

South East Europe Transnational Programme

Project Idea Form

Project idea's title

Transnational cooperation and action to protect, restore and manage the habitats of sturgeons and other migratory fishes in the Danube River Basin

Priority

(choose priority and indicate the relative area of intervention)

☐ Priority Axis 1 AoI _____

☒ Priority Axis 2 AoI **2.3 Promote co-operation in management of natural assets and protected areas**

☐ Priority Axis 3 AoI _____

☐ Priority Axis 4 AoI _____

Project Idea Promoter

(name of the institution)

International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)

Contact Person

Name **Birgit Vogel**

Address **ICPDR Secretariat, Vienna International Centre, PO Box 500, A-1400 Vienna**

Country **Austria**

Tel **+(43 1) 26060 5333**

Email **birgit.vogel@unvienna.org**

Is the applicant the project's potential Lead Partner?

☐ Yes

☒ **No** (ICPDR is aware that, as an international organization, it does not qualify to be a Lead Partner)

If not, is the potential Lead Partner already being chosen?

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No** (Discussions are well advanced to identify an appropriate Lead Partner from the project area)

Background (main problems or challenges to be addressed)

Today, five of the six Danube sturgeon species – widely regarded as flagships for the ecological health of the river system and once a major economic resource – are highly endangered in the Danube River Basin. There is an urgent need for coordinated transnational action, first to protect, restore and manage sturgeon habitats – including migration routes – for the remaining endangered populations and secondly to restore former population levels. This urgency has been formally recognised through an International Action Plan under the Bern Convention, and in the process (led by the ICPDR) of developing a Danube River Basin Management Plan under the EU Water Framework Directive. The restoration of healthy, self-sustaining populations of migratory fishes would also greatly improve the economic prospects for Danube fisheries.

Historically, sturgeons have been threatened by loss of habitat continuity along the Danube River and its major tributaries, especially due to the blocking of access to migration routes by anthropogenic barriers – hydropower dams in particular. Such barriers prevent upstream and downstream movements, so that sturgeons and other migratory fishes are unable to access the spawning and nursery habitats in the Middle and Upper Danube River necessary for completing their life-cycles. The reconnection of historic migration routes and sturgeon habitats – especially at the Iron Gate dams I and II, shared by Romania and Serbia – is a critical first step towards addressing this problem. It is also important to recognize that these migration routes and critical habitats are currently subject to multiple pressures (e.g. navigation and flood protection infrastructure), which may increase in future as a consequence of planned major infrastructure projects. Effective transnational cooperation and the building of innovative partnerships will be required to overcome these pressures.

Objectives (main and specific objectives to be achieved)

The overall long-term objective of this project is to ensure adequate habitat quantity, quality and continuity along the Danube River and its major tributaries, thereby securing self-sustaining populations of sturgeons and other migratory fish species. A crucial element of this will be the implementation of measures to overcome the most significant man-made barriers to the upstream and downstream migration of sturgeons (and other migratory fishes) in the Danube River Basin, namely the Iron Gate dams I and II. At the same time it will be essential to ensure that fish have access to adequate, well-managed habitats throughout the Lower and Middle Danube.

Specific objectives include:

- Innovative transboundary solutions for protecting, restoring and managing the habitats and migration routes of sturgeons and other selected migratory species.
- Completion of a detailed feasibility study as a prerequisite for the future re-opening of the Iron Gate dams I & II to fish movements.
- Identification and assessment of possible impacts on sturgeon migration routes and habitats from planned infrastructure projects (e.g. navigation development in the Lower Danube).
- Contribution to integrated and more sustainable management of the river's natural assets – which are also of great socio-economic importance – in the framework of the River Basin Management Plan and Joint Programme of Measures required by the EU Water Framework Directive.
- Establishment of mechanisms to ensure implementation of recommended solutions.

Main foreseen activities

The activities will be divided into six main Work Packages:

1. A detailed survey of historic, existing and potential sturgeon habitats upstream and downstream of the Iron Gate dams to be carried out by internationally coordinated expert team;
2. Identification of the habitat protection, restoration and management measures required in the framework of the Danube River Basin Management Plan Joint Programme of Measures;
3. A scientific review of the status of existing populations of sturgeons (and other selected migratory fishes) in the Lower and Middle Danube;
4. Assessment (ecological, technical, economic) of engineering solutions that would permit the passage of sturgeons and other migratory fish species through the Iron Gate dams, therefore connecting key spawning and nursery areas between the Lower and Middle Danube;
5. Creation of solutions for habitat protection and stakeholder engagement.
6. Organisation of relevant national and transboundary institutions and mechanisms crucial for the implementation of the project results.

Expected outputs and results

- Detailed recommendations for the transboundary conservation, management and restoration of key habitats (quantity, quality and continuity) to ensure that populations of sturgeons and other migratory fishes are ecologically viable and self-sustaining;
- A state-of-the-art assessment of the existing status of sturgeon and other migratory fish populations in the Danube River and its main tributaries;
- Detailed understanding of the location, status and threats to key habitats for sturgeons and other migratory fishes and the use made of these habitats by target species;
- Detailed assessment, costing and recommendations for implementation of technical measures to ensure the re-establishment of upstream and downstream sturgeon migration at the Iron Gate dams;
- Establishment of broad stakeholder engagement and mechanisms in support of implementing the recommended option as part of the Danube River Basin Management Plan and the Joint Programme of Measures.

Innovative character of the project idea

The scope and scale of this project are unique within the South East European Space and in the territory of the European Union. This will be a pioneering attempt to reconnect key habitats along a major transboundary European river and to adapt the operation of a large hydropower dam to permit the re-establishment of sturgeon migration. Other innovative elements of the project will include steps towards the establishment of 'in-stream' protected areas for the Danube River and the establishment of unique transboundary partnerships between scientific experts, governmental institutions, hydropower companies and fishing communities.

Partnership

Partners involved at this stage

(Note: We have taken a broad approach to the identification of 'partners'. Not all will be full partners in the final proposal but will be identified as subcontracted or cooperating participants).

ERDF Partners	University of Natural Resources & Applied Life Sciences (BOKU), Vienna, Austria University of Vienna, Austria Institute of Zoology, Sofia, Bulgaria Hungarian Danube Research Station, Goed, Hungary Apele Romane, Romania Danube Delta National Institute, Tulcea, Romania WWF Danube Carpathian Programme Romania, Romania Fishery Research and Aquaculture, Research Institute of Animal Production, Slovakia Governmental partners from the contracting parties to the ICPDR (Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia) Romanian part of the Iron Gate mixed commission (details to be clarified)
IPA Partners	University of Zagreb, Croatia Center for Multidisciplinary Studies, Belgrade, Serbia Institute for Development of Water Resources Jaroslav Cerni, Belgrade, Serbia University of Belgrade, Serbia University of Novi Sad, Serbia Governmental partners from the contracting parties to the ICPDR (Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia) Serbian part of the Iron Gate mixed commission (details to be clarified)
ENPI Partners*	Governmental partners from the contracting parties to the ICPDR (Moldova, Ukraine)

Partners requested

ERDF Partners	
IPA Partners	
ENPI Partners	Potential partner from Ukraine (Danube Biosphere Reserve Authority)

Estimated Total Budget

€ 4 million

Does your project idea foresee the application for the 10% rule*

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. Please, explain in detail what will it be used for and the relevance for the project Application of the 10% rule will be reviewed when more information is available.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
--	--

Estimated duration

(in months)

48 months

☒ I would like my project's idea to be published on the Southeast Europe Transnational Programme's website and presented during the SEE kick off event.

* ENPI Funds won't be available for the 1st Call. Partners from Ukraine and Republic of Moldova can be involved by applying for the 10% rule.

* The 20% rule is not applicable for the 1st Call.

