INTERNATIONAL SAVA RIVER BASIN COMMISSION

1948

ICPDR IKSD
International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River
Internationale Kommission zum Schutz der Donau

Joint Statement on Guiding Principles for the Development of Inland Navigation and Environmental Protection in the Danube River Basin 2.0

Adopted by:

International Sava River Basin Commission	August 4, 2025
International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River	June 17-18, 2025
Danube Commission	June 12, 2025

September 2025

Disclaimer

Joint Statement 2.0 has been jointly developed by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC) and the Danube Commission (DC) through a consensus-driven process involving stakeholders from the inland waterway transport, environmental protection, and water management sectors in the Danube and Sava countries, as well as the European Commission and international organizations.

This document is part of a broader framework that will also include the ***Joint Statement 2.0 Manual*** and a design of an **online knowledge management system**, which will support the practical application of the *Joint Statement 2.0*.

All three components of the *Joint Statement 2.0* framework have been developed with the financial support of the World Bank and the Global Environmental Facility through the *Sava and Drina Integrated Development Program*. The views expressed in the document are those of the three international river commissions and participating stakeholders.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This document presents the *Joint Statement on Guiding Principles for the Development of Inland Navigation and Environmental Protection in the Danube River Basin 2.0* (*Joint Statement 2.0* or *JS 2.0*). It has been developed by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the Danube Commission (DC), and the International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC) through a consensus-driven process involving stakeholders from the inland waterway transport (IWT), environmental protection, and water management sectors in the Danube and Sava countries, as well as the European Commission and international organizations.

JS 2.0* renews the original *Joint Statement (2007) while maintaining its overarching goal: fostering environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable development of navigation in the Danube and Sava basins. To enhance the effectiveness and impact of the *Joint Statement* process, *JS 2.0* reflects the current state of IWT and the river environment in both basins, as well as changes in legal, policy, and project landscapes since 2007. It also addresses increasing challenges caused by climate change (e.g., more frequent floods, droughts, and low-flow periods) and their impacts on navigation and ecosystems. The increasing demand for building institutional capacity in the region is also addressed.

Based on a comprehensive review of the *Joint Statement* process since the adoption of the original document, ***JS 2.0* aims to support**:

(i) sustainable IWT development on the Danube and Sava rivers, balancing the objectives of navigation, river basin management, and biodiversity conservation, in line with EU policies, to ensure Good Navigation Status (GNS), Good Ecological Status/Potential (GES/GEP), and Favourable Conservation Status (FCS),

(ii) maintaining waterways 'fit for purpose' and 'fit for the future' while preserving (near-)natural rivers' dynamics and ecosystem functions and services,

(iii) implementing integrated river management that incorporates innovative and adaptive management approaches, and

(iv) building the capacity of national administrations to effectively apply these approaches.

JS 2.0 outlines a holistic approach to navigation development and environmental protection in the Danube and Sava basins, covering both new IWT projects and the management of existing systems. The document provides **guidance for decision-makers and experts** in the IWT and environmental protection sectors, while also offering valuable insights for water management and other relevant sectors. Its concept and principles may be applicable beyond the Danube and Sava basins, as well.

JS 2.0 is part of a broader framework that will also include the ***JS 2.0 Manual*** – an update of the *Manual on Good Practices in Sustainable Waterway Planning* (2010) – which will provide practical guidance, reference approaches, and examples of good practice. Additionally, an **online knowledge management system** will be designed as a platform for sharing relevant information and practical experiences.

This document consists of four sections. Following the introduction (Section 1), Section 2 defines the 'boundary conditions' for implementation, covering the legal, policy, and knowledge framework, as well as the current state and future needs of IWT and river ecology, also considering the needs of other relevant sectors. Section 3 presents a framework for balancing navigation development with environmental protection, along with additional considerations that extend beyond this framework. Section 4 addresses implementation and monitoring of the *JS 2.0* process, incorporating lessons learned and highlighting areas for improvement at both national and international levels. Not all measures and requirements outlined in Section 4 may apply to every country, as some already have equivalent structures or procedures in place (in which case they should be disregarded). However, this section is intended to assist countries that still need to develop such structures and procedures. The document concludes with a list of acronyms, a glossary of key terms, and a list of references.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Legal, policy, and knowledge framework

The *Joint Statement* of 2007 was developed based on a wide range of legal and policy documents, including international conventions and agreements in the Danube region [1-3], relevant EU directives [4-8], international environmental conventions [9-13], and international navigation agreements and programmes [14-16], later expanded and updated in the *JS Manual* [17-20]. This foundation was further enriched by various technical papers, project reports, and case studies. Since then, new legal and policy documents have emerged, and advancements in scientific knowledge and practical experience have occurred in key areas such as IWT, river and floodplain management, environmental and biodiversity protection, nature conservation and restoration, water management, and climate change. The most important EU policies are summarized below[1], while the baseline information for *JS 2.0* is drawn largely from recent and ongoing EU projects[2] and good practice examples from the literature.

An **overarching framework** for Europe's green transition is provided by the *European Green Deal* [21], a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy. Its goals include protecting, conserving, and enhancing the natural capital, while safeguarding the health and well-being of citizens from environmental risks. Four of its eight key focus areas are particularly relevant to *JS 2.0*: (i) climate change mitigation and adaptation; (ii) zero pollution; (iii) ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation, and (iv) sustainable transportation. A suite of legislative acts and strategies under the *Green Deal* guide EU action in these areas, setting a binding objective of climate neutrality by 2050 and requiring the integration of climate adaptation in all policy areas [22], addressing biodiversity loss driven by land-use change, overexploitation of natural resources, climate change, pollution, and invasive species [23], and creating a vision of European transport by 2050, with a goal to reduce transport sector emissions by 90% by that year [24]. Decarbonization of the EU's industries, including transport, while enhancing their competitiveness, will be supported and guided by the *Clean Industrial Deal* – an action programme developed as a follow-up to the *European Green Deal*.

The EU's **transport policies** aim to promote clean, safe, sustainable, resilient, and efficient mobility across Europe. Despite its environmental and economic advantages over other transport modes (in terms of energy efficiency, greenhouse gases, air pollutants, and noise emissions, safety, bulk freight capacity, and infrastructure investment requirements), IWT remains underutilized compared to other transport modes. Recognizing potential for a modal shift in freight transport, the *NAIADES III* action programme [25] advocates for increasing IWT, along with emission reduction, further digitalization, and workforce development. The policies set ambitious goals for IWT development, including increasing its market share by 25% by 2030 and by 50% by 2050 [24], and a phased development of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T): completion of the core network by 2030, an extended core network by 2040, and a comprehensive network by 2050 [26]. The overarching objective is to establish a multimodal, interoperable Europe-wide network meeting high-quality standards (GNS), while aligning with the EU's climate neutrality and environmental objectives, supported by various financial instruments[3].

In the Danube region, the achievement of these objectives is supported through a dedicated process initiated by the *Luxembourg Declaration* [27]. This declaration and its subsequent conclusions, together

[1] A more detailed overview of the legal and policy framework will be provided in the *Joint Statement 2.0 Manual*.
[2] E.g., *PLATINA*, *FAIRway Danube 1* and *2*, *FAST Danube*, *Danube East of Vienna*, *MERLIN*, *Danube STREAM*, *DanubeSediment*, *Danube Floodplain*, *MEASURES*, and *DANUBEparksCONNECTED*, among others.
[3] CEF, InvestEU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Interreg, ERDF, IPA III, NDICI, Horizon Europe, and Innovation Fund.

with outputs developed under the umbrella of the *EU Strategy for the Danube Region* (*EUSDR*) [28] – including the *Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan* [29] and regular national updates on its implementation – provide the foundation for effective waterway infrastructure rehabilitation and maintenance on the Danube and its navigable tributaries, thereby contributing to the realization of GNS, as required by the *TEN-T Regulation*.

Relevant EU **environmental policies**, including water and nature directives [4-6, 18], as well as recent biodiversity and nature restoration policies and laws [23, 30-32], emphasize that healthy river corridors deliver a range of essential ecosystem services[4], supporting various human uses. Therefore, these policies prioritize the prevention of ecosystem deterioration and stress that restoring degraded ecosystems, along with their natural connectivity and functions, offers benefits that significantly outweigh the restoration costs. The main policy objectives include achieving GES/GEP for surface water bodies by 2027 [4] and restoring habitats such as rivers, floodplains, and wetlands to a 'good condition' in three phases [32]: at least 30% of their total area by 2030, at least 60% by 2040, and at least 90% by 2050, thereby also contributing to the EU's climate goals and supporting the implementation of global commitments [9, 13, 33-35][5]. The *EU Biodiversity Strategy* also sets a target to restore at least 25,000 km of rivers into free-flowing rivers by 2030 through the removal of primarily obsolete barriers and the restoration of floodplains and wetlands [23].

To **balance transport needs with environmental and societal concerns**, EU policies stress the importance of an integrated approach for future IWT infrastructure development. The revised *TEN-T Regulation* [26] outlines key principles to mitigate environmental impacts: (i) adopting a 'corridor approach' to coordinate transboundary projects and synchronize corridor development, thus maximizing benefits; (ii) conducting environmental assessments to ensure plans and projects align with environmental and biodiversity policies [4-6, 18] and the 'do no significant harm' principle; (iii) incorporating lifetime maintenance of infrastructure into the planning process; (iv) avoiding barriers that disrupt connectivity of free-flowing rivers, and (v) respecting the specific hydromorphology of each waterway and establishing reference water levels while accounting for climate change impacts. The regulation allows for exemptions from minimum infrastructure requirements if interventions have significant negative impacts on the environment, biodiversity, or cultural heritage.

Complementing these principles, *NAIADES III* promotes the greening of IWT infrastructure and ports, focusing on achieving zero emissions, but also acknowledging that the greater frequency of low-water events will require a faster development and roll-out of innovative, climate-adaptable vessels able to sail with low water levels while minimizing impacts on aquatic ecosystems and that, particularly in free-flowing sections, a goal-based approach would allow some flexibility with the requirements for fairway depths [25]. Yet, in the context of exemptions from minimum infrastructure requirements, the revised *TEN-T Regulation* [26] is not explicit regarding fairway parameters such as width and depth.

EU guidance documents [36-39] further reinforce the integration of environmental objectives into navigation development by incorporating the *WFD* goal of achieving GES/GEP into the GNS development process [36], encouraging the involvement of stakeholders responsible for the EU *WFD* implementation in the design and execution of IWT projects, and promoting coordinated approaches to streamline authorization processes and ensure compliance with the EU *WFD* Article 4(7), a prerequisite for accessing funding from European Structural and Investment Funds [38].

[4] E.g., habitats and associated species; freshwater provision; hydropower and biomass; water quality, quantity, and sediment regulation; local climate regulation through carbon storage and sequestration; recreation.

[5] In non-EU Danube and Sava countries, where the target for species and habitats set by FCS does not apply as a formal requirement, the Connectivity Status Index used in the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* [35] can serve as a valid alternative.

New policies bring **new opportunities and requirements for infrastructure projects**, emphasizing ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions (NbS) as cost-effective measures for climate adaptation [25, 40]. They also advocate for PIANC's 'working with nature' concept, prioritizing win-win solutions that maintain or restore natural river functions over merely minimizing ecological impacts [36, 37]. Additionally, these policies introduce climate-proofing of infrastructure, ensuring climate change mitigation and adaptation measures are integrated into project development from the outset of the project management cycle [41], which is especially relevant as healthy and climate-resilient ecosystems provide important services that support IWT. To support sustainable financing of infrastructure projects, a framework identifies environmentally sustainable economic activities and establishes technical screening criteria for environmental objectives [42], including climate change mitigation and adaptation [43], and considering IWT and its infrastructure [44].

While the legal and policy framework is complex, opportunities for synergy exist. For instance, exemptions in the *TEN-T Regulation*, *WFD*, *Habitats Directive*, and *Nature Restoration Law* – under specific conditions – provide flexibility for balancing environmental protection with infrastructure needs. Additionally, streamlining data collection and assessments across policies can improve coherence and efficiency. An integrated approach to river corridor management (outlined in Section 3) is an effective tool to foster synergy and enable the coherent implementation of all relevant policies.

2.2 Current state and challenges in the Danube and Sava river corridors

IWT state and needs. Over the past 10-15 years, improvements in IWT infrastructure on the Danube have led to increased cargo transport volumes on its lower sections, primarily driven by growing demand from the steel industry and for the transport of agricultural products, coal, and petroleum, as reported in DC's statistical data. However, recent changes in both cargo and passenger transport rates are largely the result of extraordinary events[6], rather than shifts in modal share. Along the upper and middle Danube sections, opposite trends can be observed.

IWT on the Sava River remains suboptimal, especially when compared to the substantial cargo volumes on parallel road corridors. Nevertheless, transport volumes on the Sava have shown a modest increase since 2017, with the contribution of Sava IWT to Danube IWT rising from 3% in 2019 to over 6% in 2022 (based on the throughput of ports). However, this positive change is driven by growth at the lower Sava River section (primarily in Serbia), while the increase in IWT rates on the upstream river sections is negligible, despite significant investments in port infrastructure in recent years. Passenger transport follows a similar pattern to cargo transport. This is due to existing bottlenecks, fairway dimensions, and the consequent variations in the waterway class, which do not consistently meet standards for international waterways, as declared for the Sava River. This situation, following the core objective of the Sava Commission, calls for action to rehabilitate and develop the Sava waterway in accordance with its international status to ensure safe and economically viable navigation.

Navigability on both rivers is highly susceptible to hydrological conditions, as demonstrated by extended low-flow periods (e.g., in 2011, 2015, 2018, and 2022). This significantly affects the efficiency of IWT and the functioning of the TEN-T on the two rivers by lowering cargo-carrying capacity, increasing the risk of accidents, and reducing reliability, potentially causing economic drawbacks and a reverse modal shift.

Notwithstanding current modal split figures, IWT plays a strategic role in ensuring supply chain resilience, particularly during crises. This value was clearly demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when supply chains remained largely operational despite lockdowns, and again during Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. From 2022 to 2024, the Danube waterway emerged as the most vital

[6] Namely, the COVID-2019 pandemic and the Russian war against Ukraine.

Solidarity Lane, facilitating the export of Ukrainian grain and agricultural products despite maritime route blockages. Furthermore, in the context of military mobility, IWT represents a critical asset within Europe's transport system.

Given its advantages as a transport mode, IWT in the Danube region has significant potential to contribute to regional economic development, Europe's prosperity, and the competitiveness of its key industries in the global market. It can also serve as a vital link between the EU and the Black Sea region, which is a future market with considerable development potential. The need for increased IWT is driven by growing demand from its traditional markets (agriculture, steel products, and construction materials). Further demand is expected from emerging sectors (renewable energy, recycling, automotive, and chemical industries), including from the Black Sea region market.

Recognizing this potential, current EU transport policies have set ambitious goals for IWT development (Section 2.1). Considerable efforts are needed to achieve GNS on the Danube and Sava rivers by 2030 [26], while fully respecting the environmental legislation. To achieve this, it is essential to ensure the reliability of inland navigation, preventing a permanent shift away from IWT to other transport modes due to perceptions of insufficient reliability. This requires increasing resilience to extreme hydrological events (involving both high and low water levels) and, from a multimodal corridor perspective, enhancing flexibility to switch to other modes when necessary.

River environment state and needs. Hydromorphological alterations caused by navigation, hydropower use, and flood protection are among the key factors affecting the basin's ecological integrity and water status, disrupting river and habitat connectivity and contributing to ecological degradation of river corridors and systems. Despite numerous measures implemented or planned over the past 15 years to address hydromorphological alterations in the Danube Basin, many surface water bodies still do not meet *WFD* objectives [45, 46]. Other major challenges on both rivers include continuing anthropogenic pressures on protected areas designated under the EU's nature directives, as well as riverbed incision, a growing issue affecting both IWT and the environment, disruption of natural sediment transport and deposition processes, and the lack of improvement in fish populations despite restoration measures.

The EU's environmental policies set clear objectives for the future status of the riverine environment (Section 2.1). Main ecological integrity needs include: (i) protecting and conserving river corridors and associated ecosystems (including improvements in water status, reducing the impacts of waves generated by ship operation on fish, and reducing the noise pollution caused by navigation); (ii) restoring modified or affected river sections and their adjacent floodplains and wetlands; (iii) establishing a near-natural, dynamic, type-specific channel and floodplain environment (regarding in-stream structures, riverbanks, side-arms, and floodplains), supporting dynamic equilibrium and adequate connectivity; (iv) ensuring uninterrupted longitudinal and lateral migration of fish species and other water-related species to ensure their natural, self-sustaining development, and (v) maintaining a balanced sediment budget. Significant efforts are still needed to achieve these objectives in the Danube and Sava basins.

Pressures and challenges. River corridors are complex socio-ecological systems where natural functioning is modified to support multiple human uses, including navigation, agriculture, energy production, flood protection, water supply, fisheries, forestry, tourism, and recreation, as well as urban and rural development. These activities exert pressures on the environment, potentially leading to impacts such as deterioration of freshwater habitats and alteration of biodiversity. Key pressures, which may also accumulate, include: (i) hydrological alterations from hydropower use, navigation, flood protection, and water supply; (ii) connectivity interruptions caused by hydropower use, navigation, and flood protection; (iii) morphological alterations due to river channel stabilization, modification, or relocation to increase conveyance or meet economic and social demands, and (iv) water pollution from agriculture, wastewater, stormwater, navigation, tourism, and other potential sources. Additional pressures may result from quantitative overuse of resources (e.g., water abstraction, irrigation, sand and gravel extraction,

or fishing), natural hazards (e.g., floods, droughts, ice events), and extraordinary events, including pandemics, accidents, or intentional acts such as military actions[7].

The sectors contributing to these pressures and potential impacts often share common interests, such as reducing flood and drought risks, ensuring sufficient water quantity or depth, improving water and ecosystem quality, and ensuring system connectivity. However, they may also generate sectoral or spatial conflicts related to water, including: (i) competition over resources, (ii) pollution versus water/ecosystem quality; (iii) infrastructure development versus ecosystem conservation, and (iv) upstream-downstream risk transfers[8]. These challenges are further intensified by climate change and economic growth, which can contribute to increased frequency and magnitude of extreme events, rising resource demand and competition, habitat and biodiversity loss, and pollution. In addition, achieving environmental objectives by 2027 or beyond may be further hindered by future infrastructure projects.

Climate change impact. Scientific evidence indicates a growing impact of climate change on the discharge of the Danube and Sava rivers. Main concerns are related to more frequent and prolonged low-flow periods and increasingly unpredictable hydrological conditions, especially in the southern and eastern parts of the Danube Basin. These changes affect river ecosystems by altering the physical extent and conditions of aquatic habitats[9], water quality, material and energy exchange, connectivity, and habitat diversity, thus influencing biota and ecosystem functions. Water-related sectors are affected by degraded water and ecosystem quality, intensified competition for resources, and negative economic impacts.

Given the current state and needs, a holistic approach should be adopted to support IWT development and ensure environmental protection along the Danube and Sava rivers, addressing existing pressures and challenges while considering the needs of other sectors.

3 HOLISTIC APPROACH TO NAVIGATION DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Approach. A holistic approach is crucial for ensuring sustainable and environmentally responsible navigation development, and it forms the foundation of the *Joint Statement 2.0* process. It takes into account that river corridors are complex, multifunctional, and dynamic systems that provide a wide range of ecosystem services, which, together with the diverse human uses they support, deliver various social, economic, and environmental benefits and emphasize the need for coordination between the environmental health of the Danube and Sava river corridors and the development of IWT.

This approach strives to offer innovative, sustainable, and resilient solutions that enhance inland navigation and protect the environment along the Danube and Sava rivers, covering both the planning and implementation of new IWT projects and the management of existing systems. By treating the river corridor as a unified (eco)system, the holistic approach addresses diverse pressures and needs across the system, ensuring balanced and integrated management. This concept promotes a shift from project-based sustainable IWT planning (the focus of the original *Joint Statement*) to a comprehensive management approach.

In this context, *JS 2.0* represents the starting point of a long-term transformation toward a new management approach that balances both environmental and transportation needs to support the sustainable use of water resources in the Danube and Sava basins. While this will require policy, organizational, and capacity adjustments at the national level, *JS 2.0* provides a flexible framework for adopting the holistic

[7] E.g., the military strikes on Danube ports in Ukraine.
[8] E.g., by building flood protection structures, reducing the flood risk locally but transferring it downstream.
[9] E.g., flow velocity, water temperature, concentration of nutrients and pathogens.

approach within existing systems and processes. It supports countries in making gradual progress toward transformation, aligned with their unique circumstances and priorities.

Key features of the approach are listed in Table 1. The approach that integrates ecology, engineering, and social considerations may be more demanding than traditional approaches in terms of complexity, time, and resource requirements. However, it has the potential to yield multiple benefits by supporting a range of aspects (Table 2).

Table 1. Key features of the holistic approach to sustainable IWT planning and management.

Feature	Description
Systems thinking	Considers all relevant physical, ecological, and social processes in a river corridor system and their interactions, to identify ways to enhance system planning and management by reducing conflicts, maximizing synergies, and achieving sustainable outcomes.
Sectoral and spatial integration	Promotes coordination and cooperation across sectors, applies basin- or corridor-wide thinking to support a strategic approach to IWT planning and management, and emphasizes cross-border collaboration to address transboundary issues effectively[10].
Coverage of the entire project management cycle	Encompasses an iterative process with five phases: scoping, planning, decision-making (design), implementation, and operations (including monitoring, maintenance, adaptive management, and reporting), with decommissioning as a terminal stage in some cases.
Interdisciplinary planning and management with stakeholder involvement	Ensures the involvement of diverse stakeholders from the outset and throughout the management cycle, fostering regular information exchange, group-based multicriteria decision-making, and collaborative problem-solving.
Adaptive management	Uses the best available knowledge and emphasizes continuous learning through simulation, monitoring, effectiveness evaluation, anticipation of change, and risk management[11] to improve decisions and adjust actions dynamically.

Table 2. Key aspects of sustainable IWT planning and management, supported by the holistic approach.

Aspect	Description
Strategic approach to IWT planning and management	Considers measures from a river basin perspective, assessing cumulative effects of measures rather than impacts of individual ones, and balancing short-term gains with long-term outcomes of measures (the corridor approach).
Sustainable and resilient management	Adopts adaptive and flexible approaches to enhance the sustainability and resilience of river corridor management through the implementation, at various scales[12], of activities that meet the applicable taxonomy requirements.
Meeting biodiversity and environmental commitments	In addition to facilitating sustainable IWT planning and management, it assists national authorities in meeting biodiversity commitments and aligning with environmental policies.

[10] E.g., a shared waterway maintenance responsibility for common river stretches.
[11] This includes the risks related to climate change and natural hazards (floods, droughts, ice events), as well as extraordinary events (pandemics, accidents, military actions).
[12] E.g., as large-scale projects, a series of smaller projects, standalone projects, or components of broader processes.

Innovative and multi-functional solutions and diversified financing opportunities	Identifies solutions that foster innovation in planning and implementation and maximize ecosystem service benefits. It also leverages diverse funding mechanisms to achieve multiple goals simultaneously[13].

Principles. To support the identification of integrated solutions that foster the development of green, sustainable, and climate-resilient IWT infrastructure, and to help achieve the objectives of *JS 2.0*, the holistic framework provides a set of principles to be applied at various phases of the project management cycle (Table 3)[14].

Table 3. Principles for sustainable IWT planning and management.

No.	Principle
Scoping	
1	**Balance sectoral objectives**[15] by integrating their needs, considering climate change-related challenges, and applying interdisciplinary expertise throughout the project management cycle.
2	**Promote transparency** through regular engagement with relevant stakeholders, consistent information sharing, and transboundary consultation where applicable.
3	**Ensure flexibility of the process** by enabling phased implementation of large-scale projects (considering their cumulative impact), adopting adaptive management, and developing diversified funding strategies.
Planning, design, and implementation	
1	**Coordinate IWT planning with relevant frameworks** by aligning it with environmental, climate, and sectoral policies, conducting thorough impact assessments based on interdisciplinary expertise and comprehensive data, and ensuring adequate stakeholder participation.
2	**Ensure sustainability and resilience** by prioritizing the preservation of key natural functions of river ecosystems[16], applying mitigation and restoration measures where prevention of negative impacts is not feasible, and integrating infrastructure lifetime maintenance into the planning process.
3	**Promote adaptive approaches** by applying a range of measures (structural, nature-based, and non-structural) on a case-by-case basis to address specific conditions, considering the multiple functions of river systems and IWT-related impacts of climate change, supported by risk analysis[11].
Operations	
1	**Strengthen monitoring and assessment** by ensuring regular fairway and comprehensive environmental monitoring throughout the project cycle, linking project-level data with system-wide baseline data, and conducting impact modelling and assessments supported by interdisciplinary expertise.
2	**Enhance information sharing** by systematically communicating monitoring results and lessons learned with stakeholders, to inform future projects and decisions.
3	**Integrate disaster risk management** into operational strategies to address climate change-related and extraordinary events, along with their impact on navigability and the state of the environment of the river corridor system.

[13] The application of multi-objective-oriented, ecosystem-based approaches can open access to multiple funding opportunities, including both EU and global instruments, such as the Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and funds responding to loss and damage.
[14] Recommendations for the practical implementation of these principles will be provided in the *JS 2.0 Manual*.
[15] This includes objectives for navigation development, biodiversity and environmental protection, nature conservation and restoration, and other river corridor functions.
[16] These functions include morphological processes, hydrological and sediment balance, and biological and chemical processes, along with the provision of habitat and connectivity.

4	For routine fairway maintenance necessary to ensure safe navigation, **apply proportionate procedures aligned with good practices**[17] to avoid delays caused by overly complex approval processes.

Undertaking new projects requires applying these principles across all stages of the project management cycle. Managing existing systems primarily involves principles related to 'operations', but also necessitates 'balancing sectoral objectives', 'transparency', and 'adaptive approaches'.

Measures. To address the complexity, conflicting interests, and growing challenges in river corridors, managing existing and planning new IWT infrastructure requires a shift from conventional, single-purpose engineering solutions to innovative approaches, including nature-based ('green') and hybrid solutions, as well as non-structural measures[18].

Modifying existing river training structures or decommissioning them where feasible to enhance system sustainability and resilience is one opportunity to facilitate this shift. Additionally, increasing attention is being given to the 'working with nature' approach and NbS, which align with natural morphological processes of the river and prioritize minimal or temporary engineering interventions. Although the EU's environmental legislation does not introduce specific targets for NbS, their adoption is supported through requirements for non-deterioration and ecological enhancement. While the potential of NbS to reduce fairway maintenance needs is still under research [47], they offer significant benefits by improving hydromorphological conditions in river corridors[19], supporting diverse water uses and contributing to the EU's environmental, biodiversity, and climate objectives. Their flexibility enables phased implementation, either independently or in combination with engineering solutions, thus fostering innovation to respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Such solutions can be effectively complemented by non-structural measures. Although many require significant resources, equipment, and institutional capacity – relying on waterway asset management systems [48] and river information services – some non-structural measures, such as a well-managed fairway maintenance [29] or innovative flexible solutions, are among the most important strategies for enhancing resilience to climate change. These measures enable adaptive management approaches that can respond to changing conditions and uncertainties, ensuring a well-maintained system that remains robust in the face of extreme events.

In the context of the shift towards innovative approaches, reducing grey infrastructure should be seen as an opportunity to pursue win-win solutions or, at least, no-regret options wherever feasible.

4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE *JS 2.0* PROCESS

4.1 National level

Actions at the national level to support the effective implementation of *JS 2.0* should focus on **strengthening institutional capacity**, **stakeholder involvement and ownership**, and **improving coordination and monitoring**.

Strengthening the capacities of national institutions in the Danube and Sava countries, in accordance with the specific competences of each institution, is essential for the effective implementation of *JS 2.0*.

[17] E.g., Austria's flexible maintenance approach.
[18] A detailed presentation of measures will be provided in the *JS 2.0 Manual*.
[19] These benefits include, e.g., flood risk reduction, water quality improvement, groundwater recharge, and habitat enhancement.

The increasing complexity of the legal and policy framework, combined with growing climate change challenges, has made waterway planning and management more demanding. This requires advanced solutions (Section 3), increased resources, and enhanced institutional capacities at all levels, across both the transport and environmental sectors. The activities needed to address this are listed in Table 4.

These efforts can be supported by sustaining capacity-building initiatives, through METEET training courses or other mechanisms (Section 4.2), organizing on-the-job training or seconding staff to enhance their practical experience, facilitating the exchange of technical and project-related information (primarily via the online knowledge management system to be designed under *JS 2.0*), and integrating sustainable and interdisciplinary approaches into higher education for future waterway managers.

Table 4. Key activities required at the **national** level.

Activity	Description	Activity holder
Strengthening the institutional capacity		
Awareness raising	Informing relevant sectors[20] about the requirements and opportunities arising from *JS 2.0*. Implementing measures to raise awareness among relevant stakeholders, emphasizing collaboration among sectors as a key factor for successful implementation.	National institutions, *with support of* the three international river commissions and NGOs
Human capacity development	Building capacity and organizing trainings for national administrations in the holistic approach to waterway planning and management.	
Operational capacity building	Strengthening administrations to effectively implement *JS 2.0* principles by reserving sufficient structural budgets for integrative project management resources[21].	National institutions
Knowledge exchange	Establishing mechanisms to share lessons learned and good practices related to the *Joint Statement 2.0* implementation.	National institutions, *with support of* three Commissions
Promoting research and education	Encouraging and supporting interdisciplinary research projects and educational programs that improve scientific understanding, ensuring that the latest knowledge is taken into account in advisory and decision-making processes.	
Increasing the stakeholder involvement and ownership		
Improving communication and cooperation	Strengthening information exchange and collaboration to create a sense of ownership by establishing systems for a transparent sharing of results with stakeholders, fostering inter-sectoral dialogues[22].	National institutions, *with support of* three Commissions
Building common understanding	Raising awareness and promoting a shared understanding of the principles, measures, and benefits of a holistic approach in waterway planning and management, and their practical implementation, among sectors.	National institutions, *with support of* three Commissions and NGOs

[20] Transport (all modes), environment, water management, agriculture, energy, tourism, finance.
[21] The necessary resources and equipment include those required to develop project Terms of Reference and budgets, conduct public procurement, monitor fairway and environmental conditions, acquire related data, provide 'real-time' fairway information, forecast water levels, develop or upgrade waterway asset management systems, improve river information services, and implement waterway marking and maintenance.
[22] This activity should also include encouraging the IWT sector's engagement with stakeholders from other sectors (e.g., agriculture, energy) and other transport modes to prevent water conflicts and enhance resilience by addressing growing challenges, such as competition over water resources, low-flow water deficits, and the vulnerability of transport modes to climate change.

Ensuring balanced involvement	Involving transport, environmental, water management, and nature/biodiversity protection institutions regularly, and engaging other sectors, such as shipping, inland ports, logistics, economy, agriculture, energy, and tourism, when necessary.	National institutions
Enhancing reporting	Preparing and timely submitting reports on IWT projects, as well as relevant projects from other sectors, for *Joint Statement* follow-up meetings.	
Recognizing and promoting success	Introducing a 'flagship' mark for successful projects based on implementation monitoring, acknowledging achievements to maintain motivation and inspire future efforts.	National institutions, *with support of* three commissions and NGOs

Effective implementation requires a **national coordination and monitoring framework**, established, e.g., through a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism such as an inter-ministerial body with representatives from all relevant sectors, supported by a legal basis where necessary. Alternative forms of the mechanism could be committees, working groups, or mechanisms that may have been established in support of cross-sectoral initiatives (such as sustainable development plans or climate resilience strategies), thus using an existing structure rather than establishing a new one. This body will facilitate communication and cooperation among sectoral authorities, coordinate and oversee the planning and implementation of activities in line with the *Joint Statement*, and ensure coherence among sectoral policies, strategies, and plans. It will also address power imbalances between sectors to ensure that all stakeholders have an equal voice in the advisory process that precedes and creates the basis for decision-making. Appointing a neutral broker with convening power can further build trust and enhance coordination across sectors.

4.2 International level

Actions at the international level to support the effective implementation of *JS 2.0* should focus on **enhancing the impact of capacity-building activities**, **strengthening monitoring**, and **increasing the effectiveness of follow-up meetings**, as well as **exploring additional actions to strengthen the impact of the process** (Table 5).

The **capacity-building activities**, performed under the METEET initiative[23], have effectively addressed institutional capacity gaps (Section 4.1), delivering new knowledge, raising awareness, and fostering mutual understanding among participants from various sectors. However, further efforts are needed to strengthen capacity of national administrations, through METEET or other mechanisms (Table 5).

Monitoring of the *Joint Statement* implementation at the international level can be strengthened by further improving the project reporting mechanism (Table 5). Most of these activities will be supported by the online knowledge management system to be designed as part of the *JS 2.0* framework, which will also serve to collect and share good practices from the IWT sector[24], supporting cross-sector learning and continuous improvement. In addition to strengthening the monitoring mechanism, the **effectiveness of *Joint Statement* follow-up meetings** can be enhanced by performing the activities listed in Table 5.

[23] Established by the EC's directorates general for Environment, Regional and urban policy, and Mobility and transport, in 2016.
[24] Particularly concerning adaptive maintenance and resilience.

Table 5. Key activities required at the **international** level.

Activity	Description	Activity holder
Enhancing the impact of capacity-building activities		
Exploring additional capacity-building and knowledge exchange opportunities	Organizing special capacity-building sessions within *Joint Statement* follow-up meetings.	Three Commissions *with support of* national institutions and NGOs
	Upgrading the curriculum and structure of METEET training sessions by incorporating the *JS 2.0 Manual* and promoting balanced representation from other relevant sectors (e.g., energy, agriculture, economy, logistics), institutions, and the private sector.	
	Transforming METEET into a project-specific tool, a resource for expertise in project preparation and implementation, or training on specific issues in countries as needed.	Three Commissions *with support of* national institutions
	Organizing capacity-building sessions within the meetings of expert bodies of the three international river commissions and through thematic webinars and publications.	Three Commissions *with support of* national institutions and NGOs
	Promoting the establishment of a *JS* Community of Practice[25] to foster more frequent exchanges covering both the planning of new projects and the management of existing systems, within (and beyond) the Danube and Sava basins.	
	Exploring the potential of how artificial intelligence can enhance decision-making efficiency and operational effectiveness in government bodies responsible for the implementation of *JS 2.0*.	Three Commissions *with support of* national institutions
Strengthening monitoring by improving the project reporting mechanism		
Enabling comprehensive reporting	Ensuring and promoting that all countries report on IWT projects and encouraging the reporting of relevant (Danube/Sava) projects from other sectors.	Three Commissions *with support of* national institutions
Streamlining data submission	Encouraging the periodical submission of all project data sheets in a standardized, updated data sheet template, and making them accessible to stakeholders.	
Simplifying the reporting process	Requesting updates only on project developments since the previous meeting to avoid repeating previously reported information.	
Increasing the effectiveness of follow-up meetings		
Streamlining discussions	Shifting focus of discussions from detailed project-by-project analysis or compliance decisions to general principles and sectoral challenges. Using projects as illustrative examples, highlighting their key elements (e.g., technical solutions, stakeholder involvement, contributions from METEET sessions and meetings of expert bodies of the three international river commissions[26]).	Three Commissions

[25] Community of Practice is an informal platform of stakeholders from all societal sectors who share a common interest in improving their practices through regular interaction and information sharing.
[26] Alternatively, two or three critical projects per meeting can be selected for presentation/discussion, rather than covering all projects at the meeting.

Adjusting the meeting structure	Taking advantage of using interactive formats[27] to complement traditional presentations.	
Expanding the target audience and/or broadening the meeting scope	Inviting stakeholders from other sectors (e.g., agriculture, energy, tourism, economy, logistics, industry) to selected *JS* events, to foster cross-sectoral dialogue and collaboration[28].	Three Commissions *with support of* national institutions and NGOs
Enhancing the impact of the *JS 2.0* process		
Raising awareness and supporting national authorities	Raising awareness among decision-makers in the Danube and Sava countries about the importance of the *Joint Statement*. Supporting national institutions in bridging communication gaps, improving inter-sectoral collaboration, and understanding each sector's needs and challenges.	Three Commissions *with support of* national institutions
Implementation support	Promoting and coordinating the implementation of *JS 2.0*, exploring additional actions to enhance the impact, and seeking external support for the process.	Three Commissions

Ensuring external support is essential to accelerate the implementation of the *Joint Statement*. Continued support from the European Commission is crucial, particularly for further capacity-building of administrations, a key need for *JS 2.0* implementation[29]. The potential role of the *EUSDR* should be explored, focusing on: (i) strengthening *EUSDR*'s involvement through Priority Areas 1a, 5, and 6, as well as others (e.g., 2, 3, 4, 10), to support the holistic approach; (ii) supporting capacity building for national authorities on the holistic approach and its application, through additional training or support for the *JS* Community of Practice, and (iii) implementing projects, under the *EUSDR*, that align with and benefit the *JS* process, such as developing a common master plan for nature and navigation across the Danube/Sava rivers (Priority Areas 1a and 6). Additionally, other opportunities for securing capacity-building support within the *JS* process, such as through JASPERS, should also be considered.

[27] E.g., introducing panel discussions following brief presentations of a few projects, to allow for more engaging interactions, and/or introducing breakout sessions, possibly using role-playing in some of them, to enhance understanding among different sectors.

[28] To this end, events organized within the existing mechanisms of the three commissions or annual/biannual expert workshops (e.g., back-to-back with the follow-up meeting) can be used as an alternative to *JS* events.

[29] E.g., organization of capacity-building webinars by the EC for all Danube and Sava countries, to introduce the new legal and policy framework relevant for the holistic approach.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CEF	Connecting Europe Facility
CIS	Common Implementation Strategy
DC	Danube Commission
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EU	European Union
EUSDR	*European Union Strategy for the Danube Region*
FASRB	*Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin*
FCS	Favourable Conservation Status (according to the EU *Habitats Directive*)
GEP	Good Ecological Potential (according to the EU *WFD*)
GES	Good Ecological Status (according to the EU *WFD*)
GNS	Good Navigation Status (according to the *TEN-T Regulation*)
ICPDR	International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
ISRBC	International Sava River Basin Commission
IWT	Inland Waterway Transport
JASPERS	Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions
JS	*Joint Statement*
METEET	Mixed Environmental Transport External Expert Team
NAIADES	*Action Programme for the Promotion of Inland Waterway Transport*
NbS	Nature-based Solutions
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
PIANC	World Association for Waterborne Transport Infrastructure
RBM	River Basin Management
TEN-T	Trans-European Network for Transport
WFD	*Water Framework Directive* (of the EU)

GLOSSARY

Connectivity	Refers to the flow, exchange, and pathways that move organisms, energy, and matter throughout an ecosystem, in longitudinal, lateral, and vertical directions, and over time.
Doing no significant harm	The requirement for an economic activity to not only substantially contribute to environmental objectives (e.g., set out in the EU *Taxonomy Regulation*) but also not to cause a significant harm to any of these objectives.
Ecosystem-based approaches	Integrated and adaptive management strategies inspired and supported by nature, that promote conservation and the sustainable and equitable use of land, water, and living resources.
Ecosystem services	Direct and indirect contributions that ecosystems provide for human well-being and quality of life.
Green infrastructure	A network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features, designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services.
IWT infrastructure	Infrastructure for IWT, including 'grey' (conventional), 'green' (natural and nature-based), and 'hybrid' (a combination of both) solutions.

Nature-based solutions	Actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits.
Riparian buffer zone	The protected area adjacent to a river intended to protect the water body from the adverse effects of development, forest harvest, agriculture, or other land uses.
River corridor	A system including the river main channel, adjacent floodplains and wetlands, associated ecosystems, and their interactions.
Sustainable development	Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
Working with nature	Achieving the navigation development project objectives in an ecosystem context, rather than assessing the consequences of a predefined project design and identifying 'win-win' solutions rather than simply minimizing ecological harm. (This term and 'nature-based solutions' are often used interchangeably.)

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PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Austria	viadonau - Österreichische Wasserstraßen-Gesellschaft mbH
Austria	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management
Austria	Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ministry of Foreign Trade & Economic Relations, Sector for Water Resources, Tourism and Environment Protection
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ministry of Communications and Transport
Bulgaria	Executive Agency "Exploration and Maintenance of the Danube River" (IAPPD)
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Ports Infrastructure Company, River Information Services Authority
Bulgaria	Ministry of Environment and Water
Bulgaria	Ministry of Transport and Communications
Croatia	Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure
Croatia	Croatian Waters
Croatia	Institute for Environmental and Nature Protection
Croatia	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Green Transition
Czech Republic	Ministry of Transport
Czech Republic	Ministry of the Environment
Germany	Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection
Germany	Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection
Germany	Federal Ministry of Digital and Transport
Hungary	Ministry of Construction and Transport - Shipping Authority Dept.
Hungary	Hungarian General Directorate of Water Management (OVF)
Moldova	Naval Agency – Administrative authority in the field of maritime and river transport
Moldova	Waters of Moldova Agency
Moldova	Port Giurgiulesti
Moldova	Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development
Montenegro	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management
Montenegro	Environmental Protection Agency of Montenegro
Montenegro	Water Administration
Romania	Romanian Naval Authority
Romania	Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
Romania	Galati River Administration of the Lower Danube (AFDJ)
Romania	Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests
Romania	Apele Romanae
Serbia	Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure - Directorate for Inland Waterways - PLOVPUT
Serbia	Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure
Serbia	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management - Republic Water Directorate

Serbia	Port Governance Agency
Serbia	Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province
Serbia	Republic Water Directorate
Serbia	Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia
Slovakia	Ministry of Environment
Slovakia	Ministry of Transport and Construction
Slovakia	Slovak Water Management Company (SVP)
Slovenia	Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning
Slovenia	Ministry of Infrastructure
Ukraine	Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine
Ukraine	Ministry of Infrastructure
Ukraine	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources
Ukraine	Ukrvodsliah
Ukraine	Ukrainian Sea Ports Authority (USPA)

International Organizations and Associations

	Central Dredging Association (CEDA)
	Danube Commission (DC)
	Duna-Ipoly National Park
	European Commission - DG Environment
	European Commission - DG MOVE
	European Commission - DG REGIO
	EU Strategy for the Danube Region Hungary
	EU Strategy for the Danube Region, Priority Area 4 - Water Quality (EUSDR PA4)
	European Barge Union (EBU)
	European Federation of Inland Ports
	Inland Navigation Europe (INE)
	International Association for Danube Research (IAD)
	International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)
	International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC)
	International Transport Forum (Former European Conference of Ministers of Transport - ECMT)
	National Park Donauauen
	The World Association for Waterborne Transport Infrastructure (PIANC)
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