



## **Minutes of the 27<sup>th</sup> Steering Group Meeting EUSDR, PA4 - To restore and maintain the quality of waters**

**DATE: 28-29 May 2024**

**VENUE:** – *meeting was organized in a hybrid form = online by the Microsoft Teams application, and personally in Bratislava in the Water Research Institute*

### **Main objectives of the meeting:**

1. To present the information by the European Commission, DG Regio about the upcoming events
2. To discuss the recent activities and events related to PA4, youth involvement, and give information on the planned events
3. To discuss the flagship projects' further development - they will have to be reviewed or updated or completely renewed this summer again.
4. To inform the participants about running projects, potential project ideas and projects submitted within the Seed Money Facility (SMF) call
5. To inform the participants about the activities within ICPDR, ISRBC, DSP, EUSDR PA7, DSTF and the GWP CEE and search for synergies

The SG members of the following 8 Danube countries attended the meeting: **CZ, DE, HU, SK, RO, MD, BG and BA** and by the representatives of the European Commission (DG Regio), ICPDR, ISRBC, DSP, GWP CEE, DSTF and the EUSDR PA 7, PA5 and Danube Youth Council (DYC).

## AGENDA

**28 MAY 2024**

**13:00 – 13:30 Welcome snack**

13:30 – 13:45 Welcome by PAC4 SK, PAC4 HU and SK National Coordinator (*Ms Danka Thalmeinerová, Mr Márton Pesel, Mr František Koločány*)

13:45 – 14:15 European Commission news, information and plans (*Mr Johan Magnusson, EC DG Regio*)

14:15 – 15:15 PA 4 activities since preceding SG meeting and future plans in 2024 (*Ms Andrea Vranovska, Mr Márton Pesel, PA4*)

15:15 – 15:30 EUSDR Monitoring report 2022-2023 - Progress and achievements of the EUSDR Priority Areas (*Ms Andrea Vranovska, Ms Zsuzsanna Kocsis Kupper, PA4*)

15:30 – 15:50 Danube Strategy Point (*Ms Cristina Cuc, DSP*)

15:50 – 16:00 PA7 activities and future plans (*Ms Jaroslava Szüdi, PA7*)

**16:00 – 16:30 Coffee Break**

16:30 – 16:50 Information on EUSDR Annual Forum (*Ms Andrea Vranovska, PA4*)

Short information on PA4 related projects in DRP SMF call – DANURELY-WS, PANNONIAN.GW, ROBORIVER (*Ms Zsuzsanna Kocsis-Kupper*)

16:50 – 17:05 Overview of 10<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum (*Ms Luca Jendrek*)

17:05 – 17:20 Discussion

**18:30 Dinner**

**Beer Palace, Gorkého 5, 811 01 Bratislava**



**29 MAY 2024**

**8:30 – 9:00 Welcome Coffee**

09:00 – 10:15 Information on Stakeholders' activities

ISRBC (*Mr Samo Grošelj, ISRBC Deputy Secretary*)

ICPDR (*Ms Edith Hoedl, Mr Adam Kovács, ICPDR Secretariat*)

Global Water Partnership (*Ms Sabina Bokal, GWP*)

Danube Sturgeon Task Force (*Ms Beate Striebel, DSTF*)

10:15 – 11:00 Information on PA4 related projects in DRP calls – Danube Water Balance, Danube Sediment\_Q2; Aquatic Plastic, RESTORIVER, Tethys, InnoWATCCH, Tisza DesWat, Monstur, D-CLEAN (*Mr Márton Pesel, PAC 4 HU*)

**11:00 – 11:30 Coffee Break**

11:30– 12:00 Flagship projects/processes, tour de table (*PA4; SG members*)

12:00 – 12:20 Questions & Answers, Miscellaneous

12:20 – 11:30 Closing session (*PACs*)

**11:30 – 12:30 Light Lunch**

## DAY 1

This session was moderated by Ms Danka Thalmeinerová (PAC4 SK).

- **Welcome by PACs** – Ms Danka Thalmeinerová (PAC 4 SK) and Mr Márton Pesel (PAC 4 HU) welcomed all participants and wished them nice and friendly meeting.
- **Welcome by NC SK** – Mr František Koločány said a couple of introductory words and he mentioned one important upcoming event – 13<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum organized by the Austrian Presidency team in Vienna in cooperation with the European Commission in the second half of June 2024.
- **Tour de table** – all online and present participants introduced themselves. The meeting was attended by SG members from 8 countries (CZ, DE, HU, SK, RO, MD, BG and BA).

### 1. **Presentation of Mr Johan Magnusson – DG REGIO, European Commission.**

He informed about the latest developments within the European Commission, emphasizing 13 June 2024 when the Sea Basin Strategies DAYS would be organized including DG MARE cooperation (the event would include 7 strategies and 2 DGs). He invited everybody to come to Brussels to attend this conference. On 12 June 2024 there would be speed dating event where everybody can meet and speak together. Small delegation also from DG ENVIRO is expected. Then he mentioned the 13<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum held in Vienna on 20-21 June 2024. Implementation report about the MRS (macro-regional strategies) shall be presented to the European Parliament and he thanked PA 4 for a very useful input. There are 4 Chapters – each chapter for each MRS. The report would be ready by the end of the year 2024. There would be caught some insights how to proceed with the strategies forward.

### 2. **Joint presentation of Ms Andrea Vranovska, Mr Márton Pesel – PA 4 activities.**

She presented PA 4 activities since the last SG meeting held in Budapest in the autumn 2023. Firstly she spoke about the cooperation with the International Association of Water Service Companies in the Danube River (IAWD). The cooperation document was prepared in January 2024 and the Memorandum of Cooperation was signed in March 2024. Partners met at the National Participation Day in Vienna on 9 April 2024 that focus on the topic of water and climate change. They agreed to inform each other about main events and cooperate and invite each other to the meetings. On 13 March 2024 the IAWD organized the webinar “Make it Rain” about water utility financing in the Danube Region. Then she spoke about other events – PA 4 prepared the Progress Report for the Danube Regional Programme on 15 January 2024 and also provided the input into Monitoring Report for the European Commission in April 2024. Trilateral meeting was organized on 29 February 2024. EUSDR joint meeting of NCs and PACs was organized on 29-30 January 2024 in Vienna. Call for DRP has been open since 3 April 2024 – PA 4 informs about this all stakeholders and observers. Youth activities – these crosscutting issues of all priority areas are emphasized and promoted by EC. Danube Youth Council



existence was prolonged till 2025 and there are 2 new PA 4 youth observers – Pejo Bosnić from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Irina Apostol from Moldova.

The cooperation on migratory fish conservation topic was reflected by PA4 active participation in Stakeholder workshop of WE PASS 2 project held on 15 May 2024 in Vienna, which brought together the key stakeholders to enable river continuity in Iron Gates dam (Romania and Serbia). It was followed by the meeting “From Iron Gates to Gabčíkovo Water Structure” organized on 16 May 2024 in Bratislava, Water Research Institute. The purpose of the later workshop was to transfer knowledge and share relevant information on migratory fish species restoration in the middle and upper Danube; look for synergies of investigation results and technical designs of fish passes in Iron Gates and Gabčíkovo Water Structure. 36 participants from international organizations (ICPDR, WWF, and DSTF) and experts from Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia participated in the meeting. Positive feedback was gained from participants, they highly appreciated open discussion and the achievements reached in migratory fish protection, especially sturgeons. She introduced thematic and institutional priorities of EUSDR Austrian Presidency. Finally she introduced upcoming activities of PA 4: within the 13<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum 2024 the PA 4 organises a workshop –parallel session focused on migratory fish; PA4 with GWP CEE will co-organise the Summer school, PA4 plans online event with PhD students, most probably from BOKU University in Vienna. Trilateral meeting will be held on 1 October 2024 in Budapest and the SG meeting will be organized in Budapest on 2 October 2024, back-to-back a plastic pollution workshop on 3 October 2024. Updating flagships will happen this June.

- *Ms Edith Hoedl, ICPDR thanked PA 4 for excellent synergies related to 2 fish events organized in May 2024.*
- *Mr Samo Grošelj, ISRBC commented the involvement of the youth, the problem is that water management is not included in the school programme/curriculum and he asked about others experience about it.*
- *Mr Laszlo Balatonyi, PA5 mentioned that they are also organizing the session within the Annual Forum and he appreciated synchronization and synergies and communication between PA 4 and PA 5 colleagues.*
- *Ms Zsuzsanna Kocsis-Kupper, PA 4 had a comment about the Austrian participation day where they met PhD students for a short discussion. Cooperation with youth can bring new fresh air into water management.*
- *Ms Sabina Bokal, GWP CEE asked about the summer school plans for this year. GWP is summer school organizer for a long time now. In 2023 PA4 organized the summer school together with GWP CEE and this year this option is still open. Online “Fundraising Bootcamp” is being organized this year by them on 15-19 July 2024. GWP prepares youth fundraising panel to engage with young people at the country level. This will be followed by 3 months supervision process. Cooperation with GWP is a part of PA 4 DTP project.*
- *Mr Daniel Arwonga, DYK mentioned 2 new participants (observers) and spoke about the activities of DYK. He spoke about collaboration on few activities.*

### **3. Presentation of Ms Cristina Cuc about the Danube Strategy Point (DSP) activities**

She started with DSP support frame. DSP supports EUSDR core stakeholders, monitoring and evaluation, communication, capacity building, youth, embedding and funding. DSP supports regular members with voting right, namely Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) and National Coordinators (NCs). NCs are to inform the PACs in written about the nominations of the new SG members and to keep the DSP informed within this process to maintain the contact lists. PACs update the NCs of the respective participating state and the DSP as soon as changes occur if communicated directly by the respective SG line ministries. DSP duly updates the respected contact lists. DSP provides a framework for an open discussion on ideas and challenges among the EUSDR core stakeholders, supports closer coordination and communication, better understanding of the concrete roles and the relationships among the stakeholders. Governance Development Task Force was established in November 2023 for the purpose of supporting the core stakeholders. The process of identifying the cross-thematic topics among priority areas started last year. Then she said a couple words about the 5<sup>th</sup> EC report on the implementation of MRS 2024 and EUSDR implementation report 2024 – benefits of having them and providing the information into them. She spoke about EUSDR Evaluation Plan 2023-2028 which was published last year. It was developed in close cooperation with SG DANUVAL. Final Evaluation Report will be finished in March 2025. She mentioned the Danube Strategy Flagships – they are processes, networks, and platforms, not only individual projects. Their purpose is showing results of strategy implementation. They can be used as a promotion elements on the websites of priority areas. She presented PA 4 Flagship video. Update of flagships should be done before 28 June 2024 and then the promotion campaign will start. DSP is preparing friendlier website for the Danube Strategy. Then she continued with capacity building – capacity building needs assessment (CBNA) is currently being developed, based on which 5 training sessions will be provided, one per year. This year there the first training lesson is planned how to improve relations between EUSDR players (SG members, PACs, NCs, etc.). Danube Youth Council (DYC) and Danube Youth Organizations Network (DYON) were mentioned then. DYON is about to be established in the upcoming time and is currently under discussion. 47 organizations registered and showed their interest in working in EUSDR. Calendar of events – she invited everybody to 11<sup>th</sup> Danube Participation Day (19 June 2024) and the 13<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum in Vienna (20-21 June 2024).

### **4. Presentation of Ms Jaroslava Szüdi about PA 7 activities**

She spoke about knowledge society, education, research and innovation. She introduced the actions from the current updated PA 7 Action Plan. Contrary to PA 4, this priority area has also task/working groups which were also introduced in this presentation. She also spoke about the usage of capitalization strategy in this priority area. She presented past, present and future activities of the PA. There are many joint activities and linkages with PA 4 – on governance level, through NCs and online streams as part of PA 4 activities in the PAC project. Online streams present interesting topics and they are organized as moderated discussion, e.g. in summer 2023 it was with the scientist Mr Peter Malik. Similar streaming will be prepared also this year, the topic will be “water management” and the discussion will be with PhD students from BOKU University in Vienna.

- *Ms Edith Hoedl, ICPDR - Danube funding coordination network was mentioned as one of the PA 7 working groups. Austrian Ministry of Research is involved here.*

## 5. **Presentation of Ms Andrea Vranovska about 13<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum held in Vienna**

EUSDR AF 2024 “Cooperation in the Danube Region: Now more than ever! Shaping transformation, Creating opportunities” held on 20-21 June 2024 in Vienna. Within the AF PA4 organised the parallel session No.5 on the topic: Is the water clean and passable enough for fish to survive? The session aimed to emphasise the importance of fish conservation, the maintenance of water quality and connectivity restoration including projects’ achievements in the Danube River, particularly focusing on migratory fish species, including sturgeons as the Danube flagship species. Then she introduced the whole programme of PA4 session: introduction by Ms Birgit Vogel (ICPDR Executive Secretary) and Mr Marton Pesel (PAC 4 HU). Short video on sterlet followed by the presentations and discussion. The format is supposed to be interactive. The second day of AF (21 June 2024) morning will take place a World café format to provide the possibility of PAs to talk about the needs in the future and followed then 5 field trips mostly connected to water.

- *Ms Edith Hoedl – ICPDR announced the plan to have the stand at the exhibition*
- *Ms Cristina Cuc, DSP – 8 parallel sessions will be organized by different PAs. World Café format is good for presenting good practice examples. Promotion is welcome.*
- *Mr Balázs Horvath, WWF – interactive format is very challenging, they are happy to participate*

## 6. **Presentation of Ms Zsuzsanna Kocsis-Kupper about the SMF projects**

On 3 April 2024 three Seed Money Facility (SMF) projects were submitted within PA 4, currently they are in the evaluation process – DANURELY-WS, PANONIAN.GW, and ROBORIVER. PACs made their part of assessment on 24 May 2024. The quality assessment of the SMF projects was done in 2 steps. In a first step the PACs were assessing the relevance of the project for the EUSDR (relevance filter) and in the second step the projects having passed the relevance filter would be assessed by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat by the end of June 2024 (strategic assessment). „Danube Region's Youth Leadership in Ensuring Resilience through a Proactive Approach in Water Sector“ DANURELY – WS proposal focuses on youth, their interests, needs, and knowledge and it would develop further the PA4 initiated Youth Study prepared in 2023. Harmonisation of joint monitoring and modelling of groundwater system of Pannonian Plain “PANNONIAN.GW” proposal aims to connect existing groundwater database. The Innovative underwater robotics for monitoring and protection of Danube river pollution „ROBORIVER” proposal will focus on development and deployment of innovative underwater robotics for monitoring of Danube pollution and Danube environment protection. *(At its 5th meeting on 26 June in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Monitoring Committee of the Danube Region Programme approved 36 new projects under the Seed Money Facility call.)*



- *Mr Samo Grošelj, ISRBC – he asked about financial and timeframe conditions - 1 year duration project, 50 000 Euro-*
- *Zsuzsanna Kocsis-Kupper replied that the maximum Programme co-financing amount is 80% of the total budget, max. EUR 50,000.00 euro. In case the SMF projects also implement other type of preparatory activities the maximum total budget for an SMF project is 125,000.00 EUR, out of which the maximum EU contribution is 100,000.00 EUR.*

## 7. **Presentation of Ms Luca Jendrek (World Water Council) about the World Water Forum**

She informed about the 10<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum which happened on 18-25 May 2024 in Bali, Indonesia. She is the youth delegate from the World Water Council which is the forum of volunteers. 64 000 participants attended this huge event, there were different expos and stakeholders from the whole planet. There were 55 side events connected to culture and impact on water conservation. There was a space for youth, they had stage and networking area. 73 young professionals participated. There were different thematic, regional and political processes. Four big regions were distinguished - Mediterranean, Asian and Pacific, African and American. She offered a very brief overview of the thematic results in the sphere of water security and prosperity, water for human and nature, disaster risk reduction and management, governance, cooperation and hydro diplomacy, sustainable finance and knowledge and innovation. Political processes included ministerial declarations and parliamentary processes. Bali youth plan and its results was also presented. Conclusions – unexpected number of attendees, special emphasis on non-conventional water resources, technology knowledge sharing and finance, great number of declarations at all levels, call to create hydro-diplomatics, etc.

## DAY 2

This session was moderated by Mr Marton Pesel (PAC 4 HU).

## 8. **Presentation of Mr Samo Grošelj (ISRBC Deputy Secretary) about the Sava Commission activities**

He provided an update on recent activities from the last SG meeting. They are in the middle of the Sava River Basin Management Plan, they work on Interim report. It will be approved in December 2024. The countries should prepare the report on planned dredging for 2024 and executed dredging for 2023. Most of activities are focused on the implementation on the Sava and Drina River corridors financed by the World Bank, he described regional activities including regional dialogue and regional plans. He named certain regional projects, e.g. Hydrological Study for Sava River Basin, update of the Sava Flood Risk Management Plan and preparation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Sediment Management Plan for the Sava River Basin, existing Sava GIS and HIS capabilities, Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for the Sava River Basin and the Study on sediment, water and biota for the Sava River Basin. Then he spoke about the





cooperation and involvement of the youth – 12<sup>th</sup> Sava Youth Parliament is being prepared for October 2024 in Slavonski Brod in Croatia and the main theme will be navigation ”lets navigate for the green future”.

#### **9. Presentation of Ms Edith Hoedl (River basin management expert) about ICPDR activities**

Discussion of SWMIs (significant water management issues) will start this autumn, next RBMP 2027 starts to be in the preparation, hydro morphology issues, integration issues, and drought issues – Water Balance project. Joint statement of inland navigation – cooperation with the Sava Commission – meeting will be held in Vienna on 12-13 September 2024 also in cooperation with the Danube Commission. Hydropower workshop will be organized in Vienna on 4-5 June 2024 - very rich international participation is expected. Sturgeons – on 15 May 2024 stakeholder meeting on WE PASS 2 project was organized in Vienna dealing with the fish passes design at the Iron Gates. Technical solutions are now on the table and it is necessary to implement them, however, this appears to be a big problem, since it lies on the shoulders of both countries Romania and Serbia. On 16 May 2024 fish meeting in Slovakia was organized in the Water Research Institute dealing with the fish pass design in Gabčíkovo Water Structure. Interaction of these 2 workshops was very useful, Gabčíkovo and Iron Gates, since the knowledge exchange was really valuable. Standing Working Group Meeting will be held in Bratislava in the Falkensteiner Hotel on 24-26 June 2024 accompanied with the Danube Art Master Exhibition located at the Hviezdoslav Square on 20-26 June 2024.

#### **10. Presentation of Mr Adam Kovacs (Pollution expert) about ICPDR activities**

He provided an update on the recent developments of the Pressures and Measures ICPDR Expert Group. Internal ICPDR workshop on drought in the Danube River Basin identified transboundary needs to put forward possible basin-wide actions and clarified the role of the ICPDR how to support the countries. It was held on 16 June 2023 in Serbia. Ordinary meeting from December 2023 outlined the drought overview report being developed in cooperation with GWP, draft should be ready in June 2024. Workshop on rural and small-scale drinking and waste water services happened in cooperation with the World Bank on 17-18 April 2024 and explored what the situation is in small region and small scale facilities. The workshop report will be prepared at the end of May 2024. Nutrients task group activities were mentioned – how to extend their scope in terms of diffuse emissions of chemicals. Agriculture – after the finalization of the guidance document the pace somehow slowed down but now ICPDR wants to organize agricultural webinars where water management sector and agriculture sector can meet and discuss. These main themes will resonate - how to decouple the development of agriculture from pollution, water retention and rural development measures. They are finalizing the stakeholders mapping to identify dialogue partners from agricultural sector. They are enlarging the group of stakeholders slowly. Hazardous substances – they are finalizing and publishing policy guideline on managing hazardous substances pollution, it has been already adopted but Heads of Delegation have some remarks. Kick off meeting of the Tethys project



was hosted in UN Vienna on 11-12 April 2024. JDS 5 specific campaign on emission monitoring is being planned, many preparatory meeting are being organized. Plastic pollution – the youngest topic in the portfolio, policy guidance was already published. AQUATICPLSTIC project is the follow up of the Tidy up project. There arose the following question - how much plastics can hydropower plants accumulate? So this is the synergy with the Hydropower Workshop in Vienna on 4-5 June 2024. In the end of the presentation he provided the overview about the upcoming meetings. They are developing a public brochure and a bottle message on plastic pollution to raise awareness.

- *Ms Danka Thalmeinerová had a comment about the Slovak Presidency in ICPDR this year and to the agricultural webinars which seem to be really useful since the diffuse pollution in the form of nutrients is in the centre of attention. She wants the recommendations from ICPDR where to move with PA 4 activities in the future. ICPDR will of course provide the PA 4 with the right direction.*
- *Ms Andrea Vranovska commented the cooperation with the agriculture sector. From her experience it is better to contact the farmers via their national agencies/farmer associations first and organise short online seminars (duration about 1 and half hour) with better chance for sufficient participation. Then to be more ambitious in addressing agricultural sector.*

## 11. Presentation of Ms Sabina Bokal about Global Water Partnership activities

They cooperate with the Sava Commission in terms of waste water and agriculture. They co-organized the 11<sup>th</sup> SAVA Youth Parliament 2023 in Ljubljana on 29-30 September 2023. The main theme was “let’s work with nature”. D-CLEAN project proposal was presented – there is involvement of PA 4 and PA 5 as the associated partners (ASPs). The purpose of the project is to use natural based solutions (NBS) in waste water treatment in the Danube Region. The community of practice for NBS in water management is an opportunity to build on wider recognition of NBS and will help increase the capacity and knowledge of its members. It is important to raise awareness - webinars series is being prepared. Possible start is expected in 2025 and the duration will be 3 years. GWP is leading the dissemination package in the HORIZON project OPTAIN. Integrated drought management programme was mentioned within the topic of climate change. Drought Resilience Conference will be organized in Geneva in Switzerland from 30 September to 3 October 2024 – integrating knowledge and practice for drought resilience. Overview report on droughts / low water levels in the Danube River Basin was introduced. Gender equality and social inclusion and drought – there was the polemics how this can be effectively improved and included in national drought plans. Join IDMP (integrated drought management programme) Community of Practice – through this platform it is possible to engage with others, discuss, exchange knowledge and experience, and to find synergies. DANURELY-WS project (SMF fund aspiration) was mentioned, it is relevant for many priority areas, and some recommendations will be drafted for the bigger project. Summer School will be similar to that in 2023 called “Drive for Change - GWP CEE Fundraising Bootcamp”. It will operate on 15-19 July 2024 and then it will be followed by the supervision period in the length of 3 months. PA 4 would like to collaborate as in 2023. Youth for Water and Climate project was introduced as well. DANUBE4all – another HORIZON project – deals with engagement



of citizens in river restoration. Everybody was invited to share the survey in this context. Water Community for Ukraine – an online environment for effective discussions, knowledge sharing, and collaboration to rebuild the water sector more innovatively and sustainably. IWRM (Integrated Water Resources Management) Action HUB – online global knowledge sharing platform supporting and connecting water professionals, very useful tool box. IWRM is a process that promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in order to maximise the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems. There are already more than 2000 experts and more than 50 communities – it is a platform for easier communication.

- *Mr Daniel Arwonga said that GWP had prepared many useful workshops for young people and there is a wish to continue. Then he mentioned RAMSAR program and cooperation opportunities in this sphere.*
- *Mr Adam Kovacs – commented on community of practice is a very good inspiration for the ICPDR to follow*

## 12. Presentation of Ms Beate Striebel about the Danube Sturgeon Task Force activities

She summarized the activities of the task force at the recent level and outlined main DSTF priorities which are preventing catch in the wild, ensuring integrity of migration corridors, preventing further collapse of populations through life support and monitoring of populations/habitats. ICPDR facilitates the sturgeon conservation and they are very happy about it – she presented the main challenges in sturgeon conservation which exist at present. Sharing the information will assure the better cooperation. DSTF are multi-stakeholder platform under PA 6. There are water and nature managers, people from academia and civil society. They do not manage projects and they ensure information exchange and experience. They identify knowledge and governance gaps and potential synergies and stimulate cooperation between different actors from different sectors and governance levels. They cooperate with EUSDR, ICPDR, inland fisheries authorities, FAO/GFCM, European Commission (DG MARE, DG ENVIRO, DG REGIO) and national and regional water and nature authorities. Their basic approach is making the eco-system function. Then she said a couple of words about poaching and bycatch which poses a threat to recovery of fish populations. In this field there is an important competition with WWF. She spoke about the ecological connectivity and priorities of physical connectivity. There are 2 significant barriers on the Danube – IRON GATES I and II (dealt within the project WE PASS I and II) and GABCIKOVO (dealt within the project LIVING RIVERS). She introduced major governance challenges for sturgeon conservation – there is lack of national political ownership of internationally agreed basin-wide nature protection targets – making them a priority; competences are fragmented across different levels of governance and between different sector authorities; there is a lack of effective embedding in nationally managed EU funds; lack of binding transboundary cooperation framework for nature protection; lack of Effective Black Sea sturgeon protection framework and lack of basin-wide exchange and information sharing.

- *Ms Edith Hoedl had to give the thanks back – she spoke about the cooperation in WE PASS project and she appreciated the DSTF support and nice cooperation between these two institutions.*

### 13. **Presentation of Mr Márton Pesel (PAC 4 HU) about the Danube Region Programme (DRP) projects**

He presented the information about the following projects submitted within the DRP calls: Danube Water Balance, Danube Sediment\_Q2, Aqua plastics, RESTORIVER, InnoWATCH, Tisza DesWat (continuation of the JoinTisza project), Monstur and D-CLEAN. He said that if anybody knows about any interesting project, should place it on a table.

- *Mr Adam Kovacs mentioned MicroDrink project dealing with micro plastics which is really appealing topic today*

### 14. **Flagship processes**

Discussion with SG members about keeping them (and updating) or changing them completely. Mr Marton Pesel moderated the discussion, there was a little poster presentation summarizing our 3 flagship processes. These are Adaptation to Climate Change, Migratory Fish (in cooperation with PA 6) and Emerging Substances. They are interconnected with several PA 4 actions and PA4 coordinators proposed to keep current flagship processes.

There will be a silent procedure on flagships voting, since some of SG members were not present that time. An email will be sent to all SG members after the meeting.

- *Ms Cristina Cuc had a general comment what these Flagships are and how we can use them. Basically they serve the purpose of priority area promotion. Each priority area has their own videos connected to Flagships placed on their websites. The deadline for the update submission is 28 June 2024. These do not have to be new ones, can be ongoing. Promotion campaign will start then in the summer and it will contribute to the Danube Region development.*
- *Ms Andrea Vranovska introduced PA4 flagship processes; provided facts on advantage of processes, not single projects; and gave reasons why coordinators had proposed their prolongation. It is the question to SG members whether stick to them or change them for other topics.*
- *Mr Marton Pesel said that the migratory fish issue is really crosscutting as well as hazardous substances and climate change is much more complex affecting more priority areas.*
- *Ms Danka Thalmeinerová suggested to look at other PAs Flagships and then to decide based on that. Particularly PA 5 and PA 6.*

### 15. **Questions, answers, miscellaneous, closing words**

28<sup>th</sup> PA 4 Steering Group meeting will be organized in Budapest on 1-2 October 2024 back to back to the Plastic pollution workshop which will be organized on 3 October 2024.

## 16. Farewell

Both coordinators concluded the meeting, thanked everybody for coming to Bratislava. And invited everybody to come to Budapest in the autumn.

**Ms Alena Kurecová (PAC SK team member)** wrote the meeting minutes.

The presentations are available at the following website: <https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/27th-steering-group-meeting/>

