



Press release of the Danube Commission: Meeting of the Working Group on legal and financial issues of the Danube Commission

The meeting of the Working Group on legal and financial issues (WG JUR-FIN) of the Danube Commission (DC) was chaired by the Representative of the Republic of Moldova, Ambassador Oleg TULEA and took place in a hybrid format from 7-8 November 2023.

The delegations of ten Member States of the Danube Commission (the Republic of Austria, Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Republic of Serbia, Slovak Republic and Ukraine) participated at the Meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting, the delegations held a minute of silence in memory of Mr Ciprian Popa, who served as a legal councilor of the DC Secretariat from 2007-2016, and expressed their condolences to the Romanian colleagues, family and relatives of Mr Popa.

In line with its practice, the WG JUR-FIN took note of the Annual Report of the Director General of the Secretariat on the implementation of the DC Working Plan 2023 (Legal, Finance and Publication chapters) and approved the draft DC Work Plan for the coming year. In 2024, DC is setting a number of important priorities in various areas of its activity, such as: assistance for the Preparatory Committee of the DC member states with regard to the revision of the Belgrade Convention of 1948, implementing the provisions of the Belgrade Convention in accordance with EU legislation, drafting a Gender Equality Plan, updating the internal regulations and providing the relevant annual publications and other activities.

The continued aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and military destruction of its port infrastructure by the Russian army constitutes an open violation of the fundamental principles of international law and the basic principle of the Belgrade Convention 1948 (Art. 1) – free navigation on the Danube. The delegations discussed the reaction to these unlawful acts from the perspective of international law. In this context, they also drew attention to the official position of the Russian Federation which has refused to pay its annual financial contributions to DC's budget since 2022 (which is a violation of Art. 10 of the Belgrade Convention). This fact has a significant negative impact on the financial issues of the organization and requires further consolidated efforts from the Danube countries to adjust the annual costs of the organisation.

Intensive discussions also covered strategic, legal and practical concerning the basic principles of the Belgrade Convention regarding the regime of navigation on the Danube (1948) and international cooperation: i) strategic directives of the DC; ii) election of the new DC leadership; iii) port access; iv) cooperation with the EU in the field of validity of vessels certificates, implementation of the Grant III Agreement between the Danube Commission and the European Commission as well as other important projects. etc.

The year 2023 marks the 75-th anniversary of the signature of the Belgrade Convention. In addition, the DC will hold its 100th session in December. These two events will offer a good opportunity for the representatives of the Danube countries to reflect on the efficient development of our organization in the future.