

Navigation project: Romania

Name: Technical Assistance for the improvement of the Navigation Conditions on the Danube between Calarasi-Braila ("ISPA 1")

River-Km: 375-175 (200 rkm)

Budget: 37.7 million EUR (implementation); 1.64 million EUR (technical assistance)

EU co-financing: Implementation – 50%; Technical assistance – 75% (ISPA funds)

Beneficiary: Romanian Ministry of Transport and the River Administration of the Lower Danube-Galati

Implementing bodies:

Technical assistance: JV Technum N.V. (Belgium), Trapec S.A. (Romania), and Tractebel Development Engineering S.A. (Belgium).

Supervision of works: Louis Berger

WWF Position

- The EIA undertaken is far below accepted international standards, and needs to be corrected.
- An effective monitoring programme must be implemented, with results obtained and evaluated before the project begins and after each phase of construction. WWF calls for a minimum of six months of pre-construction monitoring.
- The technical design accepted by the Ministry of Transport is in breach of the EU Water Framework and Habitats Directives as it is likely lead to deterioration of the current ecological status.



Project location

The project is located between the Romanian cities of Calarasi and Braila in Romania, totalling about 200 river-km.

Background

This project is part of Priority Project No. 18¹ and therefore designates this section as one of particular importance for the EU transport networks. Initial project studies have been supported by EU ISPA funds, as opposed to TEN-T funds for other Danube projects.

Project details

Inland navigation on the Danube stretch between Calarasi and Braila is considered difficult due to low water levels during dry seasons. At low water levels, the vessels must make a detour of about 100 km.

¹ http://tentec.europa.eu/en/tentec_projects/30_priority_projects/priority_project_18/priority_project_18.htm

Large convoys have to be broken apart and barges are passed through one-by-one. Therefore, the final objective of the project is to:

- Achieve a minimum navigation depth on the main "Old Danube" branch (rkm 300-348) of 2.5 m
- Protect against bank erosion
- Reduce dredging works for maintaining navigation fairway (dredging at 11 critical points will still be required to achieve navigation requirements)

Project works include:

- Partly closing and disconnecting lateral arms
- Dredging to achieve an extra depth of 0.5 m to compensate for sedimentation in the first year
- Construction of a guiding wall and bottom sill at the beginning of the Bala-Borcea bifurcation

- Bank enforcement (in total 4000 m) on the riverbank and around islands, e.g. Epurasu, Seica, Ceacaru, Tiu, Fermecatu, and Fasolele.

As of January 2010, the project continues to be on hold since 2007. The European Commission Directorate General for Environment (DG ENV) has asked Romania to improve and provide missing information in the EIA study, which was found to be less than acceptable.

Concluding the 2nd Technical Workshop/Bucharest in January 2008, a step-wise approach was agreed on. This includes monitoring before, during and after the construction and optimization measures that may be needed to achieve the ecological requirements. Monitoring has not begun.

Ecology

The eastern branch of the Danube, the so-called “Old Danube” and site included in the project, is characterised by active erosion and sedimentation processes. The river along this stretch forms many meanders and has a large number of islands. Due to its hydromorphological features, this sector is particularly important for biodiversity.

There are seven nature reserves along the Romanian stretch of the Danube River, which include islands and the riverbanks. In this section alone, 95 globally protected bird species, seven globally protected species of reptiles, four globally protected fish species, and 26 nationally protected plants have been identified and recorded. All of these protected areas are designated as Natura 2000 sites.

The section between Calarasi and Braila is considered one of the

most important spawning habitats and migration routes for sturgeon.

Impact & Conflict

The project in its current design threatens the last naturally reproducing populations of wild sturgeons in European watersheds. The few remaining stretches with stony and gravel bottoms (necessary for the reproduction of sturgeon) will be impacted, thus significantly reducing available spawning and feeding grounds. The planned bottom sill and the guiding wall at the bifurcation of the Bala arm will most likely cut off about 90% of still suitable spawning grounds on the Lower Danube stretch for migrating sturgeon species, including the Beluga.

Moreover, the planned hydraulic interventions are in contradiction with the concept of sustainable flood management and wetland restoration, seen as essential components in other EU member states to achieve objectives of both the Water Framework and Flood

Risk Management Directives. The project will cut off side arms and secondary branches to the main river. This will decrease the conveyance capacity of the system needed to drain floodwaters. It will also modify the river's natural flow regime needed to feed the remaining floodplains on the right bank of the Danube between Calarasi-Ostrov-Harsova and the Dunarea Veche (Macin) arm in Tulcea and Constanta counties.

Bank reinforcement, especially around Turcescu Island, will lead to the loss and fragmentation of riparian habitats particularly important for riparian birds. This island is also the site of an EU-funded LIFE+ nature project.

The economic benefits of the project are questionable, as the costs of dredging the Danube frequently (or permanently taking into account the very fast sedimentation process) may not exceed the benefits of inland waterway transport.

Contact

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Links

Romanian Ministry of Transport, Construction and Tourism:
www.mt.ro/engleza/index_eng.html

River Administration of the Lower Danube-Galati:
www.afdj.ro/afdj_en.html

EU project website:
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/projects/stories/details_new.cfm?pay=RO&the=60&sto=1517&lan=7®ion=ALL&obj=ALL&per=2&defl=en

WWF DCP Romania:
<http://www.wwf.ro> (Romanian)
http://www.panda.org/what_we_do/where_we_work/black_sea_basin/danube_carpathian/our_solutions/romania/ (English)

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