



Looking back – the Danube Campaign 2007



WWF staff talking to Austrian musician Hubert von Goisern about his concert tour on the Danube River and the Danube Campaign.

The year 2007 draws to a close – and with it the first 6 months of the Danube Campaign. WWF, Bund Naturschutz and other partners launched the campaign to save the Danube simultaneously with the start of the [Linz-EuropaTour](#), a musical journey along the Danube by Austrian musician Hubert von Goisern.

The campaign team and local partners joined many of the tour's concerts over the summer in order to inform the audience about the Danube and the threats it faces, to answer questions and to collect signatures for the [Save the Danube petition](#).

A big thank you goes to Hubert von Goisern and his fantastic team for their sensational music project, which helped us attract public interest and to collect more than **35,000 signatures, and counting, for the protection of the Danube** from Germany to Ukraine, and beyond.

A very big **thank you** also goes to all those of you who have supported our efforts to protect the magnificent Danube as a living river. You have given us the strength through the summer and especially this autumn and winter to stand up to powerful lobbies seeking to dredge, dyke and dam the Danube, turning the living river into little more than a shipping canal.

The opposition we have faced has been daunting – but we have made a difference. Read on for results of this work further below.

Summer Danube tour

The time as Hubert von Goisern's tour partner was an extraordinary and unforgettable experience. At each of the 23 concerts, van Goisern, his band and guest artists from across the Danube basin impressively showed how music links people, even across linguistic and political borders.



Danube supporter next to the Danube Campaign's information stand in Passau/ Germany.

The Danube Campaign team enjoyed the atmosphere every time anew. It has been a great time, with many stories to tell – like the „stormy” first concert in Vienna. Thunderstorm and hail postponed the concert for two days, which was no drawback when it comes to good vibes. It was exciting to see the [campaign video](#) on the huge LED-screens of the tour boat for the first time.



Tour boat showing the Danube Campaign movie on the LED-screens in Vienna/Austria.



Policemen signing the Danube Campaign petition in Braila /Romania.

In **Germany**, WWF's Bavarian partners, Bund Naturschutz and Landesbund für Vogelschutz, collected over 3,000 signatures – 30% of the concert's visitors. Not bad!

In **Romania**, even policemen signed their names to our petition. The police were less supportive of the campaign in **Ukraine**, where the local authorities stopped WWF from setting up a stand and informing concert goers of the campaign.



Danube Campaign members dancing in the rain in Budapest.

The disappointments in Ukraine in Izmael and Vilkovo were quickly forgotten thanks to further concerts, like that in **Budapest**, where not even the torrential rain, which started exactly with the last song, could wash away the high spirits of the concert evening. People just kept on dancing in the rain.

Along the way, WWF and partners gave tours to Hubert von Goisern, his band and camera crew of the spectacular wetland areas of Kopacki Rit in Croatia and the Danube Delta in Ukraine.



Hubert von Goisern chatting with the guard from the Croatian nature park Kopacki rit.

In short, it was an exciting summer on the Danube. But even as Hubert von Goisern's concert ship was being mothballed for the winter, developments on the Danube's future were moving quickly ahead.

Danube symposium

In September, top representatives of transport and infrastructure sector from different Danube countries met at the [Danube Symposium in Ybbs/Austria](#) to discuss how to make the Danube a "water motorway". WWF and partners (Bund Naturschutz/Bavaria, Virus/Austria) were on the ground to call attention to the unbalanced approach.



Dialogue on Danube navigation

One focus of attention was the [dialogue process](#) on the future of shipping on the Danube. Organised by the [International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River](#), the Danube Commission and the International Sava Commission, the dialogue brought together representatives of the European Commission, Danube governments, navigation lobbies and a small group of conservationists including WWF.

Outside the Danube Symposium in Ybbs, WWF freshwater expert Dr. Christine Bratrich talked with Austrian Chancellor Gusenbauer regarding the serious threats to the river from current plans for promoting shipping.

Hard negotiation, in which environmental advocates were far outnumbered by the navigation lobby, led to an agreed [vision for the future of navigation on the Danube](#) that could be acceptable to both sides. A number of ongoing cases should soon reveal whether agreed principles on paper are taken seriously and put into actual practice.

Danube sturgeon hanging by a thread

One important test will be implementation of a [navigation project on the Danube between the towns of Calarasi and Braila in Romania](#) to be funded through the EU's ISPA fund.



The navigation project area in Romania - here the Danube splits into several arms and contains numerous islands.

At the beginning of the dialogue process the Romanian government presented this project as "good practice" in navigation development. WWF and others begged to differ, pointing to the fact that the planned construction would unnecessarily cut off migration routes for 90% of Danube sturgeon and destroy highly valuable nature areas. Far from good practice, the project would set the worst precedent both for navigation as well as other projects funded by EU tax payers, as it goes against EU legislation including the

Water Framework and Habitats Directives, while the Environmental Impact Assessment undertaken for the project is far below accepted standards.

The European Commission reacted to the concerns of WWF and other experts and has challenged the environmental sustainability of the project. Although construction work was supposed to start in early 2008, the European Commission and the Romanian Ministry of Transport have agreed on a six month period to discuss the project's design and its impact on the environment and possibly revise it. Final decisions are expected to be made in January 2008. So keep your fingers crossed!

Meanwhile, a second project to be funded through the EU's ISPA programme is moving forward not far away on the Lower Danube between [Romania and Bulgaria](#). A feasibility study has already been awarded for a project to improve navigation, including areas around Belene and Batin Islands that are especially valuable for birds and other species. WWF will closely monitor the further proceedings and participate in the public consultation process.



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Many islands, like this, in the Bulgarian/Romanian section of the Danube will be affected by the planned river regulation.

Hungarian Danube in the balance

Another cliffhanger for the future of the [Danube is in Hungary](#), where the government is now considering alternatives for improving conditions for navigation on the 380 km stretch of the Hungarian Danube. While neither of the options that are being considered include construction of dams – a good thing from our perspective – they both still focus too much on fitting the river to the ships rather than pursuing other less destructive, and less expensive, alternatives.



© WWF Hungary
Natural landscapes, such as this one, are threatened by navigation infrastructure.

The Hungarian government's decision is expected to come in January 2008. WWF and partners are concerned by the government's plans to move forward more or less in parallel with project preparation as well as both strategic and environmental impact assessment – according to EU and Hungarian law, plans must be assessed before moving on to detailed project development and evaluation. Construction is currently expected to begin by 2010.

Wien-Bratislava moving forward

Moving furthest ahead toward implementation are plans for the Danube section between [Wien and Bratislava](#) flowing through the Danube Floodplain National Park. The Environmental Impact Assessment for the project has been published and is open for consultation until the end of January 2008.



© WWF Austria
Danube Floodplain National Park, Austria

The project to a certain extent represents a compromise between the interests of shipping and the environment, with deepening of the river channel as well as directing water to the floodplains of the national park, which have been slowly drying out. WWF and others however are concerned about the precedent that the project will set for river regulation further downstream



In the meantime, plans to build dams on the last free-flowing section of the Danube in Germany between [Straubing and Vilshofen](#) suffered a setback in the last months. German Federal Ministers for Transport and Environment have emphasized that only improvement of navigation through river regulation – without construction of dams – is an option.

Bystroye Canal stopped for now

The last free-flowing section of the Danube in Germany is planned to be regulated.

There have also been developments related to the future of the Danube outside the EU in Ukraine. Here a step forward has finally been made in longstanding efforts to stop construction of the so-called [Bystroye Canal](#) through the core area of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve in Ukraine, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



The Danube Delta: Europe's last intact river delta and home for a multitude of species, like the Great White Pelican.

In November, however, the Ukrainian Supreme Court ruled to annul decisions of all lower commercial courts that had permitted removal of an area of territory from the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve in order to facilitate construction of the canal. The court's decision has not saved the day, but does buy some time for the Danube Delta. [Read more](#)

So, thank you again for the amazing time this summer and for your support. We hope you will be on board next year too, when the second part of the Danube Campaign's musical program starts in June 2008. Hubert von Goisern's musical journey goes west, traveling up the Danube and Rhine all the way to Rotterdam.

WWF, Bund Naturschutz and other partners of the Danube Campaign will once again be along for the ride, and we hope that you will join us as well.