

**5th European Regional Meeting
on the implementation and effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention**

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Workshop B

**International cooperation of the Danube basin countries for water
management and wetland management, protection and restoration**

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Introduction

The countries of the Danube River basin and the European Commission signed the *Convention on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River* (the Danube River Protection Convention, DRPC) in Sofia, June 29, 1994. The DRPC aims at achieving sustainable and equitable water management in the Danube river basin. The Contracting Parties have agreed to cooperate in conservation, pollution reduction and control among others.

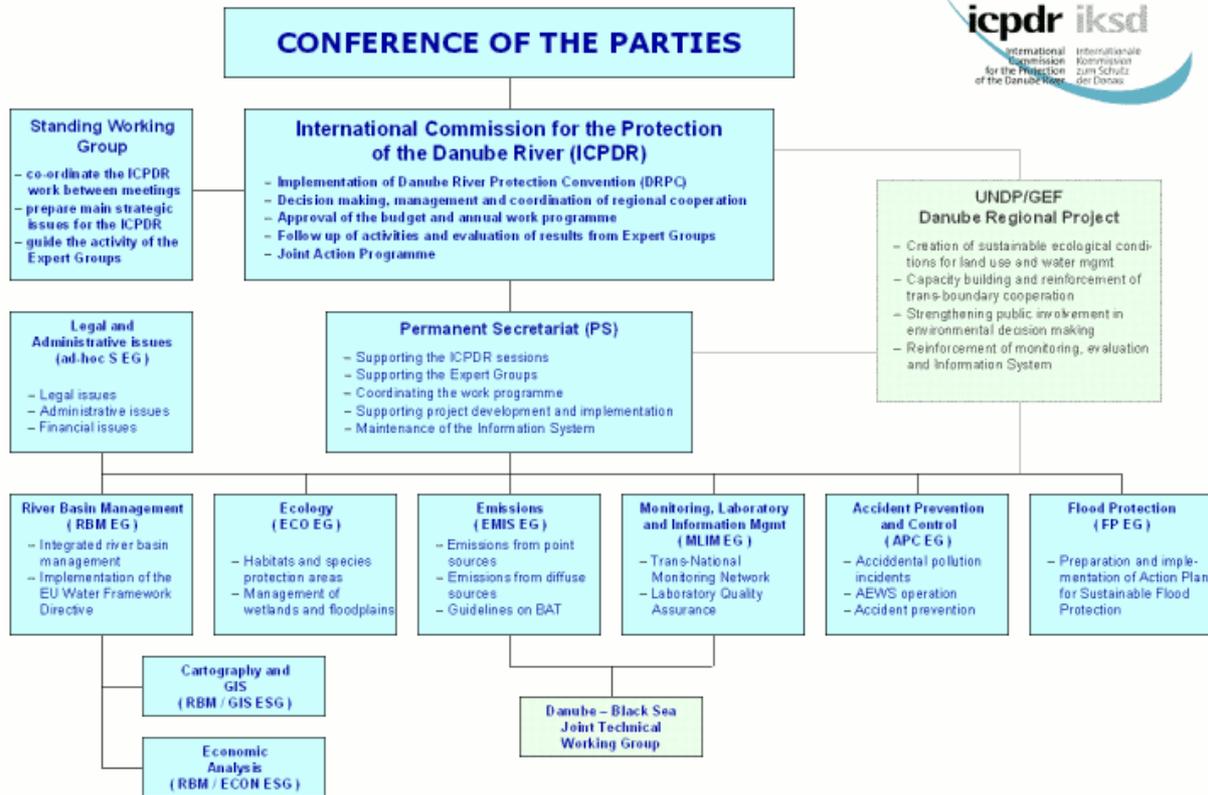
The decision making body of the DRPC is the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). An Agreement between the ICPDR and the Ramsar Convention providing the latter with Observer Status at the Danube River Protection Convention entered into force November 8, 2000. Both partners are "...acknowledging the role of wetlands in water management, including flood control, nutrient retention and groundwater replenishment, as well as the need to minimize the impacts of land use and development projects on wetland's functions and their biodiversity; ... aware of the need to promote coordinated approaches to protecting and restoring wetlands and their biodiversity in the context of river basin management, particularly in the case of shared river basins and wetland systems ...".

On the 3rd ICPDR Plenary Session in Sofia (November 2000) it was proposed to establish an ad-hoc Ecological expert group to support ICPDR activities related to the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of aquatic ecosystems and those terrestrial ecosystems and wetlands directly depending on them. At the 4th Plenary Session, one year later in Vienna (November 2001), the ICPDR firmly established the Ecological Expert Group (ECO EG) until the end of 2004. The DRPC is basing its decisions on the work of a number of Expert Groups, including those working on emissions, monitoring, laboratory and information management, accident prevention and control, river basin management, flood protection. All Danube countries are fully committed and involved in transboundary cooperation and the implementation of the DRPC.

To the ICPDR was given the important roles to coordinate the implementation of the European Union Water Framework Directive (WFD) by preparing, based on the EU WFD, a first assessment of the present status of water quality in the Danube river basin (DRB), to suggest further steps for monitoring the status of water status, and to prepare considerations for a Danube River Basin Management Plan. This is an important step, because under the ICPDR EU Member States there, accession candidates and other countries cooperate together. The EU

enlargement in May 2004 was a milestone. 2007, when more countries will join, will again have an important positive influence on the work of the ICPDR. Important financial and technical assistance is provided by the UNDP/GEF Danube Regional Project to strengthen and support the work of ICPDR with a focus on the “other non-EU countries”.

Organisational Structure under the Danube River Protection Convention



Policy base for ECO EG work

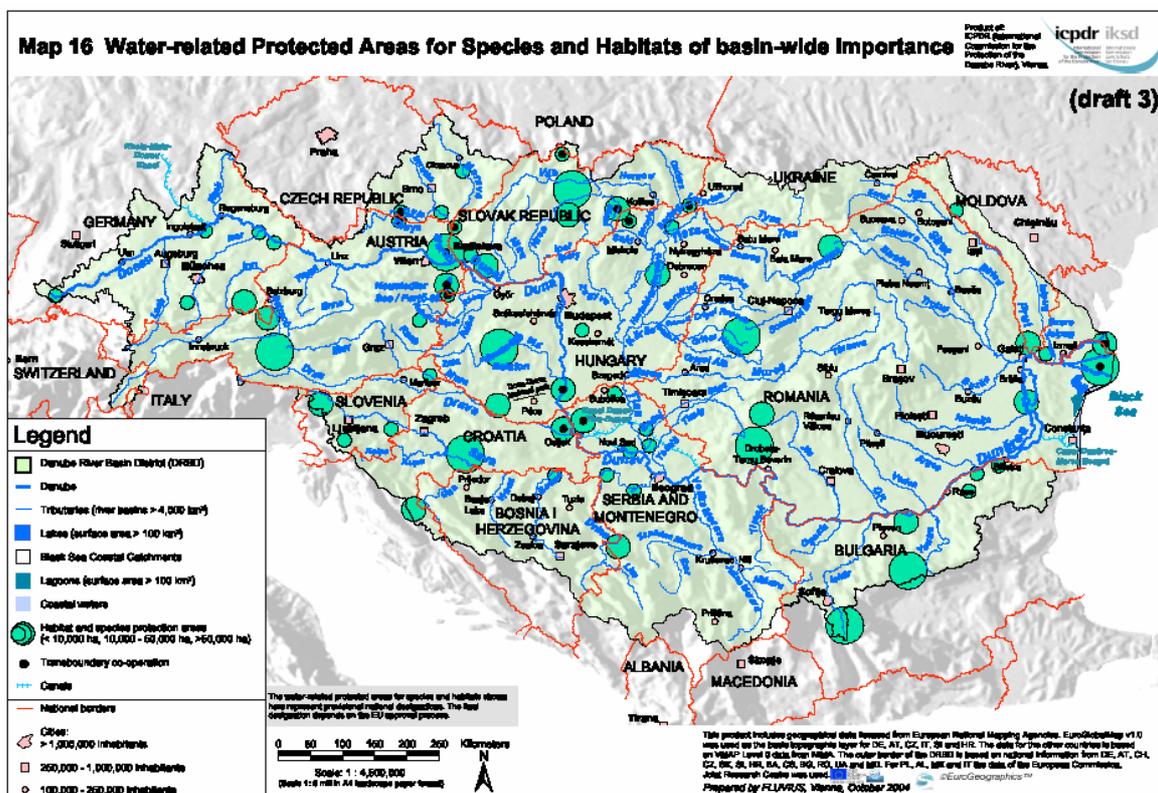
Main policy instruments guiding the ECO EG’s work are:

- DRPC on a basin level (some other agreements run within Danube catchment area, e.g. “Lower Danube Green Corridor Agreement” – signed in 2000 by Bulgaria, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine, establishment the largest transboundary wetland protection and restoration initiative in Europe, Trilateral Ramsar Platform of the Morava-Dyje Floodplains – Austria, the Czech Republic, and the Slovak Republic),
- the obligations and approaches promoted by the Ramsar Convention,
- EU Water Framework Directive (river basin approach for integrated water management and requires EU member and accession states to make comprehensive assessments and inventories of wetland ecosystems in river floodplains, mainly in view of their water purification, flood retention and biodiversity preservation capacities),
- EU Habitats Directive and Birds Directive (Natura 2000).

Role of the ECO EG

The main roles among others are to make and prepare:

- synergies between *multilateral agreements and other institutions*, exchange of experience.
- *Inventory of Protected Areas* (WFD Art. 6 and Annex IV.v): 55 sites of water-related species and habitat protected areas of basin-wide importance have been compiled in the Inventory of Protected Areas for the overview “Roof Report”. Due to the delay in the establishment of the European Natura 2000 network the present Inventory of Protected Areas provides first-step information in a running process. Nevertheless it is the most important basis for the elaboration of a list and map of Water - related Protected Areas of basin-wide Importance. For the DRB Roof Report (map at a scale 1 : 4.5 million) only multi-lateral and basin-wide important protected areas as well as other protected areas with an area of more than 1,000 ha (recommendation from the consultant) have been selected. This overview map is available and is displayed in the Roof Report (see the map below).



- *Issues Paper on “Wetlands in the Danube River Basin”*: The Issues Paper was prompted by the publication by the EU Common Implementation Strategy of the CIS *Horizontal Guidance on the Role of Wetlands in the Water Framework Directive*. Its aim is to give specific guidance for CPs how to deal with the wetlands issues in relationship to the Water Framework Directive with a focus on the situation of wetlands and floodplains in the DRB. The main topics are:
 - identification of wetlands within WFD implementation;
 - WFD environmental objectives and wetlands;
 - the relationship between wetlands and Heavily Modified Water Bodies (HMWBs);
 - Protected Areas and the WFD;
 - wetlands and the pressures and impacts analysis;
 - Programmes of measures and wetlands; and
 - monitoring of wetlands.

- *Status of implementation of the Joint Action Programme 2001 – 2005, Action 3.3. Wetland and Floodplain Restoration* (issue 4.3. of ECO EG ToR): is a good tool to show the progress of member countries in river restoration/rehabilitation in the DRB. The present status of JAP is the following: total project costs of the 83 river restoration projects reached app. 143.36 Million EURO.
- Comments of ECO EG on *the Action Programme of Flood Protection Expert Group* (further as “FP EG”): wetlands play an important role in flood retention, ECO EG was involved in commenting process of the draft Action Programme of FP EG.

Future, needs and challenges

Possible future tasks were proposed to Standing Working Group of ICPDR:

- 1) Update and complement the registers of Protected Areas (WFD Art. 6, Annex IV.v),
- 2) Integrated and sustainable wetland management in the Danube basin and its sub-basins,
- 3) Relationship between the WFD monitoring (good water status) and the monitoring of Natura 2000 sites (favourable conservation status),
- 4) Support the development and implementation of the Flood Protection Action Plan at Danube and sub-basin levels,
- 5) Make use of and implement at local or regional level the instruments elaborated under other multilateral environmental agreements.

There are many questions to the future of ICPDR work beyond the end of 2004. ICPDR suggested a evaluation of its organizational bodies, the expert groups and the Secretariat for 2005. Is the overall basis of operation of the ICPDR appropriate to meet the challenges and issues for which it was established or to which it is now confronted? Will be a new structure of the ICPDR efficient?

What kind of mandate will the ECO Expert Group have and how will be the integration of water and ecological issues ensured? Is the implementation of the EU WFD successful and effective, is all relevant ecological issues related to wetland ecosystems (invasive species, migratory species, management of the wetlands, establishment of water related protected areas, etc.) included for water management cooperation?

Is the coordinating role that the ICPDR Secretariat has played for joint work within the Danube region and work within expert groups appropriate? So, how the Ramsar Convention with its ideas, resolutions, recommendations, guidelines, etc. could help, increase and improve the cooperation between countries and what to suggest for establishment of a better and efficient water management and wetlands management, protection and restoration in the Danube River Basin?

The European Ramsar meeting is an opportunity to address key messages to ICPDR on the further future of ecology items, in particular wetland protection and management in the Danube River Basin.