

**Statement of the International Commission for the Protection of the
Danube River (ICPDR)
to the Ministerial Meeting on the Danube and Black Sea**

Bucharest, Romania, February 23, 2007

The Danube is the most international river basin in the world. The challenge of ensuring cooperation among all 19 Danube countries is a large one. There can, however, be no doubt that significant progress in the quality of Danube waters has been achieved since the signing of the Danube River Protection Convention in June of 1994.

This meeting is an occasion to take stock of this progress, to assess what we have achieved and examine what we need to do in future to maintain that progress. In this context I would like right at the outset on behalf of the ICPDR to take the opportunity to thank the Government of Romania for taking the initiative to convene this meeting in connection with the Romanian ICPDR Presidency in 2007. The ICPDR is hopeful that this meeting will provide a strengthening of the political support needed for continuing progress in integrated river basin management.

In its short history the ICPDR has been established itself as a stable institution that is providing an effective forum for cooperation among Danube countries on water management. The ICPDR has achieved this status because it is being supported by all the contracting countries to the Convention. This has led us to be recognized worldwide as an effective model of river basin cooperation.

Of importance, however, staff of Ministries in all contracting parties are actively participating in the working groups of the Commission. It is only through the active involvement of representatives of Danube countries that the work of the ICPDR can be carried out. The continued support at the national level for the involvement of experts in the work of the ICPDR is a key to the successes that have been achieved. It is also a prerequisite for ensuring future progress.

The forum created by the ICPDR has allowed us to utilize our collective capacities for constructive initiatives and to ensure dialogue on issues of potential conflict.

These collective efforts have led to such successes as the:

- Development of the Transnational Monitoring Network which monitors the status of the Danube and the major tributaries, and its recent adaption to EU WFD requirements
- Completion of the hazardous risk spot analysis, and
- Strengthening public involvement in environmental decision making, and community actions for pollution reduction and protection of ecosystems.

It has also led to the production of the Danube Analysis Report required under the EU Water Framework Directive as an integral part of the Danube River Basin Management Plan which will be completed by 2009.

That report identified four significant water management issues:

- Organic Pollution
- Nutrient Pollution
- Hazardous Substances Pollution, and
- Hydromorphological Alterations

The Joint Programme of Measures required under the Water Framework Directive is under development and based on the findings of the Danube basin analysis. It is clear that we are going to need to maintain and strengthen our cooperation to ensure that the ambitious goal of a Danube basin wide management plan can be achieved by 2009.

Added to these issues we have within the Danube experienced in recent years major problems of flooding. In order to address this problem we have agreed to a Flood Action Plan in December 2004.

The production of the Danube Analysis report and the Flood Action Programme are in and of themselves major achievements. But the work needed to address these problems is not completed. It is clear that to ensure a Joint Programme of Measures and to carry out the actions specified under the Flood Action Programme will require further strengthened efforts.

Over the past fifteen years we have been very strongly assisted in our efforts to work together through UNDP GEF and the EU.

This time of conclusion for the Danube Regional Project is an opportunity to say that this support and investment has been beneficial – and highly appreciated. The investment has helped build a strong ICPDR. It has supported our knowledge base about the problems we are dealing with, and it has helped provide us with some important tools to address the problems we have.

Although the work of the project is over, or will be shortly, the work of the ICPDR and the countries will need to continue and be focused on the significant water management issues we have identified and to implement the measures necessary to address the challenges we face.

Future Challenges

In order to meet these challenges countries need to maintain the commitment to the ICPDR. I would like to use this opportunity to express to high level officials the need to continue the support for your countries representation in the ICPDR both the manpower and expertise needed and the resources required to do the work.

We need to develop a Joint Programme of Measures and the political commitment to introduce and finance the needed measures is needed. This applies as well to the necessary measures outlined in our Flood Action Programme.

It should be noted here that under the ICPDR Joint Action Programme over 4 billion dollars of investment have been made in municipal waste water treatment which have reduced Danube pollution. Despite substantial progress there is the requirement for additional investment in the building of sewage treatment plants where they do not exist, the upgrading where necessary, and ensuring adoption of pollution reduction technologies in general.

Further funding will be required it is sensible to utilize the DABLAS mechanism to bring funding authorities and the country representatives together to ensure that the needed resources are available.

In addition there is a need to adopt policies and more simple actions to reduce pollution. The Danube Regional Project has been helpful in identifying for us some actions that could be beneficial involving specific changes in agricultural practices, the reduction of phosphates in detergents through a ban, the protection of wetlands as a mechanism to ensure the reduction or pollution and the better management of nutrient pollution in particular.

There needs also to be a basin wide modeling of pollution and keeping track of national actions in a basin wide context. For this purpose we are developing the Danube GIS and have invested in the development of a decision support tool (called MONERIS) for analyzing actions related to pollution in the Danube River Basin. The upcoming Joint Danube Survey 2 should help provide information on the state of the Danube water resources and where additional actions are needed. We would like to encourage the active involvement of Ministers and high level officials in this exercise that will take place in summer 2007.

In recent years the ICPDR has also taken important steps to engage a variety of stakeholders in the efforts to improve the conditions in the Danube River Basin. Of particular importance has been efforts to work with stakeholders of all kinds in carrying out our activities.

We have been supported in our work groups by a number of observers who have actively worked with us on addressing Danube concerns. For this active involvement we are very grateful.

Of significance has been the link that has developed with business interests in reaching our goals. The positive examples from the cooperation with the Coca Cola Europe and the CC Hellenic Bottling Company and the Alcoa Foundation need to be expanded.

We need also to find other mechanisms for ensuring input from stakeholders. The ICPDR has in this context initiated this year a very important initiative to work with the navigation section to ensure a dialogue on development and maintenance of Navigation and the Environment. We are hopeful that this dialogue will help bring solutions to one part of the problem of hydromorphological alterations.

The positive results of the work that has been done to promote Danube Solidarity through the convening of Danube Day are exciting. The enthusiasm and interest shown by people throughout the Danube River Basin in participating and organizing activities in connection with the 29th of June has been remarkable.

Hundreds of events have taken place in all Danube countries including the convening of the Danube Art Masters Competition. These actions have been very successful in strengthening public interest and involvement in the work of the ICPDR and in efforts to improve water quality.

The initiation of activities at a sub-basin level have also helped make more concrete some of the actions needed and helped to define locally appropriate solutions. The active work of country representatives in the Tisza River Basin, Sava River Basin and in future in the Prut and Danube Delta have proved very beneficial.

Of importance for the ICPDR is the connection between the Black Sea and Danube. The Danube countries have significantly reduced the pollution entering the Black Sea. The pollution loads of nitrogen and phosphorous have been reduced by 20 and 50% respectively. There is, however, a need for clear signals and data feedback from the Black Sea on the consequences of the work in the Danube to reduce pollution. Those indicators that exist show that there are ecological improvements but these need to be more systematically evaluated. To ensure this the MOU on cooperation between the two Commissions needs the support of all Danube and Black Sea countries. It is also necessary for actions to reduce inputs of pollutants similar to those on the Danube in other Black Sea river basins.

For the future it will also be necessary for the ICPDR to acknowledge and act with an awareness of the implications of Climate Change. The recent problems of flooding and drought in the Danube River are cause for concern and we will have to ensure that strategies that we develop are climate change resilient.

Above all the work of the ICPDR has shown that the problems of water cannot be resolved by Ministries of Water and Environment alone but there is a need for cooperation with other Ministries (Agriculture, Finance, Industry). In future we must find ways to strengthen this cooperation on the national level.

The ICPDR has also shown itself to be an effective forum to address transboundary conflicts and the continued role in this respect will require ongoing political support.

In conclusion we can be proud of many of the achievements of the ICPDR. We have established cooperation in the most international river basin in the world. That cooperation needs to continue and be strengthened to continue the progress and to meet the challenges we face. We look forward to the support of the countries and institutions represented here to help ensure the realization of that goal.

The ICPDR would like once again to thank Romania, and the ICPDR Presidency under State Secretary Varga, for hosting this meeting and for providing an opportunity for us all to evaluate what we have done and what we in future need to focus on. We look forward to success in our mutual efforts to achieve effective water management in the Danube river basin for the 81 million people who live here.