



## International Conference on the Conservation and Sustainable Development of the Danube Delta

27-28 February 2006, Odessa, Ukraine



### Conference Conclusions

#### “Vision for the conservation and sustainable development of the Danube Delta”

This international conference brought together experts of the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine, governmental and non-governmental representatives, and international governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned by the Danube Delta<sup>1</sup>, to exchange views and to work towards a shared vision for transboundary socio-economic development of this area in its European context.

The Danube Delta forms a culturally and geographically unique region, situated at a strategic place in Europe. The natural Danube floodplain and delta area, together with the floodplains of the lower Siret and Prut rivers entering the Danube downstream of Braila, the lakes north of the Chilia Danube branch, and the coastal lagoons south of the St. George Danube branch, support unique rich biodiversity and outstanding landscapes of global interest. Those characteristics represent an irreplaceable asset for improving the welfare of the local populations living in this region.

To provide long-term benefits however, regional development has to be planned and undertaken at a functional scale and in a sustainable way, to take into account existing ecological limitations and sensitivities, and be based on a common vision and cooperation among the three countries sharing the area: the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine.

The conference aimed to generate an overall shared vision under which individual project decisions could be taken. It complements ongoing legal mechanisms and obligations that exist related to public participation and environmental impact assessment of individual projects and activities.

In the plenary sessions and the four simultaneous workshops, conference participants raised the following issues:

- **State of the Danube Delta:**
  - The ecological values of the Delta still exist but they are under increasing pressure from internal and external human sources.
  - The Danube Delta is a unique ecosystem requiring an integrated systemic approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Namely ICPDR, UNESCO, UNDP-GEF DRP, Ramsar Wetland Convention, European Commission, Council of Europe, WWF DCP, and Wetlands International.

- Lessons should be learned from past mistakes in the management of the Danube Delta so that they are not repeated.

- **Mechanisms for co-operation:**

There is need for:

- strong political will;
- full implementation of existing legal instruments;
- scientific and technical co-operation at the Delta level;
- a stable socio-economic context in the Delta;
- exchange of information, data and methodologies;
- long-term harmonised monitoring.

- **Vision for the conservation and sustainable development of the Danube Delta:**

- to improve local livelihoods through viable alternative economies, while maintaining, restoring and promoting the natural and cultural values and processes of the Delta;
- to engage in practical co-operation and facilitate cross-border exchanges;
- to develop thematic visions for sustainable sectoral activities such as tourism, fisheries, agriculture, transport, navigation and energy.

- **How to achieve the vision:**

- to use fully existing institutional mechanisms and tools under current conventions and programmes;
- to prepare and implement a Master Plan for the whole of the Danube Delta;
- to strengthen and extend the Biosphere Reserve approach to cover the whole of the Danube Delta;
- to secure long-term stable funding for the activities required.

***The Conference participants have agreed to:***

1. Support the establishment of an expert group under the leadership of the ICPDR to prepare and implement a river basin management plan for the Danube Delta sub-basin based upon the approach and methodologies of the EU Water Framework Directive.

This group would also deal with the following issues:

- coordinating with existing mechanisms to reduce upstream pollution from other Danubian countries;
  - ensuring public access to information on water management and appropriate public participation mechanisms;
  - developing a common mechanism for monitoring of water quality, availability, distribution, and the impact of human activities thereon.
2. Elaborate and implement a single methodology for assessing the environmental impact in a transboundary context of projects planned and carried out in the Danube Delta based, on the ESPOO Convention and other appropriate methodologies.
3. Request the participating countries to fully utilize existing legal and institutional tools for strengthening cooperation in the field of conservation and sustainable development of the cultural, natural and landscape heritage in the Danube Delta. For this, participants recommended:
- to finalize the ratification process for the 2000 Trilateral Agreement “between the Ministry of Environment and Territorial Planning of the Republic of Moldova, the Ministry of Water, Forests and Environmental Protection of Romania and the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources of Ukraine on the cooperation in the zone of the Danube Delta and the Lower River Prut nature-protected areas”<sup>2</sup>, and continue the work of the Joint Commission established under this agreement;
  - to promote the establishment of a trilateral transboundary biosphere reserve under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme. Such a biosphere reserve could serve to concretely implement the above agreement and the management requirements of the existing Ramsar sites.

The necessary steps include:

- i) strengthening of the Dunaisky Biosphere Reserve in Ukraine to cover activities promoting sustainable development;
- ii) consolidating the existing Bilateral Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (TBR) in Romania and Ukraine;

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<sup>2</sup> Signed in June 2000 and deposited with the Council of Europe.



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- iii) encouraging the Moldovan authorities to establish a biosphere reserve in the Lower Prut River and proposing adding it to the Bilateral TBR;
- iv) designing an appropriate coordination mechanism for the whole trilateral TBR.

***The Conference underlined*** the need for human activities to be based on the Ecosystem Approach<sup>3</sup> as adopted by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. Trilateral activities in the Danube Delta should be based on the Ecosystem Approach, which indicates how and where policy and management interventions and decision-making can be made to ensure long term maintenance of biodiversity as well as secure human wellbeing and alleviating poverty.

Sustainable development in the Danube Delta should focus on implementing this Ecosystem Approach with special attention to:

- securing drinking water supply and waste water treatment for human settlements;
- mitigating the impacts of floods on human settlements ;
- developing communications networks and public infrastructure;
- developing alternative sustainable economic activities;
- ensuring natural habitat and rural landscape conservation and restoration;
- securing renewable energy sources for local use.

### **Follow up measures**

The Conference participants called upon the international organizations to be actively involved to support the implementation of the activities outlined above.

In order to monitor progress in achieving this vision it was agreed that a follow up meeting involving a small number of experts from each country (both governmental and non-governmental) and the international organizations would be held before the end of the year. Romania proposed to host a meeting of the Joint Commission, as established by the 2000 Trilateral Agreement, which could be used for this purpose.

The participants expressed their appreciation to the organizers of the conference, international organizations, delegations from the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine for their active involvement in discussions on the conservation of sustainable development of the Danube Delta and their readiness to implement the measures mentioned above.

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<sup>3</sup> The Danube Delta ecosystem being a complex of living communities (including human communities) and non-living ecosystem components interacting (through ecological processes) as a functional unit which provides a variety of benefits to people (ecosystem services) for human well-being and poverty reduction.