



DECLARATION

concerning common approaches to water management, flood protection, hydropower utilization and nature and biodiversity conservation in the Drava River basin

Based on the holding, from 23 to 25 September 2008 in Maribor, Slovenia, of the international Symposium "Drava River Vision", in which representatives from water management and nature conservation bodies, education institutions and non-government organizations (NGOs) from the Drava River riparian states Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary participated, in response to popular demand for the protection and maintenance of the riverine landscape of the Drava River across the different national borders concerned, and in order to strive for a good status of the river, aspiring to support and strengthen existing strong common approaches to water management, flood protection, hydropower utilization and biodiversity conservation in the river basin, affirming our intention to cooperate in the conservation, administration and further appropriate development of the Drava River and its associated topographical, hydrological and ecological systems,

PRESENT SITUATION:

The Drava River (Italian: Drau, German: Drau, Slovenian: Drava, Croatian: Drava, Hungarian: Dráva) is a tributary of the Danube, and has its source at Toblach (Italy), approximately 1,450 m above sea level. It flows through Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary, and discharges into the Danube at Osijek (Croatia) at approximately 90 m above sea level. With a length of 749 km and a median flow of 560 m³/s, the Drava River is the fourth largest tributary of the Danube.

The Drava River basin is rich in natural resources of water and raw materials, and offers huge potential for sustainable development.

During past centuries, large sections of the Drava River were regulated, successfully reducing natural hazards. Fish migration however has been prevented by the many structures that have been introduced. From Paternion (Carinthia, Austria) downstream, the Drava River is heavily utilized for hydropower. On the Austrian side of the river there are eleven hydropower stations, with a further eight on the Slovenian side and three on the Croatian side. Additional proposed stations are under discussion in Slovenia and Croatia.

Along the Drava River there are important and well preserved ecological core zones, with a huge diversity of animal and plant species. Many of these areas have been placed under protection by the governments concerned, through protection regimes such as National Parks and Nature Parks, and they form part of the "Natura 2000" European protected areas network. In the EU-candidate country Croatia, the nomination of suitable Natura 2000 areas is in preparation, alongside other national protected area designations. The EU has supported many river restoration and rehabilitation projects in recent years, which have served flood protection objectives as well as the conservation of wild fauna, flora and habitats. Increasing areas of natural inundation has been a benefit not only for rare and endangered wildlife but also for the status of the waters.

Overall there has been an obvious improvement in the water quality of the Drava River in recent decades. This has been achieved by the connection of numerous settlements and industrial plants to sewage systems and waste-water treatment plants, which generally operate at high efficiency. There is, nonetheless, still a need for action in several areas.



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To secure the values and ecological functions of the Drava River basin for generations to come, we agree the following ten objectives as priorities for the future:

1. To promote the Drava River as a model for integrated implementation of EU policies on water and nature protection

The EU Directives on water management (Water Framework Directive), flood protection (Flood Directive), and biodiversity conservation (Flora-Fauna-Habitat Directive and Birds Directive) constitute a fundamental basis for river basin management in the Drava River catchment. Intergovernmental coordination and exchange of information can positively reinforce the implementation of relevant policies.

2. To enhance flood protection through the improvement of flood warning systems and through increased information exchange

Flood protection in the Drava River basin is a shared responsibility of all riparian countries. To give warnings in flood-prone areas at an early stage, flood risk must be detected sufficiently early to provide time for people to react. In a context of cross-border coordination and climate change along the Drava River, emphasis should be given in future to the improvement and adjustment of flood forecast models and flood warning systems.

3. To enhance flood protection through protection and restoration of water retention areas along the Drava River

Recent insights – particularly based on flooding disasters – indicate that linear security measures for protection from floods alone may not provide the most effective solutions. In the face of climate change and an expected increase in extreme flood events, we aspire to an improvement in the flood situation and raising the level of system security along the Drava River – this means in the first instance preservation, and then, where necessary and feasible, creation or restoration of suitable water retention areas.

4. To continue and further develop restoration of the Drava River and its floodplains

In recent years many river restoration and rehabilitation projects have shown that flood protection and nature conservation need no longer conflict with each other. River restoration often leads to an enhancement of ecological diversity. Water retention areas associated with the river can prevent uncontrolled outflow of water, thus improving flood protection. Further river restoration and rehabilitation projects with these multiple benefits will be encouraged, both on national level and in a transboundary context, taking into account the economic capacities of particular states.

5. To maintain and further develop the Drava River as an “ecological backbone”

Ecological core zones along the Drava River such as Natura 2000 areas, nature conservation areas, landscape conservation areas or free flowing river sections form an “ecological backbone” of the river basin. This transnational biotope network has to be safeguarded through active transboundary cooperation. The establishment of transboundary protected area systems such as the proposed UNESCO Biosphere Reserve “Danube-Drava-Mura” across five riparian countries forms a key part of this, and will be supported.

6. To re-establish the ecological connectivity of the Drava River for migratory fish

As a result of numerous barriers, the Drava River is no longer passable for fish migrating over long distances. In the future we aim to cooperate in establishing appropriate measures, including fish passes and fish by-passes, to support fish migration in the Drava River and its tributaries, in accordance with the objectives of the Water Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive.



7. To establish the Drava River as a cross-border recreation area

The Drava River provides an attractive location for holiday-makers. A 366 km Drava River cycle path leads from the river's source to Maribor in Slovenia. Opportunities for sustainable regional recreation developments of this kind, based on the Drava River's intrinsic values, should be further explored. We aim to enhance the quality of the Drava River's environment for those who seek recreation and relaxation in an attractive landscape setting.

8. To use opportunities for the Drava River to be a connecting lifeline for different nations

After many years of fragmented approaches, today's more unified Europe offers new opportunities to bring together the people of many different origins who live in the Drava River basin. Those responsible for water management and nature conservation in each country will initiate new dialogues with their counterparts in the other riparian countries, in coordinated efforts towards the shared aim of a high quality of life for the people in this region.

9. To undertake integrated river basin management rather than fragmented sectoral measures

International agreements concluded in recent years such as "Agenda 21", and EU Directives such as those on Water, Floods, Flora, Fauna and Habitats, Wild Birds and Sustainable Energy Sources, together with the shift in social perceptions which these texts represent, strengthen the ongoing development of more sustainable approaches in the field of flood protection and hydropower. Modern approaches to activities such as these, therefore, in a context of integrated river basin management, seek to integrate economic, ecological and social aspects. Harmonised planning of water management, flood protection, hydropower use, recreation and biodiversity conservation can lead to sustainable solutions that also have higher public acceptance.

10. To undertake further development of the Drava River area in partnership with its resident human populations

Those engaged in agriculture, forestry, tourism, energy production and economic development, as well as residents in local communities, are all important partners in achieving the objectives of sustainable development of the Drava River. Adequate cooperation among all these groups can help to minimize any conflict between ecosystem values and economic development.

Signed as a signal for full support at the Drava River Vision Symposium

by the Heads of Delegation of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River from the Danubian States Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia and by the Director of the Department for Hydraulic Engineering of Bolzano, South-Tyrol in Italy,

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Richard Stadler
Austrian HOD to the ICPDR

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Zelko Ostojic
Croatian HOD to the ICPDR

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Gyula Holló
Hungarian HOD to the ICPDR

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Mitja Bricelj
Slovenian HOD to the ICPDR

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Rudolf Pollinger
Italian Representative Hydraulic Engineering

**and adopted by the Participants at the Drava River Vision Symposium,
Maribor, 23th - 25th September 2008.**

Let us join forces in the conservation and sustainable development of the Drava River - an aquatic ecosystem functioning as a corridor of recovery in the heart of Europe!