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Can the Danube still be saved?

International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River showcase possible answers together with the Business Friends of the Danube

VIENNA, 2 June (UN Information Service) – Can the Danube still be saved? With today's presentation of the Business Friends of the Danube the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) responded with a "clear yes" to this specific question. Renowned Austrian and international companies agreed to support the ICPDR to protect the vulnerable Danube River. In the presence of Austrian Federal Minister Josef Pröll, Coca-Cola Hellenic and The Coca-Cola Company, main players of this long-term project as well as the ORF, the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation, added its support to ICPDR.

A win-win situation in the interest of the Danube River protection

With the Business Friends of the Danube the ICPDR started an ambitious project creating a win-win situation for all involved parties and the Danube River in particular. "Membership of the Business Friends of the Danube carries responsibilities that are not only financial. More importantly, members agree to cooperate with the Governments to preserve the uniqueness of the Danube River and its resources over the long-term", said Philip Weller, Executive Secretary of the ICPDR, summarising the basic idea behind the project. The ICPDR invites businesses operating in direct relation to the Danube River to reinvest in the region.

The Austrian Federal Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Josef Pröll said he very much appreciated the project and hopes that the circle of the Business Friends of the Danube will further expand ICPDR activities: "The Danube is Europe's most important main lifeline and needs help. With this new initiative businesses can now actively protect the Danube and its basin and raise awareness of the requirements of the second-longest river in Europe. Austria held a leading role in 1994 when the Danube River Protection Convention was developed and continues to be a role-model in terms of sustainable protection of the Danube River. I hope that in the next few years many Austrian and European companies will join this initiative and increase the number of the Business Friends of the Danube," Mr. Pröll added.

Companies are "citizens" with responsibility

Companies are among main stakeholders in the Danube river basin and engage in its protection. In 2005, the ICDPR with Coca-Cola Hellenic and The Coca-Cola Company launched the Green Danube Partnership which supports the world's largest river festival the Danube Day and includes informative, entertaining programmes. A media kit called the Danube Box has also been developed. It includes teaching material about the Danube River in seven different languages and is provided to schools. Former British Ambassador Sir Michael Llewellyn-Smith, Board Director of Coca-Cola Hellenic, and Chairman of the Social Responsibility Committee, said: "From our own experience, we have found that partnering with governments, NGOs, non-profit organizations, and in particular with the ICPDR, we are able to greatly elevate our contributions to protecting water resources, which is a key policy commitment for our company. The Business Friends of the Danube offer companies an excellent mean of serving many millions of inhabitants in countries along the course of the Danube while gaining invaluable recognition for participating in an extremely worthy cause."

The ORF, the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation, acts as media partner of the Business Friends of the Danube

"The mass media has always supported social responsibility. Increased debate about sustainability is a clear sign that the ORF, the Austrian Broadcasting Cooperation in accordance with the law, is aware of its responsibility and is actively demonstrating it", said Pius Strobl, Head of Marketing and

Communication at the ORF. "As a business partner we are pleased to support this invaluable initiative within the scope of all journalistic capabilities and to contributing to the effective regulation of activities."

Know-how and financial support for the Business Friends of the Danube

With the annual fee of 25,000 euros, a Business Friend of the Danube will contribute meaningfully for a minimum of two years to the fund either with direct or indirect investment (sponsoring, organisation of various projects). "We certainly will ensure an exact recording of the placed funds and continuously communicate the results", said Mr. Weller, "However, the cooperation between the companies is also of great importance but on a different level. How companies economise can have either a positive or negative effect. Water and the responsible and sustainable management of this precious resource is the centre piece of the cooperation." Currently, the ICPDR is in discussion with a number of companies and is inviting new companies to realise their own social and ecological responsibility.

The Danube is more than just a river

The Danube is Europe's second largest river with 2780 km in length, running from the Black Forest to the Black Sea. Over the course of history, the Danube River has shaped its people and today the river plays an integral part in defining an identity for about 81 million people in over 19 countries. Besides, the Danube River disposes of the largest river basin worldwide. Valuable services for the region are provided by the river and endow resources that sustain life and work, drinking water, hydraulic power, recreation area and a route for transport. Now it is time to reinvest in the Danube and to more importantly stop increasing environmental threats.

The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)

In 1994, the Governments of all environs of the Danube River concluded the Danube River Protection Convention and manifested its proposals to improve the quality of water and the environmental conditions and thus avoid negative impacts. The ICPDR is an international organization consisting of 13 cooperating states and the European Union. Since its establishment in 1998, it has grown into one of the largest and most active international bodies engaged in river basin management in Europe. Its activities relate not only to the Danube River, but also the tributaries and ground water resources of the entire Danube River Basin. The ultimate goal of the ICPDR is to implement the Danube River Protection Convention by promoting and coordinating sustainable and equitable water management including conservation and improvement of rational use of waters for the benefit of the Danube River Basin countries and their people.

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