

Environmentally Sustainable Inland Waterway Transportation – A Vision for the Danube River Basin

Philip Weller, ICPDR Executive Secretary

Inland navigation and waterway transport is neither automatically damaging to the environment nor automatically beneficial to the environment. It can be a very environment-friendly means of transport of goods and people, if it is executed within a framework of conditions: Waterway transport had and will always have certain limits. Through careful planning and thoughtful consideration of how and under what circumstances navigation can and should be carried out it is possible to achieve environmentally sustainable inland waterway transport.

In order for this to happen it is necessary that persons engaged in protecting the environment and managing water bodies define more clearly the limits of the river related to navigation. In a similar way, navigation managers should specify the current and future needs of inland navigation and how they want to achieve those most important projects (not only in terms of infrastructure) in an environmentally sensible way. By doing so on a joint platform, as the ICPDR is offering herewith, it is possible to develop and implement a joint vision of environmentally sustainable and ecologically sound inland waterway transport in the Danube River basin.

Such a Vision requires:

- Taking into account the special ecological quality and requirements (limits of use) of each water body and the (navigable) river sections in the Danube and its tributaries;
- Working within the legal and policy frameworks that exist for integrated river basin management (i.e. EU Water Framework Directive, EU Flora-Fauna-Habitats and Bird Directives, Ramsar, MAB and UNESCO World Heritage Convention) and inland waterway development (i.e. NAIADES, national waterway development plans);
- Learning about experiences from other riverine areas about the feasibility or negative impacts of certain waterway transport, as well as about the introduction of modern, integrated techniques of waterway and vessel design, logistics and market conditions, that improve or limit such transport;
- Before taking investment decisions, sharing information on the needs and interests of navigation and developing actions and strategies for waterway and river basin management that take account of these needs.

To achieve a Vision for ecologically sustainable transportation there will be a need to focus on both questions of **process** (what information is needed for decisions? what mechanism can ensure the link between transport and ecological interests?) and specific **technical considerations** (are there improvements of the waterway that are needed and can they improve the ecological situation? are there specific technologies or instructions that can be used to minimize or eliminate harmful aspects of such transport? does the cost-benefit assessment include all – e.g. also environmental – costs?) related to the Danube river basin and specific projects that form part of an overall strategy.

The goal of this process is to achieving better understanding and – as much as possible - agreement among stakeholders involved in maintenance and development of navigation / waterway transport and in managing the quality of riverine resources of the Danube basin – based upon the principles and criteria of environmental sustainability. It is a goal that is both realisable and necessary for all interests.