

# DANTE - Improving Administrative Procedures and Processes for Danube IWT



The series of Transnational Working  
Group Meetings

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## 1 Introduction

While inland navigation has the potential to become a feasible, efficient and safe alternative to road transport, the aim of DANTE is to identify and eliminate administrative barriers and procedures that hinder the development of the Danube as a main transport axis of a region that spreads over as much as 10 different European countries.

DANTE is one of the three projects that addresses the objectives defined in the policy initiative “**Green Deal for Danube River Transport**” launched by Pro Danube International (PDI). Whereas DANTE addresses the administrative barriers faced by cargo and shipping operators, DAPhNE deals with the improvement needs of port authorities and administrations, while the main objective of GRENDDEL is to support operators and the responsible state authorities in the complex modernisation process of the Danube fleet.

Green Deal is a cooperative policy instrument that provides a coordinated framework for joint public and private actions to improve the efficiency and eco-performance of inland waterway transport (IWT) in the Danube region. This means that environmental and economic interests are not mutually exclusive but – on the contrary – can complement each other.

DANTE facilitates the work of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region Priority Area 1a and is acknowledged by the European Commission (EC)/Directorate General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE) as part of their efforts to reduce administrative barriers in the transport sector. The project contributes to the general goal of EU transport policy: to facilitate transport as a vital element of social and economic welfare. This is even truer for the international character of the Danube Region that spreads over 14 European countries. Since this region incorporates both developed and less developed regions, the diversity of the Danube Region becomes more than evident.

DANTE focusses on five thematic areas where administrative barriers are reducing the efficiency of IWT operations:

- Border Police, Tax & Customs;
- Navigation/traffic control authorities;
- Port authorities/administrations;
- Waterway and Canal administrations;
- Other relevant authorities imposing barriers.

In an era where road congestion represents a serious problem for the international transport operators and low to zero emissions play a prominent role on the European policy agenda, integrating IWT in the transnational transport and logistics chains is no longer an option, but a must. Therefore, several aspects of good practices, solutions and guidelines from other regions and modes of transport were analysed and thoroughly discussed during the national and transnational working group meetings.

## 2 The transnational working group meetings

The aim of the transnational working group meetings was to cumulate the results of the national meetings and the collected data in the barrier database, acting this way as a key step forward in achieving harmonised regulations and simplified administrative procedures in inland waterway transport (IWT). Moreover, the transnational working group meetings were the starting point of the implementation and capitalisation process of the outcomes of WP 3 and WP 4.

These meetings addressed expert decision makers and can be regarded as a fundamental step forward in achieving harmonised regulations and simplified administrative processes in IWT on a transnational level. Hence, the 4 transnational working group meetings can be viewed as an important milestone in the overall implementation process of the DANTE project. These transnational working group meetings were held in:

- Budapest, 24 October 2017
- Galați, 6 December 2017
- Karlsruhe, 24 April 2018
- Bratislava, 14 June 2018

### 2.1 Budapest: the first transnational working group meeting

The first transnational working group meeting in the framework of the DANTE project was organised at the premises of the Danube Commission in Budapest. The meeting was held back-to-back with EUSDR PA1a & PA11 Joint Working Group meeting and brought together more than 45 participants from the public and private sector to discuss the first data collected through the online barrier-reporting tool. The main objective of the meeting was reached: it comprised first comprehensive discussions on both reported administrative barriers and procedures as well as examples of good practices encountered by the operators on the Danube and its navigable tributaries.

The direct and active involvement of stakeholders proved to be, even in this very first stage of the DANTE project, extremely successful. The online reporting tool is an instrument that has the capacity to lay the necessary ground for fruitful discussions between policy-makers and the sector. While the waterborne industry can provide the necessary data on what specific administrative burdens they encounter in the daily activity of their businesses, policy makers at both national and European levels have the ability to propose and implement measures to abolish procedures and barriers that hinder the development of IWT at its full potential.

The administrative processes and procedures were collected and analysed according to the 5 thematic areas of the DANTE project:

- Border Police and Tax & Customs authorities,

- Navigation authorities (traffic control authorities),
- Port authorities (Harbor master) /administrations,
- Waterway and Canal administrations,
- Other authorities, which impose administrative barriers.

Until the meeting held in Budapest, several cases were reported via the online tool. The online reporting tool was efficiently promoted by the national DANTE partners in their respective communities already in the very first stage of the project's lifecycle. It is therefore not surprising that in the last phase of DANTE's lifespan – by the end of April 2019 – the stakeholders reported more than 250 issues. Their input played a decisive role in the successful drafting process of the “IWT Administration Strategy and Action Plan”.

In order to systematically collect the data, a predefined excel template was used. Based on the input received up until the first transnational working group meeting, a comprehensive desk research, with the active participation of 41 organisations, was conducted. The extensive analysis of the reported issues sheered light into the main bureaucratic problems the sector has to deal with. It became more than evident that the principle issues that pose a major obstacle in making IWT a safe and reliable alternative mode of transport are to be found under the first thematic area of the DANTE project – “Border Police, Tax and Customs”. The second highest number of reported issues is associated to the second DANTE thematic area – “Port authorities”.

Time losses due to specific bureaucratic requirements set by border control authorities were reported as being among the most problematic issues. High time consumption seems to be generated by the lack of sufficient qualified personnel and limited working hours. It was furthermore reported that introducing specific data for border control procedures is critical and time consuming, especially for passenger ships. Not having the possibility to leave the vessel during these procedures poses a high pressure on the shoulders of tourist shipping companies. Other mentioned issues relate to the different interpretation of the existing legal framework, lack of transparency, unclear taxes and last but not least, communication problems due to language barriers.

What furthermore became evident is the fact that most of the reported issues can easily be located. The vast majority of the reported barriers are geographically linked to the lower sections of the Danube. The problems encountered in Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania are similar. The crucial problem seems to be a lack of administrative capacity that corresponds to the actual needs and expectations of a sector that has the capacity to positively contribute to the overall social and economic well-being of this multicultural region.

The main conclusion was that a standardisation, simplification and harmonisation of the required administrative documents and related procedures at the transnational level would significantly increase the overall efficiency and attractiveness of IWT and would better integrate waterborne transport in the transnational intermodal transport and logistics chains.

## 2.2 Galați: the second transnational working group meeting

The second transnational working group meeting that was held in the framework of the DANTE project took place on 6 December 2017 in Galați, Romania. Having the main objective to further discuss and analyse the inputs received through the online reporting tool and the outcomes of the national working group meetings, the meeting reunited both representatives of public authorities as well as of the private sector in their quest to identify, mitigate and abolish administrative barriers and procedures. Special attention was granted to the drafting process of the “IWT Administration Strategy and Action Plan.”

The “Strategy and Action Plan” is one of the most important outputs of the DANTE project. It comprises the comprehensive identification process of a series of administrative barriers and procedures grouped according to the five thematic areas of the project. These specific barriers represent an enormous challenge to the development of IWT as an efficient and reliable mode of transport. The aim of this document is to propose concrete solutions and realistic periods for their implementation.

The philosophy behind the “Strategy and Action Plan” can be identified within the policy framework “**Green Deal for the Danube River Transport**” elaborated by Pro Danube International. DANTE represents in this regard the pillar dealing with administrative procedures that pose an immense burden to the waterborne industry and as such hinder its full economic development. PDI’s “**Same River, Same Rules**” principle briefly summarizes the main goal of the project: simplifying and harmonising administrative requirements on a transnational level.

The discussions held in Galați were extremely fruitful. The conclusions represented an important input into the drafting process of the “Strategy and Action Plan.”

## 2.3 Karlsruhe: the third transnational working group meeting

The third transnational working group meeting was organised on 24 April 2018 in Karlsruhe, Germany. Main objective of the meeting was to discuss the outcomes of Activity 4.4, namely a report of activities and good practices in the Rhine IWT and other modes of transport and a report on guidelines and recommendations.

The participants had a comprehensive discussion on elaborating recommendations that fit the actual needs and preconditions of the Danube Region. It was right from the beginning unanimously agreed that the project is not questioning the necessity of administrative processes or procedures as such. DANTE pleads for accurate and efficient administrative requirements that are adapted to the current market needs.

The main objective of DANTE is to harmonise and simplify bureaucratic procedures, while making the overall functioning of the administration of IWT more feasible, transparent, reliable and less time consuming. By providing examples of good practices that are

customized to the realities of the Danube Region, these recommendations and guidelines contribute to the successful implementation process of the DANTE project.

The report on activities and good practices in the Rhine IWT and the report on guidelines and recommendations deal with the question to what extent examples of good practices from other regions and modes of transport can realistically be implemented in the Danube Region. These reports address both the responsible state authorities and the inland waterway users and operators. The concrete solutions were identified and analysed by combining several research methodologies. On the one hand, valuable information was collected via the online reporting tool, while on the other hand, data was collected from the National Table Meetings and via desk research. Based on this data, the actual reports represent an excellent summary and analysis of the identified issues, while at the same time they deliver concrete solutions and recommendations to overcome the specific administrative challenges.

## 2.4 Bratislava: the fourth transnational working group meeting

The fourth and last transnational working group meeting in the framework of the DANTE project was organised in Bratislava on 14 June 2018. This last meeting was a major step forward in identifying the main IWT administrative obstacles along the Danube Region. Based on the comprehensive analysis that were elaborated in the national reports, concrete solutions to be further analysed in the “IWT Strategy and Action Plan” were proposed.

Primary data on both barriers and good practices was collected by the online reporting tool and complementary through several other instruments and methodologies such as meetings with stakeholders on both national and transnational levels and desk research.

Based on the provided first-hand input, country reports were elaborated for Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania (AAOPFR elaborated an extended Country Report for Romania including some proposals for actions to eliminate some administrative barriers) and Bulgaria. The type of administrative barriers and procedures that were mentioned the most by the Danube river stakeholders can be summarized as follows:

- Lack of standardization and unified regulations even on national level;
- High time consumption and too many documents;
- Staff shortage for customs and border police, leading to long waiting times;
- Non-transparent and inconsistent charging policies among Danube countries;
- Inconvenient work schedules of ports and customs, which causes long waiting times;
- No generally accepted working language along the Danube countries;
- Insufficient infrastructure and equipment as an obstacle for efficient processes;
- Insufficient fairway conditions due to the lack of maintenance works;
- Lack of qualified personnel and mutual recognition of documents;



- Information gaps: Lack of information causes inefficiency.

These identified barriers are thoroughly discussed and analysed in the “IWT Administration Strategy and Action Plan”. The document furthermore proposes concrete solutions that are customized to the specific regional and national political and administrative prerequisites of the entire region.

### 3 Conclusions

Identifying, mitigating and abolishing administrative burdens and harmonising bureaucratic procedures are key elements that define the transnational partnership in the framework of the DANTE project. The main objective of the project is to strengthen the transnational collaboration process between the responsible public authorities and private entities in order to eliminate and reduce unnecessary administrative procedures and processes.

It is a well-known fact that the actual potential of inland waterway transport (IWT) is by far not exploited at its full potential. The reasons for this are manifold: improper waterway maintenance, missing or technically outdated port infrastructure and last but not least the poor condition of the Danube fleet. Investing in the proper maintenance of the river in order to ensure uninterrupted navigability periods, developing innovative financial instruments for investments in ports and the fleet and last but not least initiate a well-structured reform process of the IWT administration at the transnational level, can be regarded as necessary measures to efficiently integrate IWT in the European intermodal supply chain. Out of these specific issues, DANTE addresses bureaucratic processes and procedures that shipping operators have to deal with in their daily activities.

Reducing the overall bureaucratic burden is considered as a driving force for economic development and the social well-being of a region’s inhabitants. Reforming administrative procedures on a national level is per se a challenge. Initiating this kind of a renewal process on the transnational level seems to be, at a first glance, mission impossible. DANTE nevertheless addressed this challenge and was able to produce tangible results. The national and the subsequent transnational working group meetings played in this regard a vital role.

By bringing together representatives of the responsible state authorities and of the sector, these meetings set the ground for future policy initiatives that will decisively shape the administrative environment of the sector. State administrations have the capacity to directly initiate the reform process of specific IWT related policies based on the concrete feedback received from the sector. The direct involvement of the stakeholders in the policy-making process is a vital prerequisite to make sure that the actual outcomes meet the specific needs and requirements of the business environment.

Based on multifaceted methodologies – desk research, national and transnational expert meetings and first-hand input from the industry via the online reporting tool – DANTE proposed the following strategic points to overcome the administrative barriers along the Danube and its navigable tributaries:

- Simplified and harmonised international legal framework;
- Standardised and harmonised documents that are accepted in all countries;
- Definition of a maximum data set for reporting required by the authorities and ensuring true submit-only-once;
- Usage of the state-of-the-art digital tools for reporting and to support interoperability;
- Information exchange between competent authorities in line with the data protection regulations for seamless and efficient cross-border transport;
- Harmonised, transparent and consistent charging policies;
- High quality information provision (this refers to (i) reporting requirements and (ii) events influencing the navigation) to support market orientation;
- Sufficient staff at control authorities with proper infrastructure and equipment;
- Relevant work schedules of ports and customs;
- Harmonised safety and security guidelines;
- Accepted working language along the Danube countries.

