

## **Intervention of Mrs. K. Peijs at the Budapest Workshop on the Follow-up of the**

## **"Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube River Basin"**

### **"New Perspectives of integrated waterway transport in Europe and along the Danube"**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure and interest that I am ready to take part and to contribute to the success of this Workshop.

When the three Commissions, Danube Commission, ICPDR and International Sava Commission, launched the Joint Statement exercise, I was immediately taken by the breath of the initiative.

The Danube River Basin States, with the contribution of transport and environment experts as well as representatives of interest groups and of industry, were showing a maturity and a capability to address their conjunct efforts towards the development of a safe, sound and environmentally friendly inland transport means on the Danube River.

The Joint Statement exercise is, to my knowledge, the first constructive example of a cooperation that is much needed in all fields of the human initiatives, but certainly in support of a continuous growth of mobility demand, versus the impellent need to protect the nature of our regions.

I look at this initiative with strong interest and support, as you know. Let me tell you that, in my position as European Community Coordinator for Inland Waterways, I have been tasked to support the transport development mainly in two areas: in the north western part between the Seine river and the Scheldt river network and, on the Rhine/Meuse-Main-Danube corridor.

To this last corridor, the Danube contributes, with more than 2400 km, to be precise with 2411 km from the Delta on the Black Sea till Kelheim in Germany at the connection with the Main-Danube Canal River. The Danube River Basin covers an area as vast as 800.000 km<sup>2</sup> in 19 countries and provides housing to more than 81 million people. Some countries like Austria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro and the Slovak Republic are almost completely situated within the Danube River Basin.

So we are not talking "only", let me put in brackets, of the Danube as a transport corridor: it is much more and these facts make the Danube a unique and important means for water management, for drinkable water, for irrigation or for energy production, as well as source of economic growth through

tourism and transport. And the river is also a complex, multi-dimensional and dynamic ecosystem, as it is presented in the Joint Statement.

The understanding of all these aspects requires the participation of a wide range of experts and a mutual recognition of each other points of view and needs.

In doing my role as Coordinator, I always had a firm view on how to make my task a success: we only can have a successful inland waterways transport if this is a real sustainable one. This entails that it has to be affordable, economic, source of benefits and environmentally friendly at the best, in order not to spoil the beauty of the rivers, on the contrary to preserve from flooding and creating opportunities for the inhabitants of the region.

It is evident that such an approach cannot be of simple solution and that requires dedication and strong commitment.

Today's presence of such an important audience of National representatives, experts and industry give me the confirmation that the path taken is the right one and that we must pursue our goal without hesitation. After the approval of the Principles, it is now time to revert towards applicable principles of the Joint Statement, keeping into account that it is not only a transport means, though quite important per se. What we are discussing concerns the overall regional development and we do not want to spoil this opportunity, but neither we want to repeat mistakes that will have to be recovered in the future.

As an example, I would like to highlight the case of Straubing-Vilshofen in Bavaria that will be explained later in more details.

Since decades it has been impossible to reconcile find the needs for an effective transport means with the preservation of the river habitat. All the solutions, so far proposed, have been the representation of one side point of view, either the entrepreneurs or of the environmentalist group, without taking into account the importance to contribute to the righteous economical development of the region with the also righteous protection of the river habitat.

Today we are about to start a Study, under the auspices of the German Federal Government and of the Free State of Bavaria, where a Monitoring Group, including experts from both sides will follow and asses the works performed. Of course the way forward is still long and certainly difficult, however, keeping into account the development of the region and the environmental needs we are confident that a sound solution will be found.

It is one of the first attempts to give voice to all interested groups and to make sure that the results have not been generated only by one side, but have taken into account all aspects of the problem.

In order to achieve this it is of outmost importance that a clear approach is taken and that expertise from the different invested fields are represented from the beginning of the feasibility studies until the realisation of the works.

In doing this, a sound plan for the implementation of the Joint Statement Principles can provide a common platform where to start from along with European Commission initiatives of the NAIADES Programme, from the Transport Directorate for the development of the inland waterway transport, the global Basin approach of the Regional Directorate and the Water Protection initiatives of the Directorate for Environment.

I look forward to take an active role in this process and I look forward to these two days of work as the first step, after the declaration of Principles, for the laying down of rules that, in line with the European and the National Legislations, will promote the development of the river basin, starting from a sound and sustainable transport system.