



**WWF International
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Press Release

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NGOs join forces to save a living Danube threatened by inland navigation plans

Ruse – The most prominent environmental NGOs active in the Danube basin stand united in their opposition to plans that aim at improving inland navigation at the expense of nature and local economies. On the occasion of an international workshop taking place on the banks of the Danube River in Ruse, Bulgaria, sponsored by WWF, the global conservation organisation, and IAD, the International Association for Danube Research, NGOs adopted their common position “Save the Danube as a lifeline! Steps towards sustainable navigation” and discussed with local and park authorities as well as scientists recent findings and how to cooperate further on the issue.

“Inland navigation can be considered as a viable alternative to road freight only if both global CO₂ emissions and local impacts on river ecosystems are considered equally”, says Orieta Hulea, Head of Freshwater at the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme. “Navigation projects that require regulation of the river bed and bank impede the multitude of services, free flowing rivers provide to society, such as drinking water supply, flood control, acting as a natural filter for pollutants or support of healthy fisheries. These aspects must be considered when discussing transport plans and projects. Otherwise in areas like the Danube environmental damages risks are higher than benefits”.

As part of the European TEN-T programme, infrastructure projects are planned for the Danube on a combined length of 1000 km including the last free-flowing stretches in Germany, the Danube National Park between Vienna and Bratislava, and large stretches of the middle and lower Danube in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

Current plans in Hungary would affect groundwater supply and natural areas protected under national and international law. Proposed dredging works and closing of lateral arms on the Danube in Romania will endanger the fish population due to the loss of the main spawning grounds especially for sturgeons, which are already on the brink of extinction as a direct consequence of previous river regulation.

With more than 80 million people depending directly on the economic value of its river basin natural systems, the Danube is the lifeline of Europe. “In every village and town along the Danube farmers, fishermen and small companies are depending on the natural river eco-system,” reminds Harald Kutzenberger, IAD General Secretary. “We should not easily risk thousands of local jobs along the Danube as a result of gaps in the Environmental Impact Assessments – and loose the strong potential for eco-tourism and rural development.”

NGOs are calling for the EU and national governments to guarantee and regain functioning ecosystem processes, respect socio-economic needs of regional and local economies, and prove that navigation projects meet all legal requirements, in particular compliance with the non-deterioration clause of the European Union’s Water Framework Directive (hereafter WFD) as well as achievement of the environmental objectives of the Danube River Basin Management Plan and Natura 2000 sites.



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Notes to editors

- NGO position paper on Danube navigation is sent upon request
- Information about the planned infrastructure projects in the Danube River Basin and their impacts is available on <https://www.panda.org/dcpo>
- Information about the work of the International Association for Danube Research is available on <http://www.iad.gs/>