

The Danube Commission

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Abstract: The Danube Commission is an international intergovernmental organization, set up by the Convention regarding the regime of navigation on the Danube signed in Belgrade on 18 August 1948. As a result of the Danube River Conference of 1948, the river system was divided into three administrations — the regular River Commission (which had existed in one form or another since 1856), a bilateral Romania-USSR administration between Braila and the mouth of the Sulina channel, and a bilateral Romania-Yugoslavia administration at the Iron Gate. Both of the latter were technically under the control of the main commission, members of which were — at the beginning — Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine, the USSR, and Yugoslavia.

Keywords: Danube Commission; international intergovernmental organization; River Conference of 1948

The Danube Commission is an international intergovernmental organization, set up by the Convention regarding the regime of navigation on the Danube signed in Belgrade on 18 August 1948.

The Commission is concerned with the maintenance and improvement of navigation conditions of the Danube River, from its source in Germany to its outlets in Romania and Ukraine, leading to the Black Sea. It was established in 1948 by seven countries bordering the river, replacing previous commissions that had also included representatives of non-riparian powers. Its predecessor commissions were among the first attempts at internationalizing the police powers of sovereign states for a common cause. As a result of the Danube River Conference of 1948, the river system was divided into three administrations — the regular River Commission (which had existed in one form or another since 1856), a bilateral Romania-USSR administration between Braila and the mouth of the Sulina channel, and a bilateral Romania-Yugoslavia administration at the Iron Gate. Both of the latter were technically under the control of the main commission, members of which were — at the beginning — Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine, the USSR, and Yugoslavia.

Members include representatives from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Slovakia, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, and Serbia.

The commission dates to the Paris Conferences of 1856, which established for the first time an international regime to safeguard free navigation on the Danube, and of 1921, which resurrected the international regime after the First World War.

The primary tasks of the Danube Commission activity are provision and development of free navigation on the Danube for the commercial vessels flying the flag of all states in accordance with interests and sovereign rights of the member-states of the Belgrade Convention, as well as strengthening and development of economical and cultural relations of the said states among themselves and with the other countries.

The Danube Commission in its work rests upon the wide historical experience of navigation control on the international rivers of Europe and the best practice of the international river commissions, including the European Danube Commission, established under the Paris Peace Treaty from 1856.

Postwar discussion of the Danube River was begun by the United States in 1945 when President Truman proposed at the Potsdam Conference that freedom of navigation should be assured on Europe's inland waterways. Britain and France were concerned with reestablishing their prewar positions as members of the European Commission of Danube. In 1947, the Paris Peace Treaties signed with Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria guaranteed free navigation. The Foreign ministers of Britain, France, the USSR, and the United States stipulated that : *Navigation on the Danube shall be free and open for the nationals, vessels of commerce and goods of all states, on a footing of equality in regard to port and navigation charges and conditions for merchant shipping. The foregoing shall not apply to traffic between ports of the same state.* Summary History of the Commissions of the River Danube 1856 – 1948

1856 Treaty of Paris: European Commission of the Danube established; Russian boundary withdrawn 20 km north of the Danube

1857 Riparian states meet in Vienna to regulate the whole river from Ulm to Braila - largely unsuccessful due to the dominance of Austria-Hungary

1870 Sulina declared a free port - therefore cargo could pass up the river without formality

1878 Treaty of Berlin: European Commission's rights and privileges extended; lower Danube neutralized; Romania becomes full member of the Commission following her independence; Russia again a Danubian country after war with Turkey in 1877

1895-99 Blasting and canal construction along the Iron Gates section of the river somewhat improves navigation

1902 Final Sulina arm cut-off completed, thus shortening the river by 11 nautical miles

1919 Treaty of Versailles grants four rivers including the Danube "international" status

1921 European Commission of the Danube resumes operations; new International Commission of the Danube set up for the "fluvial" river from Ulm to Braila

1939-44/5 Danube under German control

1948 Treaty of Belgrade: new Danube Commission is established to regulate whole navigable river, composed only of riparian states, except for Germany (or Austria, at first).

The Danube River Conference of 1948 was held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, to develop a new international regime for the development and control of the Danube in the wake of World War II. It was the first postwar conference pitting the victorious Allies of the west against the Soviet Union and its allied states of Eastern Europe in which the latter held a majority and were expected to win all points of disagreement between the two sides. As such, it attracted more than the usual share of attention from East and West alike. The commission elects from among its members a president, vice-president and secretary for three-year terms. The commission has a secretariat of 11 international civil servants and 19 employees under the supervision of a director-general, who is at present István Valkar of Hungary. The official languages of the commission are German, French, and Russian. The Centre of the Danube Commission is : Hungary, 1068 Budapest, Benczúr utca 25.

The commission meets regularly twice a year. It also convenes groups of experts to consider items provided for in the commission's working plans. Its primary duties are:

- Supervising the implementation of the international convention that set it up in 1948.
- Preparing a general plan of the main works called for in the interest of navigation.
- Consulting with and making recommendations to the special administrations charged with various stretches of the river and exchanging information with them.
- Establishing a uniform system of traffic regulations on the whole navigable portion of the Danube and, taking into account the specific conditions of various sections of the river, laying down the basic provisions governing navigation on the Danube, including those governing a pilot service.

- Unifying the regulations governing river, customs and sanitary inspection.
- Harmonizing regulations on inland navigation with the European Union and with the Central Commission for the Navigation on the Rhine.
- Coordinating the activity of hydro-meteorological services on the Danube and publishing short-term and long-term hydrologic forecasts for the river.
- Collecting statistical data on aspects of navigation on the Danube within the commission's competence.
- Publishing reference works, sailing directions, nautical charts and atlases for purposes of navigation.

The Danube Commission outlook is connected with the creation of the unified navigation system of inland waterways in Europe. With due consideration of the before mentioned the priority areas of the Commission activity are focused on the unification and provision of mutual recognition of the basic regulatory documents, required for the navigation on the Danube and on the other sections of the unified navigation system, contribution to the improvement of navigation conditions and safety of navigation, creating requirements for the Danube integration into the European system in the capacity of the significant transport corridor.

With a view to ensuring the said integration Commission actively cooperates with the relevant international bodies, involved in different inland waterways transport aspects, such as United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Central commission for the navigation on Rhine, European Commission and etc.

With the aim of enhancing the role of the Danube Commission in the international cooperation in the field of inland navigation, the member-states of the Belgrade Convention intend to modernize Commission, by vesting additional powers in it and new functions, as well as to enlarge the circle of its members. It will become feasible when the ongoing process of the revision of the Convention will come to end. Presently France, Turkey and European Community declare determination to become the members of the modernized Danube Commission.



Figure 1. Committee RAINWAT Meeting at the Danube Commission (27-29 April 2010).



Figure 2. The Palace of the Danube Commission.