

# Common River Declaration

## Preamble

About 120 persons participated on November 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> 2003 in the international conference *'Rivers in Central and Eastern Europe – ecological perspectives for the trans European network for transport (TEN-T)'*. The conference was held in Potsdam, and was organised by the Heinrich-Boell-Foundation and BUND (Friends of the Earth) Berlin. During the conference, participants from Germany, France, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Brussels critically discussed the massive construction plans along European rivers, and endorsed a common Declaration.

## Status Quo: natural river landscapes are our capital

Rivers and river landscapes are the most sensible and biologically diverse ecosystems in Europe. Because of numerous ways of usage through the construction of settlements, industry, infrastructure, intensive agriculture as well as through the construction of dams for hydropower, about 80 % of the original river floodplains have disappeared. Additionally, the threat of floods increases because of narrowing river floodplains, straightening of the river and through construction of dikes along rivers. The construction of rivers into 'water-highways' reduced the biodiversity and increased the threat of floods.

Nevertheless, the natural river landscapes in Central Europe are the backbone of these regions. They are an important basis for the inhabitants of these regions. Apart from that, they are the basis for a future sustainable development, especially in the areas of 'soft' tourism and sustainable agriculture. The inhabitants and the decision makers in Central Europe are often not aware of this. Awareness raising in these areas seems to be necessary.

## Rivers and construction plans on national and EU-level

In regard of the construction plans along numerous rivers in Central Europe, the participants of the conference state their concern about:

- The TEN-T (Trans European Network for Transport) of the European Union, which focuses on further construction works along rivers in Europe, for instance along the Danube over a length of more than 1000 kilometres.
- The positive attitude towards the construction of a Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria;
- The still existing pressure in Germany for construction works along the Elbe, Saale, Havel/Spree, Oder including the Hohensaaten-Friedrichsthaler Wasserstraße and Danube;
- The Polish law for the modernisation of the Oder water system, the so-called 'Program Odra 2006';

On the other hand we welcome initiatives which improve and preserve river landscapes:

- The Water Framework Directive of the European Union;
- The Birds- and Habitat Directives and the shaping of the NATURA 2000-network across the EU;
- The halting of the construction works along the Elbe as well as the halting of the construction of dams in the Danube in Germany;
- The new river policy in Germany with the “5-points-programm” of the German Government and the efforts to develop a flood protection water act.

### **The participants of the conference request:**

- When revising the TEN-T Guidelines, EU environmental legislation must be respected.
- A Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment (SEA) should be conducted for each TEN-project, before any political decisions on European level are taken about it.
- The deterioration-prohibition of the Water Framework Directive for water bodies and the goal of reaching an `ecologically good status` through integrated river basin management has to be respected and implemented along the large rivers in Central Europe as well.
- The NATURA 2000-network including the potential NATURA-2000 areas in the candidate countries and the candidate applicants should be respected and implemented.
- No public EU or national funds should be made available for the construction of any part of the TEN-network until a cost-benefit analysis of all other relevant options is carried out.
- TEN-T-planning which is in conflict with other EU-legislation should not be supported by the EU - similar to the Cross Compliance Principle in agriculture.
- Public participation in decision making processes on the European level, for instance in the case of the TEN revision, has to be guaranteed.
- We reject the construction of a Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal. Such a canal would be in contradiction with the Habitats- and Water Framework Directives of the European Union, and would economically be nonsense.
- In order to preserve a good status of rivers and to further develop them, we request a sustainable navigation on rivers. We want ships to be adapted to the national circumstances of rivers, and not the other way around.

- Instead of transport by ship, transport in Central Europe should also take place by railway along the rivers. The therefore necessary improvement of the railway connections are economically more useful than construction works on rivers.

This declaration is supported by the participants of the conference

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Potsdam, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2003