

Danube Becoming Cleaner But More Work Needed, Says New Survey by ICPDR

VIENNA, 11 September – The Danube and its tributaries are becoming cleaner, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) announced today, presenting the scientific results of the *Joint Danube Survey 2 (JDS2)* -- possibly the world's biggest river research expedition ever.

“The JDS2 was a major undertaking that fulfilled its planned expectations,” said Saša Dragin, ICPDR President and Minister for Agriculture and Water of Serbia. “It was intended to provide a good snapshot of the conditions of the Danube River and its tributaries, and it did just that.”

The findings confirm that the cooperation among Danube countries to reduce pollution is bringing positive results. Progress has been made in many areas since the *Joint Danube Survey 1* of 2001. Water quality is generally improving, but more work is needed. People can swim in parts of the Danube River Basin, but not everywhere. People can eat fish without health risk, but further investigation of mercury concentrations is needed in some areas.

The Danube still contains significant natural populations of plants and animals. The first ever systematic survey of the river's “hydromorphology” (the physical characteristics of its shape, boundaries and content) identified large areas that remain in good natural condition. Positive efforts that have been made to restore damaged natural areas, such as floodplains near Vienna and in the Danube Delta, need to continue if a good ecological condition of the river is to be achieved everywhere.

At the same time, the survey confirms that a further reduction of nutrients and organic pollution is needed. The Danube continues to show signs of degradation downstream of major cities and in a number of important tributaries because of poor municipal waste treatment. Efforts to establish waste water treatment plants in the basin, particularly in cities such as Budapest, Belgrade and Bucharest, need to be accelerated. Some countries need to intensify the pollution control efforts by industry on major tributaries. Overall, the reduction of pollution from agriculture (both nutrients and pesticides) must continue. Some toxic hot-spots also require more active attention.

Areas for further research and investigation were also identified. This includes levels of mercury in some samples, particularly in fish, as well as the sources of pollutants in some tributaries. The large number of non-native fish and other organisms in the Danube also require further assessment.

“More intensive discussions with stakeholders -- such as the navigation and agriculture sectors, hydropower and the detergent industry -- about measures to reduce particular pressures are needed,” says ICPDR Executive Secretary Philip Weller “The cooperative climate that exists among many stakeholders for addressing the problems needs to be maintained.”

Notes to Editors:

Background to the Joint Danube Survey 2 (JDS2)

The JDS2 was launched on August 14, 2007 in Regensburg, Germany. In total, a distance of 2,600 km of the Danube River was assessed, 2,415 km of which were completed by the three boats of the JDS2 travelling from Kelheim, Germany, through 10 countries, to the Danube Delta in Romania and Ukraine until late

September. The JDS2 sampled 96 sites on the Danube River and 28 on its major tributaries. Ten cities were also visited to increase public awareness.

Its main goal was to produce highly comparable and reliable information on water quality and pollution for the entire Danube River and many of its tributaries. Water pollution is a major problem in the Danube Basin. Danube governments need to make sound decisions about what future measures they will take to reduce Danube pollution and improve ecological health. This will help them to meet their obligations to implement the 'Danube River Protection Convention' which they signed in 1994.

It will also help them to meet the 'EU Water Framework Directive' -- possibly the world's strongest water legislation. Its goal is to ensure that rivers and lakes have "good chemical *and* ecological status" by 2015 -- meaning that they should provide clean water as well as good conditions, such as migration routes and suitable habitat, for natural species to live healthily. For example, many fish need natural sand banks for spawning -- a habitat that may not be available along a fully engineered stretch of river even though that stretch might have "clean water".

After the expedition ended, scientists throughout Europe analyzed the samples of water, sediment, plants, fish and other aquatic life -- assisted by hundreds of others who provided the raw data needed to create a full picture of Danube water quality. This work led to a "Final Scientific Report" and a hands-on public document -- "The Joint Danube Survey 2: Research Expedition and Conclusions", both launched today.

The JDS2 was supported by the Danube Countries, European Commission, Alcoa Foundation, Dexia Kommunalkredit Bank and Coca-Cola Hellenic:

Visit www.icpdr.org/jds to learn more.

Background to the ICPDR

The ICPDR (International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River) is an international organization consisting of 13 cooperating states and the European Union. Since its establishment in 1998, it has grown into one of the largest and most active international bodies engaged in river basin management in Europe. Its activities relate not only to the Danube, but also the tributaries and ground water resources of the entire Danube River Basin.

The ultimate goal of the ICPDR is to implement the Danube River Protection Convention by promoting and coordinating sustainable and equitable water management, including conservation, and rational use of waters for the benefit of the Danube River Basin countries and their people. The ICPDR pursues its mission by making recommendations for the improvement of water quality, developing mechanisms for flood and accident control, agreeing on standards for emissions and by assuring that these measures are reflected in the Contracting Parties' national legislations and are applied in their policies.

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For further information, please contact:

Paul Csagoly

International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)

Telephone: (+43-1) 26060-4373 / Mobile: (+43) (0) 676 845 200 290

Email: paul.csagoly@unvienna.org

Website: www.icpdr.org