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HUNGARIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**Position paper**  
**of the National Council for Sustainable Development (NFFT)**  
**regarding to the European Danube Strategy**

The NFFT welcomes the decision of June 2009 by the European Council, pursuant to which the Commission was assigned to prepare a macro-regional level EU Strategy pertaining to the Danube region by the end of the year 2010.

The Council supports the endeavour according to which Hungary feels great responsibility and commitment towards the successful preparation of the Strategy, with special regard to the circumstance that the adoption thereof in the European Council will expectedly take place in the first half of 2011, which may be an outstanding achievement of the Hungarian EU presidency due at that time.

The Council considers the creation of the Macro-Regional Strategy to be a tool that could function as a model in promoting the sustainable development of this special region, by the establishment of new perspectives and opportunities, and a real and effective co-operation framework and a harmonized system of conditions for execution. We support the endeavour that the comprehensive objective of the strategy to be prepared should be the achievement of sustainable development and the strengthening of regional cohesion (mitigation of inequalities) in the region.

The Strategy is a novel initiative, at the same time it can build upon several EU and international political, specialist policy, legal and economic regulatory and co-operational antecedents. The Strategy may create a new value by considering, harmonizing and further developing these in an integrated way, so that the Strategy should properly reflect the values, basic objectives and core principles of the EU on the one hand, and on the other hand provide for the specific and joint interests of the individual Member States to be asserted in an adequate manner. The Strategy shall be equally extended to the areas of politics, society, culture, the environment and the economy.

The Council welcomes initiatives aimed at value and heritage preservation, and those providing for the respect of such common European values as democracy, tolerance, the intensification of equal opportunities, cultural diversity, training and education, scientific co-operation, the natural and built environment, the preservation of our intellectual and material heritage. Economic development must be implemented by utilising the comparative advantages of the region, in harmony with social-economic-environmental aspects, and without the decrease of environmental potential, so that the network based development of society, the development of the conditions of a sustainable economic structure, and the preservation and sustainable use of an excellent environmental potential should be implemented jointly, in a complex manner. These at the same time together serve the promotion of social-economic development and integration.

More can be achieved both at international and national level for the sake of the development of the region by development concepts of uniform approach, by a joint information base, and by a common organisational and representational system promoting development. Overall, in the case of the



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regional demarcation, we recommend a flexible approach similar to the Baltic Strategy, which is quite flexible with regard to the issue of geographic effect, and makes it topic dependant.

The Council agrees that the protection and sustainable use of resources and values, and the improvement of environmental security require a comprehensive approach and harmonized international co-operation (e.g. in the area of climate protection, the qualitative and quantitative protection and economical use of strategic water resources, the preservation of biological diversity, the protection of ecological networks, flood prevention, transport and energy policy). In the Danube Strategy, the provision of the direct and long-term environmental conditions of a well-balanced, reasonable, healthy life should be a comprehensive goal. Therefore, from an environmental aspect, special attention should be paid to the relationship of the Danube Region Strategy with the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, the renewable Lisbon Strategy, and other important political documents thereof (e.g. energy and climate package, biological diversity). The same connections shall be reviewed at the level of our national policies.

For the major elements of the Strategy to comply with the basic principles of sustainability, with regard to the establishment of European Danube Strategy (EDS), from the aspect of the environment and water policy, the NFFT considers it especially important to take into account the following aspects of sustainability based on national characteristics and derived from international co-operation, and the incorporation of the tasks listed in detail as follows into the Strategy.

1) With regard to the establishment of the EDS, the key issues deemed to be the most important ones under the "road map"(December 2010) jointly drafted with regard to the areas of water policy and water management by Spain, Belgium, Hungary and the European Commission for the EU presidency period between 1 January 2010 and 30 June 2011, to be taken into account. These are as follows:

- the measures pursuant to the EU Water Framework Directive laid down in the initial river basin management plans (to be submitted to the European Commission by 22 march 2010),
- adaptation to climate change, including the management of the increase of the frequency and intensity of floods, water scarcity and droughts, the execution of the work program of water scarcity and droughts of the EU,
- hydro-morphological restoration of waters, the reduction of diffuse pollution and integration of water quantity and quality issues,
- the sustainable management of (historically) polluted sediments and water beds,
- the management of the negative environmental impacts of future infrastructural projects,
- strengthening cross-border co-operation, common responsibility and solidarity in shared river basins,



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- the elaboration and launch of the EU strategy for the Danube region called "Danube Strategy",
  - elaboration of proposals for strengthening and execution of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy.
- 2) In the course of the establishment of the EDS it should be considered that according to the "road map" pertaining to the three periods of presidency, the legal provisions and legislative tasks determining key water-environmental priorities and the most important frameworks and basic principles of water management, shall be as follows:
- implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD - 2000/60/EC) and the Groundwater Directive (2006/118/EC),
  - implementation of the Floods Directive (2007/60/EC),
  - transposition of the Environmental Quality Standards for Surface Water Directive (EQS - 2008/56/EC) into national legislation, the support of the elaboration of implementation guidelines, agreement on the revision of the list of priority substances,
  - implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD – 2008/56/EC),
  - adoption to climate change in the field of water policy,
  - agreement on the revision of the Drinking Water Directive (98/83/EC),
  - integration of water related aspects in other community policies, esp. Common Agricultural Policy, cohesion policy and international co-operation,
  - identification of further needs in the European legislation on water issues.
- 3) At the establishment of the EDS it should be taken into account that according to the European Regional Report (Istanbul, March 2009) prepared for the Fifth Water World Forum, the major challenges of water management in Europe, currently and in the next decade, shall be as follows:
- climate change and adaptation,
  - management of the relations of water, energy and climate,
  - development of the management of water scarcity and droughts,



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- the support of sewage water management and recycling (recycling of water and nutrients),
  - the elaboration of a consistent strategy for the management of water issues,
  - river basin management,
  - transboundary co-operation.
- 4) The living resources of waters excellently adapted to natural fluctuations in the course of long-term evolution processes, however, they are unable to endure the comparably very short-term changes caused by civilisation, without suffering damages. This unchangeable fact must thus be recognised and taken into account by human society, more so because our society does have its engineering-technical options to do so. This means that human activities shall be adjusted to natural conditions.
- 5) There are no generally acceptable and uniformly applicable ecological directives to be drafted for the water system of the Danube. All water areas, and thus all water courses, and even all regions thereof dispose of individual characteristics from an ecological aspect, which cannot and shall not be disregarded. However, the science of ecology revealed those major characteristics of water courses and the regions thereof, as well as the water areas connected to them (e.g. old river beds), based on which they can be categorised into hydro-ecological types, and by which a more comprehensive analysis and opinion on the effects of intervention and management methods, as well as the forecasting and prevention of adverse effects will be made possible. In the context of the above, ecological variability may even require or solely enable fully individual, regions-specific intervention and management, which shall be recognised and caused to be recognised at the co-ordination of international interests.
- 6) The currently most important task of strategic importance in the field of water management of the countries sharing the Danube basin is the provision of the good ecological status of all surface and ground waters, in accordance with the Water Framework Directive, until 2015, and, if that is not possible, until 2021 or 2027. In the river basin management plans the environmental objectives pertaining thereto were determined, and the action plans to achieve those were designed. In the establishment of the EDS, the execution of these action plans and by that the achievement of the stipulated environmental objectives shall be viewed as major strategic goals.
- 7) In the long term, sustainability may only be implemented by the maintenance of well functioning ecological systems (i.e. that are in a good status from an ecological aspect). The hydro-morphological circumstances that are essential for the development and permanent survival of the typical water habitats of the Danube and the eco-systems relating thereto, shall be preserved. The uniquely varied pattern of water habitats at the same time represents the precondition of a vast biological diversity of the Danube's river basin, the protection of which requires a land use and agricultural strategy in harmony therewith, by also acknowledging the public interest of eco-system services.



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- 8) In the Danube basin, one token of achieving a balanced ecological status of waters is the protection of natural values and of the whole ecological system, the preservation and sustenance of the natural areas and landscapes along the Danube, its natural and cultural values, its Natura 2000 areas, the establishment of conditions approaching the self-regulatory functioning of nature, the preservation of biological diversity, by taking into account, among others, the nature protection directives of the EU, the Directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (EU Habitats' Directive - 1992/43/EEC), and the Directive on the conservation of wild birds (EC Birds Directive -1979/409/EEC).
- 9) A distinguished objective is the utilisation of the natural and cultural resources offered by the Danube and its environment built upon the principles of sustainability, by harmonising agricultural, fishing, forestry and wildlife management eco-tourism and infrastructural developments; in addition thereto, the preservation and sustenance of the natural areas and landscapes along the Danube, its natural and cultural values, its Natura 2000 areas, the establishment of conditions approaching the self-regulatory functioning of nature, the preservation of biological diversity.
- 10) The EDS shall be prepared for a period of several decades, therefore, when establishing a strategy, the preparation for the changes (in the first place, extreme weather conditions caused by climate change, a significant reduction in water reserves, and the end of the oil era to be scheduled for this period) that will entail new challenges for human civilisation also from a qualitative aspect, shall be given extraordinary importance.
- 11) With the entering into force of the Water Framework Directive, a paradigm shift took place in the European Union in the field of river basin management, which is primarily demonstrated by the appreciation of the condition of the water environment and the habitats attached to water. At the implementation of the actions of the river basin management plans (which are unique also on a global scale) prepared in this spirit with regard to the area of the whole European Union, and at the effectuation of the new water policy strategy, the following aspects shall be specially taken into account also within the framework of the EDS:
- The natural retaining of water adjusted to the landscape's ecological capacities, its utilisation within micro-regional water circulation shall become a basic organisational principle of river basin management.
  - The restoration of the original condition of the natural zones of the Danube and its river basin, the preservation of biological diversity, the rehabilitation of fish stocks, the implementation of smooth tourism concepts, the realisation of eco-tourism developments shall be made tasks of key importance.
  - For the sake of the mitigation of flood risks, the development of the flood prevention system and the establishment of stipulated flood security shall be performed by taking into account the principle of "space for rivers" and environmental and nature protection interests.



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- A basic condition of the sustenance of human civilisation is the preservation of biological diversity, moreover, the enhancement thereof, which shall be of special importance in the decades to follow. The adaptation to the decrease in water reserves and more extreme weather conditions caused by climate change, the natural retaining and utilisation of waters, and the rehabilitation of habitats are essential. This principle shall also be dominant in the process of the development of the water and inland infrastructure.
- 12) Due to the decrease of water reserves, , the rational reduction of water consumption shall also be focused on, in line with the aim of water retention (water savings provisions, the development and introduction of new technologies, and the shaping of attitudes may be of major importance in this regard).
- 13) In the river basin management plan of the Danube, for 2015 (and for the period lasting until 2027), the future visions of river basin level, pertaining to the resolution of water-environmental problems, and the chances of the implementation thereof, were laid down. Special importance shall be given to the increasing of the chances of implementation of visions with regard to the establishment of the EDS, because the realisation of these visions is the most important condition to water management focusing on ecological aspects.

The most important Danube basin-related visions are as follows:

- organic matter pollution: untreated sewage water shall not get into the waters anywhere in the whole Danube basin,
- nutrient pollution: nutrient emissions from point sources and non-point sources shall be regulated in the whole Danube basin in such manner that eutrofisation should not endanger or worsen the status of the waters of the river basin or of the water of the Black Sea,
- pollution by hazardous substances: in the Danube basin and the part of the Black sea influenced by the water of the Danube, it shall not represent a risk to human health and the condition of water habitats,
- hydro-morphological changes: they will be managed in such way that the past, current and future hydro-morphological changes of the river shall not hinder the migration and spawning of fish anywhere in the whole area of the Danube basin,
- relationship between flood areas, water habitats and the Danube: they shall be reconnected to the rivers in the whole Danube basin, and rehabilitated. The integration function of these river bank areas shall provide for self-sustaining groups of living creatures in waters, as well as flood prevention and a reduction of pollutions in the Danube basin,
- hydrological changes: they shall be managed so that the natural development and diversity of water habitats would not be damaged,



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- future infrastructural projects: they shall be implemented in a transparent manner, with the application of best environmental practice and best possible techniques, in the whole Danube basin, a deterioration of good conditions and cross-border effects shall be avoided, and negative impacts shall be mitigated or compensated for,
  - contaminant emissions into subsurface waters: they shall not worsen the condition of subsurface waters anywhere in the whole Danube basin, and where subsurface water is already contaminated, the objective shall be to restore good condition,
  - use of subsurface waters: it shall not exceed available and sustainably utilisable water reserves anywhere in the Danube basin.
- 14) The Integrated Tisza River Basin Management Plan is partly completed, and it shall be fully completed by the end of 2010. The significant water management issues identified for the whole Danube Basin and three new groups of problems identified hereunder (flood and inland water, drought and water scarcity, and climate change) are considered for the Tisza Basin. The new groups belong to the key problems of agricultural water management. Thus it is very important for the countries concerned, and therefore also for Hungary, for their agricultural, agricultural water management and other specialist areas concerned, as well as their regional representatives, to get actively involved in the integrated river basin management planning process of the Tisza river. Another important task is to evaluate within the framework of the EDS the experiences of the Tisza planning process, and to examine how the applied method can be extended to the larger, international sub-basins of the Danube, and perhaps to the whole Danube basin.
- 15) The establishment of a sustainable, competitive, co-operating agriculture that has the inhabitant preservation ability of the country in mind as an objective is the common problem of all middle and lower Danube basin countries. The basic condition of the solution of the problem is a policy handling as a priority water management taking into account ecological aspects, and within that scope, the satisfaction of ecological water demands.
- 16) EU initiatives aimed at the management of flood, inland water, drought and water scarcity shall be supported, as well as the development of international institutional frameworks and methods providing for the implementation thereof, and also the effective integration of research program results. Active participation will be needed in the review planned for 2012 of the EU strategy regarding water scarcity and droughts.

With regard to floods, special attention shall be paid to the actions planned in the Flood Prevention Action Plans prepared by the end of 2009 for the Danube 17 sub-basin, within the scope of the ICPDR Sustainable Flood Prevention in the Danube Basin Action Program, with the provisions of the EU 2007/60/EC Flood Directive and the EU Water Framework Directive taken into account. The most important strategic elements of the action plans are as follows:

- preparation of suitable area and land use and area development regulation and flood risk management plans,



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- reactivation of former water retaining and drainage deferral capacities, sustenance of the existing water retaining capacities and the creation of new capacities,
- development of current flood prevention structures to reach the level of existing protection standards, elimination of restrictors,
- within the framework of non-structural measures, primarily the development of preventive measures (prediction and alarm system), increasing of the capacity and flood awareness of professional personnel, wide-scope preparation of society.

In the field of the management of water scarcity and droughts, the most important measures of the first “follow-up report” of the program of the EU initiated for this purpose [Communication no. COM(2007)414] and the working document elaborated for the execution thereof[SEC(2008) 3069] shall be taken as a basis, of which the most important aspects are as follows:

- proper pricing of water services (by determination of the correct proportion of cost reimbursement, and by the provisions of the Water Framework Directive taken into account),
  - more efficient allocation of funds available for the resolution of problems relating to water (with the support of measures increasing the efficiency of landscape use planning and water utilisation),
  - development of drought risk management,
  - establishment of new water supply infrastructures,
  - support of the application of water efficiency technologies and practices,
  - establishment of water savings culture in Europe,
  - development of information and data collection and processing.
- 17) The development of the main traffic routes (and of shipping routes) in itself does not necessarily entail the economic and social development of the regions concerned, and it shall not implicitly promote the catching up of regions lagging behind.(It may even be that regions with a stronger and better structured economic framework will gain more favourable positions, and those lagging behind will suffer more disadvantages due to the commencing “resource extraction”). The development of shipping is expected to reduce the load of public roads substantially if other regulatory tools enter into force in relation thereto which shall redirect public road transport to water routes (e.g. road toll). At the same time, a more sensible utilisation, quality development, and harmonisation of those with regard to the existing infrastructure will be made necessary (of the railway in the first place, and of public road networks within the region), as well as the implementation of measures aimed at the avoidance



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of possible emergencies, so that economic-social development would be achieved with as little load on environmental systems as possible, i.e. developments that will mitigate current loads should be promoted. In this regard, for the sake of the proper consideration of national interests, it is absolutely necessary to conduct environment and cost efficiency studies and to take the results of these into account.

- 18) In the course of the establishment of the long-term transport development policy of the European Union, the currently effective UNECE, and TEN-T ship parameter stipulations applicable to the Danube basin shall be made the subject of ecological-economic-social examinations. In the course of the examinations it shall be taken into account that economic, and within that transport-related challenges shall be addressed by a complex view handling ecological-economic-social capacities with identical emphasis. The review shall take as a basis the change of the changing global environment of human activities (climate change, decrease of resources – water, energy – in the first place), and the necessity of structural modifications adapting thereto. At the formation of the infrastructure, special attention shall be paid to natural water retaining and the rehabilitation of habitats. In addition to the above, the complex review shall also include a thorough legislative analysis, involving the coherence of individual EU directives, the application thereof, and the operation of EU monetary funds. It is necessary for the different sectoral policies of the EU to be harmonised. In line with sectoral policies, the involvement and informing of the inhabitants concerned with regard to the developments is very important, since these operations must be performed in the interest of society. Therefore, we suggest that both information and social involvement processes should be elaborated, and those should be provided both at the establishment of the strategy and the implementation thereof.
- 19) The development of Danube waterway parameters may only be performed in line with the observation of the conditions of environmental sustainability, and the consideration of the recommendations laid down in the Joint Declaration pertaining to shipping and environmental sustainability of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube, the Danube Commission, and the Sava International Commission. Also the positions on shipping route development by the Hungarian National Environmental Council shall be taken as guidelines. Continuous attention shall be paid to the progress of projects ongoing in other countries in relation to the improvement of the Danube shipping route, and the shipping route parameters of the versions to be implemented shall be harmonized. Also, developments shall be implemented in the shipping portfolio and in the area of logistics, which enable for the avoidance of the execution of interventions that are harmful from environmental aspects.
- 20) The recommendation laid down in the European guidelines elaborated for the promotion of the adaptation to climate change in the field of water management (December 2009) shall be tailored to the Danube basin and implemented, with special regard to the following key tasks:
- effective management of uncertainties and the scientific material of knowledge relating to climate change,
  - elaboration of strategies that assist with the establishment of adaptation abilities to the effects of climate change,



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- management of flood risk,
  - integration and reference of the adaptation to the effects of climate change in the process of river basin management planning,
  - addressing of special issues related to water scarcity and droughts.
- 21) At all levels, the experiences of river basin management planning shall be evaluated, and based on that the effective methods of international co-operation shall be elaborated.
- 22) A basic condition for the achievement and preservation of a good ecological status of waters is the development of knowledge related to ecological classification methods and ecological evaluation methods, among others for the examination of the feasibility of certain measures planned in the Danube basin, from the aspect of sustainability. The expected extent of detail and methods of ecological studies in the case of different level planning activities shall be determined. This task shall be considered important in the course of all strategic developments in the Danube basin which may influence the condition of waters to a significant extent.
- 23) At the establishment of the EDS it is necessary to look ahead to a longer term as well, because this is a basic condition of securing sustainability. It is important to think with a longer time period in mind also in relation to the before mentioned tasks. In addition to these, the following two areas may be considered key in terms of foresight:
- The options for the application of a virtual water concept shall be examined with regard to the management of Danube basin level and global water reserve management problems.
  - The Danube basin-level life cycle analysis of hydraulic engineering structures shall be started.
  - In line with ecological and technical studies, society shall also be informed and involved in the planning phase already.
- 24) Similar to the water basin management planning procedure efforts should be done for the active public involvement during the planning period of the development of joint programmes in European Danube Strategy.

Budapest, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2010

