

Press Release

Tisza River Basin a European Model for Ministerial Action

(11 October 2007: Belgrade, Serbia) The five ministers responsible for water management in Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary and Serbia announced their support for actions protecting the Tisza River Basin from pollution, floods and drought. The announcement was made at a 14:00 press conference today during the second day of the Sixth ‘*Environment for Europe Conference*’ in Belgrade, Serbia.

The ministers specifically supported the main recommendations of a report launched at the press conference entitled *Tisza River Basin Analysis 2007 -- Summary Report. A call to action*. The report was presented by Philip Weller, Executive Secretary of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the organization coordinating the report and Tisza inter-governmental cooperation.

“There is much to be proud of in the Tisza River Basin, including its unique cultures, rare flora and fauna, rich supply of natural resources and the waters of the Tisza River itself,” said Weller. “But it is the cooperation between the five Tisza countries that makes the protection of these assets possible.”

In 2004, during the first ICPDR ministerial meeting, representatives of the five countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding and agreed to prepare a Tisza River Basin Management Plan by the end of 2009. A ‘Tisza Group’ was also created to coordinate all activities for preparing the Plan. The first main activity was the development of the *Tisza River Basin Analysis 2007*, to help decision-makers identify the priority measures needed for protecting Tisza life and waters.

“The Plan is geared to help the Tisza countries meet the EU Water Framework Directive’s requirements by 2015,” says Joachim D’Eugenio from the European Commission’s Environment Directorate (DG Water and Marine Unit) and Chairman of the Tisza Group. “Europe-wide, the Tisza is probably the most advanced in terms of developing such a Plan at the sub-basin level. This achievement is especially important given the fact that the EU does not require sub-basin level plans, although they are strongly encouraged. Two of the five countries are not even in the EU. Furthermore, the Tisza Plan will go beyond water quality issues to also cover water quantity issues in similar depth, anticipating the future EU Flood Risk Management Directive, EU Water Scarcity Directive and Droughts Action Plan. It is truly a European model and pilot programme for other European sub-basins.”

The Summary Report notes the outstanding diversity of landscapes and species in the Tisza Basin, as well as wetland sites and protected areas. However, “this region faces serious threats from pollution and river engineering as well as floods and droughts,” it states. “The substantial demands on water resources in the region, for drinking water as well as for agriculture and industry, together with the impacts of climate change, can result in water shortages or excesses that can be disastrous.”

In response, the Tisza countries have committed to continuing discussions to unify assessment methods, provide additional information to finalize the Tisza River Basin Analysis 2007 and develop a plan of action for completing the Plan.

By the end of 2008, the draft Plan will be available for public consultation. It will include a Programme of Measures to address the priority issues of organic, nutrient and hazardous substance pollution as well as the impacts of extensive river engineering. A list of future infrastructure plans and projects will also be compiled and made publicly available.

Notes to editors:

About the Tisza River Basin

The Tisza River Basin is the largest sub-basin in the Danube River Basin. It is shared by Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary and Serbia. The river rises in the Carpathian Mountains of Ukraine and is formed from the confluence of the White and Black Tisza rivers. The main tributaries of the Tisza are the Mures, Körös, Slaná, Bodrog and Somes rivers. The overall area of the basin is 157,186 km². The length of the Tisza River is 966 km. The basin is home to 14 million people, and land in the basin is mainly used for agriculture, grazing land, nature reserves and urban areas.

What is the ICPDR?

The ICPDR (International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River) is an international organization consisting of 13 cooperating states and the European Union. Since its establishment in 1998, it has grown into one of the largest and most active international bodies engaged in river basin management in Europe. Its activities relate not only to the Danube River, but also the tributaries and ground water resources of the entire Danube River Basin.

The ultimate goal of the ICPDR is to implement the Danube River Protection Convention, and make it a "living" instrument. Its mission is to promote and coordinate sustainable and equitable water management, including conservation, and improvement and rational use of waters for the benefit of the Danube River Basin countries and their people. The ICPDR pursues its mission by making recommendations for the improvement of water quality, developing mechanisms for flood and accident control, agreeing on standards for emissions and by assuring that these measures are reflected in the Contracting Parties' national legislations and are applied in their policies.

For further information, please contact:

Jasmine Bachmann
Secretariat of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)
Email: jasmine.bachmann@unvienna.org
Mobile: +43 676 845 200 220
Website: www.icpdr.org