

**Policy recommendations to be adopted by the Steering Group of EU SDR PA4**

Concerning

**Action 5: “To establish buffer strips along the rivers to retain nutrients and to promote alternative collection and treatment of waste in small rural settlements”**

March 2014

The Roadmap of Priority Area 4 of the EUSDR contains Action 5,“To establish buffer strips along the rivers to retain nutrients and to promote alternative collection and treatment of waste in small rural settlements”. Hungary was identified as primary responsible actor for this Action (beside PA4 and the ICPDR)The Priority Area 4 of the EUSDR decided to make further assessment and studies to contribute and fulfil its duties concerning Action 5 of the Action Plan. In the Action Plan a special task was identified to send a questionnaire to the countries and based on the replies, to provide an assessment on the situation of the buffer zones. Based on the outcome of the questionnaire it became necessary to make further research and to carry out a complete assessment of the situation in all of the Danube countries. For this reason and partially based on Hungarian governmental funds, a contract with an international research organisation, Czech based Justice and Environment was concluded to prepare a complete research document analysing the situation in the Danube basin for the utilization of PA4. The summary of the Study and the recommendations based on the research are provided here for the Steering Group Members of PA4 and for further recommendations to stakeholder institutions. The present paper will be discussed and the study on Action 5 on buffer zones and alternative collection of waste will be discussed in detail at the SG7 Meeting in Budapest, on 28.03.2014.

Based on the comparative studies, researches and comparing the rules on protection of waters in Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Slovenia and Serbia the following general findings can be summarized for the Danube countries concerning the rules ensuring protection by territorial means, i.e. establishing water protection zones, stripes or any other forms of territorial protection (together: water protection territories) and the two major sources of pollution of waters: local solid waste and local fluid waste – in both cases we concentrate on small scale, flexible solutions and on the regulating, organising, managing roles of the local municipalities.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Quite **several laws and regulations in the field of water management law, environmental and nature protection law, public health laws, several branches of agricultural administration and other laws target these issues from their specific angles**.

Within this program the following important parts of this work was carried out:

* compared the definitions the relevant laws and regulations provide for the different kinds of protecting territories alongside waters;
* revealed the planning measures in all the concerned fields of administration that could significantly influence the territorial protection of waters, such as water management planning, drinking water planning, nature protection and forestry planning and the local spatial (physical) planning procedures that might act as a summary for all the other plans;
* analysed the detailed laws of all the concerned branches of administration that have relevance for territorial water protection and arrived at the major points of substantial legal protection of such territories and also tried to trace back cross references, if any, amongst these laws and regulations;
* we have also examined the different administrative procedures, where the representatives of other branches of administration can take part in a joint decision-making procedure and the decisions in concrete cases of territorial water protection are brought.

In all aspects of the research a typical parallel activity from the side of all of the concerned branches of administration and their respective authorities and procedures was found. Based on the research it is evident that not the individual pieces of legislation but **the whole system determines the effectiveness of the protection of our waters from overburdening amounts of nutrients and other polluting materials.**There are plenty of strengths in the possibility of **further reinforcing the cross references between and concerted efforts of these branches of administration, starting with regular exchange of information to performing joint monitoring and implementation efforts**.

Public participation in water related matters has a specific additional advantage in this compound situation: the members and organisations of the concerned communities are not at all interested in specific administrative procedures, rather they deal with the water management problems themselves their communities are facing. This problem oriented, inherently systematic approach of public participation might mean an extraordinary help in protecting the sensitive territories of our waters.

## 1. Main findings

***The definition of the protecting territories***

The definition of the legal institution of protecting territories of waterflows was a starting point for: these definitions determine the boundaries of the relevant substantial regulations, orient the legal practice with important interpretation tools and – in a fortunate case – establishes the common language for all the relevant branches of administrative law that have a say in protecting our waters.

In the 13 examined legal systems, the core elements of the definitions of water protection territories are the following:

* a certain *territory or stripe* around or alongside a water body (its extension is determined either by the law itself or by the relevant authorities according to the features given by the laws);
* the *aim of protection* can be: the protection against current and future negative impacts, avoiding the waters important for several protection purposes from leaking in nourishing materials, rain water runoff, soil erosion particles, fertilizers and pesticides etc. and also the good ecological quality, proper drinking water resources, habitats and species, recreation etc.;
* the possible *ways of their determination*: they themselves can be prescribed by specific legal provisions or established by the environmental/water management (and possibly other) authorities based on a discretionary power;
* and the *legal-administrative restrictions* introduced by the protection: the protecting territories might be subject to special constraints or responsibilities, including water protection, public health and forest management ones etc.;
* in close connection with the previous point an additional important element of the definition can be the *interrelationship* of the protection territories of waters with other protected lands, for instance with the networks of nature protection or of precious agricultural lands.

***The planning of the protecting territories***

The decision-making circle concerning the protection of waterflows starts with planning. Relevant planning documents encompass national, regional and local spatial plans, river basin management plans and nature protection plans. It is very important that the developers of these plans communicate with each other and insert proper cross references into their respective planning documents together with the necessary legal harmonization efforts and institutional connections necessary to the smoothly harmonized implementation of the plans.

An outreach for other relevant plans, such as transport network planning, seems to be vital, too. The up-to-date *register of the protected areas* that is easily available for the professional and general public can also help the mutual informing and implementation of the relevant plans and legal rules. The respective national parts of the River Basin Management Plan for the Danube are the most important plans that establish riparian zones and coastal strips in order to maintain the good quality of waters.

This plan has to be brought into harmony with all the relevant nature protection plans, including Natura 2000 management plans and also with the regional forest management plans. Other forms of relevant plans include forestry and agricultural (nitrate) planning, while local spatial plans represent a kind of summary, focal point of all the different protecting goals that have their respective spatial dimensions. We have to take into consideration that in the procedure of designing and establishing the local spatial plans there are many stakeholder taking place, including the relevant authorities, too, such as the environmental and the water management ones. Therefore in such a deliberative procedure, the interests of protecting the water flows nearby the planned extension of the settlements can be harmonized with the development needs of the local communities.

***The size of the protecting territories***

The size of the protecting territories range between 5-10-15-20-50 meters from the shore line; with or without discretionary right to the authorities to tailor the actual width of the protection zone according to the local circumstances and specialties. The discretionary power might be bolstered with several guidances, rulebooks issued by the higher level authorities.

As another sign of multidisciplinarity, these zones might form a system for several protecting purposes, with different rules of conduct. The distance between the protected water body and the edge of the protecting territory can be determined otherwise than in absolute meters even in the laws, too: the legislator can use the method of the calculated speed of the flow of polluting materials. In all cases, notwithstanding the calculation methods, when doubts raise, the precautionary principle shall be applied. In some cases, especially in water protection rules, the protecting territories are further divided into several zones where the level of protection is different.

***Substantial rules on the protecting territories***

The plans on protecting territories shall be broken down into several levels of implementing legislation. In them, amongst others there are the following substantial rules

* the conditionsforthe determining of water protection zones;
* restrictions in use of the concerned lands, activities to be refrained from, action programs for proper handling the concerned lands;
* safety measures, such as installing and operating monitoring and controlling systems;
* rules on purchasing the land or compensating the owners/users in case the constraints and limitations of use are too stringent;
* the restrictions shall be introduced into the land register;
* Additional measures to be included into the decision might encompass site and problem specific guidelines, education of farmers, and the development of alternatives to the current farming practice;
* finally, proper sanctions shall be applied in case of non-compliance with the general and specific restrictions on land use or in other activities concerning the protecting territories (administrative, petty offence and even criminal sanctions).

An interesting, although controversial legal tool is the *ex lege* protection of certain water areas, where the protection is not subject to an individual decision but ordered by the law itself. While it seems to be a strong protection tool, in practice the implementation might face a serial of difficulties because of lack of proper details of the protection that cannot be determined on legislative level.

***The process of assigning the protecting territories***

The first major question in procedures concerning the protection territories of waters is naturally the stakeholders to take place in these procedures. They can be in most of the cases: relevant authorities, water suppliers, municipalities, planning experts or organizations, concerned land owners, farmers, local communities and their organisations.

**The procedural steps, however, are similar in all cases:**

* interested water utilities, municipalities, scientific bodies or even NGOs might initiate the procedure or the water the management or other relevant authorities start it *ex officio;*
* at the onset of the procedures the authorities usually assign an expert body to develop the plans of determination of the protecting territories (in some cases a formal EIA or environmental supervision procedure is required);
* based on the study, the authority might consult or even negotiate with the other stakeholders above the plans and determines the borders of the protecting zone(s) together with the rules and restrictions within the zone(s), especially in connection with land use;
* several other procedural steps might follow this initial procedural phase and decision in the assignment phase, such as an approval from a higher level body or legal remedies applied by the concerned stakeholders;
* as a feed-back in the decision-making circle, the result of the procedure of determining the protecting zone might be entered into several levels and kinds of planning documents, too.

Naturally, the decision needs continuous implementation activities, too, such as monitoring and sanctioning in case of infringement of the established borders and economic, agrarian, construction etc. behaviour rules. Local communities and NGOs might play an important role in continuous monitoring as the “thousands of eyes and ears of the authority”.

***The elements of the local level waste management systems***

Local waste management systems in most of the countries are divided into systems serving households and also waste management services for local industrial plans. The research has focused on the first one, because of this having strong local relevance, while the industrial waste is usually managed by large nationwide systems. It is to be noted, however, that in certain occurrences waste from local services (e.g. restaurants), and from smaller construction activities etc. can wholly or partly share the management routes of the local household waste. A third branch of waste management highly relevant for water protection, yet overlooked quite frequently is the responsibility of cleaning of street roadways, squares, driveways, parks and other parts of the areas intended for public use.

Runoff waters from these public places represent a serious threat to living waters. The system of relevant solid waste management sector shall also contain the rules and the practice on littering at public places and abandoning waste in natural places, not seldom at river banks. Preventing, detecting and sanctioning illegal disposal and dumping of wastes require serious resources and also creative approaches, such as inclusion of water police or highway patrols and the high level of awareness and contribution of the local communities and NGOs, as well.

***The role of the municipalities in local waste management***

Municipalities have a serial of comparative advantages to the central government in organising local waste management activities: flexibility, cheaper procedures, knowledge of local geography and economy, closeness to the regulated communities and the possibility for being controlled by and having cooperation with them – just to mention some.

At the negative side there are some factors, too, however, such as the small financial means and the biased, sometimes patriarchal way many of the municipalities wear their mixed roles ranging from the local strategic planning agent and regulator, through certain administrative supervision entitlements, to a contracting party (on several possible sides of the local solid waste management spectrum).

Anyway, since the advantages overwhelm the disadvantages, in most of the examined countries **the local municipalities organize the largest part of the management of household waste and the equivalent parts of waste from local industry, they collect fees and issue local waste management plans and local ordinances in order to implement higher level waste management laws and also to fill in their gaps. Municipalities might also conclude long term agreements with utility firms, associations or can establish and run their own waste management enterprises.**

***Decreasing landfill waste***In all EU member Danube countries there is a strong pressure to decrease the amount of waste to be landfilled. Selective collection might start even in the households and there are usually a middle level collecting stage at the settlements, called “waste yards”, local selective collection centres or any similar way, covering quite similar concepts.

Composting is usually supported, for instance with waste management fee reduction or, as a “natural” local activity, can be supported by lighter administrative control, too. Composting might take place at the households or jointly at the settlement level, too. In both cases, consultation and training shall be ensured by the municipality or by professional civil groups. In the past, in many countries in the region almost all municipalities operated one or more landfill sites, generally not constructed according to and equipped with technologies of modern waste management.

Since the accession of the majority of the countries to the EU the national waste management policy priorities are driven by the EU waste legislation. In Hungary, for instance 4.7 million tons municipal solid waste is generated per year and 85% of this quantity gets to landfills.

Landfill is still the most common treatment and disposal method of municipal solid waste, mainly for being not as expensive as recycling or incineration. The trends of the recycling of municipal solid waste are positive, since its proportion has increased since the EU accession.

The pilot country in this research, Hungary has made rapid progress towards diversion of biodegradable municipal waste from landfill. According to the provisions of the current legislation, waste can be placed only at those landfill sites, which are authorized by the competent environmental inspectorates. Those landfill sites which did not meet the requirements of the respective EU legislation were closed in 2009. Financed by the EEOP and co-financed by the EU funds the recultivation programmes of these closed landfills has already started and will also proceed in the development period of 2014-2020.

***Local waste water treatment solutions***

With the exemption of the most developed Danube countries, there are elaborated special regulations on the waste water solutions for small local settlements or scattered households that cannot reasonably connect to the general sewage systems.

In such places usually the individual transport of waste water shall be organized in order to carry the waste water to the larger treatment facilities. In the poorer countries at the lower part of the Danube, wastewater cleaning coverage lags behind drinking water supply, in certain places only 50% of the population or less have access to public sewers. Interestingly, the technical development and flexible legal regimes of waste water management bring hope that with smaller scale solutions this discrepancy between the better off countries and the countries with poorer waste management systems would decrease.

We can count on the appearance of one or two new, intermediary forms of small and medium scale waste water treatment facilities that might be affordable even for the poorer nations. In several countries even at present a couple of dozens of households might use their own, modern local treatment solutions. Such solutions might not be subject to a too burdensome permitting procedure, a certification of the type of the applications might be enough for their operation. Even larger communities around a couple of hundreds of households might decide that their waste water shall be handled separate from the regional sewage treatment systems.

***Alternative ways of small scale local waste water treatment – a complex solution***

Depending on the environmental conditions, on the requirements of water management in the given territory and on the technical conditions, there are three main types of the individual wastewater collection and treatment facilities:

* domestic wastewater treatment facilities,
* domestic wastewater treatment units and
* domestic closed wastewater containers.

Once the amount of the waste water at a settlement makes it possible, nature friendly sewage treatment methods shall be given priority.

The general principles and interface with the other relevant fields of administration are: sewage sludge shall be used in agriculture, energy or in any alternative way as far as possible – landfill depositing is just the last resort. All the municipalities shall develop a local sewage treatment program, with proper evaluation of the situation of the status of their surface and underground waters and geological structures, the environmental, nature protection and social effects of the cleaning and depositing solutions selected, especially in connection with sensitive territories from water protection viewpoints.

The settlement sewage programs shall be brought into harmony with the local and regional spatial plans and environmental plans, as well. The possibilities of making use of the cleaned waste water locally shall be examined. Such plans, therefore, are usually subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment. In the same time, water without cleaning and rough sludge without proper treatment cannot be used for agricultural purposes. Sewage water sludge according to this regulation cannot be stored even transitionally on arable lands.

***The role of the local municipalities in waste water treatment administration***

Even if there are quite a couple of viable local solutions for waste water handling, the major permitting and controlling responsibilities lie at the central or decentralized water management authorities rather than at the municipal authorities. Local municipalities therefore have much less role in local waste water management than in the management of solid waste of local origin.

The water management authorities in several countries are assisted by the water utility companies that might even have some “quasi administrative” roles. This arrangement is explained by the higher level technical requirements the treatment of waste waters need and the higher level danger to the environment and public health they represent. The local municipalities therefore are less in the role of administrators; they can play, however, important roles of organizing local waste water services as permit holders under the control of the relevant central/regional authorities.

Yet, paradoxically, in countries where the water management systems are much less developed, the local municipalities might have certain administrative roles, too, in permitting and supervising waste water management. Even in such cases the local authorities may apply for technical assistance from the professional water management authorities of the State level or shall submit the priority cases to them.

## 2. Problems, bottlenecks, loopholes

**Altering definitions**

In several branches of administrative laws we have found almost a dozen of different definitions of the protecting territories of waters. It is quite natural that these definitions are different in many aspects, since the aim of the protection is different according to the respective features of the given branch of administration, even the direction of the protection can be established from the opposite sides of the question: some laws tend to start from the needs and specialities of the protected territories, others concentrate on the controlling of certain polluting or endangering activities.

Also the discrepancy in the definitions stem from legislative historical reasons, too: in many cases there are decade long differences in time of creating the relevant laws on the territorial protection of waters. The too big differences between the definitions are dysfunctional. In certain occurrences there are even basic elements of the definition can be absent, such as a clear description of the calculation of the territory, the aim of protection, the ways of determination of the territories, the exact list of possible legal-administrative restrictions (and the possibility of compensation of the owners and users of the concerned lands) are missing from the legal definition of protecting territories.

**The planning of the protecting territories**

Important individual plans, such as the River Basin Management Plan, Natura 2000 plans, regional and local (short and medium term) forest management plans and many others exhibit spectacular facts and valuable strategies – when we read them alone, themselves. As soon as we put them side by side, their poorly evidenced facts and empty promises become evident in many instances. Also, when we try to encounter the relevant actual legal provisions with the visions described in those plans, we frequently find that the plans are not properly broken down into the detailed regulations, they remain in many cases ad hoc improvisations from the lower level legislators.

**Substantial rules on the protecting territories**

The multiple level and compound protection of waters on territorial bases might mean an unreasonable burden on the owners and users of the concerned lands. Paradoxically, this might be the main reason of frequently experienced overlooking of these rules: if all the restrictions out of agricultural, water management, nature protection, public health etc. administrative laws were meticulously implemented, the use of such lands would be simply impossible. The other side of this problem is that the compensation rules seem to be inconsequential, nebulous, too.

**The overall opinion of the country researchers taking part in the project**

Some of the countries with older and better elaborated water management infrastructure (such as Germany, Austria) seemed to be optimistic concerning the protection goals, while other countries, especially on lower parts of the Danube river raise serious concerns about the relevant legislation and its implementation. Most of the country researchers evaluates the complex problems of soil degradation, erosion, loss of natural sites and water pollution, eutrophication and express their concerns the state resources turned onto these purposes. The complexity of the issue at the table offers the possibility of using the resources and experiences of a wide network of authorities and professions for the protection of waters and water related ecological services, while this complexity in the same time might be confusing and can blur the responsibilities of the different stakeholders. Lack of social attention and proper funding are mentioned as primary hindrances of establishing effective protection territories for our waters. The sanctions, including the amount of fines inflicted on the intruders or those who overlook the behavioural rules of the protecting territories are evaluated inappropriate by a couple of researchers, too.

**Practical experiences of the country researchers**

In the practice, unfortunately, in several countries at most of the water streams the coastal vegetation is missing and arable lands extends until the waterfront. These circumstances influence the ecological status of waters negatively. The quality of surface waters is in the worst condition at those areas where coastal zones are extensively used, where no sufficient buffer zones exists and there are introduction to the surface waters from multiple sources.

**The elements of the local level waste management systems**

While the first two elements of local waste management systems, household solid waste and that of the non-hazardous waste of small and medium sized local industry and the service sector seems to entail with less problems, the third branch of waste management the waste left on street roadways, squares, driveways, parks and other parts of the areas intended for public use represent a more difficult problem. Runoff waters from these public places represent a serious threat to living waters. Direct littering at public places and abandoning waste in natural places, not seldom at river banks also seems to be difficult to handle. These tasks are mostly left to the local municipalities which in general lack the proper resources and expertise to handle such compound logistics.

**Abandoned landfill sites**

One of the main problems in the Danube region is and will be in the forthcoming years the high number of to-be-recultivated landfills and the questionable attainability of the necessary financial resources. Naturally, they represent a standing endangerment for the surface and underground waters in their vicinity.

**Illegal waste dumping**

For municipalities the limited number of landfilling sites and the illegal dumping of waste is an ongoing problem in the pilot country and elsewhere, too. There are not even reliable data on the exact number of illegal dumping sites but the number of these may exceed 1000 in Hungary, for instance.

**Local waste water treatment solutions**

In the poorer countries along the Danube river the so called water utilities scissors are wide open. Wastewater is, therefore, generally discharged untreated into watercourses in these countries or alternatively stored in poorly insulated septic pits at every households not having connection to the sewage system, representing serious threat to the underground water.

## 3. Suggestions, policy proposals

1. **Definitions**

There shall be a legislative template that ensures that all the relevant administrative laws that deal with the territorial protection of waters define the protecting territories in comparable terms. The ways of determining the territory, the clear expression of the aims of protection, the stakeholders and the procedure of the determination of the protecting territories and the set of possible substantial requirements and restrictions (together with compensation for the restricted activities, if any) shall be the minimum elements of these definitions. An advisable legal technique is to refer partly or wholly to other existing, well accepted and operating definitions in other branches of administrative law.

1. **The planning of the protecting territories**

All the relevant plans should have cross references to each other and be communicated actively in several electronically available registers, homepages, sites etc. The regional and local spatial (physical) plans should act as focal documents for all the plans that have territorial relevance at the given level. Spatial planning is usually a complex, multifaceted procedure with the participation of all stakeholders, including the relevant administrative bodies, economic forces interested in developing the given region and the members and organisations of the concerned communities. If all the relevant water management, public health (drinking water protection), forestry, arable land and soil protection, agricultural management etc. plans find their way into the spatial plan of the given territory, it will be an added guarantee of their proper, concerted implementation, first of all because the elevated level of social attention and acknowledgement.

1. **The size of the protecting territories**

In all cases, notwithstanding the calculation methods, when doubts raise concerning the size of the protecting territories, the precautionary principle shall be applied.

1. **Substantial rules on the protecting territories**

As we have already hinted in the problems’ section, a clear, concerted regulation on the restrictions in use and on the burdens of the owners and users of the protected territories seem to be indispensable for the effective implementation of the protection plans and their broken down detailed rules. In addition to these the behavioural rules and restrictions concerning the lands on the protecting territories should be introduced into the land register system, in order to make them transparent for the real estate market. Anther suggestion, based on the best practices learnt in the project is that site specific guidelines should orient the activities of the stakeholders in connection with the protected territories, preferably on the basis of spatial planning documents. Finally, in implementation and monitoring the plans and rules of protection the participation of the organisations, groups and members of the concerned local communities shall play a decisive role, as the “thousand eyes and ears” of the relevant authorities. Naturally, public participation is especially worthwhile when it is properly informed and educated. The authorities should set up and implement capacity building plans in order to ensure these.

1. **Practical suggestions and good practices revealed by the country researchers**

Growing social and political attention should be paid to the complex problems of soil degradation, erosion, loss of natural sites and water pollution and eutrophication. At the stake is the serial of ecological services our waterflows ensure to our societies we have taken granted so far, healthy drinking water, water life, nature protection, agricultural uses of waters, just to mention a couple.

Good practical developments were revealed in the Hungarian pilot project, where according to the National Rural Development Strategy and to the DarányiIgnác Plan (DIP) the significant reduction in nutrient load burdening waters deriving from arable land cultivation and subsurface waters can be achieved by a considered restoration of the *mosaic pattern* of agricultural landscapes (e.g. establishment of boundaries, alleys, wood belts, riparian natural habitat zones and smaller ponds). The establishment of a sufficiently wide protection zone along waterways is one of the priority objectives of the DIP.

1. **Approaching the complex issue of territorial water protection in a systematic way**

A progressive legislative idea – that might be considered as the major point in this issue – would be to create multifunctional protection zones in one unified administrative procedure resulting in one concerted decision that serve several aims, including biodiversity, agricultural, soil and water protection purposes.

In such a compound legislative program, ranging from planning to detailed substantial rules, institutions especially assigned to this task, decision-making procedures, public participation etc. all the relevant administrative branches and professions should take place and should design the major legal elements (such as definitions, plans, substantial and procedural rules etc.) in harmony with their goals and could avoid duplication of efforts and wasting resources.

1. **The elements of the local level waste management systems**

Preventing, detecting and sanctioning illegal disposal and dumping of wastes require serious resources and also creative approaches, such as inclusion of water police or highway patrols and the high level of awareness and contribution of the local communities and NGOs, as well. Naturally, capacity building is again an indispensable element of any well operating public campaigns against disperse waste problems.

1. **Abandoned municipality landfill sites**

The small, abandoned landfill sites shall be overseen by the environmental, the water management, the nature protection, the soil protection, the public health and several other bodies. They shall regularly monitor them – preferably alongside a concerted, multidisciplinary implementation schedule.

1. **Illegal waste dumping**

Due to the collection of waste within public works and campaigns like ‘TeSzedd! Volunteer for a clean Hungary!’ in the pilot country where many volunteers participate each year in cleaning up the environment, both in Budapest and in the countryside, cleaning land and water from waste, the number of illegal dumping sites are slightly decreasing. Local patriots, community groups should be encouraged to take part in such movements everywhere. Naturally, they should be provided with the proper protecting equipment (gloves, dresses, boots etc.) and most importantly trained and overseen by experts from the waste management authorities.

1. **Local waste water treatment solutions**

There are initiatives in almost all Danube countries to decentralize the waste water treatment at an acceptable technical level. As the water prices rise the amount of waste water is declining, therefore the smaller, flexible, local cleaning solutions might turn out to be more reasonable both in economic and in environmental terms.

1. **Flexible legal tools**

Flexible legal tools should accompany these new technical solutions, ranging from the so called general permitting to the permits issued to a certain technical solution, rather than the individual equipment. Local municipal authorities and the local municipality councils themselves might regain certain controlling and organising roles they lost in the time of modern mass treatment facilities, handled primarily be the central water management bodies.

The EUSDR PA4 provides a platform for exchanging views and providing policy assistance to Directorate General Environment in tackling the issue of buffer zones, to promote alternative collection and treatment of waste in small rural settlement**s** for the sake of providing policy recommendations it agrees to submit the current recommendations and the related study on the topic to DG Environment for discussion.

1. See the Draft Research Reports on Implementation of the Danube River Basin Management Plan – Action 5 and Action 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)