCP Participants recognize that the Working Community of Danubian Regions has made a valuable contribution to the progress of regional co-operation through projects such as:

- The Map of the Danube Basin as well as the digital map „Cultural Itinerary Danube“ presenting several thousand cultural data along the Danube river, enhancing further development of touristical infrastructure in conjunction with heightened awareness for the protection of cultural heritage,
- The Declaration of the Working Community of Danubian Regions on Soil Protection
and the
- Study of the Working Committee for Transport and Shipping on European Transport-Infrastructure of European Regions.

The DCP Participants support the aims and activities of the member regions of the Working Community of Danubian Regions, thereby supporting the regions in their competence to apply solutions for regional problems based on regional knowledge, and acknowledge the renewed commitment of the members of the Working Community of Danubian Regions at their Belgrade Session of High Officials on 5 June 2003, to the advancement of inter-regional co-operation and the promotion of the Danube as a river of co-operation also in the future.

The DCP Participants appreciate the activities developed within the framework of Danubian Euro-regions, which represent a promoting factor of closer co-operation among local communities, aiming at strengthening human, social, economic and cultural cohesion of the region. The Euro-regions contribute to the implementation of the objectives of the Danube Co-operation Process at local levels.

The DCP Participants welcome the activities planned in the context of the “Donauhansé” project, jointly financed by the EU and a number of cities in the region. They take note in particular of the ongoing and planned projects to establish inter-city networks, in order to foster co-operation in the transport, tourism and cultural sectors, as well as networks between the various ports on the river Danube. These activities would make a substantial contribution, not only economically, but also in creating additional synergies and ties through direct and constant contact and co-operation at municipal level.

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The DCP Participants decide that the next Ministerial Conference of the Danube Co-operation Process shall be held in 2006.