

COMMUNIQUÉ

Ministerial Conference on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Belgrade Convention

Danube Commission - Strengthening the partnership in free navigation on the Danube *Belgrade, Republic of Serbia, 29 June 2018*

On 29 June 2018, the Ministerial Conference was held at the Palace of Serbia in Belgrade on the occasion of marking the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Convention regarding the Regime of Navigation on the Danube, more commonly known as the *Belgrade Convention*. The 90th jubilee meeting of the Danube Commission takes place following this conference. The Republic of Serbia, as the host of the whole event, has organized and opened the exhibition "70 Years of the Belgrade Convention" at the premises of the Palace of Serbia on 28 June 2018, ahead of the Ministerial Conference.

The Danube Conference in Belgrade which was attended by 163 members of state delegations as many as 83 accredited journalists commenced its work on 30 July 1948. During the Conference substantial agreements on a new navigation regime on the River Danube were reached. The Convention re-established the freedom of navigation. Its application contributed to the improvement of economic and cultural ties as well as the strengthening of trust along the Danube. For the first time in the history of Danube navigation, the new convention established a uniform navigation regime with common traffic regulations as well as a single regulatory body for the River Danube. The first Article of the Belgrade Convention guarantees free navigation on the Danube and undiscriminatory port charges for merchant ships and goods of all countries "on the basis of equality in respect of port and navigation charges, and conditions for merchant shipping". The Belgrade Convention was adopted at the last session of the Conference on 18 August 1948, and entered into force on 11 May 1949.

Given the complexity of historical circumstances in which the Convention on the Danube Navigation Regime was signed and the Danube Commission (DC) was formed, as well as the fact that the Convention is still in force and operational today, the extent of the changes, the Belgrade Conference of 1948 brought about for the Danube, became clearly visible. There is a continuity of the free navigation regime from the distant 1815, 1856 and 1921, with the principle of the "Danube-River of Cooperation" becoming the foundation of seven decades of existence of the Danube Commission and the duration of the Belgrade Convention. That is why the year 1948 – representing the turning point for navigation on the Danube in recent history - is placed in the DC's coat of arms, along with symbols representing the river navigation.

Today, the Danube Commission has 11 member countries: The Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Serbia, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine. At the beginning of the 21st century, the DC entered into a close cooperation with now 10 observer countries. Since 2001, this status has been granted to: the Republic of Turkey, the French Republic, the

Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, the Hellenic Republic, the Kingdom of Belgium, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, the Republic of Cyprus, and Montenegro. In addition, the DC's meetings are attended by the representatives of important international organizations: The European Commission (EC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (CCNR), the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube (ICPDR), the International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC), the Moselle Commission and the Organization for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).

The modern trends in the countries of Europe have created conditions in which certain articles of the Belgrade Convention need to be actualized and adapted to the new conditions in the transport sector.

At the 60th session of the DC in 2002, by agreement of the Member States, the work of the Preparatory Committee for the diplomatic conference was renewed in light of revising the Convention on the Danube Navigation Regime in accordance with the new geopolitical circumstances, but still on the basis of non-discrimination and mutual benefit of the Contracting Parties, respecting the sovereign rights and economic interests of the states. The audit process is still ongoing.

In view of new political, economical and environmental challenges, DC member states and all relevant stakeholders aim collectively at the enhancement of safety and security by means of improving common regulations for Danube navigation. Modal shift should be tackled jointly in favour of inland waterways. Further development of the DC, whose 70th anniversary is celebrated in 2018 today in Belgrade, should be considered in the light of new ideas and changing political circumstances.

Bearing in mind everyone's desire for the Danube to become a single traffic, cultural and natural space, the active participation of the DC in the implementation of projects for improving the conditions of navigation on the Danube, with the acceptance of all the requirements of environmental protection, is an imperative for the further development of the countries in the Danube Basin. In that sense, the DC, with its traditional role in the field of navigation and in enhanced cooperation with other organizations, encourages the role of safe, environmentally friendly and economically efficient water transport. The DC Member States are promoting multimodality and balance of development of all modes of transport, since the European inland waterways of international significance should be fully integrated into the European Transport Network.

All the stakeholders support the necessary investments in the development of river infrastructure (except in any built infrastructural facilities, the construction, reconstruction, alteration, or later partial or complete demolition of which would cause unjustifiable negative environmental impact) that include waterways, ports, fleet modernization, digitalization and education, improvement of administrative procedures, and the development and application of Intelligent Transport Systems which shall ensure the environmental benefits of Inland Waterway Transport and resistance to climate change, thus preserving the Danube as a cornerstone of the common European house.