

European Commission
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Adina Vălean
EU Commissioner for Transport

Virginijus Sinkevičius
EU Commissioner for the Environment, the Oceans and Fisheries

Prague, 30th April 2020

Subject: **Inclusion of Central European Waterways in TEN-T Network**

Dear Madam Commissioner, Dear Mr. Commissioner,

We would be grateful for your kind attention to the current status of the Danube-Oder-Elbe Water Corridor Project promoted by the Czech and Polish governments.

Environmental NGOs have recently informed Czech media that they are asking the European Commission to stop preparations for the Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor and associated works on the navigable rivers Elbe and Oder.

We consider this request to be untimely and uncalled for, given that the Czech government is currently evaluating the project from all points of view, and is also counting on a thorough and objective assessment of the impact on the environment and regional development which is the correct process according to European legislation. The up-grading and interconnection of Central European waterways should be considered as finalization of missing links determined by the European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance (AGN) and in the light of their contribution to the Baltic-Adriatic and Orient East Med Core Network Corridors TEN-T.

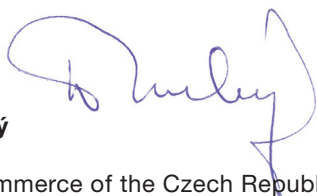
Environmental organisations have been fighting this project for various reasons since the 1990s. However, today's design of the waterway is very different from the design 30 years ago. Accordingly, we would like to provide you with some basic information and facts, to assist the Commission in its evaluation. The appended declaration covers the recent feasibility studies, environmental impact, and the issues of transport and economic development.

We have been pleased that the European Commission aims to help EU countries meet transport needs with a view to decarbonising transport and moving freight from road to rail and waterborne transport with a focus on smart technologies. We greatly appreciate EU support for the development of Czech waterways. Currently support for the Czech project to increase the capacity of the Vltava waterway in connection with the upcoming projects on the Elbe is financed from CEF funds. Here too, we see the contribution to the development of a sustainable transport network for the future, to meet the ambitious Green Deal programme.

If you are interested in receiving more detailed information on Czech waterway projects, we would like to propose a working meeting with representatives of the Czech Ministry of Transport and experts for an open discussion on this topic, in order to avoid unilateral views. We will be happy to build on good examples of European waterways projects.

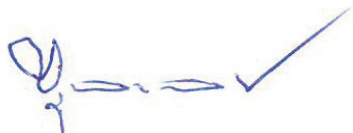
The Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor is fully in line with EU policy and we therefore call for this project to be included in the trans-European transport network TEN-T in the forthcoming revision to strengthen cooperation between Member States and implementation of the Green Deal.

Yours respectfully,



Vladimír Dlouhý

President
Chamber of Commerce of the Czech Republic
Hospodářská komora České republiky



Zdeněk Jandajsek

President, Agrarian Chamber of the Czech Republic
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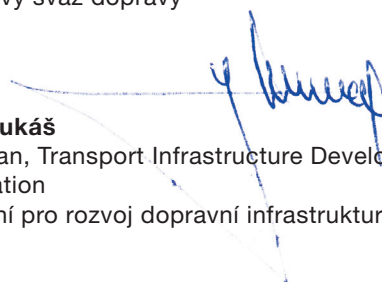
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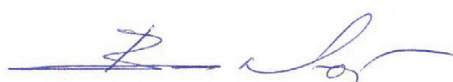
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Chairman
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ASSOCIATION OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED
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Konfederace zaměstnavatelských
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Hospodářská a sociální rada
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THE UNION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE MORAVIAN-SILESIA REGION

DECLARATION ON DANUBE-ODER-ELBE WATER CORRIDOR

1) Feasibility study

In 2018, the Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic completed the feasibility study of Danube-Oder-Elbe Water Corridor. In January 2019 results of the feasibility study, which demonstrated the economic efficiency of the multi-purpose water corridor project, were approved by Central Commission of the Ministry of Transport. The requirement to prepare a feasibility study was placed on the Czech Republic before the last revision of the TEN-T trans-European transport network. A feasibility study of the key Danube-Oder-Elbe interconnection was therefore prepared in agreement with Poland and Slovakia. Poland and Slovakia are also carrying out feasibility studies for their stretches of the waterways which we call 'water corridors' in order to reflect their other functions such as water management and regional development, and these studies should be completed soon.

The steps taken to assess the feasibility and start preparations for the first stages of the Danube-Oder-Elbe Water Corridor took place on the basis of the **Memorandum on the preparation of the Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor**, signed by the Transport Ministers of the Czech Republic and Slovakia and the Minister of the Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation of Poland on 31 January 2017.

Based on the results of the feasibility study implemented by the Czech Ministry of Transportation, Czech transport minister together with Polish minister of maritime economy and inland navigation signed on 28 August 2019 the **Declaration on the cooperation for the development of inland waterways** which aim to include Oder waterway and Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor into trans-European transport network TEN-T.

2) Environment

Thanks to the feasibility study, a new route has been designed to avoid environmentally sensitive areas and protected reserves. The ambition of the current proposal is a nature-friendly waterway modelled on examples of German and French projects supported by the EU funds.

In relation to the environment, environmental experts who have been working on the feasibility study have carefully assessed the possible impacts, especially with regard to the design of the new route. From the point of view of nature and landscape protection, it is important that the new route completely avoids non-canalised, near-natural river sections. According to our information, after completion of the study, an agreement was reached between the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of the Environment to prepare a legal assessment of the environmental impact of the project to the designated NATURA 2000 areas in the next stage of the project evaluation. We believe that this agreement will contribute to an objective evaluation of the whole project.

It appears that in their letter the NGOs are asking you to stop project preparation immediately without legal environmental impact assessment under the SEA and EIA processes, which would mean that the project would not be objectively assessed, and this would be in conflict with the European Union's practices and the Czech Senate Resolution No. 233/2019, which called for increased attention to the environmental aspects and adaptation to climate change during preparation of the water corridor project.

3) Transport and development

The Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor was designed primarily to serve as transport infrastructure, to help transfer a significant volume of freight from roads to alternative modes of transport, in accordance with the European Commission's current Green Deal priorities, i.e. with the aim of transferring up to 75% of all freight transport from road to more environment-friendly modes of transport, including inland navigation. The importance of inland navigation for the national economy of much of the EU is undisputed even in the current situation where, despite all possible limitations as a result of COVID-19 prevention, water transport continues to serve the economy on the vast majority of all waterways. At the same time, the other alternative transport mode – the railway network – that is systematically promoted by non-governmental environmental organisations, is not suitable for certain types of cargo or shipment cycles, and we see as yet unexploited potential synergy between the two ecological transport modes.

In the Czech Republic, if the waterways are not developed to handle their share of the new traffic, then the targeted transfer of 75% of transport from road to rail and water transport would require the railway network to increase its performance (in tonne-kilometres) by 196% – in the case of long-distance transport (over 300 km) – and by 335% if all freight movements are considered. These are impossible tasks, and yet the expected growth in transport, estimated by the OECD at 270-400% on the current levels, is not taken into account, while a more sober estimate by Ernst & Young is a 220% increase from today's levels. This would mean an increase for the railways in the Czech Republic to staggering proportions: 430% (transport over 300 km) to 735% (all freight). It is very likely that the rail networks of other European countries would face similar challenges, so it is clear that without the strong involvement of inland navigation throughout the EU, the objectives of the Green Deal programme are simply not even remotely

attainable. The Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor plays an irreplaceable role, both from the Czech and European perspective, in connecting European navigation areas and in increasing the overall capacity of European waterways.

Ensuring reliable access to European waterways is essential for the future of the Czech economy and free enterprise. Currently, the only waterway linking the Czech Republic with the rest of Europe is the Elbe river. Therefore, it is the priority of the state in the field of water transport to improve navigation conditions in the border section, which seems particularly important at a time when the Czech economy is threatened by another economic crisis.

From the point of view of the Czech economy, the first stage, a pilot section, which would connect the industrial area of the Moravian-Silesian Region with the Oder Waterway in Poland, is of vital importance. Without connecting this region to the waterway, there is a risk of negative effects resulting from poor transport accessibility of the region, and the Czech Republic could lose top engineering companies in the near future, which would lead not only to increased unemployment but also to loss of competitiveness. The connection of the Czech Republic to the Oder waterway, and thanks to that to the seaport of Szczecin-Swinoujście and via Berlin to the European waterway network, has always had continuous support on both the Czech and Polish sides. The first democratic talks on the navigability of the Oder River took place in the 1990s with the participation of President Václav Havel and Aleksandr Kwaśniewski. Thanks to feasibility studies carried out by the Czech Republic and Poland in recent years, a significant acceleration in the planning of this important cross-border project has taken place.

The Czech government discussed the possibilities of the Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor with neighbouring states and the intention was particularly positive for the Visegrad Group of countries and the states of the Danube region, including Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia and Serbia. The interconnection of the Czech Republic, industrial Silesia and the Szczecin and Berlin areas with the Danube Water Corridor could significantly contribute to the use of water transport throughout the region. The possibility of involving the Romanian seaport of Constanta in Central European logistics is also significant.

The European project of Seine-Scheldt could be used as a good example for this project. We believe that European experts with such experience will help Czech Republic to improve and innovate in improving the environmental performance of waterways in order to meet the ambitious goals of the European 'Green Deal' programme.

4) Water management

Another important aspect of the water corridor is its role in water management of the Czech Republic, especially in central and southern Moravia, which suffers from severe droughts. In some regions, strategic water management structures are completely lacking, and only naturally close measures and construction of small reservoirs prove inadequate. An important successful example in this respect is the water management functions of the Rhine-Main-Danube Canal. Similar water management functions have also been planned for the Seine-Nord Europe Canal.

Due to climate change, the current situation can have a very negative impact not only on the economy and agriculture, but also on ensuring drinking water for the population.

Therefore, we believe that with appropriate design and communication, a detailed project can be designed and implemented which will not only benefit transport and water resources but will also be beneficial for ensuring minimum flows throughout the associated rivers all year round. The study results of studies also show that some sections of the water corridor could be beneficial for flood protection of the most endangered locations in the neighbourhood area.

Given the need to solve the impacts of climate change, securing water supplies is one of the top priorities of the Czech Republic. Water management may prove to be a strong argument for implementing this long-term project for ensuring the stability of Central Europe.

5) Agriculture and food sovereignty

The Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor is essential for the Czech Republic, but also for other neighbouring countries, especially Germany, Slovakia and Poland from the point of view of the current development of rainfall. In recent years, droughts and monsoon rains have caused huge problems in agriculture and food production. It is essential to ensure a continuous and balanced flow of water in these regions, so that fertile areas can benefit from controlled irrigation and provide our population with a lasting and balanced food supply with efficient water use. Water is an essential attribute of security not only for industry, but mainly for human life, i.e. drinking water, water for irrigation, water for livestock breeding and food production. It is important to bear in mind that we have the best soil in these regions around the rivers, which, due to lack of water, has no chance of producing quality vegetables, fruits and other nutritional products. At the same time, without water, quality of soil degrades, and the environment deteriorates. The last ten years have shown us that despite the high level in animal genetics, plant varieties, nutrition and plant protection, we are mainly short of water at the right time. This project could be the foundation stone in the functioning of the basic needs and helping to provide enough food, which will never be enough, as by 2050 it is expected to be around 10 billion people on the planet. Functioning agriculture is the basis of food sovereignty.

COPY:

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