

WRITTEN QUESTION E-5755/08

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to the Commission

Subject: Taking account of environmental protection aspects in transport projects

The principal projects in the European Union's transport development programme and in the trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) include development of the Rhine/Mosel-Main-Danube inland waterway transport route. One organic element in this project - Priority Project 18 - is making the whole Hungarian section of the Danube navigable all the year round for shipping with a draught of 2.5 metres. However, the work which will have to be carried out on the river in order to achieve this (dredging, damming, other channelling work) may substantially increase the risk of flooding, contribute to the drying up of groundwater, endanger drinking water supplies and damage a river habitat which the WWF in 2007 classified as being among the ten most polluted and endangered rivers in the world.

In transport projects, it is up to Member States to decide by what means they wish to achieve the aim in view - in this case, improving the navigability of the River Danube, which forms part of Pan-European Transport Corridor VII - for example by increasing the depth of the water, reducing the draught of the fleet or opting for new types of navigation installations. As it is a Member-State responsibility to reconcile transport projects with environmental protection and the safety of persons (protection against flooding and protection of drinking water supplies), it is also they that are required to perform environmental impact assessments of projects. In addition to this, however, there is a need for a sectoral policy document, technical guidelines, on the basis of which the examination and assessment of ecological impact and consequences would be performed in a uniform way.

1. Will the Commission consider introducing a comprehensive, uniform system of strategic environmental assessment to replace the current system of project-by-project environmental impact assessments by Member States?
2. Does the Commission plan to compile a new TEN-T Guideline to harmonise the TEN-T programme and the NATURA 2000 programme, taking account of ecological impacts and their long-term consequences?
3. Before EU funding is paid out for transport projects, what procedure is adhered to in order to monitor whether the project in question accords with Community environmental law?