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Media Briefing

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About the Danube Strategy

The EU Danube Strategy aims to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in a vast region that stretches from Germany to the Black Sea, covering a fifth of the EU area and is home to 100 million people. http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/index_en.htm

About the Danube Region

The Danube river basin, shared by 19 countries, contains many of Europe's greatest natural treasures providing a host of valuable ecosystem goods and services. Danube floodplains provide benefits from water purification to fishing and recreation worth as much as €500 per hectare per year (assets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_restoration_potential_danube.pdf). The river system provides drinking water for 20 million inhabitants. Dense forests, including Europe's greatest remaining stands of virgin forests, store carbon with total value of about 30 million Euro per year and are of tremendous importance for maintaining the water balance and counteracting soil erosion.

About existing navigation projects to remove the bottlenecks

Germany: Straubing-Vilshofen

The last free-flowing section of the Danube in Germany is planned to be regulated to improve navigation. These river works are expected to have serious impacts on habitats, fauna, and flood control. Alternative projects that include dams could totally destroy the alluvial forest and river and floodplain dynamics. Many studies have been done on this stretch because of the strong opposition to regulation of this section. The latest study, co-funded by EU, started in 2010. A monitoring group of experts from the transport and environmental sectors has been established but the issues of transparency remain of concern.

More information: http://assets.panda.org/downloads/germany_factsheet_v18jan2010.pdf

Austria: East of Vienna

One of the two free-flowing sections of the river in Austria is between Vienna and the border with Slovakia. The largest connected floodplain forest on the upper Danube is located here. Due to involvement of ecological scientists in the project planning, ecological measures were included in the project design such as riverbank restoration, waterway linkages, and sidearm re-connection. However, not all elements of the project design are to be applauded. In particular the method foreseen to stabilise the river bed is controversial and poses ecological risks.

More information: http://assets.panda.org/downloads/austria_factsheet_v18jan2010.pdf

Hungary: The entire Hungarian stretch of the Danube

The entire Hungarian stretch of the Danube between Palkovicovo and Mohács is designated as a 379 km long bottleneck. The whole section is a Natura 2000 site (except in the proximity of Budapest). Unique side branch systems, oxbows, marshes, and large floodplain forests enrich the natural value of this stretch. Previous flood protection and river regulation interventions have caused riverbed deepening in the Hungarian stretch. Further river engineering works would aggravate this negative process. This could modify the groundwater regime, accelerate aging and



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drying of the connected wetlands and lands, and lead to the loss of habitats and fish spawning sites. Over 1 million Euros have been granted to Hungary from the EU to investigate the status of the Danube in terms of navigation and to elaborate alternatives that would ensure a 2.7 m navigation depth for almost the whole year.

More information: http://assets.panda.org/downloads/hungary_factsheet_18_jan_2010.pdf

Bulgaria/Romania

This section of the Danube, which totals 488 river-km, including the entire lower Danube, is one of the most natural stretches of the river. It is characterised by a wide riverbed and countless islands. Navigation projects threaten the entire natural section. The project involves surveying activities and construction of river groynes, cutting off the side arms for the purpose of regulating water flows, enforcement of the riverbank and dredging. EU funds have been granted for the preparation of a feasibility study and plans. Additional EU funds will be sought for implementation of the works.

More information: http://assets.panda.org/downloads/ispa2_factsheet_v18jan2010.pdf

Romania: Calarasi-Braila

This section of the Danube contains numerous islands within a unique ecosystem that will be seriously affected by the planned project. The works will affect 200 km of the most important reproductive areas for migratory sturgeon, and could negatively impact the feeding areas of starlets and other fish species. The project will also lead to contradicting use of EU funds since works under this project will have an impact on the natural dynamics of some of the most important remaining islands on the Lower Danube, which are subject to an on-going EU-LIFE project protecting the unique ecosystem of these islands. The project has received the environmental permit from the Romanian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, however the EU funds for co-financing of the project have a number of conditions the Government needs to fulfil but it is currently not clear whether this will happen.

More information: http://assets.panda.org/downloads/ispa1_factsheet_v18jan2010.pdf