

## **Socio-Economic Background for IWT Development**

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The political and economic changes taking place in East- and South-Eastern Europe within the last 15 years have created dynamic emerging economic areas and generated trade along the Danube axis. After the fall of the iron curtain and the political stabilisation in South-Eastern Europe, the Danube region is developing and converging in political, social and economic terms. The Danube area will again unfold as one of the most important economic and cultural regions in a unified Europe with the Danube as central lifeline and transport axis.

The enlargement of the EU has led to an enormous increase and strengthening of economic ties in the Danube Corridor. Intensification of trade has gone hand in hand with a rapid rise in the amount of traffic. Commercial transport along the Danube corridor has soared more than 100 % in nearly all Danube countries within the last decade, the by far largest increase was registered in road transit. The traffic flows are expected to grow even more in the next years due to the forecasted economic development of the Danube countries (minimum average GDP/capita growth rates of 3-4 % per year until 2015).

Coping with traffic volumes in a manner that is environmentally and socially-friendly, calls for a more intense use of the free capacities of the Danube waterway. **Inland navigation shall participate in future transport growth** and maintain its current modal-split within the Danube corridor. This would mean a **doubling of transport volumes on the Danube within the next 10 years**. To achieve this goal the framework conditions for inland navigation must be improved in an integrated manner by the ten Danube riparian states, following the objectives of the European Action Programme for inland waterway transport NAIADES.