



DANUBE WATCH

2/2021

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE DANUBE RIVER
WWW.ICPDR.ORG

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International Commission
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Internationale Kommission
zum Schutz der Donau

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Dear readers,

I first came in contact with the ICPDR a few years ago, when I was brought in as a nervous outsider to moderate a conference of high caliber insiders from across the Danube River Basin.

I grew up on the California coast and had been living in Santa Barbara until my broadcasting career and my Austrian girlfriend brought me to Vienna and I became a denizen of the Danube.

My preparations for that first ICPDR event, and then being able to witness the work of so many passionate experts, allowed me to dive into a Danube that had been right in front of me for years, but I never really saw. The history, the complexity, the vitality, and the beauty washed over me and I've never been the same since.

I now make it a priority to spend as much time as possible along, at, on, and in the Danube. Highlights from the past few months include sunrise runs past Melk, all-day cycling tours through the spectacular Wachau Valley, and sunset swims and stand-up paddleboarding in the old-arm of the Danube in Greifenstein.

After learning about the importance of fish passages at an ICPDR conference, visits to Greifenstein became especially interesting and gratifying. My wife and I (yes! I married

the girlfriend who brought me to the DRB) often visit the little bridge there that spans the fish passage.

At another recent ICPDR event I was thrilled to learn about the progress being made on re-establishing upstream and downstream fish migration past the Iron Gates. It was humbling to see the years of work that have gone into this ambitious project and exciting to hear that success for our fish friends is now feasible within the foreseeable future.

I also learned about an ICPDR boardgame designed to educate children about the challenges of migratory fish in the Danube. Creating a game to inform and engage young people is a wonderful initiative. I'm also a fan because, by happy coincidence, the game tracks the travels of Sturgeon Steve.

Sadly, sturgeon and other fish species in the Danube are still facing existential threats. But happily, it's not too late for some species, and solutions are at hand to help them recover and re-establish migratory routes through the Danube. If success is achieved, it will be thanks to the work being done by the great scientists, the stakeholders and the policymakers allied with the ICPDR. Fans like me are applauding you and cheering for Sturgeon Steve and his friends.

Steve Chaid is a radio & TV broadcaster and media expert based in Vienna, Austria.



International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River
Internationale Kommission zum Schutz der Donau

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Danube Watch is the official magazine of the ICPDR, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River. Danube Watch enhances regional cooperation and information-sharing on sustainable water management and environmental protection in the Danube River Basin. It reports on current issues affecting the Danube Basin, and on action taken to deal with challenges in the river basin. Striving for scientific accuracy while remaining concise, clear and readable, it is produced for the wide range of people who are actively involved in the Danube River Basin and are working to improve its environment.

The ICPDR accepts no responsibility or liability whatsoever with regard to information or opinions of the authors of the articles in this issue.

News & Events

2021's Public Consultation Process comes to a close

After a busy year of activities, the ICPDR brings to a close its 2021 Public Consultation Process and ceases receiving comments on its management plan updates.

Every six years the ICPDR updates its key management plans. This year, the review and commenting on the Danube River Basin Management Plan & Danube Flood Risk Management Plan Updates 2021 was open to anybody and everybody in the Danube River Basin, with the draft plans published on [ICPDR.org](https://www.icpdr.org) earlier in the year.

During the period from 31st March to 30th September 2021, written communications with comments on the plans were received from a total of 11 organizations and 165 private individuals. Despite the majority of activities, including the Stakeholder Consultation Workshop (covered in detail in DW 1/21) having to take place online due to the global pandemic, the ICPDR's 2021 Public Consultation has been a resounding success with a further reach than ever before in the history of the organisation.

The commenters and organisations represented a range of interests, and all of these comments (some of which are extensive



documents relating to several different sections in the plans) have been published online and taken into account during the finalisation of the management plan texts. Visit the section of the ICPDR website dedicated to the 2021 Public Consultation process for further information.

ICPDR Publishes Guidance Document and Policy Paper on Sustainable Agriculture



Advantageous conditions in the Danube River Basin make agriculture a hugely important component of the economy in many Danube countries. Although substantially subsidized

by the European Union (EU) and national governments in the region, the agriculture sector continues to face socio-economic challenges in recent years. Despite the high share of land being cultivated, agriculture is not among the strongest economic sectors in the DRB.

Thus, in the ICPDR's new Guidance Document and Policy Paper on Sustainable Agriculture, the ICPDR recommends sound policy instruments, financial programmes, and cost-efficient agricultural measures to protect water bodies for decision makers in the field of agro-environmental policy. The documents propose support for Danube countries preparing and implementing their tailor-made national agro-environmental policies, CAP Strategic Plans and relevant strategies of the River Basin Management Plans in good synergy.

Read more on [icpdr.org/main/publications/news](https://www.icpdr.org/main/publications/news)

30th PP EG Meeting marks new milestone

Unsplash ©



The ICPDR's Public Participation Expert Group (PP EG) held their 30th meeting online on 15th October 2021, marking a major milestone for the group responsible for guiding ICPDR communications and public events.

The PP EG's regular meetings have provided the backbone for various ICPDR operations over the course of the last 15 years, ensuring that the organisation's tone-of-voice and communications aims meet the demands of all ICPDR member countries. The PP EG plays a key role in finalising and planning all ICPDR communication activities, including public consultation on management plans (which has played a key role throughout 2021), annual Danube Day and Danube Art Master celebrations, plus the launch of the ICPDR's social media platforms back in 2018.

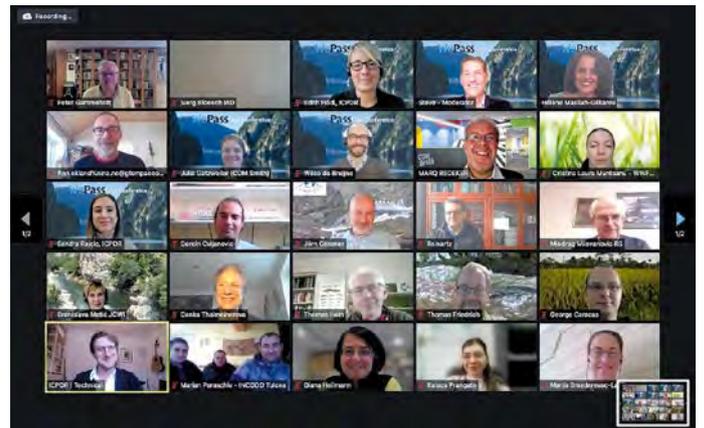
In its 15-year history, PP EG meetings have taken place in 15 cities across 10 Danubian countries, bringing together the rich cultural diversity of the Danube River Basin. Congratulations to the PP EG on the big 3-0!

We Pass Final Event

With We Pass coming to a close, the project focusing on preserving and re-establishing fish migration routes in the Danube River Basin held its Final Conference online via Zoom on 17th & 18th November 2021.

This online conference brought together a variety of partners from various relevant sectors to hear reports from the project's various Activity Leaders on Data Analysis, Fish Monitoring, Communications, 3D Modelling, and more. On the second day of the event, participants also witnessed a panel discussion with several of We Pass' experts, and presentations were given by representatives of related and similar projects focusing on the issue of sturgeon and migratory fish conservation efforts.

Spread across two morning sessions, this public Final Conference didn't only report on everything that's happened during We Pass however. The agenda also sought to pave the way forward for We Pass 2 – the follow-up project due to kick off in the coming period.



© ICPDR

Visit we-pass.org for more information



WePass: Explained

Sturgeons have been around for more than 200 million years, and the Danube River Basin has represented a key part of the habitat for these migratory fish. Sturgeons swim thousands of kilometres up the Danube River from the Black Sea to spawn, and have long formed a key part of the region's cultural fabric and shared heritage – from the inland banks of the Danube to the Black Sea coast. Man-made obstacles, however, have made migration all-but-impossible for fish like the sturgeons of the Danube River Basin. One of the largest is the Iron Gates hydropower project, lying on the Danube River itself, bridging the river-border between Serbia and Romania. This vast project has been a vital source of low-carbon energy for decades, yet its blockage of the river's course has contributed to the near-extinction of the Danube sturgeon.

That's where WePass steps in

The main objective of this project – whose full name was “Study on environmental and ecological thematic in the framework of MRS and policy coordination with DG NEAR/ENV: Support for the implementation of the Feasibility Study analysing options for characteristic Danube fish migration at Iron Gate I & II” – was to take the first major steps towards overcoming this gargantuan obstacle. Coming to a close in 2021, We Pass brought together a world-class team of experts and partners from various European countries to work out how we can create those fish routes back up the Danube without compromising essential power production at the Iron Gates.

Furthermore, the Danube River isn't just a key migration route, it also represents a vital habitat for a variety of species. Constructing fish passes at the Iron Gate Dams would re-open some 960 km of the Danube River, running all the way until the Gabčíkovo Dam in Slovakia, and granting many migratory fish including sturgeons, passage to long-inaccessible waters.

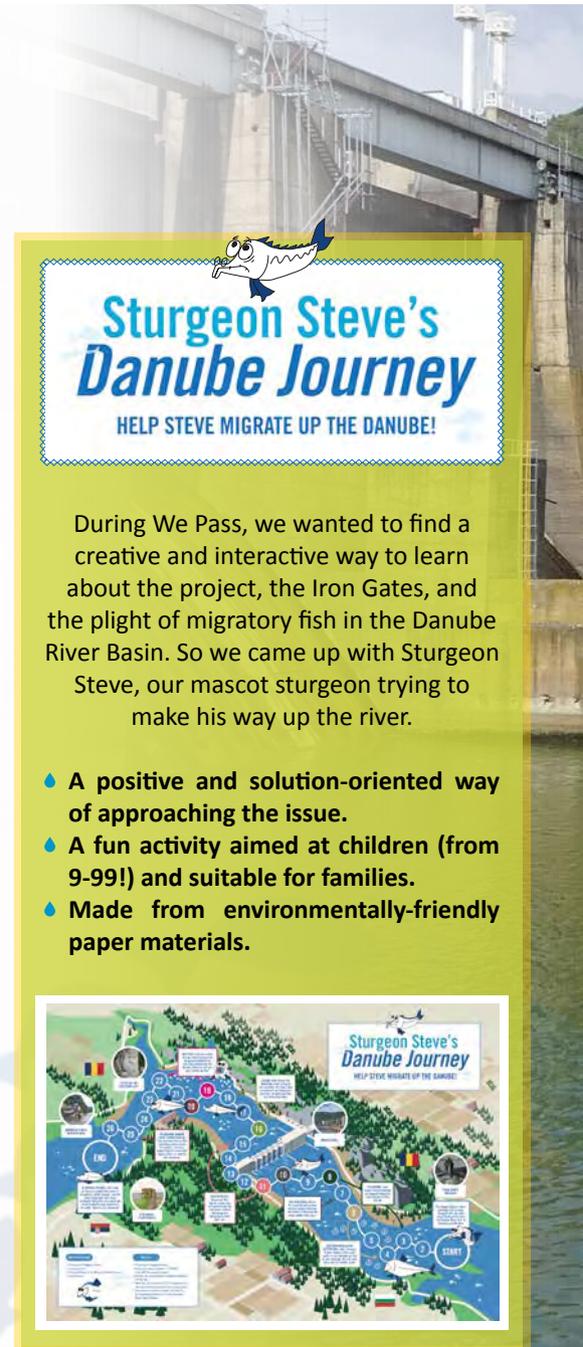
With concerted study and efforts such as We Pass, we truly believe iconic fish species such as the Danube sturgeon, can still be saved from completely disappearing. Better yet, should we act swiftly, they can also have their numbers brought back up to healthy levels throughout the Danube River Basin and beyond.

Who WePass Was

The entire project was financed through a grant awarded by the European Commission (DG REGIO), and it aspired to have a strong macro-regional character, focusing on the impact and ramifications any measures could have for the entire Danube Region. This naturally meant We Pass required close and constant co-operation with the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), central to this project, while various other synergies are always being explored.

We Pass was set up by several partners in various countries across Europe:

- ◆ The ICPDR (International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River)
- ◆ The Jaroslav Černi Water Institute, in Belgrade, Serbia
- ◆ DDNI (the Danube Delta National Institute), in Tulcea, Romania
- ◆ CDM SMITH | OAK Consultants, both in Düsseldorf, Germany and in Utrecht, Netherlands
- ◆ NINA (the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research), in Trondheim, Norway. Supported by IMSI (Institute for Multidisciplinary Research, University of Belgrade) in Belgrade, Serbia



Sturgeon Steve's Danube Journey

HELP STEVE MIGRATE UP THE DANUBE!

During We Pass, we wanted to find a creative and interactive way to learn about the project, the Iron Gates, and the plight of migratory fish in the Danube River Basin. So we came up with Sturgeon Steve, our mascot sturgeon trying to make his way up the river.

- ◆ **A positive and solution-oriented way of approaching the issue.**
- ◆ **A fun activity aimed at children (from 9-99!) and suitable for families.**
- ◆ **Made from environmentally-friendly paper materials.**



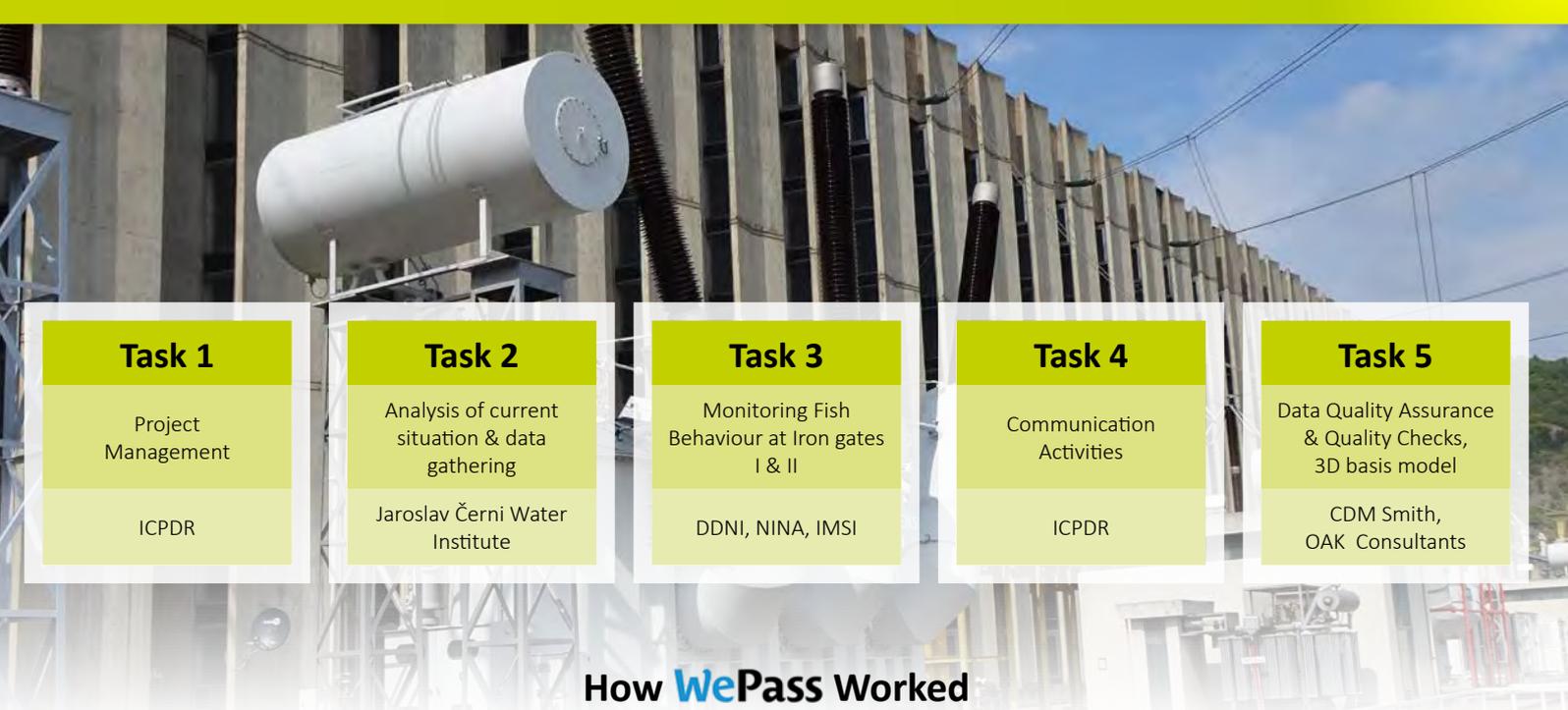
Tagging fish at the dam.



Sturgeon Facts



- All 27 sturgeon species inhabit the Northern Hemisphere
- They are long-lived animals reaching up to 170 years of age
- The Beluga sturgeon is one of the largest bony fish species in the world, and can grow to over 7 metres in length and weigh over 1,000 kg!
- They are late maturing reaching sexual maturity at an age of 6 to 25 years depending upon species and latitude
- Sturgeons have long been sought after in many countries, with monarchs claiming them as 'regalia' belonging to the crown
- They have in the past been harvested in large numbers in the Middle Danube by the blocking of their migration routes with fences



Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5
Project Management	Analysis of current situation & data gathering	Monitoring Fish Behaviour at Iron gates I & II	Communication Activities	Data Quality Assurance & Quality Checks, 3D basis model
ICPDR	Jaroslav Černi Water Institute	DDNI, NINA, IMSI	ICPDR	CDM Smith, OAK Consultants

How WePass Worked

The division of work for We Pass took the form of 5 Tasks, shown below. The ICPDR took the lead on this project, taking responsibility for **Task 1: Project Management**. Reporting to the project management team behind Task 1 however, were the four main tasks of We Pass, each with their own expected outcomes and deliverables.

Task 2:

Analysis of Current Situation & Data Gathering

While all hydropower stations, dams, rivers, and migratory fish routes have hugely varying and idiosyncratic needs, there's a wealth of experience and data from similar projects around the world that can still help us. It was thus highly valuable for us, during We Pass, to take stock of all such available data to help prove where best to target our resources – not to mention what methods to avoid – when formulating our solution at the Iron Gates. A huge amount of technical data regarding the water regime around the dams was provided, dating back to the 1970s. Additionally, the team produced a thorough literature review, taking into account experience and learnings from similar cases around the world, including fish passes in Russia, the USA, and Canada.

Task 3:

Monitoring Fish Behaviour at Iron Gates I & II

The team behind Task 3 went out into the field to gather new data from the river's waters and fish themselves. Assessing where migratory fish tend to aggregate at Iron Gates II was one of the key aims of Task 3, with the team deploying acoustic telemetry to measure the numbers and locations of migrating fish. The Iron Gate II dam is 1.7 km long, thus it's vital to identify the key locations at which passes would be most effective, and where fish could 'find' an entrance. Some additional sub goals of the project included monitoring of fish migration behaviour in the reservoir of the Iron Gates II dam (i.e., the north side), and to work out the mortality rate of fish swimming through the Iron Gates' turbines during downstream migration.

Task 4:

Communication Activities

Besides the gathering of data, scientific analysis, and formulation of vital first steps, a strong communications strategy is essential to any undertaking with the ambitions of We Pass. A wide variety of stakeholders – including the public themselves – have to be brought up to speed and on board to ensure the long-term success and maintenance of our aims. Communications Activities undertaken included:

- ◆ The creation of an animated clip explaining the project
- ◆ Maintenance of an online presence, including website & social media accounts
- ◆ A family-friendly educational board game: Sturgeon Steve's Danube Journey
- ◆ Expert updates to Wikipedia pages
- ◆ Press and partner contact and outreach
- ◆ Organisation of public events, including the We Pass Final Conference

Task 5:

Data Quality Assurance & Quality Checks, 3D basis model

Considering the paramount importance of data to We Pass, Task 5 (full title: "Data quality assurance and quality control and 3D basis model") had the essential job of both specifying and thoroughly checking the huge variety of data provided by partners throughout the project. This included data on a variety of important aspects of the Iron Gates, including its structure, various types of modelling (geological, terrain), geospatial data, and more.



© all photos, We Pass

WePass Final Conference

Though held online as a result of the ongoing measures in place due to Covid-19, the Final Conference for We Pass, held on 17th & 18th November 2021, brought a fruitful exchange of findings that brought the initial phase of this project to a positive and energising close. Over 50 participants took part in the event via Zoom, including the supportive voices of both Bettina Doeser of DG ENV, and Johan Magnusson at DG REGIO. “We have a very important future ahead of us,” explained Ms. Doeser, “so we are extremely happy from the European side to be behind the second stage of this”. Mr. Magnusson agreed: “We have the right to be proud, as a lot has been done – but there’s still more to get done.”

Stay tuned for **We Pass 2!**

The second phase of this project is already underway...

visit we-pass.org for updates.

I Tristan Bath is a consultant and editor of Danube Watch, who has been calling the Danube home for several years.



Last of the Dinosaurs?

The ICPDR's Ivan Zavadsky in Profile

After more than three decades with the commission, the ICPDR's longest-serving Executive Secretary, Ivan Zavadsky, is entering a well-earned retirement.

Few international European careers span so much change for their countries and regions as Mr. Zavadsky's. His tenure saw Czechoslovakia split into his own home country of Slovakia plus the Czech Republic, not to mention many countries in Central and Eastern Europe joining the European Union. European dedication to building infrastructure across borders and collaborating to solve pressing issues of how to manage and develop our environment has evolved vastly in recent years. It's been a historical period of tremendous progress throughout the European continent, with figures like Mr. Zavadsky playing pivotal roles along the way and breaking necessary ground and forging the international framework necessary for a new European future in the 21st century.

Zavadsky's career has seen him occupy a variety of roles, among which sector negotiator for the chapter Environment within the Slovakia accession process from his home country of Slovakia to years working in the US, and of course his long a period at the ICPDR. Early in his career where he started as a young engineer, working on large projects, with the Bratislava Water Utility Company and Slovak Government, later notably working on the GEF Secretariat too, serving as co-ordinator of two nutrient pollution reduction projects in the Danube and Black Sea Basins between 2001 and 2007.

Ivan Zavadsky is leaving behind a technically and institutionally strong ICPDR, with the waters and ecosystems of the Danube River Basin – not to mention the Black Sea – confidently backed up by increasingly strong and bold environmental regulations and investments. We took the chance to pose Mr. Zavadsky a few questions looking back on his achievements, and seeking some sage advice from decades inside the dynamic world of international organisations.



“ What was your proudest achievement of your time at the ICPDR?

It's hard to say what would be the proudest, but as the ICPDR evolved, I would say the first achievement – not my achievement, but as a group – was in the early 90s after the change of the political system, when all the middle Danube countries started coming to the EU. Suddenly we were able to overcome all the discrepancies and historical grievances and East-West jealousies, we were able to find in a short time a balanced text for the Danube River Protection Convention, a very good vehicle for cooperation. I would say the second was the short – well, 6-year – period I spent supporting ICPDR as a project manager of the UNDP/GEF project. As a small project team, were able to provide targeted assistance to establish the key structures of the ICPDR, and help country representatives with limited resources to participate.

I am also proud that when the WFD [EU's Water Framework] came into action, countries were wondering how to implement this very demanding piece of legislation, which required a lot of technical work and a lot of scientific insight. The main objective of the project was the reduction of nutrients, and a concerted effort ended up in the elimination of one of the largest dead zones, to be found in the Black Sea. Actually, the entire northwest shelf [of the Black Sea] was dead without fish, without biological life. Gradually, through the hard

work of the ICPDR, combined with the economic changes in middle and lower Danube countries these emissions went down, and now the Black Sea is recovering strongly, and there is scientific evidence of this.

What do you think is Europe's top climate priority at the moment?

The Climate Change challenge for Europe has two aspects: one is the mitigation, to reduce the production of greenhouse gases like CO₂ and methane. But also, on the other hand, you have adaptation. I will start with the latter, as I think there is a way for European countries to do the adaptation properly. We need to make sure that all the actions, investments, strategies on water usage, and further development of water resources is being designed with future challenges in mind. This is still something not entirely internalised sufficiently within the water management sector. This is the challenge of the adaptation side, to make all the adaptation strategies and measure and policies comprehensively together with all sectors. We still see some sectors, like agriculture, getting priority over all others. We need to work jointly.

Now for the more difficult challenge. To make it simple, now, at Glasgow, the European Union again made a very strong commitment to reduce greenhouse gases, such as methane emissions by at least 30% before 2030. Europe has shortened the time to get to carbon neutrality. That's the



biggest climate challenge: to make sure the national policies and measures being taken under these policies, will respond to the political commitment made in Glasgow. If all these policies, measures, regulations, and investments would happen as designed, it would be painful – and the pain would be felt by each and everybody. This is the *real* climate challenge.

The ICPDR is a great model for River Basin Organisations around the world – but there’s always more to learn. What’s the biggest lesson you learned from another RBO during your career?

I think in some of these River Basin Organisations in the developing world, where they have less-developed public institutions and there’s a large gap from the basin authorities to the central governments, they work very closely with the local communities. I think this is the big difference, and a little bit the disadvantage of ours here in the more developed part of the world, that everything is so thoroughly organised – from the mayor of the small village in Austria up to the Federal Chancellery – that everything is structured and organised. We are doing public participation and public involvement, but at the end of the day, we end up with a group of smart, well-meaning, but quite noisy NGOs. In the other parts of the world though, it’s really the communities who are actively involved, and the commissions have to work directly with them if they want to show any progress.

What would be the main piece of advice you would give to future international organisations?

My main piece of advice would be: *realism and management of expectations*. We are living in a world where to get something done in this international arena, we somewhat have pushed ourselves into this “exaggeration” cycle. To convince people that we are doing something reasonable, we have to promise what we will most likely not or never be able to deliver. Not because we are lazy or stupid, but simply because the conditions are not right

for it. I know very many international organisations in the water sector who have wonderful plans, wonderful programmes, sophisticated action plans, formally well designed frameworks for cooperation, but the progress is almost next to zero – and then not to make these failures visible, they have to engage diplomats to polish out any bleaker pictures into something more digestible.

Also of vital importance are proper data and information. Data should be for purpose, and accepted by all parties. It’s a big shame that many RBOs use national data without mutual exchange and mutual validation, and this is where ICPDR is champion, because our data sets are vetted by all 14 countries.

What would you say, if you had one sentence to give advice to your successor?

Make sure that your team at the Secretariat has the best possible working conditions: technically, economically, morally, and ethically. The role of the Executive Secretary isn’t only pushing papers around, but to make sure that these people are working as one team, so to build and maintain this team spirit is vital. When it is lost, we are done, and then we end up just bureaucrats pushing nothing but paper around with everybody just looking out for their own back.

What are you looking forward to getting up to in your forthcoming retirement? Will you be spending more time on the Danube?

Firstly, the reorganisation of the library I inherited from my late father plus all the books I have collected over the last twenty years working internationally in Vienna, the US, and Slovakia! The basement is full of books, and I want to make sure that somebody like me or my friends can use them.

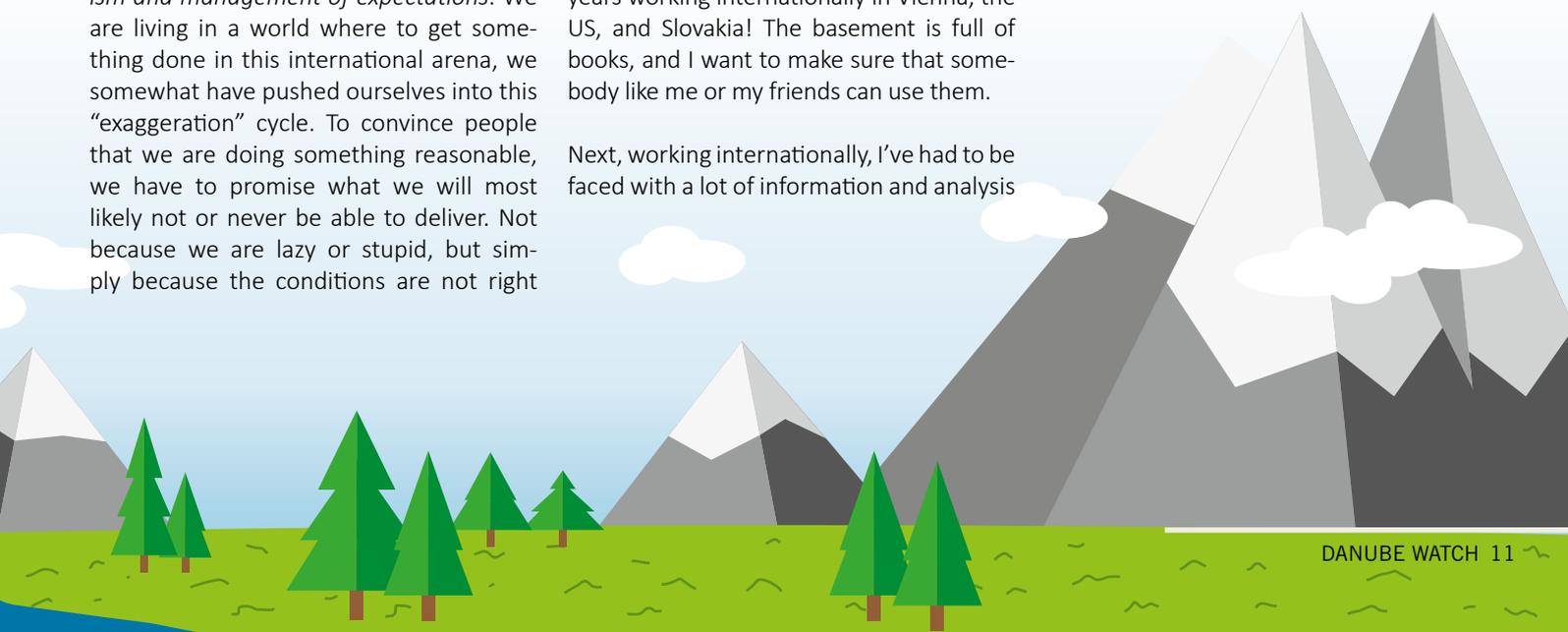
Next, working internationally, I’ve had to be faced with a lot of information and analysis

of water, both fresh and salt – though for the last ten years I was working mainly on freshwater. So I still feel a bit of a gap in my knowledge on oceans. I will use some of my free time now to get more into the nitty gritty of marine policy, marine biology, and the protection of marine ecosystems, to try and understand somewhat why ocean scientists are saying this is the key for life of the planet, and the laboratory where all the answers lie – so I want to understand a bit more about the ocean.

And lastly, for the last three years, I’ve been getting back into my beloved paddling boat on the Danube. I want to continue this, and spend more hours paddling on a race canoe around here in Vienna or up in Linz, on Attersee, in Czechia, all over. People like me, or even older than myself, get together on their paddle kayaks and canoes to compete, but in principle it’s just about the fun of being on the water!

After three years of the ICPDR on Social Media, what do you have to say about it?

Initially, we’d thought that social media wasn’t suitable for us here at the ICPDR. But after some changes on the team, when the issue came back up again a few years back in 2018, I accepted and supported the idea – while still remaining sceptical. Now though, I see that it pays back! We’re getting feedback from professionals in our network, I am getting feedback from various bits of society (including my own family) that ICPDR is doing great on social media. Our social media appearance helps us to maintain our reputation as an international organisation!



The ICPDR Celebrates 3 Years on Social Media



November 2021 marked three years since the ICPDR launched its presence on social media. Since its inception, the technical experts and members of the ICPDR Expert and Task Groups have worked around the clock, 7 days a week, 365 days a year for the Danube River Basin and its people. Social media, however, has brought a new dimension to this relationship.

The widespread use of social media had already been growing at an accelerating pace for years before the ICPDR 'went social'. Facebook alone saw over 2 billion active monthly users worldwide for their fourth quarter in 2017 ahead of the ICPDR's launch year. With continued double-figure annual percentages increases in user activity, it was clear that social media outlets aren't only an opportunity, but a necessity for organizations like ours to meet our need to communicate with internal and external stakeholders alike.

To further increase the impact of communications also means showing confidence in your capabilities and broadcasting your expertise to a broader public. The ICPDR are rightly self-confident on our social media channels, ready to fulfil our role as opinion leaders in the topics and questions with which we deal every single day. It's a dynamic new world online, and just like freshwaters in a river basin like ours, social media connects with every aspect of our society. These additional communication channels are already contributing to a strengthening of our image and reputation, and building our credibility with an even wider audience.

"As members of the ICPDR, we service the Danube River Basin and carry a legal mandate in the public and for the public," explained, Susanne Brandstetter, Chairperson of our Public Participation Expert Group, at a recent meeting. "Exchanging information and discussing important

themes we wish to relay to the outside world also means promoting our internal, multi-disciplinary communications, as we strengthen shared interests and connect our different directions."

Winning more people over to our mission is always a key aim. It's been a vital part of any River Basin Organisation since before the advent of social media. When it comes to these new digital channels however, real results can take time, as building an on-line audience and a dedicated following is always the first – and very challenging – step.

Bringing in the Cavalry: Introducing Raffeiner Reputation

While the ICPDR has decades of experience communicating with the public of the Danube River Basin, social media is still an entirely different kind of beast. Since launching our social media presence, the ICPDR has been working closely with Vienna-based social media gurus, Raffeiner Reputation, learning the ropes of how to turn river basin management lingo into user-friendly social media gold. Alexander Raffeiner, the founder of Raffeiner Reputation, gives us some insights into working with the ICPDR these last three years:

"Working with the ICPDR on Social Media means working on emotional topics that have a broad impact on many countries and a lot of people: water, pollution, sustainability, and so on. At the same time you have to deal with precision and a lot of facts and figures. Emotion and facts and figures, all at the same time - how does that fit together? The ICPDR proves on its channels – Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn – what in my opinion is crucial for social media communication: **"Packaging without content is worthless!"**

The challenge of a trustworthy and sustainable social media presence for an international public organisation as the



© Raffeiner Reputation FYI

ICPDR, is to strike the balance between a wide range of stakeholder interests; internal and external stakeholders, throughout Europe That's why we began the ICPDR's efforts on social media with a detailed stakeholder analysis and a Danube-wide participation process. Looking back, this was decisive for success. Social Media Management with such complex topics in a complex organisation is a marathon, not a sprint. I am happy to have, in the engaged team of the ICPDR, a sparring partner willing to go this marathon distance. Thank you for that! The Team at the ICPDR are brilliant "complexity reducers", and I'm looking forward to continuing our cooperation in further developing the ICPDR on Social Media in the coming years."

Alexander Raffeiner is an entrepreneur in the field of communications management and consulting, having found the specialized strategy and communications agency RAFFEINER REPUTATION in 2011 in Vienna. Having an economic and marketing background gained at MCI - Management Center Innsbruck/Tyrol, Alexander was early focussing his efforts on B2B communication and primarily reducing complexity in communications processes from and among public organisations.

Hélène Masliah-Gilkarov is the ICPDR's Technical Expert for Public Participation & Communication and Executive Editor of Danube Watch

ICPDR @ICPDR_ORG · Mar 22
 "Water is of utmost importance to everybody living in the #Danube River Basin", says ICPDR President, Momčilo Blagojević. Find out how monitoring, assessing, managing and valuing water resources lies at the heart of the #ICPDR's activities: loom.ly/1oUJE20 #WorldWaterDay



1 5 12

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The ICPDR is proud to be an example to river basin organisations (RBOs) around the world. However – we've learned a lot from several of our fellow RBOs. Read a recent article in Danube Watch about what we've found out along the way. #RBOs #RiverManagement icpdr.org/main/publicati...



ICPDR @ICPDR_ORG · Jun 23
 Two more days to go: Can you guess the name of the fish pictured? Little hint: If you browse through danubesurvey.org you can find our Danube Fish Cards online & maybe even spot this little fellow. Click here loom.ly/6xqm25M & leave a comment until 25th June. #JDS4



ICPDR @ICPDR_ORG · Jul 15
 🌿🌿🌿🌿 The Donau-Auen National Park is home and refuge to many endangered plants and animal species: over 800 kinds of vascular plants, 30 mammalian species, 8 reptilian & 13 amphibian species, 100 breeding bird species & 60 species of fish. #ICPDRMemberWeek @BMLRT_at



Passive sampling is a technique used to monitor an environment, whereby a medium is collected over time in a man-made device or biological organism.

The length of the Danube is globally ranked on place 30.



87 illicit drugs, drugs of abuse and their "transformation products" were detected in JDS4 samples.

ICPDR 588 followers 4mo

Wastewater management remains an important challenge for most of the countries in the #Danube River Basin. The #ICPDR has developed a recommendation paper communicating the challenges, needs and pr ...see more



ICPDR Publishes a Recommendation Paper on Wastewater Management | ICPDR - International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River icpdr.org · 2 min read

Our last 6 months on social media

Facebook  2,261 followers (+189), increase of 9%

Instagram  664 followers (+107), increase of 19%

LinkedIn  575 followers (+196), increase of 52%

Twitter  679 followers (+161). increase of 26%

Agriculture: The Future of Danube Farming

A Basin Built for Agriculture

Agriculture is an important component of the economy in many Danube countries since the geographical and climatic conditions in large parts of the Danube River Basin (DRB) are particularly favourable for agriculture. More than 50% of the territory within the basin is utilized for agricultural cultivation. Agronomic conditions are especially favourable for maize (corn), soybeans, sunflowers and other thermophilic crops besides the ordinary cereals. In the Western regions of the Danube River Basin, agriculture plays a key role as the local supplier of commodities that are further transformed into food (mainly milk and meat products, fruits and vegetables). In the Eastern regions, agriculture is one of the most important employers in rural regions.

Socio-economic challenges of agriculture

Although agriculture is substantially subsidized by the European Union (EU) and the national governments, the sector is facing socio-economic challenges. Despite the high share of land being cultivated, agriculture is not among the strongest economic sectors in the DRB. The share of the agricultural sector in the total national Gross Domestic Product of the EU Member States (MS) is not significant (less than 5%), whilst non-EU Member States have a share around and above 10%. In many regions the intensity of agricultural production is low due to the less favourable economic situation. In areas where land productivity is low, farmers are often facing difficulties, as agriculture in these regions may not be competitive at all. In many Danube countries, a larger number of farms tend to be smaller in size, working on a few hectares. Typically, these farms are highly dependent on EU or national subsi-

dies, and often such smaller subsistence farms have limited capacity to comply with strict and ambitious cultivation and environmental provisions. These regions are often threatened by land abandonment, poverty and social exclusion, and don't always have the benefit of integrated and powerful advisory systems, which form key instruments for reaching and supporting farmers elsewhere in Europe.

Environmental concerns

Water-related environmental concerns are also of great relevance to agriculture. Agriculture needs large amounts of clean water to satisfy the increasing demand for high quality food. However, intensive agriculture may cause quality and quantity problems of surface- and groundwater by pollution, over-abstraction and inappropriate land management. Additionally, nutrients have been released from agricultural areas of the DRB in significant amounts during recent decades, and nutrient pollution has even been identified as one of the significant water management issues in the DRB. Currently, about 20% of the surface water bodies are at risk of failing good ecological status/potential by 2021 due to nutrient pollution, for which agriculture is one of the main sources alongside other sources such as urban areas or municipal wastewater. The ultimate recipient water body of the Danube is the Black Sea which, being the world's most isolated sea, is highly sensitive to eutrophication. Back in the late 1980s, nutrient loads transported by the Danube to the Black Sea peaked, triggering a serious eutrophication problem in the north-western shelf.

Nevertheless, river loads entering the Black Sea have been significantly dropped in the last decades, as measures have been implemented for agriculture throughout the DRB. As of 2018, on more than 60% of the areas of the DRB, strict rules on manure and fertilizer application are being implemented. Out of the agricultural areas of the DRB, 70% are determined for direct financial support and 20% receive additional subsidies for implementing environmentally friendly measures (only in EU countries of the DRB). In the last two decades, more than €90 billion was spent to support farmers and finance effective environmental measures and methods (best management practices). Direct payments amounted to ca. €78 billion, and support of agri-environmental measures reached ca. €17 billion. Thanks to these measures implemented in agriculture, but also as consequence of low agricultural intensity in several Danube countries, the nutrient surpluses (gross balance) of the agricultural fields are rather low or even negative in many countries indicating a lack of nutrient inputs which is compensated by the soil stocks accumulated over the previous years.

However, the severe eutrophic conditions of the late 1980s may well arise again if wastewater treatment and agriculture are not managed sustainably in the catchment area. Moreover, nutrient emissions frequently represent unutilised losses of soil nutrient resources, which have to be supplied by external inputs in order to sustain the required production rates.

With regard to water quantity, both water scarcity and drought situations are emerging issues in the DRB and will likely become

more intense, longer and more frequent in the future. Serious drought periods hit the Danube region in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2012, 2015 and in the period of 2017-2020, affecting different water-dependent economic sectors, vegetation and the water resources. The estimated economic losses caused by the drought in 2017 for example, cost Danube countries more than €1 billion.

Making a Sustainable Future for Farming

To address these multi-dimensional challenges, agriculture and water management should be well aligned by coordinated strategies and joint actions to ensure the protection of water resources, the economic livelihood of the farmers and the production of high-quality food. However, at the regional scale of the DRB, a proper dialogue between the water and agricultural sector and coordinated policy tools have not been fully established yet. To tackle this shortcoming, Danube countries agreed in 2016 to begin a broad discussion process on water and agriculture, seeking the involvement of the agricultural sector throughout the process. The initiative was driven by the recognition that improving the socio-economic situation in the agricultural sector is a prerequisite for a successful implementation of agri-environmental policies. Water and agricultural policies should be designed and harmonised in a way that income losses for the farmers are minimised or compensated when implementing measures to protect water bodies. Policies should seek win-win solutions wherever possible. However, finding the way towards these objectives needs a paradigm change: policies should be shifted from the traditional, purely command-control type regulative enforcement to more balanced approaches, taking into account the perspective of farmers' economic benefits. This new direction should be based on open dialogue, mutual trust and

common understanding, which is expected to result in a willingness by both sectors to make certain compromises.

With this paradigm shift towards sustainable agriculture, the initiated dialogue set an ambitious objective of developing a sound guidance document on sustainable agriculture in order to support decoupling future agricultural development from both increasing nutrient pollution of surface and ground waters and prolonged water scarcity. Such an approach may contribute to achieving sustainable agriculture by balancing the economic, ecologic and social aspects of agriculture and rural development. The initiative is fully in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal, the current political momentum of aligning water and agricultural policies at the EU level and the stronger ambitions of the proposed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2020 regarding environmental protection and climate change adaptation.

Our New Guidance Document

To achieve its ambitious goal, our recent Guidance Paper recommends sound policy instruments, financial programs and cost-effective agricultural measures to protect water bodies for decision makers in the agri-environmental policy field. It offers Danube countries support for the preparation and implementation of their tailor-made national agri-environmental policies, CAP Strategic Plans and relevant strategies of the River Basin Management Plans in good synergy. The recommendations provide the Danube countries with a framework to adjust their national agri-environmental policies. Our recommendations give specific advice on how to implement existing legislation more efficiently (e.g., Nitrates Directive, cross-compliance/conditionality of the CAP) while also helping countries better identify, target and finance additional measures going beyond legal obligations. Thus, the guidance should act as a sturdy strategic policy framework into which the Danube

states are encouraged to integrate their individual national methods. It lays down the basis for designing cost-effective, targeted national measures according to national needs and conditions taking into account that no "one size fits all" standardisation could work in the DRB.

The primary focus of the guidance is sustainable nutrient management related to agriculture and rural land management. Nevertheless, Danube countries have recently declared that climate change effects, including water scarcity and drought, are to be considered as a Significant Water Management Issue in the DRB. Bearing in mind the strong linkage between the drought issue and agricultural water management, the scope of the guidance document has been extended to include the drought issue as well as nutrient pollution. Moreover, pesticide pollution related to agriculture is also an emerging issue to be tackled. Further editions can be expected to broaden the scope towards pesticides and other harmful substances.

The guidance document accompanied with a policy paper is available here:

[icpdr.org/main/
icpdr-publishes-
guidance-document-
and-policy-paper-
sustainable-agriculture](https://icpdr.org/main/icpdr-publishes-guidance-document-and-policy-paper-sustainable-agriculture)



Adam Kovacs is the Technical Expert for Pollution Control at the ICPDR Secretariat.

The Danube Declaration:

Every six years, the ICPDR holds a Ministerial Meeting to adopt its two management plans. One of the main features of these meetings is that a new and updated 'Danube Declaration' is also signed and adopted by those in attendance. This Declaration is the culmination of this vital meeting, bringing together 15 ministers from the ICPDR's member countries plus the European Union, to extend the objectives of the management plans, and add further political commitments to strengthen the ICPDR's goals for improving and maintaining the Danube River Basin.

While every Danube Declaration naturally highlights the significance of the ICPDR as a coordinating mechanism within the Danube River Basin for matters of transboundary water management, it also brings new issues, revises old approaches, and generally points the way forward for action.

Past Declarations

Held in Vienna on 13th December 2004, the first ICPDR Ministerial Meeting brought together the signatories of the Danube River Protection Convention to mark the 10th anniversary of its signing. While the meeting largely aimed to highlight successes achieved, the first Danube Declaration was also signed, realigning and reformulating aims for the future. The EU's Water Framework Directive was already the key driving force behind many new changes in the 2004 Declaration, including the drive to complete a co-ordinated Danube River Basin Management Plan by 2009.

The first declaration was a bold and brave step forward, with ambitious goals such as to "stop by 2015 at the latest, all discharges of untreated wastewater from towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants" and "to reverse the trend of the physical degradation of aquatic ecosystems by returning sections of the Danube and its tributaries to a more natural state". Reading it 17 years hence, the declaration is the work of a still-young commission. Four member countries – Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Slovenia – were only just entering the European Union in 2004, and deeper understandings of the Danubian region as a 'neighbourhood' connected by its waters, and precisely what this means, were still in development.

Fast forward to 2010, and the commission was already clearly growing closer and smarter, while Bulgaria and Romania had now joined the EU as member states. "The Danube waters are shared by us all and therefore we also share the responsibility,"

said ICPDR President Mitja Bricelj at the meeting in Vienna on 16th February 2010. "We meet to ensure that the resources of the Danube Basin are managed in an environmentally sustainable manner." The adoption at the meeting of the first Danube River Basin Management Plan put in place concrete measures due by 2015, aiming to further reduce organic and nutrient pollution, plus look at the construction of fish passes, reconnection of wetlands, and other renaturation measures, not to mention to introduce phosphate-free detergents in all markets amongst much else.

By the 3rd Ministerial Meeting held in Vienna in 2016, Croatia was also a member state of the EU, and the ICPDR's messaging around its goals was becoming slicker and smarter. The meeting launched the ICPDR's "three pillars" of action: a cleaner, healthier, and safer Danube River Basin. The meeting also saw the adoption of the first Danube Flood Risk Management Plan.

ICPDR President Peter J. Kalas underlined this landmark moment for the ICPDR at the meeting: "As a milestone act in its history, by adopting today two management strategies for the Danube river basin to guide its smart sustainable development during the next 6 years, 14 countries and the European Union expressed a joint commitment for their implementation until 2021 and set the example of tackling global challenges locally."

The most major step forward in 2016 was the consultation process behind the development of the plans. The ICPDR elaborated both with the use of a comprehensive set of public consultation measures, involving environmental NGOs and other key stakeholders, not to mention members of the Danube Public, directly into the process.

To Be Declared...

The next Ministerial Meeting is just around

the corner at time of writing. Due to take place in February 2022, the updated Danube Declaration can proudly take a moment to look back on 25 years of achievements. The shared waters of the Danube River Basin are being co-managed by tighter and better-informed transboundary legislation than ever before, counting amongst its overarching achievements thus far, huge improvements to the status of the Black Sea, massive steps in groundwater infrastructure throughout the basin, and a large number of aids for migrating fish amongst much else.

The victory lap must be a short one though, as the mood music throughout Europe is further focusing the attention of the continent onto climate protection, plus climate change adaptation and prevention. The ICPDR is already ahead of the game here, having added '**Effects of Climate Change**' to its priority list of SWMIs (Significant Water Management Issues) in 2019. (To be precise, the full title of the SWMI is "Effects of climate change (drought, water scarcity, extreme hydrological phenomena and other impacts)").

The Danube Declaration is preparing our shared river basin for the challenges ahead, envisaging a bold programme for the next – and ever-more essential – six-year period. For example, the Declaration lays out a vision for developing and implementing "sustainable adaptation measures to urgently enhance resilience of aquatic ecosystems to climate change impacts". It goes further too, aiming to support enhanced "cooperation and exchange of good practices on adaptation measures to climate change impacts". The Declaration is thus tooling up the Danube River Basin to play its part in a broader European project marking a shift towards bolder future measures throughout the continent at the forefront of a global movement.

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE



2004



2010

Ministers and representatives holding a giant Danube Basin puzzle at the Ministerial Meeting 2010 in Vienna



2016



EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED:

Flood Risk Management in the Danube River Basin and Beyond

Floods are natural phenomena. They shape natural landscapes, create habitats and support ecosystems. However, floods might become catastrophes when they interfere with human activity.

The severe flood event in central Europe in July 2021 again stressed our tremendous vulnerability against natural hazards. The high, quite frankly beyond belief, numbers of casualties and amount of damage seen particularly in Germany, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Luxembourg emphasize the imminent need to approach flood risk management in an integrated way. The awareness against residual risk by means of overtopping of existing flood protection schemes and the potential failure of dykes, dams, forecasting and early warning systems as well as past decisions in settlement development should give momentum to implement our integrated strategies and measures to avoid and reduce flood risk.

Adding to that, an uncertain future due to likely impacts of climate change on flood hazards pose an as-yet unsolved challenge in the framework of risk management. The flood events during the last two decades have increasingly highlighted that human behaviour – especially settlement development, infrastructure expansion, site development for industry and trade, sealing of land and the accompanying reduction of retention areas – have significantly increased flood risk. The whole risk cycle needs to be considered appropriately by strengthening the knowledge on hazard and vulnerability.

On basin-wide and administrative level, this process of better understanding risk and the coordination between relevant sectors is supported by the implementation of the EU Floods Directive. Based on a preliminary flood risk assessment and the preparation of flood hazard and risk maps, flood risk management plans are established. This implementation process supports the institutionalisation of integrating sectors beyond flood protection. Decisions within the context of spatial planning, building regulation, emergency management, agriculture, forestry, environment, nature conservation, awareness raising, information and participation can be crucial contributors to reducing flood risk.

Throughout the centuries, the Danube countries have suffered from many disastrous flood events. In response, the Action Programme for Sustainable Flood



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Prevention in the Danube River Basin was adopted at the ICPDR's Ministerial Meeting on 13th December 2004, marking a first step towards integrated risk management predating the implementation of the EU Floods Directive.

As a follow-up to this Action Programme, 17 sub-basin flood action plans were published by the ICPDR in 2009. They were based on 45 national planning documents and covered the entire basin. They provided the first ever comprehensive overview of actions to reduce flood risk in the whole Danube River Basin. The ICPDR also committed to implement the EU Floods Directive even though not all countries of the Danube Catchment are obliged to do so, as not all are EU Member States. This again shows the pioneering work that's already been done on catchment scale.

The 1st Danube Flood Risk Management Plan, according to the Floods Directive adopted in 2015, set the flood risk management priorities for the Danube River Basin until 2021. It represented a milestone in the ICPDR's work towards sustainable flood risk management addressing all aspects of flood risk management. It focused on prevention, protection and preparedness, including measures for achieving the established objectives and including calls for solidarity among all ICPDR Contracting Parties.

In 2021, the updated Danube Flood Risk Management Plan outlines the key flood risk management priorities for the Danube River Basin until 2027 and is a principal instrument for the coordination of the implementation of the EU Floods Directive. At the same time, this plan demonstrates the efforts made by the ICPDR in coordinating the application of the Floods Directive (FD) and of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), focusing on opportunities for improving efficiency and information exchange, and towards the achievement of common synergies and benefits regarding the environmental objectives of the WFD.

The updated DFRMP presents the strategic basin-wide level measures to prevent and reduce flood-based damage to human health, the environment, cultural heritage, and economic activity.

Special attention in the 2021 update is given to measures employing areas which have the potential to retain flood water, such as natural floodplains as well as the other areas enabling controlled flooding. When it comes to prioritisation, measures favoured were those sufficiently robust to the uncertainty in forecasting of climate change impacts. The major ICPDR platform for a joint implementation of the strategic level measures are transboundary projects.

Today, it is of the utmost importance to translate the strategic basin-wide level measures and the measures defined on country level to the regional and local level to raise awareness on all the options we have at hand to reduce flood risk.

We are well advanced in the development of integrated, anticipatory approaches having numerous options and measures to manage flood risk. However, totally unexpected events like the one in July 2021 demonstrate the urgency with which we can find ourselves facing sudden setbacks. Our deepest sympathy is with the victims and citizens affected by this extreme event.

Clemens Neuhold chairs the ICPDR's Flood Protection Expert Group and works at the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism.

FAST FASHION, DYING RIVERS?: A FILM SCREENING FROM THE ICPDR & UNIS

Ciné-ONU is a film event series by the United Nations, that screens movies tackling UN-related issues in 14 cities across Europe. After over seventeen months of online-only screenings, the series celebrated its return to in-person screenings on 20th September 2020 at Vienna's Top Kino. While this co-screening with the ICPDR had initially been planned to take place back in 2019 before the pandemic saw it postponed, the issue posed by the movie screened remains in any case an urgent cause for water managers the world over.

RIVERBLUE

Directed by David McIlvride and Roger Williams, and first released in 2017, picking up Best Documentary Feature at the Raindance Film Festival along the way, RiverBlue follows conservationist Mark Angelo as he explores the unintended consequences of the fast fashion industry on the world's precious waters. The film visits a variety of rivers contaminated by toxic emissions stemming from the fast fashion manufacturing process, with several of these water bodies no longer able to support river life at all, and actively endangering local residents in China, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia and beyond.

This isn't just your average advocacy doc though... What's special about RiverBlue is its focus on solutions. The final act of the film visits groundbreaking new manufacturers in Italy and Spain, finding ecologically friendly new ways of producing garments that don't destroy the environment. It's a call-to-action for conservationists and the fashion industry, not to mention a focused guide to the way forward – and a surprisingly moving one at that.



Can fashion save the planet?



RIVERBLUE

NARRATED BY JASON PRIESTLEY

PADDLE PRODUCTIONS INC. PRESENTS "RIVERBLUE"
DIRECTED BY DAVID McILVRIDE & ROGER WILLIAMS. CO-DIRECTED BY MARK ANGELO. PRODUCED BY LISA MAZZOTTA

riverbluethemovie.eco



Martin Nesirky:
UNIS Director

“The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River plays a crucial role in protecting waters in the Danube River Basin, including reducing pollution from settlements and industry and protecting the ecosystems. I thank Ivan Zavadsky, Executive Secretary of ICPDR, for bringing his knowledge and expertise into the discussion after the film screening of RiverBlue and for the kind and generous support to make this event possible.”



Lisa Tamina Panhuber:
Consumer Campaigner, Greenpeace Austria

“Greenpeace has been fighting for a toxic-free, safe and slower textile industry for years - this documentary shockingly illustrates why it is important to focus on this issue: The toxic chemicals used in the production of throw-away fashion are harming people and planet, the labor conditions are inhumane, the emissions are a major driver of the climate crisis and the waste that is generated in the production

process and after consumers discard clothing is polluting the environment.

The Greenpeace Detox campaign secured global commitments from 80 companies and suppliers, representing 15 % of the global textile market, to achieve zero discharges of hazardous chemicals in their supply chain manufacturing. This shows that change is possible, now governments have to make sure that the other 85 % of the market must follow suit. The EU has to set an overall objective of elimination of all hazardous substances, reduce the chemical footprint across the supply chain and require the disclosure of suppliers’ lists and their environmental performance.

At the same time, the big issue of overproduction and overconsumption has to be tackled immediately. For example, in Germany, a party top is used on average 1.7 times and is then discarded. It is estimated that 25% of the textiles produced remain unsold. This market failure has a catastrophic impact on our planet. A 2018 report found that apparel and footwear contributes to 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

In the face of the planetary climate and biodiversity crises, regulators must finally take responsibility for changing the way that fashion is made. We need policies

that restructure the textile industry to slow the flow and close the loop. Governments have to support businesses that are transforming from fashion retailers to fashion service providers (eg. repair, reuse, renting and sharing services).”



Stefanie Erhartmaier:
Co-Head of the Fashion Department, We Fair

“I think it is a very important movie that illuminates how the fast fashion industry is destroying, exploiting and sacrificing the environment. It is a call for change in terms of policy, industry and individual shopping habits. It dramatically shows that fighting for the conservation of our environment and the reduction of the usage of resources is as important as fighting for human rights and better working conditions.

The documentary points out that we all have to stand up for climate justice and take responsibility. We must become aware of the fact that our nature has limits and that the risk of continuing like this is carried by the most vulnerable and worst paid. What we need is more courage for transparency on the industry’s part to face the environmental challenges.”

Discussion

This Ciné-ONU Vienna film screening was organized as a cooperation between the United Nations Information Service (UNIS) in Vienna and the ICPDR, held during the



autumnal pandemic respite experienced in Austria during September 2021. Nonetheless operating with a mask mandate and reduced capacity, the screening was followed by a panel discussion moderated by UNIS Director, Martin Nesirky, speak-

ing with ICPDR Executive Secretary, Ivan Zavadsky, Co-head of the Fashion Department at sustainability NGO WeFair, Stefanie Erhartmaier, and Consumer Campaigner from Greenpeace Austria, Lisa Panhuber.

The trio held an enlightening debate, keeping up with the film’s spirit of solution-seeking. Additionally, a video message from Roberta Annan – a UN Environment Goodwill Ambassador and Supporter on creative Economy in Africa – was screened. The panel went into detail on the issues of ‘greenwashing’, the complexities faced by any effort as cross-sectoral as the fashion industry, and the key complexity of bringing consumers on board with conservation issues.

All panellists were in agreement that a lot more effort is necessary to adequately address fashion-related river pollution and

water(over)usage. The necessity of bringing public and governments alike on board with any efforts was also underlined. In this sense, the issue is a veritable microcosm



for the battle against climate change at large. A healthy planet needs healthy river, but a healthy population needs clothes too. As RiverBlue makes abundantly clear however, this problem isn’t only very possible to solve – the solution is already here.

© UNIS

A HIDDEN CORNER OF THE DANUBE



Amid the great many wonders this country has to offer, still few know that Albania is one of the 19 countries that share the most international river basin in the world. The Vermosh River basin has an area of 142 km² (86 km² lying within the borders of Albania) constituting less than 0.01% of the total Danube River Basin. Even so, for the first time this year, Danube Day was celebrated in Albania. A key activity took place, "Dialogue on trans-boundary rivers": a case study on Danube and Drin / Vermoshi Rivers. The aim is to transform this into an annual event, celebrating Albania's small-yet-beautiful, and wholly treasured corner of the Danube River Basin.

The village of Vermosh (from which the basin gets its name) lies in Albania's northernmost region and is one of the largest in the Alps. At an altitude of over 1,000 m a.s.l., Vermosh stands out for its natural richness boasting a variety of waterfalls, caves, flora, and fauna of rare biodiversity.

Archaeologists have also found Illyrian coins and ceramic fragments, copper and iron tools, animal fossils, and charcoal drawings from the Bronze Age, indicating early settlements in this area. Procopius of Caesarea (6th century A.D.) mentioned

a Byzantine castle called Clementine in his writings to be found in what today is the region of Kelmend.

Europe's highest flora density is found in the Kelmend region with approximately 3 species per square kilometre. This area is well known for the growth of medicinal plants, where over 30 species can be found – including blueberries, saleg, linden, balsam, raspberries, and many others. What's more, many animals also inhabit the two mountains surrounding the Vermosh valley. A host of animals can be found roaming the region, from brown bears, roe deer, wolves, pigs, wild goats, and many rare eagles and other bird species. The area additionally offers various opportunities for recreation, such as mountain trekking in the Marulla highlands, or hiking in the deep alpine valleys of Lëpusha or Cem, skiing in steep mountainsides, mountain biking, horseback riding or fishing in the natural small lakes of Vermosh.

In the second week of every August, "Logu i Bjeshkës" gets organized, a folk festival for the northern part of Albania with many visiting artists travelling from Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro. There's also a beauty contest featuring young women dressed in the traditional clothing of the region. A traditional event in the area since ancient

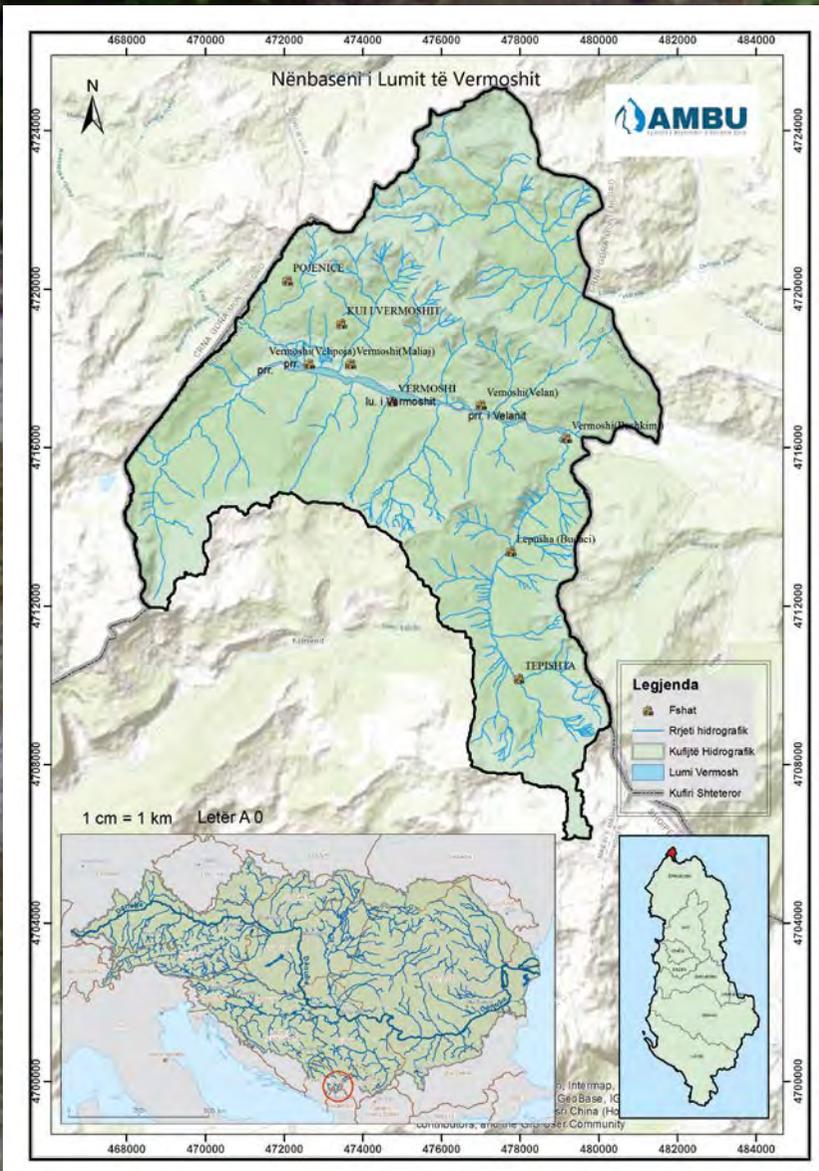
times, "Logu i Bjeshkës" has now become the most important cultural festival in the entire Kelmend region, gathering thousands of people each year. This celebration is usually combined with a local products fair.

Flowing through the village is the Vermosh River. Interestingly, it is the only river in Albania that does not discharge into the Adriatic Sea, and unlike other rivers that flow from East to West, it rather flows from West to East. Along with its two tributaries – the Lëpushë and the Greben, both part of the Drina river basin – it flows into the Danube River. The unique habitat is represented by perennial herbaceous plants, which grow along the watercourse, mainly *Alnus incana*, *Rhamnus alpinus*, *Aruncus dioicus*, *Carex pallescens*, *Rhamnus alpinus*, *Equisetum* spp., *Epilobium* spp., *Calamagrostis helix*, and several others. The river has a rich flow throughout the year, especially in the spring season, and as a result of the influence of climatic-pedological factors, the well-known beech forests of Vermosh have been formed.

Alba Zhori is a biologist and specialist in organic farming and water resources management at the Water Resources Management Agency in Albania. Visit: www.ambu.gov.al



Vermosh also has its own distinctive culinary and food traditions. The area is known for the peculiar quality of its dairy products and delicious potatoes. A unique potato variety grows in the Albanian Alps, which has already been included in the list of endangered species. The "yellow potato of Vermosh" has been cultivated since the '70s of the last century, and it was first introduced as the 'Adretta' variety, originally from Germany. People living in this area have preserved traditional farming practices over centuries, thereby protecting local native plants and breeds which provide for their livelihoods. Growing native species and looking after animals unique to this region has helped mitigate the negative impacts of agriculture on biodiversity and restore and preserve local ecosystems. ◀



Vermosh is distinguished for its astonishing panorama of pristine nature. The flora in this area consists mainly of beech wood and conifers. Another element is the traditional alpine-style architecture, which seems to be preserved with fanaticism, the legend of 'bjeshke' (the hills) that is inherited in generations. ▼



Foldout to find out about Danube Day 2021
 Danubian countries marked the 18th Danube Day: a superb celebration of the many ways that rivers enrich our lives.

DANUBE DAY 2021: DISCOVER DANUBE!

The ICPDR would like to thank everyone involved in Danube Day 2021.

Read about events and organisers at www.danubeday.org.

On the 29th June each year, the 14 countries of the Danube River Basin jointly celebrate one of Europe's greatest river systems, along with the rich diversity of people and wildlife that rely on it. In 2021, a multitude of events took place across the Basin in the weeks either side of Danube Day.

Due to the various continuing restrictions on public gatherings throughout the Danube River Basin as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, 2021's Danube Day celebrations on and around 29th June took place both online and offline, to ensure participation could take place without compromising safety.



BULGARIA

From 25th – 30th June 2021, a Danube Day Festival took place around the scenic towns of Nikopol and Baykal on the banks of the Danube in Northern Bulgaria. The festival included interactive educational models, concerts, competitions, exhibitions (held in accordance with pandemic safety regulations). Clean up events were also held up and down the Danube and its tributaries throughout Bulgaria.



SERBIA

SLOVENIA

One Danube Day 2021 action took place in Slovenia around the Kola River, titled: "When water from Kolpa will reach the Danube: Continuing with action Marking of high water level". The main purpose of this action was to encourage critical judgment of one's own and others' actions while raising the individual's sense of responsibility in case of floods.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Czech activities for Danube Day 2021 remained online this year, coinciding with their launch of communications of the results of the Fourth Joint Danube Survey (JDS4). Additionally, the Czech Ministry of Environment published a (Czech language) article about both JDS4 and Danube Day 2021.

AUSTRIA

Austria created their own dedicated Danube Day website, including an online game app for kids offering a chance to learn about the Danube, and become a "Danube detective". Visit: www.danubeday.org. Additionally, a special exhibition was on display in Vienna throughout Summer 2021 on the Danube Island ("Donauinsel") in the city, receiving over 300 visitors, and featuring 12 display boards with interesting facts about the Danube, a kids' dice-game, a "hot wire" skill game, and a fishing game!

SERBIA

The Serbian Danube Day team created a platform on their website (srbijavode.rs), which included educational short films about the sights of the Danube River, and a quiz for participants to take to test their Danube knowledge. Additionally, PWMC "Srbijavode" created a video about Roman heritage on the banks of the Danube. Sadly however, the annual Vode Vojvodine Regatta was once again postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Several Danubian municipalities in Serbia also organized local events, including clean up events in Apatin, an ecological music festival in Bački Monoštor, a family-focused gathering in Banoštor, a creative arts workshop in Bačka Palanka, and an arts exhibition in Smederevo.

GERMANY

A stakeholder and river expert meeting at the German-Austrian border was organized in Jochenstein. Participants from both countries active in water administration, nature conservation, hydropower and experts for biodiversity and river restoration, expressed their commitment to improving nature in the Danube ecological corridor. The blue ribbon of the Danube symbolizes the connection along the river across the borders. A few days prior, an ecumenical action circle of Catholics and Protestants for 'A Flowing Danube' met at the Danube River crossing in Niederalteich, near to Deggendorf (a town noted for its old monastery). The participants celebrated 25 years of commitment for the Danube with music, singing and praying for the river and for a sustainable use of nature.

HUNGARY



SLOVAKIA



DANUBE DAY

AUSTRIA



MOLDOVA



ROMANIA

The Romanian Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests published a press release in the local and national media to promote the importance of the Danube River in our lives and to the aquatic ecosystem. Furthermore, the Banat Water Basin Administration participated in a large cleaning water action in Orșova, on the Gulf of Cerna, collecting over 110 bags in 5 hours representing 900kg of waste. The Crisuri Water Basin Administration also organized several different activities dedicated to Danube Day 2021: in Beius County the children from the Aquarium Club participated in an ecological workshop dedicated to the little ecologists, and hosted a painting exhibition. Several more local municipal events also took place, including a celebration at the Natural Science Museum in Galati, clean-up efforts in Tulcea, a fair for schoolchildren in Braila, and an event in Calarasi City Hall.

MOLDOVA

On the event of Danube Day 2021, a public conference on Danube activities was held in Moldova, taking place in the Lower Prut region with remote hybrid connections in Chisinau and elsewhere. Some 200 people were in attendance to discuss various aspects of Danube water conservation in Moldova.

SLOVAKIA

On 9th July, a cross-border excursion into Donau Auen was an opportunity for Slovaks to learn more about the revitalisation of watercourses in the context of WFD implementation in Austria. An online webinar on 28th June ("Danube – our and European River") also took place, and a photo competition was held by the Slovak University of Technology (STU) - the happy winners were awarded coveted Danube Day bags!



ROMANIA



UKRAINE

UKRAINE

On 26th June, in Kvasovo village, Zakarpattya Oblast, at the Borzhava River (a tributary of the Tisza River), specialists of the Tisza Basin authority and Oblast department of the emergencies in the Oblast held an event where they removed litter from a river net, specially-designed to catch floating litter in the water. The action included a joint cleanup of the Borzhava floodplain, along with parallel cleanups in the Prut and Siret basins and at the Danube Delta, plus some online video reports. Additionally, a quiz for kids, "Story of your river", took place at the school in Kvasovo. Kids were able to draw their answers to various questions on a wall placard.

HUNGARY

An online event organised via www.dunanap.hu reached over 12,000 people, and included an online contest wherein partners prepared short presentations on their activities and quizzes with 5 questions each. Additionally, an award ceremony also took place for those who won a prize during the online contest, and some 80 - 90 participants were invited to Esztergom for an award ceremony held at the Duna Múzeum, including some pre-prepared games for children. The event closed with a water and environment related puppet-show presented by "Délibáb Társulat".





**ICPDR – International Commission
for the Protection of the Danube River**

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