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AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

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**REPORT**

**ON THE SPOT EXPERT APPRAISAL OF THE  
DANUBE DELTA BIOSPHERE RESERVE  
(ROMANIA)  
8-11 JULY 2019**

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## 1. PREFACE

The on-the-spot appraisal was carried out in July 2019 for the first time since 2005(!). The site was awarded the European Diploma in 2000. The latest Diploma for the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve has been granted until 20 June 2020 (Resolution CM/ResDip(2010)17, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16 September 2010) without prior appraisal. The visit took place on 9 and 10 July 2019. One day was added to gain a deeper insight on this large protected area. The Danube Delta Biosphere is also registered as Biosphere Reserve under the umbrella of UNESCO and as NATURA2000 site of community importance. The site is managed by the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority (DDBRA) in Tulcea.

With a surface of more than 580,000 hectares, the time constraints and the boat as the only means of transport, it was not possible to see all the features and beauties the delta has to offer. Thanks to the well organised visit, it was possible to see at least the main habitats, the harbour town of Sulina and Sfantu Gheorge with the Black Sea coast.

## 2. AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

Official documents on the European Diploma include the on-the-spot appraisal report 2005<sup>1</sup>, the resolution on the renewal 2010<sup>2</sup> and the annual reports for the years 2017 and 2018. Further documents can be found on the Council of Europe website.<sup>3</sup> The representatives of the visited area provided further documents, and information material such as booklets, brochures and maps. The management plan was partly translated into English.

A management plan for the larger NATURA2000 site is under preparation (see below).

## 3. SITE DESCRIPTION

The Danube Delta is one of the largest deltas in Europe, the biosphere reserve in Romania covering 580,000 ha. Information on the size of the delta differs according to the various sources. The delta is split in a Romanian and a Ukrainian part, the latter about 100,000 ha large. It is the last section of a 2,850 km-long river, the second largest in Europe.

Officially, the Romanian part of the Danube Delta, which is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve consists of a 50,600 ha core area, a 223,300 ha buffer zone and 306,100 ha transition area, totalling 580,000 ha. Other figures, e.g. on various websites, are not correct and unofficial.

In geological terms the Danube Delta is very young. It originated after the last ice age, about 12,000 years ago, when the sea level began to rise. It was always a struggle between land and sea, accumulation and erosion. First descriptions by the Roman historian Herodotus are different from what can be experienced today. The making of the Delta has not come to an end yet. One important factor that changed is the reduced freight of sediments due to various hydropower plants upstream, the Iron Gate between Serbia and Romania being the largest one.

The Delta starts a little upstream of Tulcea, where the Chilia arm splits from the main stream. Shortly after passing Tulcea, the main river splits again into the Sulina arm and the Sfantu Gheorge arm. The Chilia arm also forms the border with Ukraine. Although the Chilia arm carries most of the water, the Sulina arm is the most important.

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<sup>1</sup> Report PE-S-DE(2005)6

<sup>2</sup> CM/ResDip(2010)17

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/danube>

Sulina, the end of the Danube or the start of the river kilometrage (because of sedimentation, the zero milestone is not the end of the Danube anymore) has lost its importance as a harbour. It was the place where the European Danube Commission was founded in 1856 as the first European Commission, and which later became the headquarters of this Commission. The Sulina arm between Tulcea and the Black Sea was shortened to approx. 60 km and regulated between 1857 and 1900, and is permanently maintained. This made the Sulina arm the most important canal for navigation. Nevertheless, Sulina has lost its importance as a harbour to Tulcea, Galati and others. Sulina as well as Sfantu Gheorge and other villages in the delta are only accessible by boat.

### Habitats and species

The Danube Delta is first a wetland. Apart from the mentioned main arms of the Danube, numerous canals of different scale form an impressive landscape, ranging from navigation routes to arms, which can hardly be used by boats, overgrown and with trunks leaning over the water. The Delta is a mixture of swampy habitats, reed beds and open water surfaces. Willow forests are the only ones, which can afford the different groundwater levels and to be overflowed during long periods.

On higher levels sand dunes, steppe vegetation and oak-ash-poplar forests can be found. Grassland is used for agriculture and grazing cows.

Although there are various fauna and flora species, listed in the Bern Convention and in the Annexes of the Fauna-Flora-Habitat-Directive, the Delta is famous for its birdlife. About 325 species have been identified, 160 breeding and 165 migrating birds. It is a crossroad for various species from Africa, the Mediterranean, the Arctic, Siberia and China. More than 100 bird species are considered rare or threatened. A flagship species is the pelican, which is shown in the logo of the DDBRA, the White Pelican and the Dalmatian Pelican

The fish fauna is constantly decreasing. The most famous species, the sturgeon, is now protected and under observation under European Union programmes. See more about the sturgeon and its rehabilitation programme below.

## **4. EVALUATION**

### **4.1. European interest**

Being one of the largest river deltas in Europe is one of the best arguments to trigger European interest. The Delta is protected not only by national law, it is also listed as World Heritage site and Biosphere Reserve under the auspices of UNESCO and as wetland of international importance under the RAMSAR Convention. As NATURA2000 site, it is also of community interest. It is representative for wetlands of remarkable size, incomparable in Europe and undisturbed by traffic routes and other infrastructure, except the navigation route on an international waterway and a few power supply lines. The Danube Delta plays an important part for the South-Eastern European flyway. In winter, over one million birds use the Delta.

Unfortunately, the water quality in the Danube, and therefore in the Delta, is worsening. The amount of micro plastics and chemicals is rising. It reminds of the situation in 2000, when the Danube Delta was first awarded the Diploma and when at the same time a disaster in a gold mine in northern Romania led to a heavy pollution of the Tiza and down to the Danube river. But these problems cannot be solved by Romania alone. States upstream should be made to avoid any form of pollution to ensure the integrity of the Delta.

### **4.2. Conservation measures**

#### *Legal protection*

The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (DDBR) was established under Law 82/1993, which was changed several times. The latest amendment was made in 2018, when the DDBR went back under the authority of the Ministry for Environment. Government Decision 1217/2012 approved the organisation and functioning relations, including an organisational chart and the number of jobs. Government Decision 538/2015 approved the circulation of ships and boats on internal canals and lakes, and Government Decision 763/2015 defined the management plan and regulations for the DDBR.

The boundaries of the biosphere reserve remained unchanged.

#### *Supervision and warding*

Since 2015, the Danube Delta Integrated Control Commissariat Direction has been mainly dealing with fish poaching. In 2018, the Commissariat was split into small departments, subordinated to the Governor. It consists of 38 people and two mobile units (monitoring and control) of 13 members each. The number of fines and controls has been increasing since 2010.

#### *State of conservation*

The status of the environment in the DDBR is subject of a continuous monitoring activity on water, air and soil quality parameters, and on their influence on natural habitats and ecosystems. The reports on environment quality are posted on the webpage [www.ddbra.ro](http://www.ddbra.ro).

Various research programmes and studies are carried out annually by scientists and/or universities. The Danube Delta Institute for Research and Development (DDNI), located in Tulcea, provides studies on various topics, not only for the DDBRA.

In general, the state of conservation is satisfying.

#### *Land use*

The landownership in the Danube Delta Reserve is mainly public, subordinated to various levels of authorities with more than 80% of national interest. Less than one per cent is private.

<b>Nr. crt.</b>	<b>Land category</b>	<b>Surface (ha)</b>	<b>%</b>
1	Total area	580.000	100,0
2	Public Domain of National Interest	474.638	81,83
3	Public domain of county interest	71.292	12,29
4	Public Domain of Local Interest	29.281	5,05
5	Private domain	4.789	0,83

The land use in the reserve is dominated by water. Forms of land coverage are:

Agricultural, total . . . . .	61 453 ha
<i>of which in agricultural polders.</i> . . . . .	39 974 ha
Water, reed, total: . . . . .	344 553 ha
<i>of which in fish polder:</i> . . . . .	36 567 ha
Marine waters: . . . . .	140 492 ha
Forest, total: . . . . .	22 796 ha
<i>of which in forestry polders</i> . . . . .	6 442 ha
Courtyards, buildings, dams, roads . . . . .	3 143 ha
Unproductive. . . . .	7 563 ha

### 4.3. Management

#### *Management plan*

The latest management plan, which was partly translated into English, was approved in 2015 for a period of five years and is still the basis of the management. For the next five-year period, the management plan will be replaced by a new improved one, with objectives and activities for the management of the Natura2000 sites. It should be published mid-2022. As far as the management plan was translated, it seems to be sufficient as a working document to achieve good management results for the Delta.

There is also a joint management plan for the DDBR and the Lower Prut River in Moldova as a basis for transboundary protected area management, finalised in 2016. was designed for the period 2007 to 2013. It already includes the objectives of the management plan for the DDBR and was improved with objectives for the Lower Prut River.<sup>4</sup> The Integrated Strategy for Sustainable Development ("Strategie Integrata de Dezvoltare Durabila") is also a document designed for a sustainable development of the Romanian region of the Danube Delta, not only the biosphere reserve, but also the surrounding areas.

It should further be mentioned that under the coordination of the WWF Danube Carpathian Programme - Ukraine, a climate change adaption strategy and action plan<sup>5</sup> was drawn up for the trilateral region. This strategy is a remarkable contribution and exemplary for European Diploma sites and beyond.

#### *Institutional arrangements*

The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority (DDBRA) is responsible for the administration and management of the area. According to Law No. 82/1993, subsequently completed and modified, the DDBRA is a public institution subordinated to the Ministry of Environment. It should be noted that the heads of the DDBRA, the Governors, have been changed quite often in the last years. This situation does not always allow for a consistent and administration. In other countries, the director is usually appointed for a three or, even better, five-year term.

The main objectives of the DDBRA for the management of the Biosphere Reserve are:

- Conservation and protection of the existing natural heritage;
- Encouragement of sustainable use of natural resources;
- Provision of support, based on the results of research, for management, education, training and services.

The responsibility of the DDBRA is quite extensive and can be summarised as follows:<sup>6</sup>

- Asses the ecological status of the natural heritage, organizing the scientific research, drawing up the conservation and restoration strategy and, after its approval by the DDBRA Scientific Council, taking the necessary measures for biodiversity conservation and protection;
- Establish and implement the ecological reconstruction measures of the Delta's ecosystems and determine adequate legal measures for the protection, improvement and restoration of the environment quality where it had deteriorated;
- Directly manage the public land of national interest within the DDBR and take measures for the restoration and protection of the component physical and geographical units;

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<sup>4</sup> Danube Delta Biosphere Authority (2007), joint Management Plan for Protected Areas. Consolidation of nature protected areas network for biodiversity protection and sustainable development in the Danube Delta and the Lower Prut River Region.

<sup>5</sup> Adapting to Change. Climate Change Adaption Strategy and Action Plan for the Danube Delta Region Romania-Ukraine-Moldova. Coordinated by Oleksandra Kovbasko (WWF Danube Carpathian Programme, Ukraine), Camelia Ionescu (WWF Danube Carpathian Programme, Romania), Ele Jan Saaf (external consultant)

<sup>6</sup> The overview of the tasks was kindly provided by the DDBRA but partly shortened

- The DDBRA can request support from the State institutions responsible for control and punishment of the illegal practices, in accordance with the law;
- Establish, together with the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Dwelling, the regulations for the access and circulation of boats, motorboats, river and maritime ships on river arms, channels and lakes within the DDBR, and propose and submit to the Ministry of Water and Environmental Protection the access and circulation rules, verifying whether they are adhered to;
- In co-operation with the decentralized departments of the other specialized authorities of the central and local public administration, and in partnership with other local institutions and the private sector:
  - Draw up management objectives for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the DDBR (Management Plan of DDBR);
  - Elaborate and implement local strategies for the environment and sustainable development;
  - Contribute to the design and implementation of land use planning and urban development, ensuring the integrity of the environmental dimension and ecological requests in the zonal and local strategies;
  - Take part in the elaboration and implementation of the plans and programmes for the protection of local people's interests, the conservation of cultural heritage, as well as to increasing the quality of life, civilization and improve their living standards;
  - Contribute to the design and implementation of protection plans and programmes against flooding and natural calamities;
- Issue the environmental approval and authorization of economic activities by individuals and local entities in accordance with the biodiversity conservation requirements and specific ecological structures;
- Evaluate the status of natural resources and their level of exploitation in accordance with their potential for regeneration and ecosystem support capacity;
- Co-operate with local public authorities to defend the interests of local people and improve their quality of life;
- Encourage and impose the promotion of safe technologies, changing production and consumption patterns through the sustainable use of material and energy resources and the reduction of negative impacts on the environment;
- Participate in the elaboration and implementation of cooperation programmes and projects with national and international institutions in a transboundary, regional and international context;
- Draw up and publish periodical reports on the environmental status in the DDBR;
- Operate through all the means foreseen by the law and on the entire DDBR territory, for the protection and improvement of the environmental status and life quality, taking into consideration the need to implement at local level the provisions of international conventions and agreements of which Romania is part, as well as for the achievement of the objectives, programmes and action plans based on these conventions and agreements;
- Encourage and develop partnerships with all civil society sectors, non-governmental organizations, as well as public and private institutions engaged in supporting and realising the environmental objectives and sustainable development;

- Organize instructive, formative and educational activities; provide information about the evolution and status of the DDBR environment quality to the local population and authorities;
- With regard to ecosystem protection, approve proposals for land use planning and urban development on the DDBR territory, elaborated in accordance with the law;
- Cooperate with the national company Apele Române S.A. for an effective water management and implementation of the necessary hydro technical works.

### *Capacities*

Human resources are rather limited compared to the size of the protected area. The number of staff is defined by the responsible Ministry, but as can be seen from the table below, that the maximum number was never reached in the last 10 years.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Maximum staff	173	173	173	133	133	171	171	171	171	171
Employees	113	114	112	114	108	114	147	145	127	124

As far as technical resources are concerned, the DDBRA has the main office in Tulcea, seven field posts on the DDBR territory, six visitors centres, 14 cars and three cross-country vehicles, 49 motor boats of different sizes and five crafts of pontoon type.

### *Financial resources and budget*

The annual budget comes partly from the national budget and partly from project funds. No trends can be seen from the following table. Compared to the 2015 contribution from the Ministry, which should cover running costs, staff costs etc., the national budget has lately been about 23% lower and is constantly decreasing. There is obviously a tendency to substitute regular budget through project funds.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
National budget (mil. lei)	14 657	8 661	9 137	7 491	8 508	13 009	12 376	11 003	10.592	10 060
Projects (mil. lei)	15 111	13 076	10 706	2 158	4 202	19 003	15 326	9 967	3 767	35 108

### *Research and monitoring programmes*

Every year a number of research permits are issued for institutes and universities for different projects with objectives such as monitoring biodiversity and environmental factors, strategies for biodiversity conservation, ecological recovery of the population of certain species in decline, invasive species and the elaboration of preventive management measures, and others.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
No. of permits	34	51	28	22	24	33	28	24	26

### *Natural resources management, including water resources*



The major sources of water pollution on the territory of the reserve come from the economic sector situated in the surrounding area and by the shipping activity carried out on the waterways, both by small crafts and by sea and river boats in transit. Compared to previous years, there is a decrease in hydrocarbon spills from ships. In general, the legislation in the field of waste, especially hazardous waste (waste oils, hydrocarbon residues) is respected.

As already mentioned, another source of pollution comes through the Danube River from countries upstream of Romania.

#### *Relationship between the body responsible for the area and the other stakeholders (local elected representatives, socio-economic actors, NGOs)*

According to Law 82/1993 on the establishment of the DDBR, an Administrative Advisory Council (Order no. 914/03.09.2018 of the Minister of Environment) was founded. This Council consists of 43 stakeholder representatives, i.e. the Ministry of Environment, the National Agency for Natural Protected Areas, local authorities from Tulcea and Constanta County, institutes, NGOs, the National Environmental Guard, mayors, tourism associations, fishermen's associations, etc. The design and implementation of the management plan is a consultative process.

#### *Public services, including waste management*

In the DDBR perimeter, the collected household waste is not subject to any pre-treatment/ treatment prior to final storage. To a small extent, there is a manual sorting of waste stored for recyclable PET waste from Sulina, Chilia Veche and Sf. Gheorghe, as well as of metal waste. Most of the hazardous waste comes from transport (engine oils and tank slurries, oil-containing wastes, lead-acid batteries).

#### *Use of renewable energy systems*

The use of renewable energies in the DDBR perimeter is insignificant at the moment. There are, however, local initiatives supporting the use of solar panels for domestic water-heating. The installation of wind turbines affecting the main routes of migrating birds is not allowed on the territory of the DDBR. The DDBR is listed in the Natura2000 Network. Dobrogea is one of the most important bird migration routes in Europe. For this reason, wind farms should be established outside the perimeter of the reserve, and only in areas where the impact is as small as possible. As some wind turbines exist close to the DDBR, an official ban within a certain distance seems to be necessary.

### **4.4. Uses and socio-economic activities**

Uses and socio-economic activities are appropriate to the site and do not have any impacts on the protected area.

#### *Forestry*

The forests in the DDBR cover an area of 22,796 ha or about 4%, of which 6,442 ha are in forestry polders. The manager of these areas is the National Forest Administration (Forestry Department Tulcea). Wood harvest is mainly done by private companies, but also by the National Forest Administration. The anthropic pressure on forests and forestry results in uncontrolled grazing of half-wild domestic animals (cattle, horses) and fires, caused by the negligence of fishermen, farmers or tourists. But so far, there are no remarkable threats to the area.

#### *Agriculture*

On the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve's territory, agricultural land covers 61,453 ha. The largest part is arable land (63%), followed by natural meadows (36.7%). Vineyards and orchards occupy insignificant areas on the private land owned by inhabitants.

### *Grazing / hay cutting*

Animal husbandry (breeding) is an old occupation of the local population on the territory of the Reserve. More than 36% (22,545 ha meadows) of agricultural land, and to a lesser extent other non-agricultural land, are used for animal husbandry. Animal breeding in the Reserve is done extensively. Cattle, horses or pigs are bred free in the Delta. Sheep farming is traditionally practiced mainly on communal pastures. The livestock kept in free regime in administrative-territorial units, fully or partially included in the DDBR in 2018, totals 7,067 cattle, 48,141 sheep, 4,415 goats and 558 horses.

### *Buildings and infrastructures*

There are no urban agglomerations within the DDBR perimeter. Around the Reserve, there are a number of rural and urban localities (Isaccea, Babadag) and Tulcea Municipality with a population of over 150,000. Inside the Reserve there are 25 localities, organised in 7 communes (Ceatalchioi, Pardina, Maliuc, Crişan, C.A. Rosetti, Sfântu Gheorghe, and Chilia Veche) and the town of Sulina. Some communes have partly territories inside the Reserve (Nufăru, Beştepe and Murighiol), as well as the Tudor Vladimirescu suburb of Tulcea Municipality.

The total population within the Danube Delta is slightly decreasing, from 12,038 inhabitants in 2013 to 11,663 in 2018

### *Tourism / leisure activities*

The DDBRA defines the main forms of tourism carried out on the territory as follows:

- Recreational tourism - practiced through travel companies, in hotels/boarding houses on the territory of the Reserve, or using floating hotels;
- Educational tourism - practiced either individually or through organized excursions, suitable for small groups of visitors;
- Special forms of tourism for ornithologists, specialists, researchers, students;
- Youth programmes to promote knowledge, understanding and appreciation of nature;
- Rural tourism, organised by locals. This type of tourism has an important potential for improving the incomes of the local population;
- Tourism for water sports, photo-safaris
- Sport fishing activities, highly appreciated by visitors of all ages in all seasons and for any species of fish.

By the end of the 2018 holiday season, there were approx. 6,737 beds in 13 hotels, 122 boarding houses, 63 bedroom pontoons, 2 hydrofoils, 1 passenger ship, 9 campsites, and 1 youth camp.

In the last decade tourists were mainly:

<b>Tourists</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	
Romanians	56 236	48 026	33 229	21 856	32 437	50 741	52 235	73 279	70 772	
Foreigners	16 072	28 043	28 286	36 356	27 025	36 950	22 097	18 223	21 782	
<b>Total</b>	<b>72 308</b>	<b>76 069</b>	<b>61 515</b>	<b>58 212</b>	<b>59 462</b>	<b>87 691</b>	<b>74 332</b>	<b>91 502</b>	<b>92 554</b>	

### *Awareness-raising information/education resources and activities*

Six information centers are located on the territory of the DDBR, in Chilia Veche, Crişan, Gura Portiţei, Murighiol, Sf. Gheorghe and Sulina. In 2018, there were 5,984 visitors, 4,963 Romanians and 1,021 foreigners. Various events also provide information about the Delta to locals and tourists.

### *Car traffic and public access*

Car traffic in the Delta and public access are limited. This includes boat trips to the Reserve. But the number of allowances is steadily growing and must be monitored.

### *Hunting / fishing*

Hunting is forbidden in the DDBR. In 2017 and 2018, hunting activities were allowed to monitor the spreading of disease, such as African swine fever.

A ban on fishing sturgeon was extended to 2021. Although some poaching is evident, the ban is generally observed. But it is always a point for discussion and is expected to be lifted in 2021. A detailed programme for the protection and rehabilitation of the sturgeon has been developed<sup>7</sup> at international level.

Fishing activities include commercial fishing, family fishing and sport/recreational fishing.

Permits	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Family fishing	839	1 074	952	362	1 318	970	1 065	833	170
Sport / recreational fishing		7 320	17 009	26 562	31 762	34 108	33 054	45 099	48 401
Commercial fishing			1 254	1 254	1 103	1 034	1 015	1 180	1 065

### *Human occupation*

The exploitation of natural resources is one of the most important economic activities coordinated by the Reserve Authority. Living aquatic resources and reed resources have the highest share of renewable natural resources on the territory of the Reserve. Sustainable management requires a regular assessment of the state of natural resources and the level of their exploitation, in line with their regeneration potential and ecosystem capacity.

The main occupations of the local population are fishing, reed harvesting, small-scale agriculture and tourism. In 2018, 3,063.73 tons of fish were harvested compared to 4,736.30 tons in the catch quota allocation. According to the reports of the reed harvest season 2018-2019, 5,377.28 from the authorized quota of 5,950 tons were harvested in the concession areas.

### *Cultural heritage*

According to the management plan, the authority supports the development of the ethno-cultural identity of the local population. The number of inhabitants is slowly decreasing, e.g. when Sulina lost its role as harbour, many people left. The cemetery in Sulina, where sailors and people from dozens of nationalities who died at sea are buried, and the lighthouse are remarkable sites.

## **4.5. Connectivity of the area**

### *Ecological connectivity with other areas*

In 1998, the Romanian Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and the Ukrainian Danube Biosphere Reserve were declared a transboundary biosphere reserve by UNESCO.

<sup>7</sup> ICPDR – International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (2016), Sturgeon 2020 - A program for the protection and rehabilitation of Danube sturgeons. Vienna  
<https://www.icpdr.org/main/sites/default/files/nodes/documents/sturgeon2020-final.pdf>

*Other forms of recognition awarded to the area or certification of protected areas*

An area of 312,440 ha from the Romanian Danube Delta was registered on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in 1991 as a natural site. The Danube Delta hosts over 300 species of birds and 45 freshwater fish in its numerous lakes and marshes.

In 1990, the entire Danube Delta and its surrounding geographical units were declared biosphere reserve under UNESCO's "Man and the Biosphere Programme", with a total area of 580,000 ha. In 1998, the Romanian Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and the Ukrainian Danube Biosphere Reserve were declared transboundary biosphere reserve. The importance of the Danube Delta for the migratory and sedentary water birds and its huge area of waters resulted in its nomination on the List of the RAMSAR Convention in 1991. The Danube Delta is also part of the Natura2000 Network.

**Recommendations 2010:**

*The last appraisal took place in 2005. In 2010, a list of 13(!) recommendations was added to the resolution concerning the renewal of the European Diploma<sup>8</sup>, more than ever before. But so far, no condition was imposed to the European Diploma site ever.*

- 1. the process of co-ordinating the ecological management of the delta system with the three countries concerned (Moldova, Romania and Ukraine) should be continued and strengthened and the possibility of establishing a cross-border protected area should be considered in the framework of the trilateral agreement signed by the three countries concerned, under the auspices of the Council of Europe;*

In 2018 the International Co-ordinating Council of UNESCO's "Man and the Biosphere Programme" recognized the first biosphere reserve in the Republic of Moldova, the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve. The Romanian Parliament initiated discussions to extend the existing Danube Delta Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, consisting of the Romanian Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and the Ukrainian Danube Biosphere Reserve, to a trilateral Danube Delta – Lower Prut biosphere reserve.

The DDBRA was a partner in two projects financed under the Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013, with the participation of entities from the three countries:

- Consolidation of the nature protected areas' network for biodiversity protection and sustainable development in the Danube Delta and Lower Prut river region (PAN Nature).
- Inventory, assessment and remediation of anthropogenic sources of pollution in the Lower Danube Region of Ukraine, Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

In 2019, a new international project of these countries will start, led by Rewilding Europe, a Cambridge Conservation Initiative, under the Endangered Landscape Programme. The project "Restoring the Danube Delta, Europe's largest wetland - Ukraine, Romania and Moldova" will be implemented over the period 2019-2024.

The DDBRA invited Ukraine and Moldova to participate in the appraisal visit, but unfortunately, Ukraine had to cancel the visit.

- 2. the possibility of reactivating the co-operation between other European Diploma sites which are deltas (Camargue National Reserve (France) and Doñana National Park (Spain)) should be explored;*

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<sup>8</sup> CM/ResDip(2010)17

The co-operation under the Memorandum of Understanding between the DDBRA and the Joint Union for the Management of the Regional Nature Park Camargue, signed in 2016, continued in 2017 with the study tour of a French student to the Danube Delta. In 2018, a Romanian team visited the Camargue for the celebration of the 40 years of the Regional Nature Park Camargue. In 2018 and 2019, a team from Camargue visited the Danube Delta to identify new fields of cooperation and promote joint projects.

3. *the monitoring of the ecological services and of the socio-economic activities carried out on the reserve (fishing, hunting, shipping, agriculture, forestry, logging, tourism) should be strengthened in relation with the carrying capacity of the natural ecosystems and the value of the reserve; special attention should be paid to the shipping activities (movement of boats and speeding) as well as to illegal fishing and hunting.*

The integrated monitoring programme of the Reserve includes monitoring of ecological services and socio-economic activities carried out in the Reserve (fishing, hunting, shipping, agriculture, forestry, logging and tourism) and of all the other aspects mentioned above. The rules for navigation inside the Reserve are stipulated in Government Decision no. 538/2015.

In 2018, the DDBRA bought a radar to detect boats exceeding the legal speed on channels inside the Reserve, in line with Government decision no. 538/2015.

4. *potential external threats should be continually monitored, especially the likely adverse transboundary impact on the ecosystem of the whole delta of the works related to the Bystroe canal in the Ukrainian sector;*

The integrated monitoring programme of the Reserve includes the monitoring the impacts of transport activities from the Chilia channel, as a consequence of the functioning of the navigation channel Danube – Black Sea (Bystroe), built on the Ukrainian side of the Danube Delta.

The situation of the Bystroe canal has remained unchanged for years.<sup>9</sup> Any improvement of the canal is subject to an environmental impact analysis and bilateral agreements.

5. *the usefulness of banning hunting, or of managing hunting on a demonstrably sustainable basis, on the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, especially in the most sensitive areas, should be studied;*

Hunting activity in the protected area was banned in 2013. In 2017 and 2018, hunting activities were allowed for the authorities concerned to monitor the spread of diseases like the African swine fever.

6. *a system for better management of natural fisheries resources should be explored for the benefit of the local people, in order to reduce the categories and number of intermediary actors/stakeholders; the fish resources should be managed by the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority;*

The Order 44/1195 (2011) defines the rules regarding the access to the living aquatic resources for commercial fishing in natural fishing habitats within natural protected areas. The DDBRA manages the fish resources in the Reserve, based on the Management Plan 2015-2020.

7. *information concerning access of boats to vulnerable parts of the reserve should be made readily available to the public;*

All necessary information related to the economic activities allowed on the protected area's territory are posted on [www.ddbra.ro](http://www.ddbra.ro).

8. *the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority should continue to bring technical and financial assistance to the local populations, municipalities and private operators in different fields (land*

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<sup>9</sup> TRACECA IDEA II Transport Dialogue and Networks Interoperability II, Study on current situation and likely development of the Bystroe canal and Kiliya arm. Final report January 2016. [https://mtu.gov.ua/files/31110551\\_dod.pdf](https://mtu.gov.ua/files/31110551_dod.pdf)

*planning, water supplies, sewage treatment) and assist with information on organising and developing activities compatible with the aims of the reserve, such as ecotourism, bird watching and handicrafts;*

Financial programmes for the period 2014-2020 support various kinds of activities, and stakeholders and beneficiaries inside the Reserve. The DDBRA supports local communities in accessing the funds.

In 2014, the Integrated Strategy for sustainable development in Danube Delta (2030) of the World Bank was finalised at the request of the Romanian Government. The Strategy was developed based on a technical systematic analysis and in a participative process.

*9. the restoration programme of the existing buildings should be continued, using traditional materials and natural local products; the cultural value of the reserve, especially the different ethnic roots of the populations, should be enhanced with the engineering and technical input of specialised institutes;*

The DDBRA surveys how the objectives presented by the implementation of the Building Regulation in the reserve are followed.

*10. an external review and assessment of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve's Conservation Strategy (for example, priorities, management objectives, operational objectives and financial requirement) should be organised in 2010, ten years after its declaration, with the support of international expertise;*

In September 2015, the DDBRA organised an international meeting for an external review and assessment of the Conservation Strategy. The DDBRA has in mind to improve its legal framework and the strategies for the conservation of the Danube Delta's biodiversity and ecosystems in the next years.

*11. the necessary funding should be provided in order to improve the capacities/performance of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority; a feasibility study on the creation of a financial mechanism should be undertaken so that all commercial activities and uses (not only tourist activities) contribute to the financing of the reserve;*

The DDBRA improves its budget with funds from taxes, fees, permits and issuing of authorizations. Any reduction in the State budget for the DDBR must be substituted from project funds.

*12. the adoption of the legal framework (master plan, Law on the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, Law on the Protected Areas) should be accelerated;*

Government Decision no. 763/2015 approved the management plan and the Regulations for the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve. In line with the management plan, the DDBRA submits every year new legal documents for adoption to the Government to support its activities for nature conservation and protection, and sustainable development in the area.

*13. noting that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure is in operation, the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority should continue to analyse carefully the requests for new wind farms in the neighbourhood of the reserve.*

The DDBRA monitors carefully the development of wind farms in the Reserve's neighbourhood, but the influence on projects is limited.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The visit was accompanied by numerous representatives of various organisations, experts, managers and staff, but also representatives of communities in the Delta. The participation of a Moldavian delegation was highly appreciated.

The site itself offered an impressive insight into a fascinating and mostly undisturbed wetland. An outstanding bird life is a trademark of the area. The limited access due to natural barriers and legal restrictions ensures an undisturbed development of nature. The managing body, the DDBRA, does a good work and administrates this large area with a minimum of staff. For this reason, some of the recommendations are addressed to the Romanian Government to secure support for the Danube Delta.

## **6. EUROPEAN INTEREST**

Being one of the largest deltas in Europe, the conservation of this site and its role for nature conservation are undisputed. The restricted access leaves the area largely undisturbed. This is also confirmed by its recognition as World Heritage site and Biosphere Reserve (UNESCO) and as RAMSAR site. The European interest is also underlined by its designation as NATURA2000 site.

## **7. RENEWAL OF THE DIPLOMA**

It is recommended to renew the European Diploma for the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve for the period 2020 to 2030, taking into consideration the following recommendations:

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. When the ban on sturgeon fishing ends, to implement a monitoring system to assess the development of the sturgeon population in the Delta.
2. The responsible Ministry to raise the number of staff to the maximum limit foreseen to enable efficient work and add part-time contracts whenever needed for additional projects.
3. To secure a basic budget for the DDBRA to sufficiently fulfil the administrative tasks of the authority and allocate project funds fully to the project itself.
4. The responsible authorities to work out a master plan for wind farms in the perimeter of the protected area to prevent any impact on the bird life in the Danube Delta and consider the participation of the DDBRA in this process.
5. To evaluate the rising number of permits for car and boat traffic and public access and define a maximum number of permits, which should only be exceeded under exceptional circumstances.
6. To review the appointment system for the management/Governor with regard to a minimum length of a working period to enable the managers to develop and guide mid- and long-term strategies for the further development of the DDBR.
7. To make intensive use of the European Diploma logo and explain the relevance of the Diploma in the information centres and in all information material provided to the tourist sector (boat excursions, accommodations, etc.).

## **9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The visit was perfectly organised by the DDBRA. Special thanks go to all the many participants who shared their experience in various meetings and during the field trip. The open discussion was highly appreciated. Although all staff members are highly motivated and dedicated to their work, I would like to mention in particular the Governor, Mr. Catalin Tibuleac, who accompanied the field trip and Mr. Ion Munteanu, who prepared the relevant documents and made the appraisal easy.

The programme as well as the names and functions of the participants are attached.