

Green and efficient Danube fleet

*“Towards modernisation & greening of Danube inland
waterborne sector and strengthening its competitiveness”*

Output 5.1 – Public consultations

Work Package 5 Regulations & Strategy

Version 1.0

Date: 30/11/2020

FINAL

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1.0	30.11.2020	Pro Danube & Danube Commission

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1 Scope of the document

The Green and efficient Danube Fleet project (GRENDEL) is co-funded by European Union Funds (ERDF, IPA) under the Danube Transnational Programme and it aims at supporting the Danube vessel fleet operators and their public counterparts in modernisation of the sector. The project's overall goal is the improvement of the environmental and economic performance of the Danube fleet.

The public consultations organised by the Danube Commission in the framework of GRENDEL aim to make sure that vital interests of Danube fleet operators are collected systematically and are well represented in the on-going work of regulatory bodies. They are an instrument for initiation and revision of policy frameworks at both national and European levels in order to ensure favourable legal preconditions for the overall modernisation process of the Danube fleet.

The 1st public consultation held on 26.03.2019 in Budapest (Hungary), by reuniting Danube fleet operators with the relevant state authorities, set the ground for subsequent discussions and recommendations, ensuring that vital interests of Danube fleet operators are collected systematically and are well represented in the on-going work of regulatory bodies.

Attended by experts of the European Commission (DG MOVE and DG COMP), the Danube Commission as well as national public and private entities, the core objective of the 2nd public consultation organised on 22.01.2020 in Budapest (Hungary) was to discuss and analyse the ongoing drafting process of the GRENDEL model state aid scheme. The current status of the draft proposal was thoroughly evaluated by the attendees. As a result, valuable input was provided to further develop and fine-tune the text contentwise. European and national experts furthermore discussed scenarios for the concrete implementation process of this innovative financing instrument and the possibility to support the scheme through the Cohesion Fund.

The core objective of the 3rd public consultation organised online on 30.09.2020 was to discuss on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Danube IWT with public and private stakeholders and relevant services of the European Commission and to consider possible recovery actions. The video conference gathered over 60 participants. The panel provided a forum with experts interacting on the challenges as regards to fleet and ports operation, infrastructure maintenance, job protection and education, new projects and initiatives in times of the COVID-19 crisis.

The present document intends to give an overview on the public consultations by providing the meeting minutes of these events, including each time the agenda and the list of participants. Besides, the GRENDEL website offers the possibility to consult the presentations held during the 2nd public consultation¹ and the 3rd public consultation².

¹ <http://www.interreg-danube.eu/news-and-events/project-news/5027>

² <http://www.interreg-danube.eu/news-and-events/project-news/5489>



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Green and efficient Danube fleet

“Towards modernisation & greening of Danube inland waterborne sector and strengthening its competitiveness”

Output 5.1 – 1st Public consultation on 26.03.2019, Budapest

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GRENDEL 1st public consultation

Meeting Minutes

- Date & Time:** 26 March 2019, 09:00 – 12:00
- Venue:** Danube Commission, Benczúr utca 25, 1068 Budapest, Hungary
- Meeting purpose:** The main goal was to make sure that vital interests of Danube fleet operators are collected systematically and well represented in the on-going work of regulatory bodies. The consultations will be aligned with the work programme of CESNI and topics addressed in the work of DC covering technological developments, standardisation and education and training affairs.
- Minutes by:** PDI

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Agenda

09:00-13:00	Registration
	Introduction <i>Horst Schindler</i>
	Presentation of topics from the CESNI & Danube Commission Work programmes (Milestone M 5.1.1) CESNI/QP <i>Imre Matics</i> CESNI/PT <i>Sergey Tzarnakliyski</i>
	Presentation of topics (if any additional CESNI/DC programmes) from the regulatory framework (gap) analysis (Milestone M 5.1.2) CESNI/QP <i>Imre Matics</i> CESNI/PT <i>Sergey Tzarnakliyski</i>
	AOB <i>All</i>
	Summary <i>Horst Schindler</i>
	Networking lunch (<i>offered by the Danube Commission</i>)

Meeting Minutes

1 Introduction

Mr. Horst Schindler, Chief Engineer of the Danube Commission, opened the meeting. The meeting started as scheduled at 09:00. Mr. Schindler welcomed the participants and made a brief presentation of the main topics of the agenda and the objectives of the first public consultation in the framework of the GRENDEL project. This public consultation was the first out of 3 that are foreseen to be organised during the lifespan of the project.

The main goal of these public consultations is to bring together representatives of the industry and of public authorities to exchange views on the general improvement of inland waterway transport (IWT) on the Danube and to make sure that vital interests of Danube fleet operators are collected systematically and well represented in the on-going work of regulatory bodies. Furthermore, the consultations are aligned with the work programme of CESNI and the topics addressed in the work of the Danube Commission covering technological developments, standardization and topics related to training and educational issues.

2 Presentation of the topics from the CESNI & Danube Commission work programmes and from the regulatory framework (gap) analysis (Milestones M 5.1.1&M 5.1.2)

Due to illness, Mr. Imre Matics, counsellor for Nautical Issues, was unable to attend the meeting. Mr. Schindler presented the main goals and objectives of the topics of Activity 5.1 in the framework of the GRENDEL project. In its capacity as an international organisation whose main objective is to promote and provide free navigation on the Danube, the Danube Commission is a key partner in the overall implementation process of GRENDEL.

The main goal of Activity 5.1 is to facilitate a favourable regulatory framework for future technological developments and innovations through regular meetings and interactions between the Danube Commission and its Member States. The outcome of these meetings will be a major input into the regulatory frameworks shaped at both transnational and European levels (through CESNI).

The working platform consists, as was already observable during this very first public consultation, of Danube fleet operators, IWT experts and users. They support the Danube Commission and its Member States by providing expert advice and practical experience. The platform should continue to exist after the lifespan of the project ends in order to offer support in the modernisation process of the fleet and on overall issues related to the development of IWT on the Danube.

Mr. Schindler summarized the two main thematic areas that are covered by Activity 5.1: regulatory frameworks related to specific fleet modernisation activities and issues related to training and education issues (human resources).

2.1 CESNI/PT and CESNI/QP

Mr. Sergey Tzarnakliyski, Counsellor for Technical Issues (Danube Commission), made a comprehensive presentation on the main objectives and goals of CESNI (European Committee for Drawing Up Standards in the Field of Inland Navigation). The main goal of this 2015 established committee is to bring together experts from EU Member States and other international organisations with a specific interest in inland navigation. The creation of this committee should result in a

simplification of procedures that regulate inland navigation. In this regard DANTE, another DTP project under the lead of Pro Danube International, who aims at identifying and eliminating administrative barriers for IWT, plays a vital role. DANTE reunites on transnational and European level stakeholders and representatives of public authorities in order to provide feasible and sustainable solutions to overcome administrative barriers that are hindering the development of IWT at its full potential.

Mr. Tzarnakliyski furthermore presented the two main working groups of CESNI that are directly linked to Activity 5.1 of GRENDEL:

- Working Group Technical Requirements - lays down the technical requirements for inland navigation vessels ES-TRIN. New standards are published every two years. ES-TRIN lays down the uniform technical requirements necessary to ensure the safety of inland navigation vessels.
- Working Group for Professional Qualifications (European Standard for Qualification in Inland Navigation).

The discussions that evolved around the issue on professional qualifications made clear that the main problem is that there is still no harmonised system at the transnational level. It is furthermore challenging to attract young professionals. Vessel modernisation will also have future implication on qualifications.

3 Summary/Conclusions

Language poses a barrier in the IWT sector – especially with regard to port and border police authorities. Accepting a common language at transnational level – as indicated by the DANTE project – would significantly ease administrative procedures and make them less time consuming. The English language was introduced by the RAINWAT agreement. An agreement between States is still pending.

It was furthermore concluded that innovative technologies face the certification challenge. The overall certification procedure for new technologies is due to specific administrative procedures extremely time consuming.

Legal emission requirements set by the European Legislator pose other challenges to vessel operators – according to a representative of the industry, the Serbian fleet is, from a technological point of view, outdated and does not have the capacity to implement the strict emission requirements. This is probably a valid conclusion for other fleets, too – like the Slovak, Croat, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Romanian ones. Therefore, as was unanimously recognized by all participants – both the public and private sector – a tailored State Aid Scheme to support the modernization of the fleet is needed. The main objective of the GRENDEL project is to provide this kind of innovative funding instrument.

It was also concluded that the Danube countries have to be active in the work performed at European level and raise the Danube voice (at CESNI for example). In this respect, the Danube Commission is already taking part in EU-funded projects as GRENDEL.

Meeting ended at: 12:00





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GRENDEL 2nd Public Consultation on State Aid for the Modernization of the Danube Inland Fleet

Meeting Minutes

Date & Time: 22 January 2020, 10:00 – 15:00

Venue: At the premises of Danube Commission,
Benczúr utca 25, 1068 Budapest, Hungary

Meeting purpose: To discuss the draft model State Aid Scheme elaborated in the course of the GRENDEL project with stakeholder groups of the project and relevant EC Services in order to gain feedback and guidance for its further implementation

Minutes by: Elena Echim, DC

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Agenda

10:00-10:15	<p>Welcome & official opening</p> <p>Speaker Manfred Seitz, Danube Commission</p>
10:15-10:30	<p>Greening the Danube Fleet with regard to EU IWT policy</p> <p>Speaker Hugues Van-Honacker/EC/DG MOVE/Unit D3- Ports and Inland Navigation</p>
10:30-10:45	<p>State of play of the GRENDEL project</p> <p>Speaker Charlotte Siot, Pro Danube</p>
10:45-11:00	<p>State Aid for Modernizing the Danube Fleet – The legal framework</p> <p>Speaker Daiwa Zukowska/EC/DG COMPETITION/Unit F2- State Aid Transport</p>
11:00-11:30	<p>Draft Model State Aid Scheme – Proposed measures & conditions</p> <p>Speaker Lucia Karpatyova, Pro Danube</p>
11:30-11:45	<p>State Aid for Danube fleet as part of National Operational Programs – Example Czech Republic</p> <p>Speaker Vojtech Dabrowski/Ministry of Transport Czech Republic/Deputy Director Inland & Maritime Transport</p>
11:45-12:30	<p>Lunch Break</p>
12:30-13:15	<p>Stakeholder feedback & questions regarding the Draft Model State Aid Scheme</p> <p><i>Discussion with participants about the investment needs, measures proposed, funding conditions, etc.</i></p> <p>Moderation Manfred Seitz, Danube Commission</p>
13:15-14:00	<p>Exchange of opinions between delegations from Danube States, IWT industry and EC services regarding the implementation of State Aid schemes</p> <p><i>Experience with State Aid in inland waterborne transport in Danube countries, experience with setting up public support measures, current & future intentions, national mechanisms, integration in operational programs, etc.</i></p> <p>Moderation Manfred Seitz, Danube Commission</p>
14:00-14:30	<p>Coffee break</p>
14:30-14:45	<p>Next steps to the finalization of the draft model State Aid Scheme</p> <p>Speakers Charlotte Siot & Lucia Karpatyova, Pro Danube</p>
14:45-15:00	<p>Conclusions and closing of the workshop</p> <p>Speaker Manfred Seitz, Danube Commission</p>

Meeting Minutes

1 Welcome & official opening

Manfred Seitz (DC) welcomes the participants to this 2nd Public Consultation on state aid for the modernization of the Danube inland fleet (from Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia - vessel operators, representatives from ministries and administrations responsible for inland waterborne transport and public funding; GRENDEL project partners and other invited IWT stakeholders; representatives of European Commission services - DG MOVE and DG COMP) and explains the purpose of the meeting: to discuss the elements of a new State Aid Scheme which shall provide financial support to the barge operators in the Danube States for the modernization of their vessels to adopt the Danube fleet to the new challenges of climate change, close to zero emission in transport, but also to reach higher efficiency for its transport operations. The Public Consultation ensures that the interests of Danube fleet operators are collected and represented.

2 Greening the Danube Fleet with regard to EU IWT policy

Hugues Van-Honacker (DG MOVE – Unit D3 Ports and Inland Navigation, participating via skype) presents the European Green Deal policy aimed to improve the well-being of people. The main scope of this policy to become climate neutral in 2050 will require actions in all sectors of the economy: decarbonise the energy sector, cut energy use and pollution, support industry to innovate and to become leaders in clean products and technologies, roll out cleaner and healthier transport. European Green Deal is a general concept which have to be integrated in various sectorial segments, including inland waterways. Thus, Inland water platform will support the European policy makers to draft Inland navigation program under the framework of NAIADES 3 project with the assistance of industries and waterway administrations.

3 State of play of the GRENDEL project

Charlotte Siot (Pro Danube), Project manager of GRENDEL, makes an overview on the progress of the GRENDEL project and underlines that the first draft of model State Aid scheme should be ready at the end of March 2020. This draft model scheme will be sent for feedback to Member States and the final version of the model State Aid scheme is going to be ready at the end of April 2020. Based on this model each country is invited to develop its own State Aid scheme until the end of the project in November 2020. After the current public consultation the next events within the GRENDEL project are: 4th Consortium meeting on 31.03.2020 and the Know-how Transfer Event on 01.04.2020.

4 State Aid for Modernizing the Danube Fleet - The legal framework

Daiwa Zukowska (DG COMPETITION - Unit F2- State Aid Transport) explains the meaning and definition of state aid, the prohibition of state aid and the sole role of EC to approve the state aid that might be granted by the member state (after the notification procedure, excepting the case of *de minimis* rule). In case the state aid is approved, the shared management funds might be used, such as European Regional Development Fund or Cohesion Fund. The application of General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) does not need the prior notification. The provisions of GBER envisages fostering of innovative solutions, reducing pollution, waste treatment on board vessels, transforming vessels to make them more hydrodynamic, optimizing energy on board etc. (included in Aid Plan for

Modernization and Innovation of the inland waterway fleet 2018-2022 - PAMI). GBER is going to be extended (tentative Q3 2020) to 3 new areas: financing and investment operations supported by the InvestEU Fund; RD&I project with Seal of Excellence, co-funded projects and Teaming actions; European Territorial Cooperation projects (also called Interreg).

5 Draft Model State Aid Scheme – Proposed measures & conditions

Lucia Karpatyova (Pro Danube), Senior project manager pointed out the work approach, basis for the elaboration of the fleet investment needs catalogue, priorities vs. state aid regulatory framework, sub-programmes of Danube fleet modernisation State Aid set as priorities: -environmental performance (priority 1 with such measures as acquisition of lower emission engines, measures to reduce air pollutant emissions, energy efficiency & management on-board, noise emission reduction, water and waste reduction and treatment, adaptations of vessels: hydrodynamics), - integration into logistic chains (priority 2 measures: adaption of vessels to attract new or perpetuate existing traffic, construction or acquisition of vessels to attract new freight, construction or adaptation of vessels to serve maritime ports, acquisition of instruments and software to help the navigation o operation of vessels/fleet), - increasing safety of IWT (priority 3 measures: measures to adapt equipment used for manoeuvring of vessel and related monitoring devices, measures addressing vessel's safety equipment and fire protection systems, measures addressing safety at work stations and crew safety, as well as other safety related issues), - renewal of actors in the sector (priority 4 measures: support to renewal of actors in the sector), - innovative solutions (priority 5 measures: development of innovative solution and experimentation with innovations), as well as the procedures regarding state aid relevant to each priority (potential beneficiaries, eligible costs, assessment basis for aid, legislation and terms of application).

6 State Aid for Danube fleet as part of National Operational Programs – Example Czech Republic

Vojtech Dabrowski (Ministry of Transport Czech Republic - Deputy Head of Water Transport Unit within the Rail- and Waterborne Transport Department) shares Czech experience of modernization of inland waterway vessels based on the decision to help skippers by inclusion of vessels modernization programme to Operational Programme Transport (OPT). Thus, Programme Modernization of Inland Waterway vessels (OPT I) had an aid density of 49% for SME, while OPT II (ongoing) had an aid density of 75-85% for SME (density according the size of the company). Subprograms are directed to enhance the IWT safety, to increase the multimodality of cargo transport, to re-motorize the vessels (by purchasing of low emission propulsion and auxiliary units) and to low the fuel consumption (with total allocation of 10 mil Euro and 103 applications received).

7 Stakeholder feedback & questions regarding the Draft Model State Aid Scheme

Following questions have been discussed by stakeholders with reference to measures proposed for each priority: regarding Stage V engines; operational costs (that are not covered by state aid); alternative fuels that might become a part of State Aid scheme; necessity to design the European Green Deal more detailed for Inland Waterways Transport and to establish as a mandatory requirement for the European governments to undertake the necessary measures to improve the environment for the waterborne transport; size of companies which might benefit from state aid; modernization of Danube

fleet vs. renewal; possibility to mix the priorities in the application addressed to the DG Competition; noise emission (within Priority 1 framework) and definition of “new traffic”; kind of vessels which shall be adapted to the maritime ports; necessity to maintain the Danube standards regarding the infrastructure and maintenance works to ensure the water level and water transport competitiveness (within Priority 2 framework). At the same time the representatives of industry expressed their concern regarding the competitiveness of Danube fleet with old vessels, taking into consideration the low water as well, that cannot attract new actors in inland water transport (Priority 4 framework).

8 Exchange of opinions between delegations from Danube States, IWT industry and EC services regarding the implementation of State Aid schemes

Opinions have been exchanged among the delegations with reference to the owner - operator, criteria of vessel investment, procedural aspects (whether the notifications should be addressed through the national competition authorities), operational programmes taking into account budget for the modernisation of the fleet to be able to implement the model State Aid scheme (aspect that should be discussed with DG REGIO on country by country case), possibilities to bridge the gap in financing period (*de minimis*, GBER and Innovation fund), Croatian experience to interact with DG COMPETITION on State Aid, as well as a necessity to form national working groups (after current consultation) to deal with all features of Model State Aid Scheme.

In this regard a list of questions (that will support the elaboration of Model State Aid scheme taking into account the national experiences) regarding types of financing and incentives, eligibility criteria for beneficiaries, procedural aspects, technology related measures, application process, eligibility of costs, operational costs, national strategies and operational programmes, as well as the implementation of Renewable Energy Directive has been shared between the delegations.

9 Next steps to the finalization of the draft model State Aid Scheme/Action Points

Nr	Short Description	Responsible Person	Due Date
1	Replies from member states to the list of questions presented during the event (these questions will be sent per e-mail after the event)	Member states	End of February 2020
2	First draft of model State Aid scheme	Pro Danube	End of March 2020
3	Final version of the model State Aid scheme	Pro Danube	End of April 2020
4	3 rd Public Consultation	DC, Pro Danube	Early July 2020 (probably)

Meeting ended at: 15:20





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FINAL

GRENDEL 3rd Public Consultation Impact of COVID-19 and possible recovery actions for Danube IWT

Meeting Minutes

Date & Time: 30 September 2020, 13:00 – 16:00

Venue: Online event (use of Webex)

Meeting purpose: To discuss the impact of COVID-19 on transport of cargo on Danube & navigable tributaries with public and private stakeholders and relevant EC Services and to explore possible recovery actions.

In general, the main goal of public consultations is to make sure that vital interests of Danube fleet operators are collected and well represented in the on-going work of public/regulatory bodies.

Minutes by: DC

Participants (61): Vessel and port operators, representatives from ministries and administrations responsible for inland waterborne transport and the public funding from Danube countries, GRENDEL project partners and representatives of EC services.

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Agenda

12:45-13:00	Connectivity tests and start-up of video-conference
13:00-13:15	Official opening – <i>Manfred Seitz, Danube Commission</i> Welcome address – <i>Luca Farkas, Policy Officer EC/DG MOVE/D3</i>
13:15-14:15	Impact of COVID-19 on transport of cargo on Danube & navigable tributaries and economic perspectives
13:15	Overview on development of IWT- Market Observation Q1 & Q2/2020 <i>Pjotr Suvorov, Chief Engineer DC</i>
13:25	Economic Analysis and outlook from viewpoint of barge operators <i>Mladen Grujic on behalf of Bratislava agreement group</i>
13:40	Situation and perspective of Danube sea and river ports <i>Costel Stanca, General Director Port of Constanta</i> <i>Bela Szalma, Chairman Advisory Group Danube Ports Network (DPN)</i>
14:00	Economic perspective of major industries in the Danube region with high relevance for IWT <i>Richard Grieveson, Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies</i>
14:15	Comments & questions from sector representatives
14:30-14:45	Break
14:45-15:45	Strategies and actions for recovery which can be taken into account in the regulatory framework What is needed on the level of transnational coordination and public support, what can be provided? <u>Interventions from:</u> <i>Herfried Leitner, Chairman, Pro Danube International</i> <i>Theresia Hacksteiner, General-Secretary, European Barge Union EBU</i> <i>Fritz Lehr, CEO, Port of Vienna, President EFIP and IGÖD</i> <u>Viewpoints from the European Commission & Danube States</u> <i>Alexandru Hagiiani, State Secretary Transport of Romania</i> <i>Vera Hofbauer, Head of Unit BMK/W2</i> <i>Luca Farkas, Policy Officer EC/DG MOVE/D3</i> <u>Open Discussion</u>
15:45-16:00	Conclusions & Closure - <i>Manfred Seitz, Danube Commission</i>

Meeting Minutes

1 Official opening & welcoming address

Manfred Seitz (Director-General, Danube Commission Secretariat / DC) opened the meeting, welcomed and thanked participants to the 3rd Public Consultation on impact of COVID-19 and possible recovery actions for Danube IWT for their attendance. He highlighted the purpose of the public hearing: to develop a common understanding about the impact of COVID-19 and the regulations of the Danube states to contain the pandemic, on the operations of IWT, as well as on the cargo volumes, which can give an indication of the overall economic situation in the IWT sector.

GRENDEL is a project implemented by private and public stakeholders of the IWT sector from the entire region in the Interreg/Danube Transnational program. The project can be considered as the lead project to support the sector and the public administrations in the efforts to modernize Danube navigation which means to make more efficient and environmentally friendlier.

Mr. Seitz pointed out that the consultation will cover the emerging needs of cargo (barging companies) and passenger transport, as important elements sharing the same infrastructure, including the situation and outlook of sea and river ports on the Danube.

DG Move is a very important partner to ensure free movement of cargo vessels on the Danube in the lockdown scenario and is heavily engaged in the coordination of the infrastructure development of the Danube corridor.

In this regard, Luca Farkas (Policy Officer, EC/DG Move/D3 – PORTS AND INLAND NAVIGATION) provided an update on recent measures taken by the EC services to restore transport activities affected by the COVID-19 crisis. She elaborated on the implementation of the Green Lanes under the Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and to ensure the availability of goods and essential services from 16 March 2020. To ensure unobstructed transport of goods along the entire TEN-T Network, amid pandemic situation, all transport operations should be treated in a non-discriminatory manner. Mrs. Farkas particularly emphasized the crew members' treatment, their changing procedure, and a coordinating role of national contact points as regards to the effective functioning of the "green lane" border crossing points.

Impact of COVID-19 on transport of cargo on Danube & navigable tributaries and economic perspectives

2 Overview on development of IWT – Market Observation Q1 & Q2/2020

Pjotr Suvorov (Chief Engineer, DC Secretariat) provided an overview on the situation in the market of Danube navigation in 2019-2020 related to passenger and cargo transport volumes, including passages through the main control points (Jochenstein, Mohács and Gabčíkovo locks, Cernavoda-Constanta Canal). He informed the audience about the DC's regular publications on market observation of Danube navigation. According to the DC's data, cargo turnover of ports in March 2020, unrelated to the cereals transshipment, amounted to 65-67 % of the volumes in March 2019. Passenger transport by cabin vessels was stopped in March, and only in June one-off voyages of cruise vessels were started in compliance with declared passenger limits. The liner transportation of passengers and the operation of one-day trip vessels at the main water touristic centres were rare. Mr. Suvorov stressed that the Danube Commission has a strong focus on ensuring uninterrupted fleet operation, namely on extension of service documents for crew and personnel, vessel's and the ADN certificates, ensuring crew changes, optimizing cargo handling operations and vessel maintenance services.

3 Economic Analysis and outlook from viewpoint of barge operators

Mladen Grujic (on behalf of Bratislava agreement group), made an overview on the consequences of COVID – 19: economic fallout, difficulties in crew changes, extension of loading/discharging in river ports, new controls and procedures, protection and prevention of ships, investments, maintenance and repairs. Followed by the low water periods, COVID – 19 has severe adverse effects on the Danube fleet. With a view to support Danube shipping, Mr. Grujic proposed enabling free movement of crew members, elaboration of unique and uniform rules to move cargo faster and easier, as well as financial support for overcoming crisis period, as short-term measures. Long-term support measures, such as financial support to build a new Danube fleet, solving the problems of critical sectors on the Danube and investment in human resources and education, are required as a matter of extreme urgency. He summarized that river transport has proven to be the most reliable mode of transport, even in the COVID-19 pandemic. Crews ensure the uninterrupted delivery of cargo by superhuman efforts, while the disease transmission is minimal. The crisis caused by COVID - 19 showed all the advantages of transport on the Danube and the justification of investment in fleet modernization.

4 Situation and perspective of Danube sea and river ports

Costel Stanca (General-Director, Port of Constanta) made a presentation on the current situation and the COVID-19 impact for the Constanta port. During the first half of 2020, global ship call contracted by 8.7%; passenger traffic is the most affected sector. Amid the year 2019, when there was a high increase in total transport, the year 2020 recorded a drop of 46 % for iron ore, of 22-26% - oil product and crude oil accordingly. He marked the role of the Danube ports as an entry points of EU for cargo flows from/to hinterland, linking a major corridor for dry-bulk cargo and energy hub. Port authorities initiated a series of measures to supply safety, medical and sanitary equipment for employees and hospitals. The current situation has brought to the front the need to engage with the digital solutions and innovations, to deal with the development of port connections and social responsibility and awareness. GRENDEL is an opportunity to make steps forward to facilitate integration of visions on port and fleet development.

Bela Szalma (Chairman, Advisory Group Danube Ports Network / DPN) presented the structure of the Danube Ports Network. He apprised of the challenges faced in the Hungarian stretch during the eight months of 2020. The port of Mohács registered 22 passenger ships in the first 7 months, compared to 568 - in the same period last year. The number of boat moorings due to the city visit decreased to 6% (223/14). Crews of passenger ships came over to the carriage of goods, queuing up to work for freight owners. Strict rules on crew changes made shipping difficult. Last year's good corn crop provided a great foundation for the first half of 2020. Based on the turnover of the first 7 months, the container traffic on the Danube is a bit higher compared to the same period last year. Although overseas traffic fell in April and May, this was an offset by an increase in European traffic. Water-side traffic increased, mainly due to fertilizer. The industry's appeal is to ensure adequate navigability, the easiest possible crew exchange and the shifting of cargo from road to inland water, reducing the burden of COVID-19.

The consortium of UTIBER Road Investment Ltd., VIZITERV Consult Ltd. and the Budapest University of Technology and Economics is carrying out the planning tasks related to the development of the Trans-European Transport Network - TEN-T inland waterway with the help of the Water Plan. At each of the 43 intervention points, improvement in water depth can be expected, including navigability (+0.5 to +1 m). The tender plan can be completed in 2021, while the implementation may take place between 2022 and 2025.

5 Economic perspective of major industries in the Danube region with high relevance for IWT

Richard Grieveson (Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies) provided an overview on the impact of Covid-19 on IWT sector and public health and mobility, economic fallout and recovery prospects. This year, external exposure to travel/tourism and trade seems to be a key area of vulnerability for the region's economies. Initial economic data suggest tough recessions for all the sectors, but clearly worse for some than others. As for transport sector, initial signs of impact is quite divergent in different Danube countries. Growth slowed down, with the deepest peacetime recession since the 1930s overtaking the global economy, and worst for CESEE since early 1990s. The most vulnerable factors are health and tourism reliance, reliance on capital flows, large share of SMEs, limited fiscal/monetary space (especially non-EU members). Factors of resilience, such as international financial support, including large EU funds allocation, along with the quick initial reaction and lockdown measures, enable the sector to withstand negative influences. Overall public health impact in the Danube Commission's countries has been less bad than for Europe on average. Economic fallout generally negative, but not all countries and sectors affected equally: pockets of resilience and even success. Automotive sector struggling whereas agriculture seems to be a relative bright spot.

6 Comments & questions from sector representatives

The panel interacted on the topical challenges: fleet and ports operation, infrastructure maintenance, job protection and education, new projects and initiatives, financial opportunities under the EU funds in times of the COVID-19 crisis.

Mr. Ivanov (Trading Line) emphasized the need to modernize services using state-of-the-art technology and demonstrating innovative approaches that can be scaled up by the sector representatives. Despite the Covid-19 lockdown, new vessels have been brought to the Danube. Taxation system must be improved to attract new fleet. In order to ensure market resilience and to enter new markets, investment in perspective modes and types of cargo transport (container transport, hydrogen transportation) is needed. He also noted that Constanta Port Business Association made a request to the Romanian policy makers to merge the Black Sea Canal Administration (ACN) with Constanta Port Administration (APMC) and to reduce the canal fees as a result of the higher efficiency in public administration.

Mr. Grujic noted the ongoing nature of the problems existing on the Danube, and the necessity to explore solutions to adapt to new challenges with a special focus on crew protection measures.

Herfried Leitner (Pro Danube International) pointed out that the demand for river shipping has to be increased. In this context, the most relevant are the following steps: to solve problems with the main bottlenecks in order to enable industry to make use of sustainability and low freight rates as a key advantage for Europe; to focus on the transportation of industrial products; to invest in making the Danube stable.

Leonard Cotiga (AAOPFR) stressed the importance of good infrastructure as a prerequisite for the transport's credibility and market benefits and shared practical examples.

Theresia Hacksteiner (European Barge Union / EBU) marked out that the COVID-19 crisis requires reduction of port fees to provide support to the industry.

7 Strategies and actions for recovery, which can be taken into account in the regulatory framework

What is needed on the level of transnational coordination and public support, what can be provided?

Herfried Leitner (Chairman, Pro Danube International) made an intervention concerning the COVID-19 implications for passenger and cargo transportation, harmonization of regulatory framework and financial measures. The catastrophic situation in the passenger sector requires transnational efforts for common rules in cruising. Generally, cargo IWT operators have very moderate financial means. Despite the support of recovery programmes, there is a dissonance as regards to the geographical zones, volume flow and tonnage. Immediate development of contingency plan is needed. Exchange of crew members procedure should be regulated uniformly. Suggestion: a. to define “Crew Exchange Ports” (CEP’s) along the Danube (at least one port / country & in close vicinity to highway), b. “Travel pass” between Danube riparian countries to allow crew members (of all nationalities) to enter or transit countries with car/buses in order to reach the CEP, exchange the crew and leave directly again. Border control locations should be kept in regular conditions. It is suggested to limit working hours due to the pandemic. Europe-wide harmonized approach for the cruising/passenger industry has to be found for all the Member States. The financial support may entail short-term (waiver of port and channel fees channel for a specific period) and mid-term measurements (upgrade of cargo ports, terminals and equipment to increase efficiency through accelerating loading times and supporting 24/7 operations).

Theresia Hacksteiner (General-Secretary, European Barge Union / EBU) updated on the COVID-19 impact and possible recovery actions for Danube IWT. She underlined the key problematic areas impeding the recovery of transport sector - national restrictions and lack of coordinated European cooperation. Under the EU’s Recovery and Resilience Plan, 70% of the grants provided by the RRF shall be committed in 2021 - 2022. The remaining 30% shall be fully committed by the end of 2023. The recovery requires a combination of tailor made funding for the large-scale deployment of green technologies for the fleet, alternative fuels and digitalisation; taxation incentives, regulatory measures to stimulate and accelerate the innovation. The roadmap towards Greening the IWT sector addresses the aspects of greening the fleet, alternative fuels & OSP and modal shift (infrastructure and digitalization and integration in multimodal chain). The IWT Greening Fund with the support of the Recovery Package may cover the total costs of the investment in engines and retrofit of engines, as well as vessel design improvement measures. EBU calls upon the Danube states to make use of both the Recovery and the CRENDEL Packages and to support IWT in its recovery, in particular in their energy transition towards zero emission.

Fritz Lehr (CEO, Port of Vienna, President EFIP and IGÖD) informed about the COVID-19 measures, which have been taken in support of operating abilities and protection of employees by the Port of Vienna. The COVID-19 impacts on EFIP’s Danube ports affected the following cross-cutting areas: cruise / day-trip shipping and container transport. The most profound impact occurred in ports where cases of the virus have been confirmed. With the closing of various European borders, the movement of crews became extremely problematic with crews not being able to reach their vessels or return from their assignments. Centralized collection and dissemination of data are needed to understand the impact of the crisis (the Danube Commission could lead this effort). Future perspectives presume a support of new market developments in the region.

Viewpoints from the European Commission & Danube States

Alexandru Hagiiani (State Secretary of Transport of Romania), as a representative of the public administration, shared Romania’s experience with managing the COVID-19 crisis to ensure health protection and to keep up the pace of the ongoing economic activities. IWT in Romania was less affected: ports were open, port and waterway administrations continued providing their services. The

transit through the Black Sea channel was 8% higher over the last year. The number of vessels crossing the Sulina channel was 95 less in the first 6 months and 243 less in the first 8 months compared to the same periods in 2019. Professional education and training saw positive developments, where the activities were quickly adapted to the restrictions by organizing on-line trainings. On 1st July 2020, the Romanian Government published the Investments and Economic Recovery National Plan, under which ca. 1 billion euros is allocated for the business support. The EU earmarked over 16 billion euros for the investments in transport and infrastructure for the next 10 years, including port developments, to ensure optimal navigation conditions. Strategy for developing water-born transportation will include fleet modernization plan with economic and financial support measurements. Romania welcomes the initiative of the GRENDEL project, to provide a harmonized State Aid Scheme and investments activities to develop river fleet and to support river operators.

Vera Hofbauer (Head of Unit BMK/W2) briefed the participants on Austria's experiences and lessons learned. A multi - level coordination and communication (NtS, website, Newsletter, etc.), involving country authorities, international organizations (DC, CCNR, EC, UNECE, EBU/ESO, IG River cruise) and the river operators are needed to ensure continued functioning of all transport processes. Experiences to date suggest the following support tools: to avoid national rules in international transport, to follow European guidelines (green lanes, European pandemic emergency plan in freight transport), to enable free transport of goods, supply for vessels and crew (e.g. gas, food, repair) and crew changes, to provide transparent coordination of measures (incl. non-EU countries as far as possible), to continue authority processes (certificates, tests, exemptions where needed, etc.), to ensure proper communication and information channels - "one-stop-shop", FAQs (e.g. CCNR, DC). Participation of IWT in Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF) via national RRF coordination also foresees investments in greening, digitalisation and resilience activities.

Mrs. Farkas thanked the participants for the information shared during the meeting. She updated on the financing opportunities available under the EU's funds, highlighting the "Next Generation EU" recovery plan, an emergency package of 750 billion euros to jump-start Europe's recovery over the period 2021-2024, in particular in the countries heavily hit by the COVID pandemics. The proposed new Recovery and Resilience Facility will support investments in the most affected regions according to national envelopes and will contribute to the actions with green and digital impact. Individual Recovery and Resilience Plans prepared by a Member State are the cornerstones of the Facility. Guidelines and Standard Templates aim to assist in preparation of the individual plans to be submitted to the EU services between 15th October 2020 and 30th April 2021. Mrs. Farkas made a plea to the participants asking to inform their Member States and respective Danube actors about the said instruments and to lobby the initiative to insert inland waterway projects into the Individual Recovery and Resilience Plans. CEF 2 is undergoing negotiations between the Parliament and the Council. Along with this, the EU Parliament will dedicate 2 million euros for the Danube region for a study to enable a sustainable management and development of ports. Mrs. Farkas updated on the ongoing activities concerning the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy based on the horizontal cross-modal approach in three independent pillars: resilience, suitability and digitalization. The Strategy package includes NAIADES 3 Action Plan (to be released in October 2020).

8 Conclusions & Closure

Mr. Seitz thanked the participants for their contributions and pointed out the essentials for the industry with regard to the future handling of the COVID-19 crisis by the authorities of the Danube States:

- to let the cargo move freely on the Danube corridor: Clear European Guidelines enforced;

- to ensure the continued operation of the infrastructure in particular the locks and the ports throughout the further pandemic and to enable transport movement,
- to ensure free movement of crew members for crew change based on the recommendations of the EC [Green Lane Guidelines of EC] and supply of vessels (e.g. for repair),
- to ease authority processes (certificates, tests), exemptions where needed,
- to implement State Aid Scheme for fleet modernization; the Grendel Model State Aid Scheme is an excellent instrument and can be applied right now.
- to implement support measures for human resources and education in the entire sector,
- to ensure best possible fairway maintenance by the national waterway administrations,
- to consider reduction of canal charges and port fees,
- to speed up projects - if possible – which will bring sustainable solutions for the shallow water sections of the Danube,
- to make use of the EU Funds and Facilities which shall support the Recovery of the European Union for financing the State Aid Scheme for fleet modernization as well as for providing financial support: funding and financing,
- to check out the Recovery and Resilience Fund for support measures for the IWT sector and the REACT EU initiative [provides € 55b top up to current 2014-2020 cohesion policy programs].

Concluding the discussion, Mr. Seitz highlighted that the DC is able to continue to act as a hub for information and communication supporting the Danube States in coordination when requested.

For more details, the presentations are available for consultation under the dedicated [News on the GRENDEL website](#) and on the Danube Commission website ([following link](#)).

Meeting ended at: 16:45