

10 Frequently Asked Questions about a River Commission International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River

1) What is the legal basis of the Commission?

The ICPDR's legal basis is the “Convention on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable use of the Danube River (Danube River Protection Convention)”, generally referred to as the “Danube River Protection Convention” or “DRPC”. It commits the contracting parties (Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, and the European Union) to join their efforts in sustainable water management, including conservation of surface and ground water, pollution reduction, and the prevention and control of floods, accidents and ice hazards. The convention was signed in Sofia in 1994 and came into force in October 1998. It can be found online at: <http://www.icpdr.org/main/icpdr/danube-river-protection-convention>.

2) What are the key functions of the Commission?

The ICPDR was created to implement the Danube River Protection Convention (DRPC). It is both a forum to allow its contracting parties to coordinate the implementation of the DRPC and a platform to review the progress they make. The key objectives of the ICPDR include the following:

- Ensure sustainable water management
- Ensure conservation, improvement and rational use of surface waters and ground water
- Control pollution and reduce inputs of nutrients and hazardous substances
- Control floods and ice hazards.

The ICPDR also facilitates cooperation between the Danube countries and the Black Sea region in issues requiring coordination, cooperates with other international organisations where appropriate, and addresses new challenges related to water management (e.g. climate change adaption) as they emerge.

When the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD, formally Directive 2000/60/EC) was adopted in October 2000, all countries cooperating under the DRPC (which includes at present 8 EU and 6 non EU member states) decided to make all efforts to implement the

Directive throughout the whole basin. The Non EU Member States also committed themselves to implement the WFD within the frame of the DRPC. In addition, the ICPDR serves as a coordination platform for the basin-wide implementation of the EU Floods Directive (EFD, formally Directive 2007/60/EC).

3) How is the Commission managed?

The ICPDR is an international organisation. It meets twice a year: The Ordinary Meeting is held in Vienna in December, another meeting of Heads of Delegations is held in June in the country of the Presidency. The meetings comprise of delegations of contracting parties and observer organisations. Every contracting party has one Head of Delegation representing the country. For all decisions the achievement of consensus is sought. The meetings are chaired by the ICPDR President; ICPDR Presidency is passed on from one country to another in an alphabetical order every year.

In addition, much of the work of the ICPDR is done by Expert Groups (EG), which are panels of specialists from the ICPDR contracting parties and observers – usually civil servants of the relevant ministries, in some cases employees of NGOs or contracted agencies. There are seven permanent Expert Groups and one ad hoc EG. The EGs all have Terms of Reference and mandates adopted by the Commission. They usually meet twice to three times a year. Time- and target-limited task groups may also be established for specific tasks which not necessarily all countries are represented in.

The expert groups discuss issues related to their Terms of Reference and prepare reports and recommendations for coordinated action.

The ICPDR has a Permanent Secretariat to support its work, supervised by an Executive Secretary. The secretariat has its headquarters in Vienna, from where it administers, manages and supports the work of the ICPDR.

The total staff of the secretariat is 8 permanent staff members and additional short-term project staff. If all national experts, delegates from observers and consultants are considered, there are more than 300 people working with and for the ICPDR.

Note the Organigram in Figure 1 on the next page.

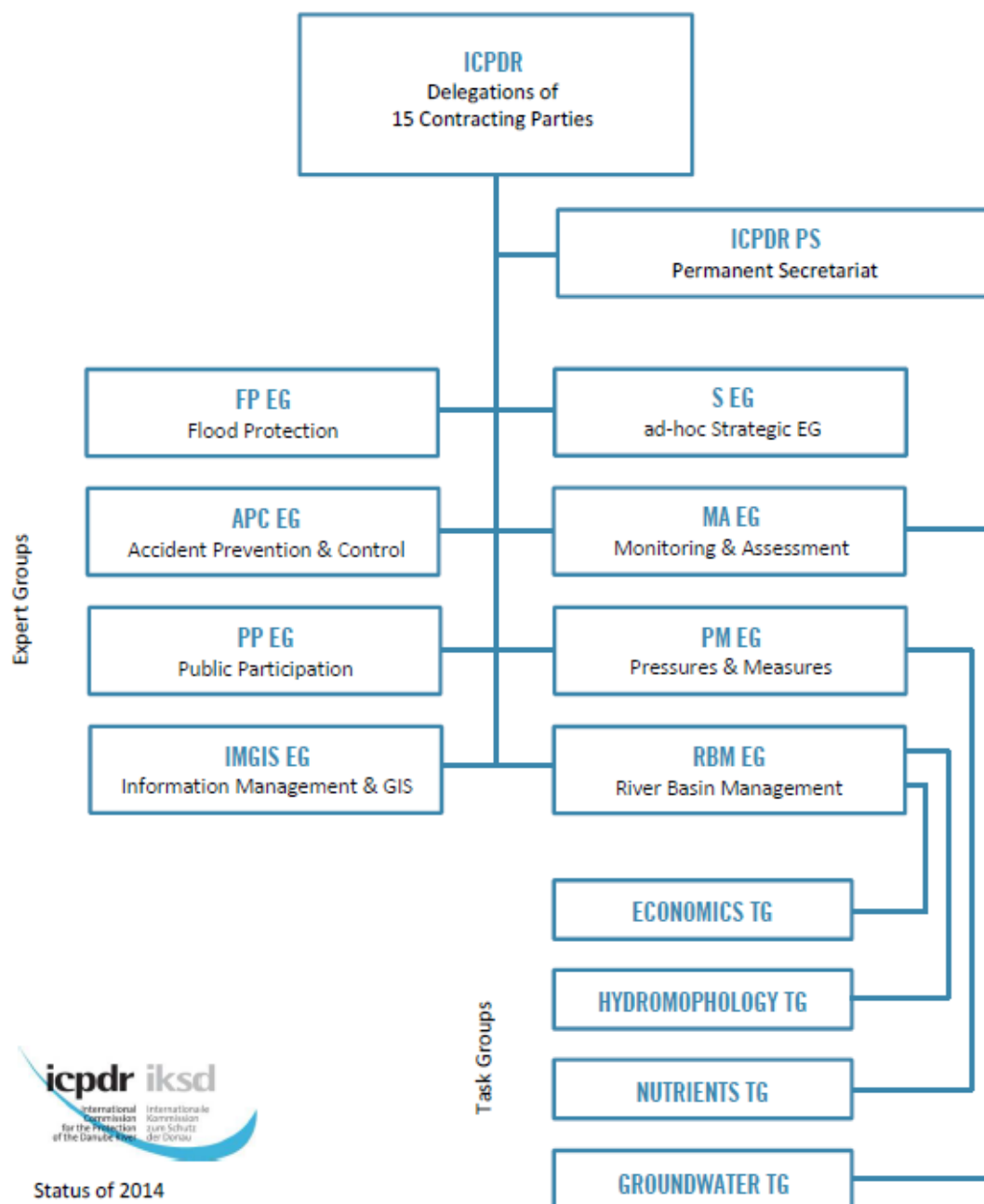


Fig. 1: Organigram of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), status of 2014.

4) How is the Commission financed?

The ICPDR budget comes from the contributions of the Contracting Parties. According to the DRPC the Contracting Parties (except for the EU) shall contribute an equal share, unless unanimously decided otherwise by the ICPDR. Some exceptions are currently applied for a transitional period. The total annual budget of the ICPDR is a little more than one million Euros. Much of the ICPDR's work is done directly by Member Countries. Such contributions in staff and material are therefore also considerable, even though this does not show in the ICPDR budget. Costs of participation in the Commission's and Expert bodies' work are also covered by the parties themselves.

In some cases, the ICPDR engages in projects that have separate sources of funding. These include projects funded by the European Union, the United Nations Development Program, GEF, individual member countries or private businesses through the public-private partnership "Business Friends of the Danube".

5) What are the means of organising the work of the Commission?

The ICPDR is an international organisation that involves representatives of each contracting party. Therefore, all key-decisions are made by the delegations of the contracting parties and prepared in the relevant Expert Groups. The persons in the ICPDR delegations are often also members in various Expert Groups themselves and know current issues first hand and in detail.

Expert groups are composed of at least one national expert per contracting party as well as representatives from interested observer organisations. Currently, there are 21 observers to the ICPDR who represent the interest of stakeholders. They range from other intergovernmental organisations to environmental NGOs, to representatives of the business sector that are active in areas such as navigation, hydropower, or tourism. National experts have a vote in the expert groups. Observers contribute to the discussions, but have no formal vote. Draft decisions of the expert groups are passed on to the Ordinary Meeting of the ICPDR in December as recommendations, where they have to be approved.

The daily operational work is co-ordinated or conducted by the staff of the permanent secretariat. There is constant exchange between delegations, expert groups and the secretariat.

6) What are the role and responsibilities of the Secretariat staff and how are staff members selected?

Roles and responsibilities of the staff are established by the Danube River Protection Convention, the ICPDR Rules of Procedure and the Staff Regulations. Particular attention is given to the Executive Secretary (ES) and the Technical Experts (TEs), which are currently five.

Executive Secretary: performs the functions that are necessary for the administration of the Danube River Protection Convention and for the work of the ICPDR in accordance with its Rules of Procedure and its Financial Regulations. The ES supervises the staff at the secretariat and ensures the day to day operation of the Commission in consultation with the President.

TE for River Basin Management: provides guidance and coordination to ICPDR activities related to the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive in the Danube River Basin.

TE for Pollution Control: supports ICPDR activities to reduce or eliminate, as far as possible, pollution from point and diffuse sources, and other significant pressures.

TE for Water Quality: develops and coordinates the actions needed under the ICPDR Action Program for Sustainable Flood Protection and provides the ICPDR with information related to the state of the waters in the Danube River Basin and organises monitoring programs or the compilation of monitoring information.

TE for Public Participation and Communication: supports and provides input to ICPDR activities regarding public participation issues including awareness raising measures.

TE for Information Management and GIS: supports ICPDR activities related to the operation and further development of the ICPDR information system. It comprises control over the development, implementation, testing and maintenance of a common Danube River Basin Geographical Information System (DRB GIS).

The selection of the secretariat staff is based on an open competition among persons from the countries of the region (including the EU). The selection procedure includes the assessment of the application material by Heads of Delegations, a panel interview and

additional tests where appropriate. In addition, the secretariat has support staff and interns that are recruited by the Executive Secretary.

Members of the Secretariat serve the interests of the Commission and are not representing the countries from which they come.

7) What are the role and responsibilities of the delegations?

All key-decisions are made by the delegations of the contracting parties. On the domestic level of their countries', delegations have the obligation to ensure input from other government agencies than their own. This can include regional governments or the various ministries that play a role in specific water management issues. For example, a delegation might be composed of civil servants from a ministry of the environment; however, navigation issues that the ICPDR deals with might also affect objectives of a ministry of transport. In such a case, the delegation has to match its position with the over-all national interest.

8) What is the role of the Commission in managing projects?

The ICPDR is primarily not a project implementing body, but there are some projects for which it has taken some responsibility to achieve its core objectives. For some of them, the ICPDR acts as an implementing entity; in others, it plays a role as an advisor or as a facilitator for the implementation of different components through its Expert Groups. The ICPDR also acts as a forum for the development of projects that are submitted and carried out by others (but benefiting the cooperation under the ICPDR) including many of those currently proposed under the EU Danube Strategy. Since water protection interferes with many other policies, inter-sectoral projects and activities are likely to gain significance in the future.

Important projects in which the ICPDR was or still is involved include the GEF Danube Pollution Reduction Project; the EU Floodrisk Project to map zones that have a high risk of falling victim to floods; contributions to the EU Platina project on sustainable Inland Navigation; MONERIS to model nutrient loads that enter the Black Sea; DABLAS to modernise wastewater treatment plants; and many more.

The ICPDR focuses on the facilitation of projects which are directly carried out and managed by national authorities. The results of the projects are then disseminated to the ICPDR and its contracting parties.

9) What are the most important activities?

In a nutshell, the ICPDR (1) assesses the state of surface and ground waters in the Danube River Basin; (2) develops actions to conserve or improve these waters; (3) collects information on the implementation and progress of these actions; and (4) supports individual contracting parties or other relevant entities in the implementation efforts of these actions. From this, a range of activities can be derived.

Particularly important ones include:

- implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive;
- implementation of the EU Flood Directive as well as the orchestration of basin-wide flood protection measures;
- Danube-wide assessments in the course of a “Joint Danube Survey” and through the Transnational Monitoring Network (TNMN);
- involvement in the EU Danube Strategy;
- coordination to maintain an accident emergency warning system (AEWS) and risk spot inventories;
- modelling of nutrient pollution loads that enter the Black Sea via the Danube;
- efforts to define strict phosphate caps for laundry and dishwasher detergents;
- technology exchange in areas such as the construction or modernisation of wastewater treatment plants;
- maintenance of emission directories and GIS data management;
- implementation of measures to fight hydromorphological alterations, nutrient pollution, organic pollution and hazardous substance pollution;
- protection of habitats and wetland restoration including promotion of fish passes where needed and development and maintenance of a network of protected areas (Danube Parks);
- dialogue with representatives from sectors affecting water such as hydropower, navigation or agriculture;
- management of awareness raising campaigns such as the Danube Box, a teaching program for schools;
- organisation of Danube Day, a public event;

- exchange with other river commissions, such as ORASECOM of the Orange River;
- exchange on environmental issues and collaboration in Danube sub-basins such as the Tisza, Prut, Sava or Danube Delta;
- collaboration with private companies to promote the work of the ICPDR (“Business Friends of the Danube”);

and many more.

10) What does the ICPDR do to assist dispute settlement?

The ICPDR serves as a platform for co-operation and coordination. The signing of the convention however, commits the countries under international law to some specific actions and to uphold certain principles. In some past conflicts, the ICPDR could contribute to accommodating the harmonisation of efforts by providing a place for discussion. The President or the staff at the secretariat can induce talks on specific issues and contribute to building consensus.

The convention provides a dispute settlement mechanism, but in practice this has not been needed so far, as the countries concerned have worked to ensure dialogue and developed consensus on issues of conflict. The work of the ICPDR is less prone to conflict than outsiders might imagine: The atmosphere at meetings is focused on facts and characterised by mutual respect and a common acknowledgement of the ICPDR’s objectives and tasks.

Further Questions

For further information, please see the website of the ICPDR at www.icpdr.org or contact the commission’s permanent secretariat at icpdr@unvienna.org