



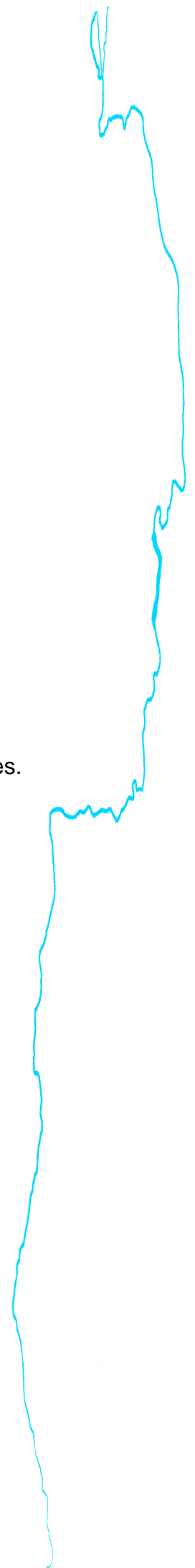
Baden-Württemberg

**Final Declaration of the Danube Conference 2008
“The Danube – River of the European Future”
On 6th and 7th October in the
Representation of the State of Baden-Württemberg
to the European Union**

I. The Danube Area: an important potential for a strong Europe

The Danube area includes ten states, six of which are EU Member States. With over 200 million inhabitants, the states which border the Danube represent an important socio-economic potential within Europe. There are around 75 million people living in the regions directly alongside the Danube or crossed by the river.

As a connecting link between Western and South Eastern Europe, the Danube area unites old and new democracies, market economies, living and cultural areas. At the same time it symbolises the successful surmounting of the European inner and outer borders and it stands for a strong transnational region which is characterised by an impressive variety in economy, society, science and culture.



The Danube area is not just significant in this regard. It is also a symbol for the successful reunification of Europe following the fall of the Iron Curtain. While the Rhine is the historical symbol of the successful European reconciliation and understanding for the “old” Member States in Western Europe, the Danube is the river which symbolises the “new” enlarged Europe. The Danube region is suitable for embodying the potential and riches of a peaceful union in diversity like no other European region.

The particular challenges and opportunities of this transnational and inter-regional development area were the reason for and the subject of the Danube Conference 2008. More than 1000 delegates from the fields of politics, administration and economy of the states, regions and cities along the Danube as well as representatives of the European Institutions took the opportunity to assess the already existing organisations, projects and initiatives and to push them forward in a future-oriented way.

II. Challenges for the Danube Cooperation

The Danube Conference 2008 was well scheduled. For the years ahead, a number of significant developments will become apparent in European politics, which will make it necessary for the Danube area to position itself even better in the European context. As early as today, work on a realignment of the European structural and regional policy after 2013 is underway. This will largely depend on understanding the Danube region at a European level as an integrated area for transnational and inter-regional cooperation. For one thing this requires that the framework of the structural-political instruments and programmes of the European Commission should be adjusted to it. For another the areas in which cooperation adds European value should be even more clearly emphasised.

The question of future arrangements and the optimisation of the infrastructure and the Trans-European Networks is an additional challenge which the Danube area will have to take up in the short and medium term. The Danube area has a great potential for innovative development projects. At EU level too it must be seen as a priority which is very much in the whole European interest. The consultations on the TEN-T Green Paper which are taking place in 2008 provide an excellent opportunity for initiatives in the Danube area.

Alongside this the key themes of Danube politics so far continue to be of great relevance. It is necessary to implement them jointly with even greater vigour in the years ahead. The improvement of the navigability on the entire Danube and thus the development of its potential as an indisputable Trans-European transport system is an urgent matter of concern for the whole of Europe. The creation of a strong joint economic and trading area, the implementation of a common environmental policy which takes into account the specific requirements of this highly sensitive system, the development of sustainable tourism and also the creation of an integrated education and science area represent strategic tasks which will be borne by the Danube countries with even stronger unity in the future.

III. The Strategic Dimension of the Danube Area in Europe

There have been up to now two great transnational areas on the European level which are anchored in the consciousness of the European Institutions and which are equipped with fully functional organisational structures as well as financial and human resources:

- the Union for the Mediterranean area
- the Northern Dimension/Baltic Sea Region

In cooperation with the European Commission both areas are endeavouring to create new institutions and instruments to intensify the structures of cooperation and for a better perception on a European level.

On 13th July 2008 the Mediterranean cooperation was started off with the title “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean” in which the fundamental strategic significance of this area for the European Union was underlined. The political and institutional cooperation between the 27 EU Member States and the 16 southern and eastern states on the Mediterranean will be improved and led into a new dimension.

The final conclusions of the European Council in December 2007, March 2008 and June 2008 form the basis for this step. Considerable financial and human resources will be employed here by the European Union in the years ahead. The areas of energy and energy security, environment, civil defence and transport dominate the contents. The first projects involve improving water quality, building motorways, marine transport, promoting solar energy and also promoting the economy, especially with regard to small and medium sized companies.

In its final conclusions in December 2007, the European Council asked the European Commission to present a strategy for the Baltic Sea Region by June 2009 at the latest. The joint tackling of the environmental problems in the Baltic Sea is right at the centre of this. The Northern Dimension will form the framework for the external aspects of the cooperation in the Baltic area. Sweden will take over the presidency of the Council on 1st July 2009 and then drive this strategy forward on the European level. In this context there was also the planning of a first “Stakeholder Conference” which focused on the topic of Northern Dimension/Baltic area and which took place on 30th September 2008 in Stockholm. A subsequent conference is planned for 2009 in Rostock.

By contrast the Danube area, as the third transnational area, has hardly played a role in Brussels' perceptions so far. In the Danube area various international and inter-regional institutions, networks and partnerships have been created for decades which are not yet however so intensively linked to the European Institutions in Brussels in contrast to comparable institutions in the "Mediterranean Union" and the "Northern Dimension".

In June 2008, the European Council charged the European Commission with further expanding the concept of the "Eastern partnership" by early 2009 which is of great significance in this context. This concept will clearly go beyond the programmes of the European Neighbourhood Policy and as central elements it will include the provision of visa facilitation, the creation of a free trade area, the extension of direct personal contacts (pupil and student exchange programmes, citizen platforms, seminars and cooperation of local and regional partners) and also a strong promotion of the EU integration process. A further goal is the intensification of the cooperation between the eastern countries neighbouring the EU. Up to now this concept has not been introduced yet into the Danube area. The aim must be the inclusion of the Danube area in this concept.

IV. Development of a European Danube Strategy

These developments show the necessity of firmly establishing the Danube area as a further transnational cooperation area in the European awareness and in the concrete work of the EU. Relevant initiatives agreed between the national governments of the states bordering the Danube and also the regions and cities along the river are necessary for this. The eventuality of appointing a Danube Coordinator, possibly within the European Commission, could also be considered in this context.

The presidents, ministers, members of parliament, secretaries of state, regional politicians and mayors from the Danube states agreed on the following objectives in the framework of the Danube Conference 2008:

- strengthen the function of the Danube region as the “Blue Riband” of European integration;
- focus on future inter-regional cooperation on areas with European added value;
- enhance the visibility at EU level through concrete signs of political action by the Danube countries.

Furthermore, the representatives of the Danube countries present at the Danube Conference 2008 have agreed to work in the future towards the following:

- to have the Danube area explicitly mentioned in the final conclusions of the European Council in the near future, to have a reference to the Danube area as a unified development area made in these as well as to have the European Institutions strongly committed to it.
- to have the European Commission developing a European Danube strategy with which the Danube cooperation is placed on the same level as the Mediterranean Union and the Northern Dimension,
- to have this Danube strategy gaining particular significance during the Hungarian presidency of the European Council.

In addition they suggested bringing about the following initiatives in the European Institutions:

- the formation of multi-party groupings within the European Parliament such as an "Intergroup Danube" for example and also a Danube network in the EU Committee of the Regions of the European Union
- initiative reports by the representatives from the countries bordering the Danube in the Committee of the Regions on the topic "European Danube Strategy"
- the presentation of case studies and exemplary projects in the Committee of the Regions which put intense focus on the Danube area, comparable to the presentation "Euroregion Baltic" in June 2008.

V. Concrete Fields for Action as a Result of the Danube Conference 2008

The representatives of the Danube states present also support the implementation of the recommendations for action worked out in the following topic areas in the workshops of the Danube Conference 2008

- Infrastructural Area Danube and Transnational Networks
- Economy and Trade Area Danube
- Lisbon Process and the Danube Region

by supporting corresponding European, national and regional initiatives. For this purpose they pronounced themselves in favour of working on concrete projects and measures up until the next Danube Conference with which the above objectives can be implemented.

The variety and dynamism of the cooperation already existing in the Danube area represent a strength which needs to be developed even more. The representatives present from the Danube countries pronounced themselves in favour of further promoting the synergies between the individual cooperation levels and projects in the future and increasing noticeably the efficiency of the cooperation in the medium term in the framework of institutional pooling. In this context they emphatically welcomed the formation of a Council of the Danube cities and regions as a concrete initiative for the creation of an integrated European Danube area which was proposed in the framework of the "Ulm Declaration" of 12th July 2008. They declared themselves prepared to support the implementation of this idea and promised their active cooperation in the preparation of a subsequent conference to the Danube Conference 2008.