



Process begins for ships and environment to share Danube River

VIENNA, 25 April (UN Information Service) -- A one-year process began today to reach agreement on how to maintain and develop inland waterway transport on the Danube River without damaging the environment. The kick-off meeting of the process is being held in Orth an der Donau, Austria, from 25-26 April.

The joint initiative is being organized under the leadership of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) in cooperation with the Danube Navigation Commission and the International Commission for the Protection of the River Sava.

The over 50 participants are all key stakeholders concerned about the future of Danube inland navigation. They include representatives from the navigation sector, governmental water and river basin managers, conservation NGOs and the European Commission.

The overall goal of the process is to reach, by the end of 2007, a stakeholder agreement on the basic guiding principles and criteria of a “Joint Statement on the Development of Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube River Basin”.

“Inland navigation is neither automatically damaging nor beneficial to the environment,” says ICPDR Executive Secretary Philip Weller. “But through careful planning and thoughtful consideration, environmentally sustainable inland waterway transport is possible and can even reverse some of the impact that previous river regulations caused. It is a goal that is both realisable and necessary for all interests.”

The process aims to ensure that currently planned infrastructure projects related to navigation are developed in an environment-friendly way and within an overall framework for the entire Danube Basin. This especially includes projects under the EU’s Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) programme geared to developing the Danube into a major transportation corridor for cargo. Examples include a project on the Danube between Vienna and Bratislava and one in the Lower Danube near Calarasi in Romania.

“Inland navigation can contribute to making transport more environmentally sustainable, particularly where it replaces road transport,” said Mr. Weller. “But it can also significantly influence river ecosystems, jeopardizing the goals of EU legislation which aims for the “good ecological status” of all waters by 2015.” In this respect, the outcome of the process should also help Danube decision-makers to develop their river basin management plans required by the EU for 2009.

The second meeting will be held in late June in Bucharest, Romania. The third meeting planned for October will focus on drafting the Joint Statement. A public release of the Joint Statement is expected at the end of 2007.

Notes to the Editor:

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 River, 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 improvement and rational use of waters for the benefit of the Danube River Basin countries and their people.

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