

DANUBE DECLARATION

adopted at the
ICPDR Ministerial Meeting
9 February 2016

**Water Management in the Danube River Basin:
Integration and Solidarity in the most international
river basin of the world**



We, the Ministers, High Officials and the Member of the European Commission, being responsible for the implementation of the Danube River Protection Convention

Our common home - The Danube River Basin and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)

(1) *reaffirm* the “Convention on the Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River” (Danube River Protection Convention), signed in Sofia in 1994, as the sound basis for our common work towards sustainable and equitable water management and flood risk management in the Danube River Basin which we coordinate in the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR).

(2) *highly value* the reliable work of the ICPDR as the major coordinating body in the Danube River Basin with regard to all water management issues and *commit* to further strengthen the ICPDR as a platform for continuing exchange and cooperation among our countries, characterized by a sense of basin wide Danube solidarity and in line with the “ICPDR Vision and Mission” statement as recently adopted.

(3) *appreciate* the significant support by the European Union (EU), its enlargement process and the ongoing cooperation between EU Member States and Non EU Member States in the framework of the ICPDR.

(4) *renew* our commitment to make all efforts to implement the EU Water Framework Directive and the EU Floods Directive throughout the whole Danube River Basin - with due consideration of the requirements of the EU nature and environmental protection legislation - while recognizing that there are differences between EU Member States and Non EU Member States with regard to their legal obligations and financial resources which need to be taken into consideration

(5) *welcome* the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) as a new strategic partner for the ICPDR. Having in mind the multi-sectoral approach of the EUSDR and its focus on facilitating project preparation and implementation we *acknowledge* the great potential for synergies between ICPDR and EUSDR and *intend* to intensify our cooperation, based on the “Joint Paper on Cooperation and Synergy for the EUSDR Implementation”.

(6) *express* our appreciation and support for ICPDR’s ongoing cooperation with all relevant partners in the Danube River Basin and beyond, in particular with regard to

- the coordination of relevant activities in the sub-basins of the Sava, Tisza, Prut and Danube Delta, which are complementary to the work of the ICPDR;
- the cooperation with the Black Sea Commission based on the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2001 and today benefitting from additional impulses by the implementation of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive;
- the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes
- the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians;
- the partnerships with other international river basins in line with the objectives and principles of the International Thies Riverprize awarded to the ICPDR in 2007.

The updated Danube River Basin Management Plan

(7) *recall* the first Danube River Basin Management Plan (DRBM Plan) approved in 2009 as a major milestone in our cooperation. Bearing in mind the challenges which a complex and ambitious regulation as the EU Water Framework Directive pose for the Danube River Basin as the most international river basin in the world we had to break new ground in many areas in the preparation of the first DRBM Plan. Since 2009 many measures have been implemented or are currently under implementation. We made progress but in view of the ultimate goal of the EU Water Framework Directive to achieve the “good status” of water bodies, or where appropriate the “good potential”,

additional measures and more time are needed. Therefore we reviewed and updated the DRBM Plan, its Joint Program of Measures and our national programs of measures.

(8) *endorse* the updated DRBM Plan and *commit* to implement the Joint Program of Measures, which forms an integral part of the DRBM Plan, as well as our national programs of measures. The Joint Program of Measures will be our common roadmap guiding our activities and ensuring the necessary harmonization of actions at the basin-wide scale.

(9) *reconfirm* the four significant water management issues identified in the first DRBM Plan, i.e. organic pollution, nutrient pollution, hazardous substances pollution, hydromorphological alterations, and – as a separate item – the identified important issues related to transboundary groundwater bodies.

(10) with regard to **organic pollution** *appreciate* the fact that urban wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure has been improved at almost 900 agglomerations by 2015 and the BOD emissions via waste water have been reduced by almost 50% thanks to substantial progress made in waste water infrastructure.

(11) *commit* to continue our efforts to invest in the waste water sector, keeping in mind the need to facilitate such projects in particular in the Non EU Member States, and with a focus on the major amount of remaining BOD emissions stemming from agglomerations with existing sewer systems but without treatment.

(12) *state* with regard to **nutrient pollution** a remarkable decrease of point source emissions compared to the first DRBM Plan, and also a drop of diffuse emissions. The total nitrogen emissions slightly decreased by 12%, while the total phosphorus emissions declined by 34%. The loads to the Black Sea have declined considerably but are still higher than those of the early 1960ies. Keeping in mind our long-term goal - as agreed in 2001 in the Memorandum of Understanding between the International Commission for the Protection of the Black Sea and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River - to reduce the loads of nutrients discharged to such

levels necessary to permit the Black Sea ecosystems to recover to conditions similar to those observed in the 1960s, we *agree* on the need for additional initiatives and *encourage* other countries in the Black Sea basin to undertake such initiatives as well.

(13) *are determined* to continue our ongoing measures with regard to urban waste water, the industrial sector, market production and the agricultural sector. Taking into account the significant amount of nutrients stemming from agriculture we *ask* the ICPDR to enter into a discussion process with the agricultural sector and all relevant stakeholders as further defined in the chapter on integration (paragraph 31).

(14) *state* with regard to **hazardous substances pollution** that important steps have been taken to fill the existing data gaps, i.e. by developing national inventories of emissions, discharges and losses of priority substances. Nevertheless further efforts are needed to identify which priority substances and other emerging chemicals are of basin-wide relevance.

(15) *commit* to continue our efforts in closing knowledge gaps by compiling a basin-wide inventory on emissions, discharges and losses of priority substances and in improving waste water treatment and industrial technologies as well as regulating market products.

(16) *state* with regard to **hydromorphological alterations** that a significant number of measures have been taken since 2009, in particular more than 120 fish migration aids have been constructed to improve river continuity, more than 50,000 ha of wetlands/floodplains have been partly or totally reconnected and/or their hydrological regime has been improved and more than 50 measures addressing hydrological alterations have been implemented¹. Nevertheless we *are aware* of the fact that a high number of pressures remains and that we will not achieve good ecological status/potential for all water bodies by 2021.

¹ Numbers in this paragraph refer to rivers with catchment areas larger than 4,000 km². Many more measures are taken in smaller catchment areas.

(17) *commit* to continue our respective measures, i.a. we *plan* to implement until 2021 measures for at least 146 fish migration aids, for about 15,000 ha of wetlands/floodplains and at least 66 measures addressing hydrological alterations¹. In addition we *intend* to intensify the exchange on methodological aspects regarding hydromorphology in order to further harmonize our approaches throughout the basin, *underline* the need to focus on priority measures taking into account the results of the ecological prioritization approach for continuity restoration and *strongly support* the activities of the ICPDR with regard to promoting close cooperation of all relevant sectors.

(18) *state* with regard to groundwater quality that the key pressure is still pollution by nitrates from diffuse sources. We *agree* that - in addition to the measures addressing pollution of surface water by organic substances, nutrients and hazardous substances - measures are needed to prevent significant losses of pollutants from technical installations, to prevent or reduce impacts of accidental pollution and to set an effective regulatory framework ensuring prohibition of direct discharge of pollutants into groundwater.

(19) *state* with regard to groundwater quantity that overabstraction is still the key pressure. Therefore we *agree* on the need for appropriate controls regarding abstractions of fresh surface water and groundwater and the impoundment of fresh surface water (including registers of water abstraction) as well as for requirements for prior authorization of such abstraction and impoundment.

(20) *agree* that the integrative, basin-wide and cyclic approach of the EU Water Framework Directive as well as its main objectives and instruments have proven to be a useful and practicable framework even in the most international river basin of the world consisting of EU Member States and Non-EU Member States. There had been a lot of lessons learnt from the joint commitment and efforts of the Danube countries. However 15 years after the entry into force of the EU Water Framework Directive and at the beginning of the second cycle its full implementation remains a big challenge in

particular due to the complexity and magnitude of the problems Danube countries face in the process of WFD implementation in the given timeframe.

The Danube Flood Risk Management Plan

(21) recalling the latest flood events in the Danube River Basin and their disastrous damages we *express* our sympathy for all those who have suffered from these floods and our gratitude for the solidarity experienced on sub-basin as well as basin-wide level. We *recognize* that even though floods are natural phenomena which cannot be prevented in their entirety, we *urgently need* to increase our investments in flood risk management as this will reduce the likelihood and severity of negative flooding consequences and – in the long run – be less expensive than compensating for flood damages. To further promote a harmonised Danube basin-wide flood risk management we have developed - building on the ICPDR Action Program for Sustainable Flood Prevention adopted in 2004 and the seventeen sub-basin flood action plans published in 2009 - the first Danube Flood Risk Management Plan (DFRM Plan) in line with the EU Floods Directive.

(22) *endorse* the DFRM Plan and *commit* to implement the measures foreseen in the DFRM Plan and in our national flood risk management plans. We *underline* our common objectives we have agreed upon for the basin-wide level, i.e. to avoid new flood risks, to reduce existing flood risks, to strengthen resilience against floods, to raise public awareness and to apply the solidarity principle by avoiding exporting of flood problems to neighboring countries. With the measures agreed in the DFRM Plan we *give priority* to measures with positive downstream effect such as natural water retention, warning systems, reduction of risk from contaminated sites in floodplain areas or exchange of information.

(23) *welcome* and *support* in this context the Danube Region Operative Flood Management and Cooperation Program of the EUSDR aiming to support projects and actions addressed in the DFRM Plan.

Promoting integration – lessons learnt and future challenges

(24) in light of the valuable and encouraging lessons learnt from the ongoing implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive and the EU Floods Directive we *underline* the cross-cutting character of water management and the need for integration of all relevant sectors. In particular we *emphasize* the importance of the ICPDR activities in the following areas:

(25) in line with the relevant regulations of the EU Floods Directive and the EU Water Framework Directive we have developed the DFRM Plan and the DRBM Plan in a parallel process exploiting synergies in particular with regard to information exchange, efficiency of measures and the active involvement of all interested parties. In the implementation phase of both plans we *will further strive* for realizing win-win measures, e.g. by seeking options for the conservation and restoration of the natural functions of wetlands and floodplains. In this context we *support* the preparation ongoing in the framework of the EUSDR of a “Danube Floodplain Project” with the aim to reduce the flood risk through floodplain restoration along the Danube and other rivers in the basin while at the same time contributing to the integration of the EU Floods Directive, EU Water Framework Directive and EU nature protection legislation as well as biodiversity and climate policies.

(26) aware of the impacts of discharges of nutrients and hazardous substances from the Danube on the Black Sea ecosystem we *renew* in line with the coordination requirements of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive the willingness of the ICPDR to serve as platform facilitating the coordination with the land-locked countries and to contribute hereby to a close coordination of the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive and the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive. We *support* in particular all efforts of Bulgaria and Romania to promote such coordination in the Black Sea Region.

(27) in view of the close interlinkage between river basin management and nature protection, specified in the relevant provisions of the EU Water Framework Directive

and the EU nature protection legislation and policies, we *emphasize* the mutual benefits we aim for through a coordinated implementation of both policies, in particular as a significant number of protected areas is located along the Danube and its tributaries. In case of infrastructure projects located in protected freshwater habitats we *recommend* an integrated planning approach with stakeholder involvement from the start as best way to avoid impacts on the protected areas.

(28) *reaffirm* the “Joint Statement on Development of Inland Navigation and Environmental Protection”, concluded by the ICPDR, the Danube Commission and the International Sava River Basin Commission in 2007, *appreciate* its ongoing follow-up process offering regular meetings to exchange experiences with its application and *recommend* to make best use as well of the “Manual on Good Practices in Sustainable Waterway Planning” which was successfully developed in the frame of an EU PLATINA project and outlines further practical steps and examples for integrated planning approaches.

(29) *appreciate* the “Guiding Principles on Sustainable Hydropower Development in the Danube Basin” adopted by the ICPDR in 2013 after a broad participative process involving the hydropower sector, NGOs and the scientific community, *call* for their comprehensive application by an intensified cooperation of the relevant sectors and *support* the envisaged follow up meetings to exchange practical experiences.

(30) *take note* that a sediment balance for the Danube River Basin is still lacking. Such a sediment balance would allow to identify the significance of sediment transport on the basin-wide scale and to propose, on this basis, appropriate measures ensuring a balanced sediment transport taking into account the needs of navigation, hydropower, flood protection and ecosystems. We *support* the project proposal on sediment management encompassing all relevant sectors and *underline* the high priority we give to such a project.

(31) recalling the ongoing efforts to reduce nutrient pollution and the need for additional initiatives we *ask* the ICPDR to organize in close cooperation with the agricultural

sector and all relevant stakeholders a broad discussion process with the aim of developing an ICPDR Guidance document on agricultural practices towards the reduction of water pollution caused or induced by nutrients from agricultural sources and the prevention of such pollution in the Danube River Basin. The document could i.a. provide with a sound knowledge base on the agricultural sector and its impacts on water quality in the Danube River Basin, highlight the existing European legislative framework and financial mechanisms, summarize cross-compliance as well as supplementary measures related to the EU Common Agricultural Policy and other financial programs as well as recommend good agricultural practices and potential policy tools and cost-effective measures supported by case studies. This ICPDR Guidance would aim at the effective protection and use of water bodies as well as a sustainable and balanced agricultural production in the Danube countries.

(32) *appreciate* the “ICPDR Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change” adopted in 2012 and its integration into the updated DRBM Plan and the DFRM Plan. Welcoming the historic Paris Agreement agreed on 12 December 2015 under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and taking note of the rapid progress made in research about climate change and adaptation in general as well as in the Danube River Basin we *ask* the ICPDR to foresee an update of its strategy, in particular with regard to its knowledge base, in 2018 in order to prepare the updated strategy in time for the next planning cycle of the EU Water Framework Directive and EU Floods Directive.

(33) taking into consideration the increasing number of water scarcity and drought events and their significant effects to the water quantity we *appreciate* that the updated DRBM Plan contains a first assessment of the relevance of the water scarcity and drought issue for the Danube River Basin. Even though it is not considered an issue of basin-wide relevance at this stage we *ask* the ICPDR to maintain its activities expanding the knowledge and facilitating the exchange of information on best practice examples and progress in research.

(34) recognize the role of the ICPDR to contribute to implementation of the water related SDGs of the Agenda 2030.

Danube Sturgeons – the flagship species of the Danube River Basin

(35) *recognize* that the Danube sturgeons are “living fossils” representing a natural heritage of the Danube River Basin once existing all over the basin whereas today only some critically endangered or vulnerable species are left, living in particular in the lower Danube River Basin, but with regard to the sterlet and ship sturgeon also in the middle Danube River Basin and with regard to the sterlet in the upper Danube River Basin.

(36) bearing in mind the manifold pressures from different sectors which need to be addressed through an integrated water resources management in the Danube River Basin and considering that sturgeons are a suitable indicator for a variety of pressures while at the same time recalling progress made in other river basins by designating a flagship species we *reaffirm* our intention to establish the Danube Sturgeon as the flagship species for the Danube River Basin hereby desiring to advance broad public awareness and political commitment for the Danube sturgeons and the ecosystem of the Danube River Basin as a whole.

(37) *welcome* and *support* the progress made on sturgeon issues in the framework of the EUSDR, in particular the Program “Sturgeon 2020” elaborated by the Danube Sturgeon Task Force, as well as the sturgeon fishery bans being in force in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Austria and *offer* further coordination with the ICPDR in those areas where the ICPDR is holding key competences. We *welcome* as well the fact that the World Sturgeon Conservation Society will hold its 8th International Symposium on Sturgeons in 2017 in Vienna and *ask* the ICPDR to present its relevant activities at the conference.

(38) *appreciate* the progress made with regard to a feasibility study analyzing the options to establish fish migration at the Iron Gate Dams and *reaffirm* our support for the next steps identified in the project “Towards a Healthy Danube – Fish Migration Iron Gates I & II” as well as for the envisaged follow up actions further upstream in case of positive results at the Iron Gates.

Creating synergies and fostering cooperation

(39) *recall* the extensive public consultation of the updated DRBM Plan and the DFRM Plan, including the ICPDR stakeholder conference in July 2015, as milestones in the ongoing cooperation between the ICPDR, its observers and the wider public and *acknowledge* the reasonable suggestions we have received as a result of this process.

(40) *underline* our intention to further develop the existing outreach activities of the ICPDR, e.g. Danube Day and Danube Watch, and to explore options for further communication activities of the ICPDR related e.g. to the tourism sector or the Danube Sturgeons as flagship species of the Danube River Basin. In this context we *express* our sincere gratitude to all business partners and observers of the ICPDR supporting these activities.

(41) *appreciate* the very valuable scientific results of the third Joint Danube Survey in 2013 as well as its considerable effect on awareness raising for the ICPDR, *request* the ICPDR to prepare, based on an evaluation of the previous surveys, a fourth Joint Danube Survey to be held in 2019 and *commit* to secure the necessary funding.

(42) bearing in mind that according to the EU Water Framework Directive and the EU Floods Directive the DRBM Plan and the DFRM Plan respectively need to be reviewed and updated by the end of 2021 *declare* our intention to convene our next Ministerial Meeting in 2022.

(end)