



SÜDOSTEUROPA- GESELLSCHAFT

in cooperation with



Supported by



International Conference
Berlin, 29 and 30 May 2008

EU and Turkish Perspectives on Black Sea Regional Cooperation

**Statement by Milovan Bozinovic, Ambassador,
Permanent Representative of Serbia to the Danube Commission,
Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

BLACK SEA BASIN AND DANUBE: SYNTHESIS AND SYNERGY

1. By common and justified understanding, the Danube is one of the invariables of European identity and a topic discussed in European politics since the earliest times. The Danube is the birthplace of some of the oldest European cultures, but it is also, according to its potential for the future, a strong factor of European integration, of this all-embracing process marking these times and that we have a possibility to impact upon. Which direction will the developments on the Danube and in its riparian States take? What can we do to have our objectives and expectations fulfilled? In this context, I shall now make a few observations and assessments.
2. The Danube Commission that I had the privilege to preside over in the last three years¹ was shaped in its present form by the Belgrade Conference held in 1948, at a time when the contours of an impending Cold War began to emerge. The riparian States, supported by the great powers, sought a binding treaty which would guarantee them free navigation irrespective of the “nationality” of the vessel, of its cargo or ideological positions of the crew. It is highly unlikely that consensus would have been reached on such a crucial matter as free navigation - which is, though, not without its strategic dimension – at a later stage of the fiercest Cold War. It was as if countries felt that there were some important things that needed to be protected from the incoming political animosities.

This significant experience that consensus over the Danube is above our daily political considerations, and this is how it has always been, points to another aspect that is particularly important in the light of our today’s deliberations. Dealing with the Danube cannot be held down or fragmented by any criterion: national, state, scientific or technical discipline, or vertical timescale. All major Danube and Danube-related projects are multinational and interdisciplinary in nature. They are all pure

¹ Between May 2005 and May 2008. The Danube Commission is made up of representatives of 11 member States and is based in Budapest, Hungary. The first Danube Commission was established in 1856.

science and cost effective projects that were a task to be accomplished by more than one generation and, sometimes, by more than one epoch politically.

It is the credit of the European Union, and a sign of its maturity, that it has initiated a number of major Danube research projects in recent years. Thanks to studies like PINE and EFIN, we know now more and have reliable information on the potential and fragile points of the Danube, or how we can improve it and hand it down to the next generations and, at the same time, how we can enjoy this big river and draw tangible benefits from it even today. Practical implications of these studies are embodied in the Action Plan symbolically called NAIADES, a capital and intervening well-known document which serves and will serve in the years to come as a lynchpin of our common efforts to promote the Danube.

One thing is clear: the Danube is an exemplary case showing that the integrated Europe is the comprehensive political, economic and social context making possible and revealing in their full splendour endeavours that will keep us tied to this magnificent river over the next decades.

3. Several other facts and insights deserve to be mentioned as well. The Rhine-Main-Danube (RMD) axis, connecting the North Sea with the Black Sea, is of central importance within Europe's system of inland waterway transport, and this will surely not change in the time to come. At the moment, there is a good atmosphere, better than ever before, to invest in this waterway in the next decades to transform it into an effective, functioning backbone of a future harmonised network of European inland waterways. No accurate estimates have been made of the kind of resources needed for the entire RMD system to become more and fully operational, and perhaps such estimates are not possible to make at all. Nevertheless, we know now that for the section of the Danube covered by Corridor VII – approximately from Linz to the Black Sea – alone, there is a potential for some €3 billion worth of meaningful investments. “Investment in a waterway” means here not only to promote an inter-modal transport network, which is now a fundamental, generally accepted fact, but also to agree on a catalogue of other complementary investment which will profoundly transform Europe's lower Danube region. And

this part of Europe today as it leaves behind all the transition related traumatic experiences and faces new development challenges, is at an advantage politically to move its big river, which used to be on the margins of political interests for many years, more resolutely towards the centre and the mainstream of its development plans.

An environment of a functional, harmonised, effective and economically attractive inland waterway system will lead us to face further challenges. First of all, the present organisational infrastructure of European inland waterways will have to be modernised. River commissions, primarily the Rhine and Danube Commission, will remain as the focal points of these activities. However, some things will have to be changed. For instance, changes will affect the mandatory nature of decisions made by commissions; the mutual harmonisation of navigation regulations, the compatibility of vessels, crew and other navigation aspects. What is encouraging as far as the Danube Commission is concerned is the news that the work on streamlining the basic document “Convention on the regime of Danube navigation” (Belgrade Convention) is being finalised and that it seems that this major reform effort since the Danube Commission was set up sixty years ago will be crowned with success.

An early adoption of the new, revised version of the Convention (expected by the middle of 2009) will have several positive effects. The most important among them is the enlargement of the Danube Commission by three more full-fledged members: Turkey, France and the European Union. All member States have already made known their willingness to support the decision. Each of the new members will bring to the Commission some specific, either short-term or long-term positive effects. Let us mention that France and Turkey, two strong economies, prove with their membership in much larger measure that the Danube is a transport resource and a potential they will be counting on in the future. This can only make easier the adoption of investment decisions that are expected in the period ahead. On the other hand, the EU is given the opportunity to act as a full member within the Commission in all the areas that constitute its original responsibilities and that are part of the NAIADES Action Plan as a point of departure for all EU activities in this field.

4. A third aspect that I would like to touch upon briefly makes, in a way, the main theme of the Conference. For a number of years now, the Danube and the Black Sea are viewed as a complex system having strong internal links. This is so as it can be no other way. To become aware of this fundamental fact, it was necessary for Europe to rediscover first the lower Danube region and, then, to look further to the East, towards the Black Sea region. This has been extensively discussed at international conferences and in political and academic circles. Various hypotheses are in circulation – from worst case scenarios inspired in recent months by ambiguities and concerns about oil price rises, to those seeing the Black Sea region as a motor of development and stabilisation of the Middle East. Recently, in my capacity as President of the Danube Commission, I had the honour and pleasure to visit the BSEC headquarters in Istanbul where we agreed close cooperation between the two organisations. This is, I believe, natural and logical and enjoys the support of all DC member States. After all, a significant number of these countries are members of both organisations.

The issue of a unified Danube-Black Sea system, its prospects and preconditions for its further integration and merging will, for obvious reasons, figure on the agenda of this Conference. The DC and, I reckon, all other factors of European inland waterways have already integrated that angle of vision into their approach on the subject. The importance of Turkey as a Euro-Asian country and culture, as a geographic and political centre and pivotal point of a complex geopolitical configuration has been widely looked at without providing definitive answers to all questions posed in the discussion. However, some facts and truths have still emerged, like that Turkey is that strong and reliable factor to be reckoned with, a partner that Europe can and must rely upon on an expanse going from the Eastern Mediterranean, South East Europe, to the Middle East and the Black Sea basin. This is equally true for the future of the Danube navigation that includes the creation, through a well-considered development policy and investment, of a fully integrated Danube-Black Sea navigation system. The Danube Commission member States are therefore aware of, and they welcome an early upgrading of Turkey as a full-fledged member. It is my honour and pleasure to pass this message on to you.