

Information document

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“Bystroye Canal” / Danube-Black Sea Deep Navigation Channel

Overview: In 2004, the Ukrainian government officially launched construction of a canal in the Danube Delta named the Danube-Black Sea Deep Navigation Channel, or the so-called “Bystroye canal”. Aimed at boosting the economy in the region, the project has raised a lot of concern among stakeholders and environmental international organisations due to its likely negative environmental impacts on the unique species and habitats of the Delta, which is protected under the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme.

Project location: The canal is constructed along the Bystroye arm of the Danube (former Novo Stambulskoye), which runs through the heart of the Ukrainian part of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve. The Delta, where the Danube River empties into the Black Sea, is shared by Ukraine and Romania. Bystroye, a natural arm of the Danube, starts 7 km downstream of the city of Vilково and has a total length of about 3.3 km.

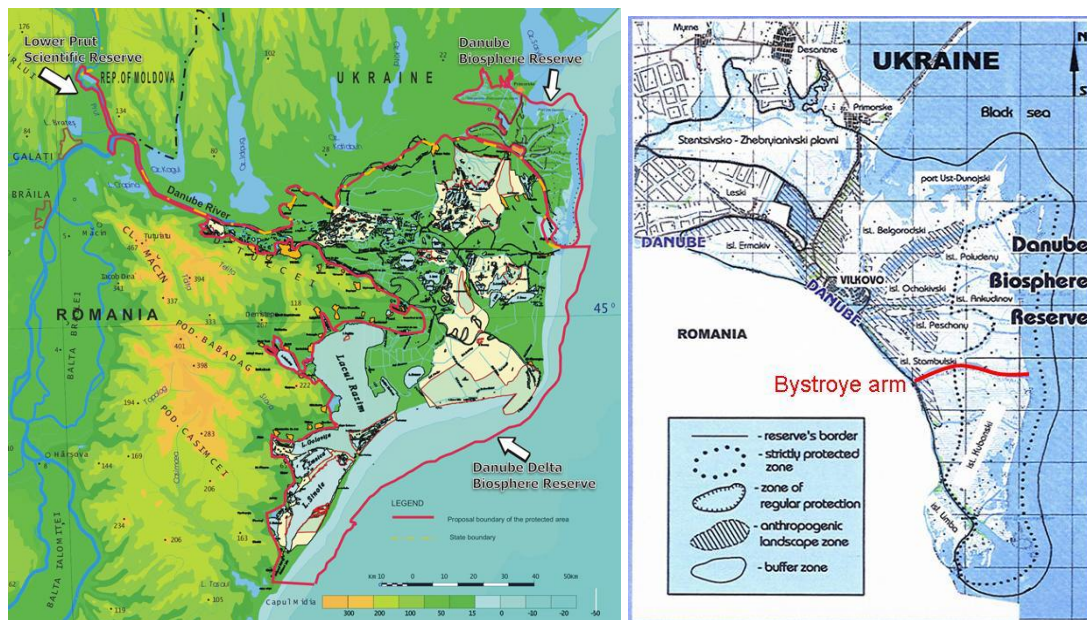


Figure 1: Map of entire Danube Delta with biosphere reserve borders (left), and the Ukrainian part of the Danube Delta (right).

Implementing organisations: The final beneficiaries of the canal project are the [Ukrainian Ministry of Transport and Communications](#) and the [State Enterprise Delta Pilot](#) (“Delta Lotsman”).

Project justification: The Ukrainian government has justified construction of the canal claiming that it is of geo-strategic importance to the country and that it would revive the shipping industry, thereby increasing employment in the Delta. Presently, ships have access through the Delta along the Sulina

canal in Romania and the small connecting Prorva channel in Ukraine suitable for smaller vessels. The government of Ukraine states that having a sea access channel on their own territory will save them the cost of paying fees to use the Sulina canal. Moreover, Ukraine will generate their revenue from ship passage in a canal on its own territory.

Project aim: The canal will ensure the passage of large ships with a draught of 5.85 m (Phase 1) and subsequently up to a draught of 7.2 m (Phase 2). Works on the Kiliya arm (Phase 2) of the Danube River aim to create better conditions for sea-going ships to travel to the Ukrainian ports on the Danube, e.g. Izmail and Reni.

Planned works:

- **Phase 1:** dredging the Bystroye arm to a depth of 7.65 m with a bottom width of 85 m; construction of a stone sea dam of 1.54 km long.
- **Phase 2:** dredging the Bystroye arm to a depth of 8.32 m, increase the bottom width to 100 m; extend the dam to 3 km length; deepen and strengthen the banks of the Kiliya arm.

Each project phase is subject to a separate national authorization procedure, including environmental authorisation procedure (called a “State ecological examination” in the Ukraine).

Budget: The total costs announced initially amounted to 144.9 million UAH (€24 million), including Phase 1 costs of 35.6 million UAH (€6 million). As construction started, this figure was revised – Phase 1 now costs 78.6 million UAH (€13.1 million). The latest figures for Phase 2 are reported to cost 540 million UAH (€90 million). In 2007, 2008 and 2009, the Ukrainian state budget allocated 74.4 million UAH, 100 million UAH and 130 million UAH, respectively, for the maintenance of navigation sluices, dredging of inner waterways, and construction of the dam.

Timeline and status of the project

Following completion of Phase 1 in August 2004, larger, sea-going ships started using the Bystroye canal. However, the canal quickly silted up past its previous depth by March 2006, and became unusable by large ships. Therefore, dredging to re-open the canal began in November 2006 and was completed in April 2007. Since then, ships once again use the canal.

The design for Phase 2 was initially rejected by the Ukrainian Ministry of Environment in August 2005, and was sent back for revision. One of the requirements for this revision was that the project must meet conditions of the [Espoo Convention](#). In May 2006, however, the EIA for Phase 2 was approved by the Ukrainian Ministry of Environment after a change of staff. In December 2008, a Ukrainian court declared the EIA of Phase 2 invalid because it was in violation of the Espoo Convention and other international agreements.

The process of decision-making on Phase 1 of the project was carried out in violation of national and international law. The action by the Ukrainian Government demonstrated a serious lack of commitment to international conventions and agreements that Ukraine is signatory to (e.g. [Bern](#), [Aarhus](#), [Espoo](#), [Bonn](#), [Ramsar](#), and [Bucharest](#) Conventions). This 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. One of the most important decisions was made on 21 May 2008 when the Espoo Convention Meeting of Parties decided that Ukraine was in [non-compliance with its obligations under the Convention](#), and subsequently requested Ukraine to stop works on Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project.

Despite this decision, a [press release](#) in February 2009 by the Ukrainian Ministry of Transport and Communications confirmed that works on Phase 1 continue; moreover it stated that works started on

Phase 2. This prompted the Executive Secretary of UNECE to send an official letter to the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine on 20 March 2009 asking that Ukraine explicitly show that works for Phase 1 and 2 (both operational and maintenance) are stopped.

Ukraine failed to show that works stopped, and the Executive Secretary of UNECE sent another letter to the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine on 16 October 2009 once again reminding Ukraine of Decision IV/2 of the Espoo Implementation Committee, which requests that Ukraine stops all works relating to Phase 1 and 2 of the canal project.

In spite of these repeated requests of the international community, there are still references in the media regarding the construction of the canal, and WWF continues to receive eyewitness accounts and newspaper articles from local people all pointing to the fact that construction work on the canal is ongoing.

For a more detailed project timeline and related links, please see “Annex 1: Timeline of events relevant for the Bystroye Canal project”.

WWF’s position

The project has been carried out with a number of breaches of international commitments. Local and international stakeholders and environmental organisations have been highly concerned about its likely negative environmental impacts on the unique species and habitats of the Delta, which is protected under the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme. The decision to construct the canal has been based neither on solid socio-economic and environmental analysis nor on proper assessment of alternatives, although such alternatives have been investigated. More information on the alternatives to the Bystroye canal that lie outside the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and WWF’s position is available at:

http://assets.panda.org/downloads/bystroye_wwfposition_may09.pdf

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