

# Presidency of the Slovak Republic in the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River

In 2024, the Slovak Republic is chairing the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR).

The Presidency is based on the rotation of the 14 Danube states and the European Commission, which are signatories of the Danube River Protection Convention. Hence, the Slovak Republic is the presiding state once every 15 years.

As part of the Slovak presidency, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment of the Slovak Republic appointed Ing. Vladimír Novák, Director General of the Directorate of Water Policy, to be its president. The ICPDR reported on this at the 14th regular meeting of the heads of the ICPDR delegations, which took place in December 2023 in Vienna.

The Convention on Cooperation in the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube was signed on 29th June 1994 in Sofia, Bulgaria. In 2024, we are therefore commemorating 30 years of successful cooperation between the Danube countries. In 2024, we are also commemorating another anniversary – 20 years since the declaration of International Danube Day on 29th June (date of signing the Convention).

The Convention on Cooperation in the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube created basis for future cooperation of the Danube countries, especially in the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive and Directive on the Assessment and Management of Flood Risks (Floods Directive). In this context, the ICPDR develops support activities and measures in the Danube river basin, coordinates the implementation of EU directives, creates a platform for the ongoing exchange of experience, and facilitates cooperation between EU and non-EU countries. In February 2022, all signatory states of the Convention signed the Ministerial Danube Declaration, in which they commit to achieving good water status, increasing the safety of residents against floods and droughts, as well as returning the Danube iconic fish – the sturgeon – to its waters.

On 25th and 26th June 2024, the Directorate of Water Policy of the Ministry of Environment organized a two-day meeting of the Permanent Working Group, which discussed the fundamental direction of the ICPDR's activities. On behalf of the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, the meeting was opened by the president of ICPDR for the 2024, Ing. Vladimír Novák.

Furthermore, the Directorate of Water Policy of the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic organized the meeting of the Monitoring & Assessment Expert Group (MA EG) in Bratislava on 25th and 26th September 2024, in the premises of the Water Research Institute (VÚVH) as well as online.

On 24th September 2024, the so-called JDS5 Biology Core Group and JDS5 Chemical Core Group working meetings were organized with the aim of organizing the Joint Danube Survey (JDS5) in 2025; its main goal is proposing a programme for the field of biology and chemistry. The organization and premises will be provided by VÚVH.

The priorities of the Slovak ICPDR presidency in 2024 are mainly the following:

- Support for processing the ICPDR Interim Report on the Joint Programme of Measures, or implementation of Danube Basin Management Plans. The Interim Report will be prepared in the form of examples of successful implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive and Floods Directive. The deadline for approval of the Interim Report is December 2024.
- Support for Joint Danube Survey 5 (JDS5) – this is the fifth cycle of the joint survey of the Danube. Previous surveys were carried out in 2001, 2007, 2013, and 2021. The JDS is the most comprehensive surface water

monitoring research project in the world, harmonizing water monitoring practices in the Danube countries to support compliance with the Water Framework Directive. Scientific research teams from all Danube countries are participating in the survey. JDS helps to cover the information gaps necessary for updating the management plan of the Danube basin administrative area. An important role is played by VÚVH – Water Research Institute with its expert staff and laboratory equipment. The Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute (SHMÚ), which provides in-kind support for the TransNational Monitoring Network for all Danube countries, is also cooperating in the survey. There will be new challenges for monitoring in JDS5: eDNA will be used to assess biodiversity elements, sturgeon will be monitored. Preparation for JDS5, which is expected to take place in spring 2025, is being carried out throughout 2024.

- Support for the organization of the ICPDR Sustainable Hydropower Workshop, which took place on 4–5th June 2024 in Vienna. In 2011, the ICPDR published the Main Principles for the Integration of Environmental Aspects of Hydropower Use, which the Danube countries committed to incorporate into their national policies. The aim of the workshop was to present new challenges in the field of renewable energy sources and the adoption of the EU RePower regulation in 2021 in the countries of the Danube basin. Hydropower stations offer the possibility of reducing greenhouse gas emissions; however, at the same time they have negative impact on river ecology. The workshop was a dialogue between water managers and power engineers to ensure balanced and integrated development, which dealt with the potential conflict of interests from the beginning.
- Accompanying events on the occasion of Danube Day on 29th June 2024, due to the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the declaration of Danube Day. This international day was announced on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Convention on Cooperation in the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube.
- Presentation of activities within the “LIFE Living Rivers” project, which aims to restore rivers. The Directorate of Water Policy of the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic is cooperating in the project, and the main partner is VÚVH. It was assumed that representatives of the Danube countries would be invited to one of the workshops in 2024. This is a contribution to the implementation of the Water Plan of Slovakia as well as the EU Water Framework Directive the EU Nature Restoration Law, the obligation to restore rivers and ensure free-flowing sections of rivers.

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