

Launching of Danube Day Press Conference, June 1, 2004

Statement of **Philip Weller**, Executive Secretary, ICPDR

Herewith the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) is officially declaring the 29th of June as Danube Day.

Why you might ask is the ICPDR is convening Danube Day. The answer is simple:

Danube Day is an occasion to celebrate the successes we have had in cleaning up and protecting the Danube River. It is also a day to acknowledge the challenges ahead and to mobilize the energies and resources for meeting those challenges. We must ensure that the river in future is clean and provides the basis for sustainable development throughout the basin.

Success in restoring and protecting the Danube River and its tributaries must begin with a public understanding of being connected to this great river basin. Danube Day is providing the opportunity for the 82 million people of this basin to discover their connection to the river and its tributaries and to find expression of that connection.

The Danube is the most international river basin in the world. On June 29, 1994 the main Danube countries and the European Commission signed the Danube River Protection Convention committing themselves to cooperation in water resource management in the Danube basin.

In the ten years since the signing the Danube River Protection Convention the ICPDR has been established and has matured as the forum for cooperation among the Danube countries.

We are very pleased and proud that with the exception of Bosnia-Herzegovina all Danube countries are contracting parties to the Convention. We are hopeful that Bosnia – Herzegovina will also soon ratify the convention.

The countries of the Danube have actively been participating in the work groups of the ICPDR and achieved important progress in their joint efforts to manage this shared river system.

- We have established a transnational monitoring network (TNMN) to evaluate the water quality of the Danube.
- We have established an Accident Early Warning System that notifies downstream countries in the event of accidental pollution.
- We have a 5 year Joint Action Plan that includes commitments for major reductions in pollution inputs to the Danube including major investments in sewage treatment.
- We are also in the process of completing the Danube River Basin flood action plan involving all the Danube countries.

Of major importance as well has been the commitment of all Danube countries, EU member states, accession countries and the other European states, to adopt the EU Water Framework Directive as the basis for their joint work. This innovative and important water legislation is being applied in all Danube countries including those that have no legal obligation to do so. The EU WFD has important implications for the ICPDR because first and foremost it emphasizes the necessity of cooperation on a river basin level. The ICPDR is therefore currently compiling, with input of all countries, the comprehensive assessment of actions needed under the Directive to achieve “good water quality” by the year 2015.

Another essential element of the EU Water Framework Directive is that it requires public participation at various levels, local, regional and international. Danube Day, which we are announcing today, is an important step in achieving public participation and involvement in water management. Through the designation of Danube Day we hope to ensure that people understand the principle of basin solidarity – that people living in cities along the Inn, the Mura, the Drava, the Tisza, the Sava, and the Prut rivers are all connected with one another through this great river basin.

The ICPDR established Danube Day as a platform for actions to be taken by governments and citizens throughout the Danube basin and we are very pleased to say that the response to this initiative has been much greater than we ever imagined.

To cite some examples:

In Bayern (Germany) a major gathering will happen on the Steinernen Brücke (Stone Bridge) in **Regensburg** involving water games, excursions to see “What lives in the Danube”, and a mobile water quality lab. The International Association of Danube Researchers is convening a Bicycle from the Vienna International Centre along the Danube to **Bratislava**. In Hungary events will be happening in the cities of **Esztergom**, **Győr**, and **Baja** and will include a river clean-up and the signalling by ships horns travelling on the Danube at 11 am. The cities of **Novi Sad** and **Belgrade** will be convening events including boat trips along the waterfront and an Ethno Festival of Food and Music. All along the **Romania** Danube cities will be organizing events as well their

neighbours in **Bulgarian cities**. In Moldova as well Danube Day will be celebrated in the city of **Chisinau**.

A large event will also be celebrated here in **Vienna** - where else than on a Danube Bridge. Following the slogan “Danube - Bridge to the Future” we invite all citizens to celebrate the Danube on June 29. This event is organised together with the Austrian Lebensministerium, the City of Vienna as well as other partner from the private sector. To bring the spirit of the other Danube Countries to Vienna several Embassies of the Danube countries will provide food and drinks, typical from their homes. You will not only be able to enjoy “Weisswurst and Bretzel”, but also “Gulasch” and “Kebab”. The highlight of the evening will be the projection of Danube impressions on a giant screen, lying on the Danube Water as well as a life performance of the artist Wolfram Huschke.

In addition to all of these and more events throughout the Danube region school children have been busily beginning preparations for a “Danube Art Master” competition involving art works created from stones, driftwood and plants from the Danube and its tributaries. Every Danube country is participating in the competition and the creative powers of children are being used to express in art their vision of the Danube.

The winners of this competition will be brought to Vienna where they will be acknowledged in the presence of the Environment/Water Ministers of all Danube countries at a Ministerial meeting on December 13, 2004.

In conclusion I would like on behalf of the Danube River countries and the ICPDR to acknowledge the support we have received for these events from the UNDP/GEF Danube Regional Project and the European Commission.

And finally, we encourage everyone to join with us in celebrating Danube Day. Let us work together to make Danube Day a day to remember.

For more information:

Please visit <http://www.danubeday.org>, <http://www.icpdr.org>

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