

*Address by István ÓRI, President of the ICPDR in 2005*

Dear Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This conference is organised at the initiative of the Government of Ukraine, in cooperation with the government of Romania and Moldova with the support of UNESCO, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, the Ramsar Wetlands Convention, the Council of Europe, UNDP Black Sea Recovery Project and Danube Regional Project, WWF and the European Commission. I am speaking on behalf of an international organisation participating in this process.

As President of the International Commission for the protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) in 2005 I had the chance to visit part of the Danube delta area in Ukraine for the first and the only time so far in my life. Although it was for a very limited time I was impressed by the beauty of the area but at the same time I realised also the need for social and economic development. However development should be considered with due care to the environmental and natural values and this is the challenge we call sustainable development. That is what I emphasised during my presidential mission and am emphasising now. This challenging task has to be faced by countries sharing the region and by the wider international community since this unique ecosystem of the Danube delta is of international importance and plays an active role in the protection of the Black Sea as well.

I don't wish to go deeper into the description of the unique features of the Danube Delta and its importance now. The preliminarily distributed conference paper gives an excellent overview of it and the two days ahead of us will provide an excellent opportunity to discuss all aspects relevant to the delta and its future.

Allow me just to share some thoughts about the history of the realisation of this conference and related expectations.

While dealing with the Delta we should not conceal neither the potential conflict of interests of the countries concerned nor the potential conflict of interests of the ecosystem of the Danube delta and its development related activities.

The ICPDR as an international governmental organization responsible for the protection and sustainable use of the Danube Rivers has already faced some of such potential conflicts and managed to handle them by clearly defining its role. The Bystroe project was discussed in our meetings and similar process started concerning the Moldavian oil terminal. Already existing navigation-supporting hydrotechnical structures on the Romanian territory came up also in the debates. Some more might follow.

It was agreed that the ICPDR serves as a platform for exchange of information and dialog and stressed that the potential conflicts should be resolved among the interested parties.

We came also to the conclusion that the Danube Delta should be dealt with as a whole in its complexity. That's why this conference takes place now and I am proud that the Hungarian ICPDR presidency could contribute to the consolidation of the situation. Instead of deepening conflicts we managed to divert the processes towards dialog and discussion by putting the Delta issue in a wider context and facilitate the organisation of this event.

At this point I wish to acknowledge the Ukrainian leadership in convening the conference and the willingness of the other countries to participate in such a forum.

I wish to underline also the role of the international organizations and conventions concerned in the preparation of this conference. Each of these organizations has special mandate but cooperation and coordination between them is necessary and appreciated.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all can agree that the development of the delta area should be handled in peaceful coexistence, and based on professional expertise excluding political interest, furthermore integrating environmental and nature conservation aspects in the economic decision making process.

EU legislations and other relevant international legal instruments are in place to provide professional and legal guidance to the activities.

By the EU enlargement process the Danube and its delta attracts more and more attention of the European community. Presently, EU regulation applies to more and more Danube countries and the Black Sea countries will also step by step follow it.

As an upstream country representative I find it important to note that all countries of the Danube river basin are aware of their interest as well as their responsibility for the preservation of the Danube delta.

The Memorandum of Understanding on common strategic goals signed between the Danube and the Black Sea protection commissions in November 2001 is a high level confirmation of this responsibility.

All pollution reduction measures taken by the upstream countries lower the risks of the negative or adverse effects on the Delta ecosystems and on the Black Sea itself.

From the Danube delta and the Black Sea protection point of view the Presidency of the ICPDR is in the best hands now since a lower Danube country, Moldova holds it in 2006. No doubt, an increased focus on this region will be ensured this year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the ICPDR and also of the other international organizations involved we offer our expertise and wish fruitful discussions on this very important issue. We hope to reach agreement on a Delta vision based on which harmonized joint efforts and national programs can be realized.

This conference can lead to creating further good will and common understanding and conclude with confirming mechanisms for securing ongoing and further cooperation (for instance the Trilateral Biosphere Reserve or the Basin Management Plan for the Danube delta in line with the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive).

Hopefully the increased attention and involvement of the international community will facilitate also external support to the realization of the planned programs for the benefit of the Delta ecosystems and people of the Delta region.

I repeatedly appreciate cooperation between the countries in achieving sustainable development in the Danube Delta and joint efforts of relevant international organization with the same aim.

Thank you for your attention.