

New International System for Early Flood Warning in Danube River Basin Launched

VIENNA, 10 March (UN Information Service) -- The first international system for forecasting Danube floods and providing an early flood warning was launched today by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission.

The new system will provide the national authorities of countries in the Danube River Basin – the most international river basin in the world -- with up to 10 days to prepare for large floods. Examples of national response measures include opening temporary flood retention areas, building temporary flood protection structures such as sandbag walls, and civil protection measures, such as closing down water supply systems (to avoid contamination) and evacuating community residents.

Following the disastrous 2002 floods in the Danube and Elbe river basins, the ICPDR accepted the JRC's offer to develop and test a basin-wide flood alert system. `Danube-EFAS´ is now part of the JRC's European Flood Alert System (EFAS), used by 25 national authorities across Europe and covering over 85 per cent of the continent's major international river basins.

“Developing and testing of the Danube-EFAS directly supports a key measure of the ICPDR's Flood Action Programme,” said ICPDR Executive Secretary Philip Weller. “EFAS records will also help the ICPDR to track long-term climatic trends and better prepare for the impact of climate change.”

Memoranda of Understanding for the development of the Danube-EFAS have been signed with, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Romania. Negotiations are pending with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

“EFAS complements but does not replace existing national flood forecasting systems,” said Dr. Ad de Roo, JRC's Project Manager for EFAS. “While the Danube-EFAS has already had some testing in the Danube, it will improve through user feedback, so we strongly encourage the new system to be used as much as possible.”

“With basin-wide coverage and extended warning times, we strongly believe its use will help reduce the negative impacts of Danube floods – financial, social and environmental -- in our country,” said Ms. Lucia Ana Varga, Head of the Romanian Delegation to the ICPDR and State Secretary for Environment and Sustainable Development – responsible for flood management in Romania.

Danube-EFAS information is available through a password-protected website, 24 hours a day, through an online service managed by the JRC. The system currently includes 700 rainfall stations in the Danube Basin, with plans for an increase to around 3,000 stations through an ongoing European-funded EU-FLOOD-GIS project carried out by JRC. Information includes rainfall and flood forecasts throughout the river basin, and maps showing rivers potentially reaching critical alert levels for all Danube tributary rivers with upstream areas larger than 4,000 km².

A training session will be held for users next June in Budapest, Hungary. Danube-EFAS is expected to go into full operation in 2009-2010 following additional use and improvement.

Note to Editors:

The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) is an international organization consisting of 13 cooperating states and the European Union. Since its establishment in 1998, the ICPDR has grown into one of the largest and most active international bodies of river basin management expert in Europe. ICPDR deals not only with the Danube itself, but also with the whole Danube River Basin, which includes also its tributaries and the ground water resources.

The ultimate goal of the ICPDR is to implement the Danube River Protection Convention (DRPC) and make it a living tool. Its ambitious mission is to promote and coordinate sustainable and equitable water management, including conservation, 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 standards for emissions and by assuring that these are reflected in the Contracting Parties' national legislations and applied in their policies.

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) is a Directorate-General of the European Commission comprising 2,900 employees in seven research Institutes in five European Union Member States. The mission of the JRC is to provide customer-driven scientific and technical support for the conception, development, implementation and monitoring of EU policies. As a service of the European Commission, the JRC functions as a reference centre of science and technology for the Union. Close to the policy-making process, it serves the common interest of the Member States, while being independent of special interests, whether private or national. The European Flood Alert System (EFAS) has been developed and tested since 2003 at the Joint Research Centre's Institute for Environment and Sustainability in close collaboration with the national authorities of the Member States and the various meteorological services. EFAS currently issues two medium-range flood forecasts each day, providing 3-10 day advance warnings for the most important river basins. When flooding is imminent the results of the analysis are immediately forwarded to the water agencies linked with the EFAS Project.

To learn more about EFAS, visit <http://efas.jrc.it/>

For further information, please contact:
Jasmine **Bachmann**, ICPDR Secretariat
Mobile: +43 (0) 676 845 200 220, Fax: +43 1 26060 5895
Email: jasmine.bachmann@unvienna.org
Web site: www.icpdr.org