



## CONFERENCE CONCLUSION

### INVOLVING THE BIOEAST INITIATIVE INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IT'S EU MISSION: TO RESTORE OUR OCEANS AND WATERS BY 2030

#### **Preparing the Danube Lighthouse**

07/ DECEMBER 2022, PRAGUE

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture Czech Republic, a successful high-level international conference was organised during the Czech EU Presidency on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2022 by the BIOEAST Initiative in collaboration with the BIOEAST HUB CZ and Technology Centre Prague on the implementation of the Danube Lighthouse of the EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030.

**The conference aimed to increase awareness and connect all relevant policy makers to discuss a common approach and specific action, enhance the engagement in the deployment of the European Missions to Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030. More specifically, focused on freshwater, it articulated the need for additional and targeted support, when aligning the existing structures and for the innovative ecosystem in the Danube River Basin.**

The one-day discussion with 70 participants including high level EU officials, ministry representatives, and also leaders of programs, projects and initiatives highlighted the already rich but extremely scattered programming on freshwater related issues. The currently running EU Strategy for the Danube Region coordinates several priority areas, but neither the financing nor the structure or the new legislation supports this complexity. The EU Mission and the Mission Charter could well bring harmonisation, and could align programs, projects and existing structures along the mission's objective. Research and innovation priorities may help to align the usually conflicting sectorial approaches and could help with knowledge-based decisions about unavoidable trade-

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offs. The successful mission implementation would require additional cooperation and support action to map and enable the alignment of different interests. A specific roadmap is required to better engage the cooperation of the sectorial policies and priorities.

The conference was structured into the three following sections: the presentation of the EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters and Its 4 Pillars, including the Mission Charter, high-level discussions concerning the needs of the Danube region, and the third session focused on the presentation of already existing initiatives, strategies, programs, partnerships, projects and national initiatives.

Distinguished guests from the EU Commission the Missions Manager Mr Kestutis Sadauskas, Deputy Director-General DG MARE, highlighted the unique opportunity offered by the Mission to rethink our future in the Danube Region and to engage with the implementation of innovative approaches. Ms Elisabetta Balzi the Head of the Healthy Seas and Oceans Unit DG RTD called for synergies and highlighted the opportunities when combining different funds.

The conference was opened by vice minister Radek Holomčik, Deputy Minister of Agriculture CZ, Mr Kestutis Sadauskas and Barna Kovacs, Secretary General of the BIOEAST Initiative. Radek Holomčik indicated some current problems of Czech farmers and agriculture connected with drought, soil quality and water retention. Kestutis Sadauskas illustrated the essence of the European Mission to support the deployment of innovative systemic long-lasting solutions. Barna Kovacs introduced the governmental level BIOEAST Initiative of 11 Central and Eastern European Countries supporting the freshwater related excellence-based science, research and innovation. Also highlighted was the interest to get involved in the implementation of the Danube Lighthouse as the vast majority of the BIOEAST macro region are inland countries. The Danube River Basin could become the "lighthouse" for the whole freshwater related priorities, even reaching beyond the Danube basin.

In the keynote speech, Ms Elisabetta Balzi introduced the new Mission Ocean and Water and its Charter, similarly the Danube lighthouse. The first session continued with Natalia Martin Palanzuela's presentation that introduced the project PREP4BLUE and its contribution to the Mission. Fabio FAVA, Professor of the School of Engineering of University of Bologna and representative of the BLUEMED initiative GSO talked about the initiative promoting sustainable growth of the Mediterranean blue economy and how this will be exploited in the Mediterranean Lighthouse of the Mission to Restore our Oceans and Waters by 2030. The fourth invited speaker to the 1st session was Iuliana Nichersu, Project Manager in Steinbeis Europa Zentrum, to introduce the already selected support action for Danube Lighthouse who was unfortunately not able to participate.

The first session set the scene for the panel discussion joined by Mr Sadauskas, Ms Aniko Juhasz, Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture Hungary, Mr Martin Kovac, State Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, Mr. Gheorghe Constantin, Deputy General Director of Water Department, Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests Romania and Mr Petr Chalupa the Head of Fisheries and Apiculture, Ministry of Agriculture CZ.

**Kestikus Sadauskas highlighted the need for a bottom-up approach, the positive attitude in cooperation, the necessity to map the knowledge of the riverbeds, to become self-sufficient in sea and freshwater sea food. Martin Kovac stressed the need to share innovative approaches to tackle the big and small water cycles, the need to improve soil function to increase water retention capacity, for planning on the regional level and provide risk assessment and risk adaptation. Aniko Juhasz emphasised one of the reasons behind the establishment of the BIOEAST Initiative - to gather needs and knowledge of the BIOEAST macro-region that are perhaps not well communicated, the cooperative approach of the BIOEAST Initiative is a good way to overcome the reticence of Central and Eastern Europe.** Fresh water, and the ecosystem services of the aquaculture ecosystem are key topics in Hungary. There is a need to coordinate properly the wide spectrum of relevant stakeholders, align their needs and balance demands of water management experts, mayors and farmers. Aniko Juhasz highlighted that both water and soil are a hot topic in Hungary, likewise in Slovakia, the aquaculture topic is an issue for both Hungary and the Czech Republic. Mr. Gheorghe Constantin accentuated the obligation to comply with the new EU policy water framework directive, to fulfil the goals of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and also the Green Deal Strategy and revitalising of the 25th km of rivers, to urgently solve the emerging problem with plastic and micro plastic pollutants in the inland water bodies. **He acknowledged that proper cooperation along the Danube river basin, and implementation of new solutions for water pollution that can vastly improve the condition of the Black Sea.** Petr Chalupa highlighted the need to advance upon the long tradition of pond aquaculture, fish farming and solutions that might contribute to the security of healthy nutrition if new innovative solutions are enabled. The session's conclusion shows that special cooperation and support actions are still required to align the different views in different ministries and related policies.

The last session was opened with a keynote speech delivered by Viktor Oroszi, Hungarian EUSDR national coordinator, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The session was divided into three sub sessions. The first was focused on the macro-regional perspective. Theresa Geidel Researcher and representant of the Fresh Thoughts Consulting summarised the results of the Macro- Regional Assessment of the Danube restoration, **to build on existing projects and continue work through the ICPDR to build on the work strongly, to develop common definitions and protocols relevant for data related to the Mission targets, strengthen and enable restoration projects, and face a still open question to map the financing possibilities and possible synergies between EU and national funds..** Marie Kubankova, the Leader of the Fresh Water Based Bioeconomy Thematic Working Group (TWG) and the Coordinator of the BIOEAST HUB CZ introduced Fresh Water BBE TWG as the working body of the BIOEAST Initiative.

**Fresh Water Based Bioeconomy TWG is facilitating the dialog between policy makers and scientific experts. It is currently working on 11 countries priorities concerning the freshwater based bioeconomy, specifically on research and innovation agendas.** Konstantin Ivanov introduced the Global Water Partnership Central and Eastern Europe. The second sub-session was focused on partnership and innovation actions. Antonio Lo Porto introduced the EU Partnership Water4ALL, Jeno LABDY Technical Deputy Director - General Directorate of Water Management Hungary presented the Innovation Action of the Daube Lighthouse DALIA, Adrian STANICA, Executive Director of GeoEcoMAR International Centre for Advanced Studies on River-Sea Systems introduced the GeoEcoMar development towards becoming a European research infrastructure. Renata Berta Deputy Director, Pannon University closed the session with a presentation focused on the national level network for science and knowledge transfer: Hungarian National Laboratory for Water Science and Water Security.

(Conference Conclusion)

**The conference mission was to connect already established networks, macro regional, international and national actions to advance the discussion and mobilise stakeholders along the Danube River basin. A clear message was communicated by the representatives of the EU Commission towards the BIOEAST Initiative - the new EU Mission to Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030 will provide resources and political engagement as the EU Mission is targeting the goals of the Green Deal. The Danube Lighthouse is to provide solutions for fresh water that can be put in place to increase the quality of inland water bodies and rivers. Being the biggest in Europe, the Danube River is a symbol, the Danube Lighthouse is therefore designed to provide freshwater solutions that can be replicated elsewhere in the EU. The Danube Lighthouse can tackle the climate change challenge and provide the solutions for both the drought season, storms, and floods. It has the potential for promoting aquaculture production, as a flagship for species migrations and a service for the interactive river - sea solutions.**

**Fresh water is important for the BIOEAST countries as the production lines have been built based on fresh water. However, the implementation of any agenda is extremely scattered, several ministries and entities are engaged. The Mission is indeed a good opportunity, the BIOEAST countries located in the Danube river basin need support to align different agendas. The BIOEAST Initiative and its Thematic Working Group Fresh Water Based Bioeconomy has the potential to act as a macro regional network where different interests can be discussed. If connected with the national initiatives (such as national HUBs, clusters etc), they can act as the horizontal enablers of the EU Mission, and engage citizens societies and businesses. In comparison with the activities in the Mediterranean, there is an evident need for more support actions to map all relevant actors, set proper systems of cooperation, to be able to**

bring to the table all interested groups and to be able to discuss a common long-term vision, define research needs and provide supportive tools for decision makers and evidence base policy. The digital twin in silico river model can speed up finding the optimal solutions for inland waters and rivers, support the promising freshwater aquaculture, and support the multi criterial impact analysis to both water and soil eco system.