

Danube – Black Sea Deep Navigation Channel (“Bystroye Canal”)

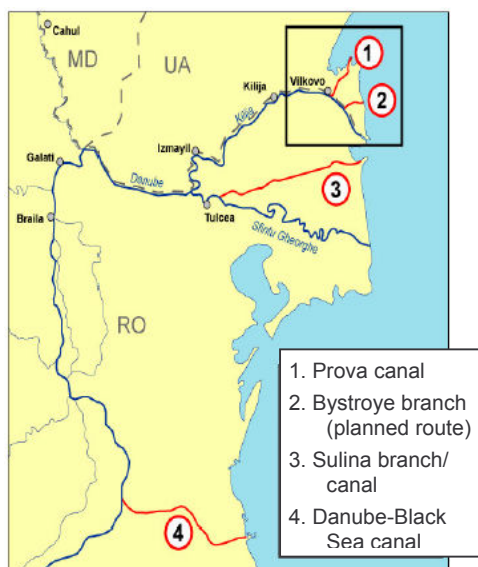
Location: Ukrainian part of the Danube Delta (see Route 2 on the map to the right)

Budget: Initially announced at 144.9 million UAH (24 million EUR), including Phase 1 costs of 35.6 million UAH (6 million EUR). As construction started, it was announced that Phase 1 would cost 78.6 mill UAH (13.1 mill EUR).

Final Beneficiary: Ukrainian Ministry of Transport and Delta Lotsman (UA)

WWF Recommendations

- WWF recognizes the need for **holistic, transboundary management** of the entire Danube Delta.
- WWF supports the idea of a socially and economically-justifiable waterway to the Black Sea as long as **no negative transboundary environmental impacts** and **no impacts on the biosphere reserve** will occur. This must be proven.
- **Feasible alternatives** to the Bystroye canal, which are less damaging to the environment, must be considered.
- Any environmental assessment processes carried out must comply with international standards, and be developed through a **transparent and participative public process**.



Overview

The government of Ukraine has chosen to construct a canal to the Black Sea via the Bystroye arm that will cut through the heart of the Ukrainian Danube Delta Biosphere reserve.

Up to eight alternatives have been suggested for the route of the canal, including two investigated by a special Ramsar and UNESCO mission to the Delta in 2003. The Ukrainian government proposes to use the canal to reignite the shipping industry in the Delta as a solution to the unemployment problems in the closed Delta ports. Presently, ships have access through the Delta along the Sulina Canal in Romania. The government of Ukraine claims that the use of this route costs them billions of dollars per year in fees.

In September 2005, the Ukraine formally submitted a request to the EC to consider the Bystroye Canal project

as a priority under the TEN-T programme. This decision has not been finalised yet.

Impact & Conflict

The construction of the Bystroye canal endangers biodiversity conservation of the Danube Delta.

The action by the Ukrainian Government demonstrates a serious lack of commitment to International Conventions that the Ukraine is signatory to, breaks international laws, and has shown that the Ukrainian government is prepared to go back on promises made to protect the Danube Delta (e.g. Bern, Aarhus, Espoo, Bonn, RAMSAR, Bucharest Conventions).

This has caused a number of international bodies to start a dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities in order to find the best possible solution for the sustainable development of the Delta.

Timeline

1990: UNESCO designates the Romanian part of the Danube Delta as a **Biosphere Reserve**. The Ukrainian part receives the same status in 1998.

23 November 1995: Ukraine puts the Danube Delta on the **Ramsar List** as a wetland of international importance

12 May 2004: The **Ukrainian government officially launches the construction** of the Bystroye Canal, which runs through the heart of the Ukrainian Biosphere Reserve, although other alternative routes for the canal were proposed.

24 August 2004: the Ukrainian President launches Phase 1 of **canal construction**; in Phase 2 the canal should be deepened so that seagoing vessels can also pass through.

August 2004: The **European Commission** (EC) requests that Ukraine halt the project.

August 2004: The **International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River** (ICPDR) stresses their concern on the environmental impacts of the canal's construction, and calls upon the Ukraine to stop further construction.

17 November 2004: The **EC Directorate General of Environment** sends an expert group to the Ukrainian part of the Danube Delta to investigate the project.

December 2004: The Conference of the Parties (COP) of the **Berne Convention** adopts a resolution against construction of the canal and calls upon the Ukraine to comply with the requirements of the Convention.

27 May 2005: Member parties of the **Aarhus Convention** agree on political sanctions against the Ukraine, stating that construction of the canal violates the most important points of the Convention.

June 2005: **A common Working Group** is established after negotiations between the Romanian and Ukrainian governments. This aim of this group is to assess the transboundary effects of the canal.

7 June 2005: The Ukrainian Minister of Environment Pavel Ignatenko announces **the temporary halt of the canal's construction** until environmental impacts are clarified.

12 February 2006: The public consultation period to comment on the EIA for the second phase ends. So far, all indicators show that **construction work will start again**, probably within the next days.

Current status

Following Phase 1, bigger, sea-going ships starting using the canal. However, the canal has silted up past its previous depth, and is therefore unusable. Dredging works now continue to complete Phase 1; the Ukrainian government has a budget for this.

The design for Phase 2 has been presented, and is presently under the scrutiny of Ukrainian Ministry of Environment. Phase 2 is planned to begin in Spring 2006. The start of Phase 2 is awaiting decision by the Ukrainian Ministry of Environment with regards to ecological expertise (EIA).

A trilateral conference will be held at the end of February 2006 in Odessa to launch a holistic transboundary vision for the Danube Delta. In addition to the governments of the Ukraine, Romania and Moldova, this conference is supported by the UNEP, Ramsar Convention, ICPDR, UNESCO and WWF.

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