

# **Conclusions**

## ***on effective waterway infrastructure rehabilitation and maintenance on the Danube and its navigable tributaries***

Final version of 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations responsible for Transport from the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia, the Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Slovak Republic, Ukraine and the Republic of Serbia reached the following conclusions:

### **HAVING REGARD TO:**

- "The European Green Deal" Communication 2019/640 final of the European Commission of 11 December 2019, which stipulates the designing of policies to accelerate the shift to sustainable and smart mobility;
- Article 15 §3. (b) of the Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T), including its potential extension towards the neighbouring countries, obliging EU Member States to achieve a good navigation status by 2030 at the latest, while respecting the applicable environmental law in the framework of the NATURA 2000 network and the Water Framework Directive;
- the "NAIADES II Communication 2013/623 final of the European Commission of 10 September 2013 "Towards quality inland waterway transport", which includes infrastructure as one of its key areas of intervention;
- The Commission Staff Working Document "Mid-term progress report on the implementation of the NAIADES II action programme for the promotion of inland waterway transport (covering the period 2014-2017)"<sup>1</sup>;
- the "Council Conclusions on Inland Waterway Transport of 3 December 2018"<sup>2</sup> ;
- the Commission Staff Working Document on "Digital Inland Navigation" of 18 September 2018<sup>3</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> SWD(2018) 428 final

<sup>2</sup> Council of the European Union, 13745/18 TRANS 489 MAR 156

<sup>3</sup> SWD(2018) 427 final

- The European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance (AGN) – for those countries who have ratified it;
- the provisions of the Belgrade Convention of 1948 establishing the Danube Commission and the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin of 2002;
  - the European Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the related objective to optimally manage and improve navigability conditions as well as landside infrastructure in a harmonized and environmentally sustainable way, as stipulated in the revised Action Plan concerning maintenance and rehabilitation measures;
- the Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube River Basin adopted by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the Danube Commission and the International Sava River Basin Commission in December 2007;
- the "Declaration on effective waterway infrastructure maintenance on the Danube and its navigable tributaries", signed at the Danube Ministers Meeting in Luxembourg on 7 June 2012 by the Ministers and Heads of Delegations responsible for Transport from the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and the Slovak Republic and supported by the responsible Ministers in the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine;
- the "Conclusions on effective waterway infrastructure rehabilitation and maintenance on the Danube and its navigable tributaries", signed at the Danube Ministers Meetings in Brussels on 3rd December 2014, in Rotterdam on 20th June 2016, as well as in Brussels on 3rd December 2018 by the Ministers and Heads of Delegations responsible for Transport from the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia, the Federal Republic of Germany, Romania, the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Serbia;
- the "Agreement between the People's Republic of Romania and the Government of the People's Republic of Bulgaria concerning the maintenance and the improvement of the fairway on the Romanian-Republic of Bulgarian sector of the Danube", signed in Sofia on 29 November 1955.

HAVING TAKEN NOTE OF:

- the recommendations by the NAIADES II Implementation Expert Group on "An Inland Waterway Transport Agenda for Europe 2021-2027";

CONSIDERING that inland waterway transport needs a reliable, safe, cost-effective and climate-resilient infrastructure network.

CONSIDERING that inland waterway transport remains an energy-efficient, safe and sustainable alternative to other modes and contributes to decongesting overloaded road and rail networks.

WE, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations responsible for Transport:

RECALL the importance of the "Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan of the Danube and its navigable tributaries" as prepared within the framework of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region by Priority Area 1a on Inland Waterways in November 2014;

ENDORSE the updated "Master Plan implementation progress summary report" presented in the Annex;

NOTE that the Master Plan shall not affect in any way the determining and marking of the state borders;

ACKNOWLEDGE the progress made in the majority of Danube riparian states also through the contribution of activities and EU-funded projects towards reaching the recommended minimum levels of service as set out in the Master Plan;

WELCOME the progress made in the allocation of resources as indicated in the Master Plan for a number of Danube riparian states, as reflected in the "Master Plan implementation progress summary report" presented in the Annex;

RECOGNISE the positive examples, including the rehabilitation of bottlenecks in the Republic of Austria and the Republic of Serbia by means of river engineering measures, the general intensification of fairway marking activities and maintenance dredging activities in the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Austria, the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Serbia, Romania, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Moldova as well as in Ukraine;

NOTE however that the navigation status has still not improved in all Danube riparian states compared to 2014, as reflected in the "Master Plan implementation progress summary report" presented in the Annex;

RECOGNISE the importance of the Rhine-Danube Core Network Corridor and WELCOME the CEF co-funded project FAIRway Danube and the joint efforts of all its beneficiaries (Republic of Austria, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia, Hungary, Romania and the Slovak Republic) to preserve a good navigation status, as far as this is possible with maintenance and rehabilitation measures;

AGREE to maintain this level of activity and - where still needed - to step up fairway rehabilitation and maintenance efforts in 2020 and beyond in order to improve the fairway conditions according to the maintenance objectives in force;

UNDERLINE the need to execute them in an integrated manner in order to ensure that applicable environmental legislation is respected as well as the Guiding Principles of the Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube River Basin;

UNDERLINE the importance of easily accessible and up-to-date fairway information services, in particular topical fairway depth and width data in shallow sections and water level forecasts, as provided by the national administrations respectively River Information Services providers;

REITERATE the need for national action and cross-border coordination procedures in the field of fairway rehabilitation and maintenance, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity;

REAFFIRM the will to cooperate with the relevant coordinating bodies such as the European Commission, EUSDR, river commissions for the establishment of joint initiatives for the efficient and effective implementation of the Master Plan, such as cross-border and transnational projects, in particular the CEF co-financed FAIRway Danube project and FAST Danube project for those who are beneficiaries of the projects, with respect to the sharing of resources and joint investments by the project beneficiaries;

FULFIL the legally binding obligation to preserve "Good Navigation Status" (GNS) of the Danube River and its navigable tributaries that are part of the TEN-T network, as far as this is possible with maintenance and rehabilitation measures, and – at the same time – SEEK for reaching a "Good Ecological Status/Potential" (GES) and a "Favourable Conservation Status" (FCS) as legally required by the Water Framework Directive and – where applicable – by the Birds and Habitats Directives;

CALL ON all relevant riparian EU Member States and non-EU countries to contribute to an update of the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan by the end of 2020, thereby focusing on the key issues that have emerged and developed since the publication of the Master Plan in 2014 and that have to be resolved in the period 2021-2027;

CALL ON all relevant riparian EU Member States and non-EU countries to further support effective and timely progress monitoring regarding the Master Plan and thereby UNDERLINE the importance of the annual National Action Plans as one of the monitoring tools for individual actions, responsibilities, budgets and resources for rehabilitation and maintenance measures in line with the Master Plan;

ENCOURAGE efforts towards further digitalisation of waterway management operations as well as monitoring by means of both national waterway management and transnational monitoring systems, as for example currently being developed in the framework of the FAIRway Danube project;

RECOGNISE that the availability of appropriate national financial means for the implementation of the Master Plan is of fundamental significance and by that a critical success factor;

UNDERLINE the importance of the European Union co-funding, notably within the framework of the Connecting Europe Facility, the European Structural and Investment Funds and the Instrument for

Pre-Accession as well as the EU coordination for the realisation of this Master Plan especially with regard to procurement of additional equipment for monitoring, marking, dredging and information services to fairway users;

CALL ON all Danube riparian states to ensure the sustainable operation of EU-funded equipment and systems (gauging stations, systems for water level forecasts, vessels, national and trans-national waterway management and monitoring system(s), etc.) as well as information services to waterway users even after the end of the related projects;

SUPPORT the embedding of national thematic priorities in line with the "Council Conclusions on Inland Waterway Transport of 3 December 2018" in the ongoing national programming processes for the European Structural and Investment Funds post 2020, where applicable;

STRESS the need to also pursue the implementation of important flanking measures, such as the reduction of administrative barriers in cross-border Danube navigation, the development of land-side infrastructure (in particular mooring places) as well as the further greening of the inland fleet in order to reach the ambitious targets of "The European Green Deal";

WELCOME the results of the joint Working Group of EUSDR PA 1a and PA 11, which are aimed at the simplification, harmonisation and digitalisation of administrative processes in Danube navigation, which have resulted in a first set of harmonised border control forms (arrival and departure report, crew list as well as passenger list), endorsed by the PA1a and PA11 Steering Groups and which are part of the current TEN-T Corridor Flagship Projects;

ACKNOWLEDGE the successful introduction of the mentioned harmonised control forms in Hungary, the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Serbia and SUPPORT the further roll-out of the control forms along the Danube and its navigable tributaries;

ENCOURAGE the further digitalisation of border control processes, amongst others with the help of the CEF co-financed RIS COMEX project that also facilitates cross-border control procedures;

UNDERLINE the importance of a needs analysis and the development of good-practice concepts for mooring places on the Danube and its navigable tributaries, in order to raise the safety of mooring operations as well as to reduce external effects of mooring;

ENCOURAGE all Danube riparian states to engage in the development of digitalised waterway infrastructure and traffic management systems in line with the Digital Inland Navigation endeavour;

MEET every two years or as necessary to follow up on the present conclusions and make sure that they are implemented as agreed.



## **Status of the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan for the Danube and its navigable tributaries**

(dated 01-04-2020)

### **Key achievements since the endorsement of the Master Plan in 2014**

The **Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan for the Danube and its navigable tributaries** was developed by the EU Danube Region Strategy's Priority Area 1a Steering Group based on the Luxemburg Declaration (2012). It highlights the national needs and mid-term measures required to realise harmonised and stable fairway conditions on the Danube river and its tributaries, in line with the existing international legal framework and the related PA 1a targets.

With the **Ministerial Conclusions signed in Brussels on 3 December 2014**, ten Transport Ministers of the Danube region adopted the Master Plan and agreed to take the necessary measures foreseen in the plan. **The Transport Ministers reconfirmed their commitment to its implementation with the Ministerial Conclusions signed in Rotterdam on 20 June 2016 and in Brussels on 3 December 2018.**

The European Union's involvement enabled an investment offensive, boosting the realisation of the Master Plan through EU co-financed projects mainly within the Connecting Europe Facility, the national Operational Programmes and the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA). The results of these activities are starting to bear fruit on the ground, as fairway conditions are improving at several critical sections.

### **Project initiatives for the implementation of the Master Plan**

The Master Plan is realized through a rich portfolio of transnational and national projects, all of which are listed in the PA 1a project database (<https://navigation.danube-region.eu/projects/>).

#### Transnational projects triggered by the Master Plan:

The most significant transnational project is **FAIRway Danube**. Seven partners from six countries use the co-funding of Connecting Europe Facility to invest approx. 22 million EUR between 2015 and 2020 in order to jointly execute the first implementation phase of the Master Plan. Under the lead of the Austrian Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, FAIRway Danube prepares the harmonized rehabilitation of the Danube and its navigable tributaries by means of the following activities:

- Regularly update the National Action Plans, which monitor the implementation status of the Master Plan and thereby constitute the planning tools for its implementation;
- Procure the necessary equipment and carry out pilot operations in order to, on the one hand, gain experiences for improved operative tasks of the waterway administrations and, on the other hand, establish a solid and harmonised data basis for management decisions regarding follow-up measures;
- Provide the gathered hydrological and hydrographical data on user information platforms for the immediate benefit of the waterway users (water level information, surveying results and water level forecasts).

Selected national projects triggered by the Master Plan:

- **Austria:** The fairway marking system was modernised. A new marking craft was put into operation and all fairway marks were equipped with remote monitoring units that enable the real-time monitoring of the signalisation. The exact position data of the physical buoys will be integrated into the electronic navigation charts (IENCs) to be displayed on board of ships. The nationally financed Catalogue of Measures for the Danube East of Vienna contains both procedures of maintenance activities and river engineering optimisation projects. This includes bedload management as well as the optimisation of regulating structures (e.g. groynes). This optimisation process resulted in less dredging activity and reduced maintenance costs, whilst at the same time fairway conditions under low water conditions were improved significantly.
- **Slovakia:** Within the DaReM project, a list of priority work measures in the Hrušov reservoir will be defined and the consistency of the excavated material will be studied. Rehabilitation dredging measures are planned to be executed with the newly purchased equipment. A sustainable solution for the time after the project will be defined.
- **Hungary:** The entire fairway marking system was successfully modernised by means of the CEF co-funded HUMARK project. Three full-functional marking vessels and three high-speed inspection boats will replace the approx. 45-year-old fleet. All land- and waterside navigation signs are being replaced; 110 buoys are being equipped with GPS trackers that enable the real-time monitoring of the buoys' status and positioning.
- **Croatia:** With EU co-funding from the national Operational Programme the Croatian marking system will be modernised until 2023. This entails the procurement of two modern marking vessels, to be operated on the Sava and Drava rivers, as well as AIS AtoNs for the remote and real-time monitoring of the signalisation.
- **Serbia:** With the procurement and installation of more than 160 new buoys, equipped with AIS AtoN transponders that enable real-time monitoring of the floating signalisation, Serbia has successfully upgraded its marking system on the Danube. The exact position data of the physical fairway marks will be displayed in the electronic navigation charts (IENCs) on board of ships, providing valuable real-time information to the waterway users.
- **Romania:** Extensive maintenance dredging was conducted in several critical locations and improved the availability of adequate fairway conditions, especially between Corabia and Bechet. The quantity of dredged material more than doubled in Romania between 2014 and 2019, by allocating additional financial resources and signing the framework contracts that allowed for works to be carried out under optimum conditions and maintaining navigability also in the low water level periods. Two dredging equipments especially designed for Lower Danube river parameters will be purchased using a national investment fund. Within the SWIM project, co-financed from CEF, an AIS AtoN pilot system will be installed on the critical locations for providing valuable real-time information about the fairway parameters.
- **Bulgaria:** After more than 20 years, maintenance dredging works were conducted in 2018 and 2019 under a framework contract on the Bulgarian Danube sector, which improved the navigation conditions in several critical locations. Dredging equipment will be procured, funded from the national Operational Programme.

The improvement of the navigational systems and topo-hydrographic measurements on the Danube River was finalised in 2018, financed from the Operational Programme. Within the project a specialized surveying vessel for hydrographic measurements in shallow and narrow river sections was constructed.

- **Republic of Moldova:** In 2017, the fairway marking system was upgraded through the installation of navigation signs at the entrance into the Giurgiulesti International Free Port. In 2018, a feasibility study on the need to equip Giurgiulesti Port with a tugboat, a dredger, and ship-generated waste reception facilities has been developed with EU support. The study has been presented to the European Commission and funding for these purchases is expected to be approved. In the meantime, dredging works are carried out where necessary and the adequate fairway conditions are maintained, both on the Moldavian sector of the Danube and in Giurgiulesti Port.
- **Ukraine:** Major and scheduled repairs of 2 dredgers of the “Delta Pilot” Branch of Ukrainian Sea Port Authority (USPA) were made. This equipment is essential to maintain adequate fairway dimensions on the Ukrainian sector of the Danube and to ensure the safe entry of vessels into the Danube ports. A specified program for updating the fleet of the USPA until 2021 provides for the purchase of further dredging equipment.

### Structural measures accompanying the Master Plan

Accompanying measures (e.g. investments in locks) are equally necessary to preserve a good navigation status, which is prescribed by the TEN-T Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013. Although not directly triggered by the Master Plan, the following projects and activities are important flanking measures.

- **Germany:** In the sense of accompanying measures, the German Federal Waterways and Shipping Administration continuously carries out surveying and monitoring, dredging and fairway marking activities in order to preserve stable fairway conditions.
- **Slovakia - Upgrade of Gabčíkovo locks:** The CEF co-funded upgrade of the Gabčíkovo locks aims at the modernisation of the locks and consequently the provision of continuous and reliable navigation conditions for both of the Gabčíkovo lock chambers and to ensure a safe passage through the locks.
- **Hungary:** As a precondition for the implementation of any physical interventions aimed at improving the navigability on the Hungarian Danube, a study for the entire national stretch is being elaborated. This includes the EIA study, building permits documentation and the drafting of tender designs.
- **Croatia:** With co-funding from CEF the EIA study and design documentation for the critical sector Jaruge – Novi Grad on river Sava are under preparation. This includes the delivery of a main design covering works priority measures to be implemented along this critical section and to issue construction permits and physical planning. Regulation works are also foreseen on the Danube, in the critical sector Sotin. A first winter vessel shelter on the common Croatian – Serbian stretch of the Danube will be built in Opatovac. Both measures, at Sotin and Opatovac, will be co-financed within the national Operational Programme.
- **Serbia:** The River training and dredging works on critical sectors on the Danube River & Supervision and environmental monitoring of river training and dredging works on critical sectors on the Danube River are financed from the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA). The implemented river training structures and dredging works



will improve the navigation conditions during low water periods at six critical locations along the Serbian sector of the Danube between Backa Palanka and Belgrade.

- **Serbia - Rehabilitation of the Iron Gate I navigational lock in Serbia:** The navigation lock at the Serbian side of the dam at Iron Gate I has been in operation for about 40 years. The structural, mechanical and electric installations, which are necessary for proper lock operations, are in poor condition. The CEF co-funded project will rehabilitate the Iron Gate I navigational lock.
- **Romania - Rehabilitation of locks on the Danube-Black Sea Canal in Romania:** With funding of the Operational Programme, the locks on the Danube – Black Sea Canal and on the Poarta Alba – Midia Navodari Canal were rehabilitated to ensure the availability, reliability and safety of navigation in both lock chambers.
- **Romania and Bulgaria:** Following the obtaining of environmental permits from the CEF co-financed FAST DANUBE project, capital dredging measures will be executed in three critical locations on the Romanian-Bulgarian border section of the Danube in the framework of the SWIM project, co-financed from CEF, to improve the port access in Corabia port, to create a new sustainable fairway alignment in the Bechet stretch and to ensure two-way navigation under the Calafat – Vidin bridge. The pilot equipment for the execution of the capital dredging works was already purchased.
- **Ukraine:** In order to bring the Danube-Black Sea Deep-Water Navigation Route project in line with the Espoo Convention and to find a compromise solution for the future implementation of the project, a number of steps were taken to adapt Ukraine's environmental legislation to comply with the Espoo Convention and EU legislation. A clear program of actions to achieve the set objectives was developed and presented to the Committee on the Implementation of the Espoo Convention. Since 2019, the realisation of design works on «Reconstruction of construction facilities «Creation of a deep-water ship course of the Danube - Black Sea on the Ukrainian section of the Delta». Feasibility stage» is ongoing.

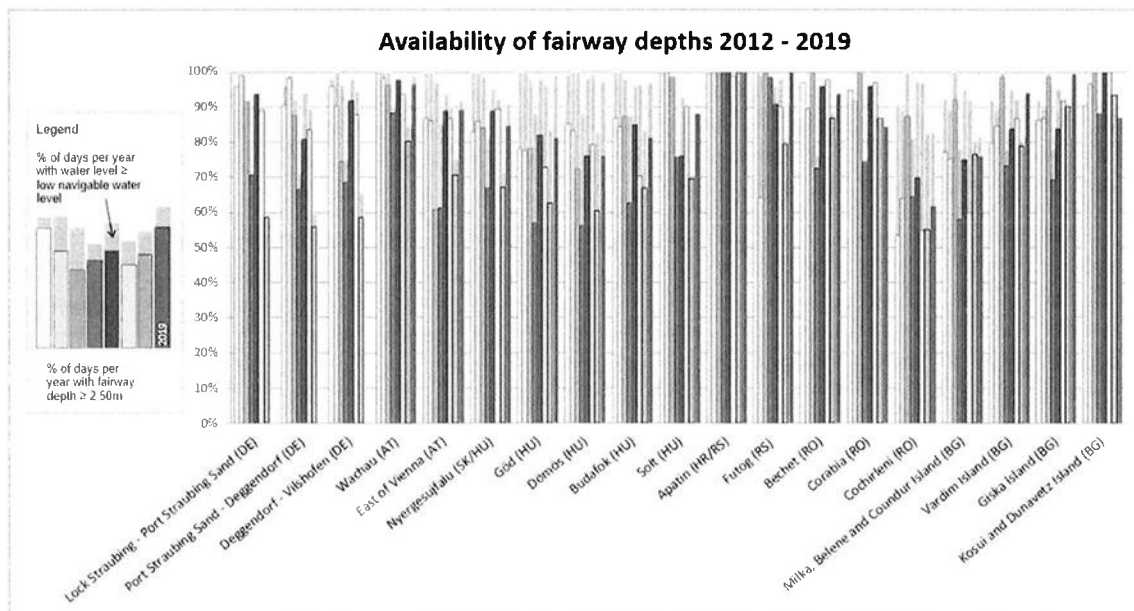
### Effects of the initiatives on the fairway conditions

The operational investments and activities triggered by the transnational and national projects summarised above shall have positive impacts on the fairway conditions at critical locations along the Danube in the medium term.

The figure below summarises the development of fairway conditions between 2012 and 2019<sup>1</sup> for different critical locations along the Danube. The figure illustrates the gap between the available water levels and the actual fairway depths on potentially critical fairway sections (in downstream order):

- The coloured bars depict the % of days per year on which a fairway depth of 2.50m was offered (determined by waterway management activities).
- The grey bars reflect the % of days on which the water level was above the low navigable water level (determined by natural processes like rainfall, which cannot be changed).

<sup>1</sup> For Germany data is available for the period 2012-2018.



The agreed Level of Service is to offer 2.50m fairway depth at low navigable water level, with the exception of Germany, where the target value refers to 2.00m fairway depth. The respective targets are reached when the coloured bars completely overlap the grey ones.

The sections for which the gap is the largest over the years show the biggest need for maintenance and/or rehabilitation interventions. Highly critical locations in terms of maintenance and rehabilitation can be identified: the Hungarian Danube, the area around Milka/Belene/Coundur (BG) and Cochirleani (RO). The section Straubing-Vilshofen (DE) is also critical in terms of navigation conditions. Formerly critical sections, which show a relative improvement over the last years include for instance East of Vienna (AT), Futog (RS), Corabia (RO) and Turcescu (RO).

In 2019, fairway conditions were very favourable until mid-July. In the beginning of August water levels dropped rapidly and remained below or just slightly above Low Navigable Water Level until the end of the year, resulting in fairway depths below 2.50m at several critical locations, particularly on the Central and Lower Danube. Nevertheless, extensive maintenance dredging and fairway marking activities prolonged the period of stable fairway conditions and significantly improved fairway availability during the low water season in summer, especially on the Lower Danube.

## Summary and conclusion

Since the endorsement of the Master Plan in 2014, significant steps have been taken for its implementation. More than 75 million EUR have been invested through EU co-financed projects within the Connecting Europe Facility, the national Operational Programmes and the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA). In Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria more than half of the national investment needs declared in the Master Plan have been satisfied. Hungary has invested significantly more than initially planned in 2014.

Over the last two years, the operative use of the new equipment for targeted rehabilitation and maintenance measures has gradually improved the physical fairway conditions as well as the information situation for the waterway users.

Despite this fact, a major share of the national investment needs until 2020 – as stated in the Master Plan – is still to be secured. Complementing the new equipment (e.g. purchasing dredging equipment) where required and securing sufficient and regular operational budgets at the national level remain to be the key challenges for the next years. In the mid-term the gradual optimisation or establishment of river engineering structures following an integrated approach will be the main objective.

The present Danube Ministerial Conclusions not only address the current status and the next steps for the implementation of the Master Plan, but also encourage the joint work with EUSDR Priority Area 11 - Security for the simplification, harmonisation and digitalisation of border control procedures along the Danube and the establishment of fleet modernisation programs in the sense of flanking measures.