



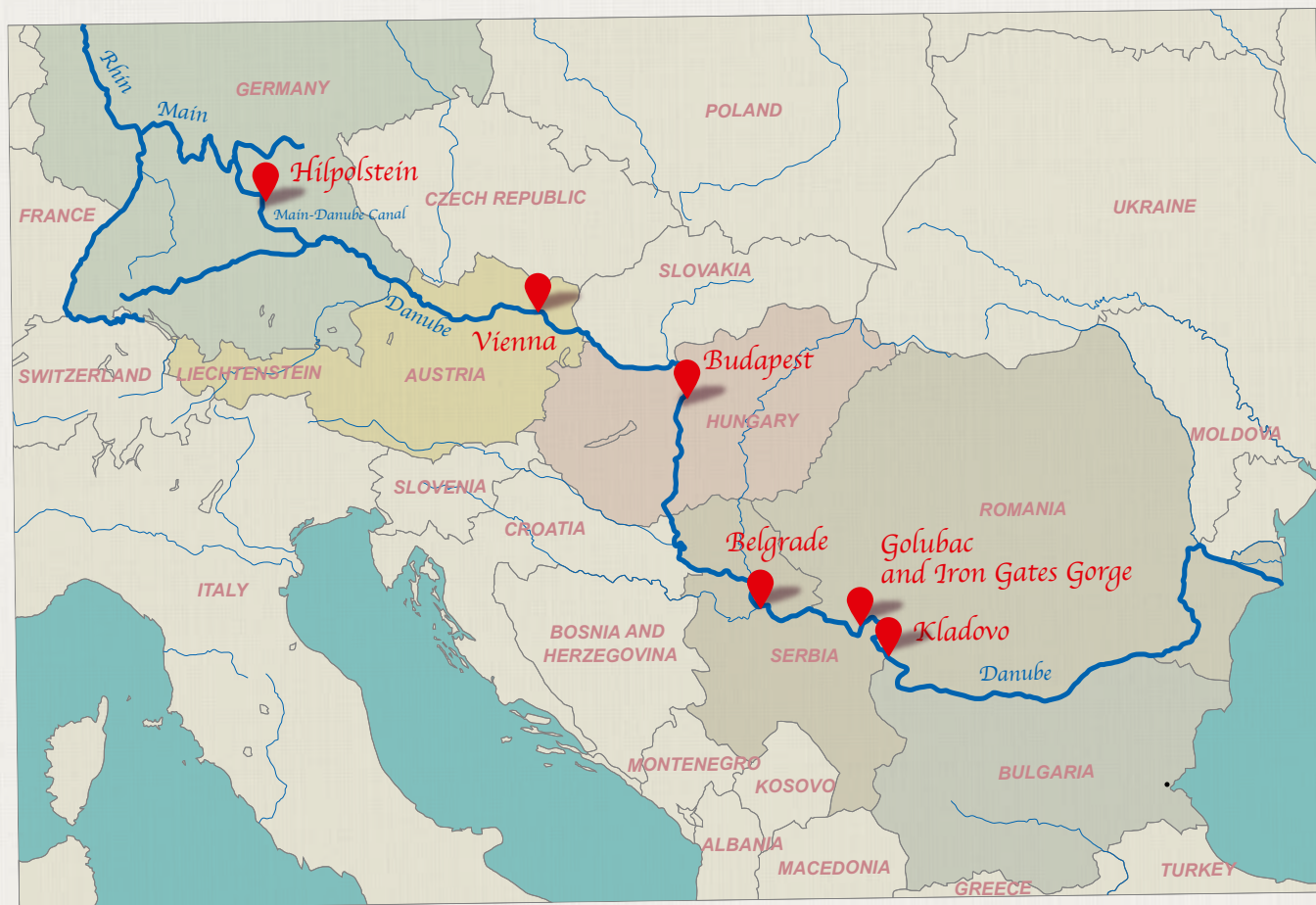
INITIATIVES POUR L'AVENIR
DES GRANDS FLEUVES
INITIATIVES FOR THE FUTURE
OF GREAT RIVERS



*The Danube,
the River Europe*

FLUGPOST
AIR MAIL
PAR AVION

THE DANUBE, THE RIVER EUROPE



If the Rhine embodies Germany, and the Po and Tiber tell the story of Italy, then the Rhone and Garonne must bend over backwards to try to represent France. However, the Danube is Europe!

TOUR PROGRAMME

- Vienna
- Belgrade
- Golubac
- and Iron Gates Gorge
- Kladovo
- Budapest
- Hilpolstein lock

The centre of Europe, the Europe of great empires, the Europe of the Alps and Carpathian mountains. Two thousand seven hundred and eighty kilometres link the Black Forest in Germany and the Black Sea, crossing legendary cities (Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, Belgrade, etc.), and a basin covering 800,000 square kilometres shared by 19 countries. I remember Milan Kundera speaking to me of this Europe. "Look at the Soviet Union. It covers the maximum area for the minimum diversity. My Europe is the opposite: the maximum diversity for the minimum area". I remember the novel by Joseph Roth, "Radetsky March", which I had the honour of adapting for the cinema. It told of how the Emperor Franz Joseph addressed his subjects as "my peoples".

7 July 2015

A dark day for our continent. Greece is sinking into a crisis and threatens the construction of Europe. I am in Vienna to meet the managers of the Danube. Before getting into technical conversations, I would greatly like to address myself to this mythical river. There are times when politics must overcome reason. Do you remember that crazy idea of forging Europe, the proposal to pool coal and steel only five years, yes, only five years, after the Second World War? So why not now call for help from this great river. Danube, you have woven and linked for so long, couldn't you breathe a little spirit of union into us?

The water gods must have heard me. I'll show you the way to rekindle your spirits. Take line U1 of the local subway. Get off at Kaisermühlen station (the Emperor's mills in English). Follow the flow. Go through a checkpoint similar to those at airports. Welcome to the UN! As in New York, in Vienna what is pompously called the "international community" has its own town, with its guards, restaurants and

hairdressers'. High towers shelter countless men and women of good will who work for peace in every field. Don't listen to the bitter, those who repeat that the salaries of these brave people are high and generally exempt from taxation. This compensation in no way detracts from their merit. It must be so depressing, on certain days, to fail to prevent our fellow humans from tearing each other apart.

Here is the fourth floor of the E. Gagnons building, but I will not disclose the number of the office for reasons of security.

Hello, Mr Ivan Zavadsky! This talkative and charming Slovak is no less than the Executive Secretary of the ICPDR. In other words, translated into English, he coordinates the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River. Active since 1998, this commission has been given the mission



from the 14 signatory States to promote the responsible and sustainable management of water resources: a daunting ambition which mainly consists of fighting against different forms of pollution and combating the scourge of floods in every possible way. One question comes to mind immediately: do you have the authority to oblige and punish? Mr Zavadsky smiles, "We act only through consultation. And believe me, it's the only good method. National experts meet and we coordinate their proposals". As a good Frenchman faithful to centralisation and authority, you probably imagine that I was not in the least convinced.

An Austrian, Horst Schindler, met later on was to share my doubts and told me of his impatience. He is the Director General of the

Danube Commission, responsible since the Belgrade Convention (1948) for developing navigation on the river. No sooner was he seated before me than he railed against the slowness of things. "Believe me, I've checked. No other river

has led to as many studies. For the so-called experts, there's no more profitable vein than the Danube. And nothing progresses".

I thought again, admiring and benign, of Mr Zavadsky's optimism. Dear young reader looking for a job, dear young reader with the same expectations, my age permits me to give you some advice.

If you have not yet taken on the habit of daily

and fervent repetition, avoid a career as an international functionary.

It will drive you mad in spite of the advantages mentioned above.



Publication of the ICPDR

A hard and fast activist was invited to dinner. Tall, handsome, charming and very determined. His name was Ulrich Eichelmann. A former biology student, he became the head of WWF Austria and is now the President of River Watch. His conviction is simple: man must not touch anything belonging to Nature. And when he says nothing, he means NOTHING. What makes him see red most, his favourite daily enemy, is dams, all dams. He recounts his campaigns to prevent the construction of such and such a dam as if they were military

exploits. And when I ask him if, in his entire career as activist, there were not a single dam that he found useful, he reacted fiercely. NONE! He reasserts that there cannot be ANY good dam. A dam is an aggression against the planet. But what about the need for energy? Isn't hydroelectricity better than the other sources? He sweeps this argument away. There is only one solution to save the Earth: reduce our consumption and that of energy first.

Mr Zavadsky had warned us: the Danube joins worlds that have nothing to do with each



other. Perhaps it even links the centuries. It leaves the modern era and goes back in time. The difference is striking immediately one enters the airport waiting room, bound for Belgrade. Naturally, generalities are lazy and deceptive, but the men and women returning home appear less well fed than the Austrians met in the streets of Vienna; the cut of their clothes is of poorer quality, like the fabric. In other politically incorrect words, we find ourselves among "poorer" people. This impression was confirmed by the figures: in 2014, the GNP per capita in Austria was US\$51,127, it fell to US\$9,997 in Romania and was only US\$6,152 in Serbia! The Danube basin gathers economies with very different levels. But what of the perceived well-being?

We arrive in Serbia. Belgrade will be for later! A dam awaits us, supposedly the most powerful in Eastern Europe. We had to drive a long time to reach it. One is ready to make the sacrifice for things one likes and hydroelectricity production has fascinated me for some time: the metamorphosis of water into light!

A passion my psychiatrist brother qualified as addictive, drives me towards turbines, whether Kaplan or Francis (the specialists will understand). The bottom of the range Chevrolet runs as well as it can, at the pace of tractors and convoys of trucks. River transport has not cleared the bottlenecks.

There's nothing as trim as the villages and small towns we cross. Large, brand new houses, equipped with every modern amenity: verandas, double glazing, parabolic antennae on the roofs. Is a wave of prosperity crossing Serbia? Our lady translator damps our enthusiasm. These beautiful houses are owned by expatriates, most of whom are in Austria. They build them for when they retire, for their families and to show off their success. Look, she continues, most of these houses are empty. There's no more work here. Agriculture is stagnating. Everyone is leaving. And then suddenly, we see the Danube again. It has widened and (almost) looks like the sea. It's the forebay. The dam is still far, well downstream. We pass Golubac and its medieval fortress undergoing restoration funded by the



The fortress of Golubac

European Union, information displayed on the traditional blue panel sprinkled with stars, before the road enters the gorges. The mountains on the other side of the green water are in Romania and all crowned with wind turbines. These former communist lands have changed over to renewable energy! The valley widens from time to time and we again find ourselves driving along what looks like an Italian lake. Countless fishing rods align the banks waiting for fish to bite. The anglers leave the rods to do the work, certainly dreaming of the miraculous catches of their forefathers and attested by

the sturgeon exhibited in one of the offices of the Academy of Sciences of Budapest. A little further on they talk together, chests bared and beer cans in hand. They've come in groups to holiday among friends. They stay in caravans that they've parked in circles like the cowboys of the Wild West. But where are the Indians that they must defend themselves against? Or is it the ghosts of communism, or on the contrary, capitalist cost controllers, agents of the IMF or others? All said and done, fishing is a better bet. If the gods smile on them, they will catch a pike perch or a few carp, provided a giant

catfish doesn't drag away all their gear !

The defile narrows between the walls of grey rock. We're approaching the Iron Gate or Djerdap in Serbian, a name that can be explained by one of two competing legends. When thinking about, they're not contradictory and recount more or less the same story, that of the Danube at two periods of its existence. In bygone times, well before the creation of memory, the sea advanced as far as Belgrade and drove

a path through these mountains.

Slightly more recently, an Austro-Hungarian emperor was no longer able to stand seeing his territory invaded by the boats of Ottoman merchants. He ordered for a great chain to be placed across the Danube to bar their route. A customs post was installed and a border established between the two empires.

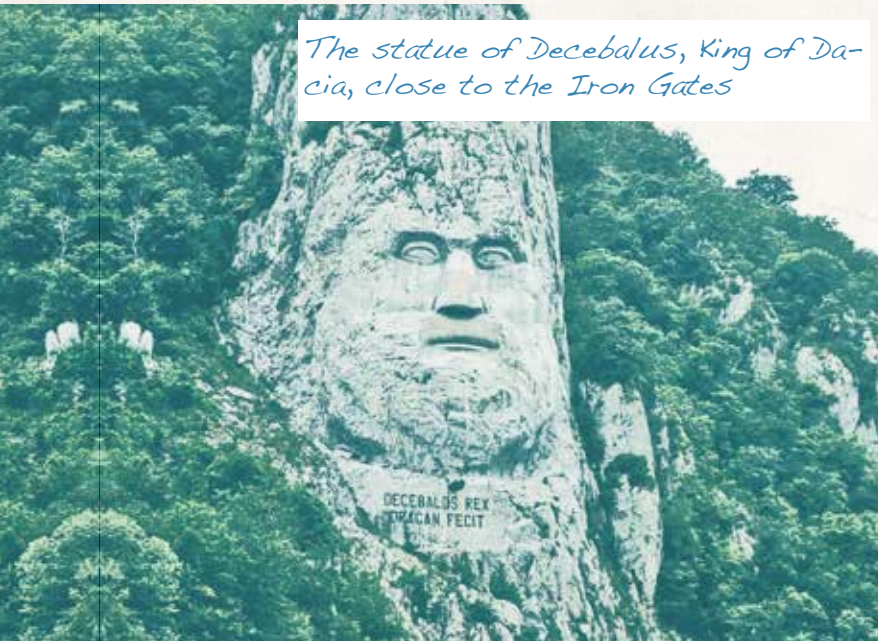
Thus the Iron Curtain, which cut Europe in two for so many years, was not a recent invention.

But the real history dates back much further in time. It is said that of 19 Roman emperors, 17 were born in the region. Given the distance from Rome, here at the marches of the empire, energies were generated without which great destinies could not be realized. Countless vestiges of this antiquity remain and the presence of Trajan can be found everywhere, like a guardian ancestor.

He had a bridge built with arches spanning 50 m, a feat of genuine technical prowess.

Once again the gorges widen.

The statue of Decebalus, King of Dacia, close to the Iron Gates



At last, the dam.

A fine example of binational cooperation between Serbia and Romania, the construction of this monster required 350,000 tons of concrete and 170,000 tons of steel.

Built between 1964 and 1977, Iron Gate I was joined by Iron Gate II, 80 kilometres downstream, in 1984. Iron Gate III remains the mirage of the Danube, many times spoken of but never achieved. True, it concerns only Serbia, but the turpitudes of the 1990s and

the economic environment since have not exactly helped its construction. With an installed capacity of 2,050 MW, six turbines on either side, it boldly produces 11 TWh a year. The flowrate of the river at this point is 5,000 m³ a second.

The Serbian and Romanian engineers took into account the river's capricious nature by installing a spillway up to the task with a maximum capacity of 1,900 m³ a second. They did the right thing! In 1996 and 2009,

The Iron Gates Dam





The machine room of the Iron Gates dam.

all the gates were opened to let through a flow rate of $17,200 \text{ m}^3$ a second. And in 2014, the same operation had to be repeated to lower the level of the forebay to 63 metres (instead of 69 metres during normal operation) to absorb the more than considerable floods of the Danube. Djerdap also participates in river navigation



The lock control tower, Serbian side

with its two locks, one on either side, which take turns every month to manage the upstream and downstream traffic, thus ensuring parity. Indeed, 3,000 to 4,000 ships pass through them every year and they have seen the passage of some 75,000 since they were commissioned.



*Meeting with the mayor
of Kladovo in Serbia*

The mayor of Kladovo, the small neighbouring town, insists on welcoming us. A young doctor, only the month before he was elected to hold office for four years and he wants us to know of his torment. He sees river cruise liners filled with tourists pass by several times a day.

"Imagine, none of them stops because we have no establishment worthy enough to receive them, not even a landing stage! Brussels has

promised us funds to restore our old taverns but we've received nothing so far. And this river of gold continues to mock us. Maybe you could help us, since you say you are a friend of rivers".

The taste for cruising has become global and spread from the sea to inland waters. A bonanza rains down on the cruise companies and on the regions visited. Serbia is awaiting its turn.

Budapest at night

I understand why our ATR plane was held up for an hour at Belgrade. A storm of unusual violence had struck the Hungarian capital, with trees torn down and tunnels flooded. It was better to allow the tempest to subside. The thermometer had reached 40°C just before. Now we're shivering, it's barely 20°C. The personalities invited by the Ambassador have arrived by boat via different routes. Dr Janos Jozsa, a scientist and the newly appointed Rector of the University of Technology and Economic Sciences of Budapest ; Gabor Baranyai, a legal expert, and ministerial commissioner for the sustainable utilisation of natural cross-border resources ; and Andras Szollosi-Nagy, a former Rector of the UNESCO-IHE Institute for education on water.

All three of them are very ardent and quickly agree on the most important subjects :

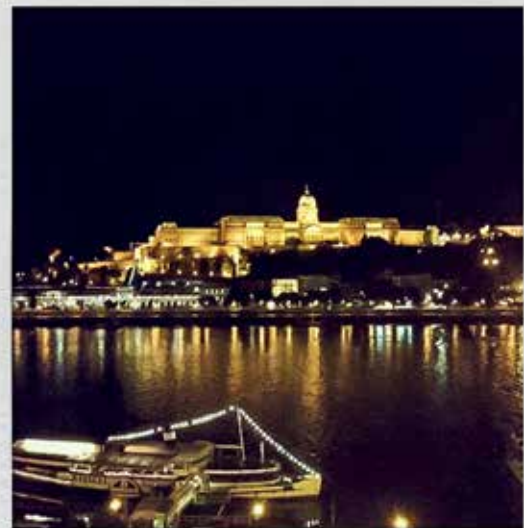
- sediment management ;
- the reduction of agricultural yields in the deltas due to the increase in the rate of salinity

(the sea is rising everywhere while the levels of rivers is falling due to the increasing number of dams);

- the combat against flooding, since cities are developing chaotically, ignoring nature and its fits of anger;

- finally, governance: rivers cross borders while human beings remain confined within them.

They wished us courage, making us think they wanted to spoil our evening despite their kindness.



*The attraction of river cities:
Budapest at night*

Budapest in the morning

Mr Gabor Spanyik greets us on one of his boats. His likeness with Vladimir Putin is impressive: the same well sculpted face, the same athletic look, and the same determined authority. He runs the State owned company Mahart which offers cruises on the river, a type of tourism undergoing constant growth: more than three hundred thousand passengers this year. What a shame that the events in Ukraine worry a rather old, mostly American clientele seeking culture, beautiful landscapes, but most especially peace and comfort!

No matter, the future is promising. Hungary's tourist resources have hardly begun to be exploited. The fact that Mahart's capital is public doesn't stop its shareholder from setting ambitious targets. Instead of groaning, everyone must get up and work. When one has a treasure like the Danube, one has no right to complain. It has to be exploited even if conditions are sometimes hard.

According to the seasons and flowrates, the water levels can vary by as much as nine metres !

Did you know what odyssey real river lovers choose? They board at Amsterdam and stay on their floating hotel for fifteen days until they reach the shores of the Black Sea.

Still in Budapest

Lunch with Istavan Joo, a young counsellor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. His field is vast: no less than a strategy for the Danube, and his priority files are difficult. First is the combat against floods which are tending to increase. They above all hit the tributaries, including the River Tisa. He shows us photos of the small and charming village of Szeged invaded by water, starting with the hospital. They have found a new solution, a long, no, very long steel palisade erected over two kilometres. It seems that it affords efficient protection. However, such mobile barriers are expensive! Exorbitant you mean to say! It's the European Commission that's paying.

The most irritating thing about the floods, as they're the easiest thing to remedy (in a normal world), is the lack of information. Nobody warns anybody else when all that's

needed is a telephone call to say "the flows will be reaching you in three or six hours". And why can't we build a common meteorological forecasting system? Countries keep their data jealously. Do the rainfall levels have a strategic dimension?

Our diplomat has another worry: water quality. The mountains of southwest Ukraine are a real water tower down which many generally polluted rivers flow. When they exist the treatment plants date back to Soviet times and haven't been maintained since 1989. Right now

the government of Kiev needs understanding as it has other priorities. In the meantime, Hungary receives all this filth. What do you want me to do? It's always the same discomfort when you're downstream.



Nostalgia for another era?

The village of Hilspolstein lies 35 kilometres south of Nuremburg, 406 metres above sea level. We're on the dividing line between the

waters of the Rhine and the Danube. It's also the highest point of the canal built to reach the Danube from the River Main.

The idea for this canal is not new. Traces of excavation date back to Charlemagne's time. More recently, the King of Bavaria, Ludwig I, ordered that works should begin. They were to last 24 years. The link was completed in 1848 but the waterway

was not (at all) wide and the locks were (too) many. A structure of much larger gauge was quickly deemed necessary. Achieving this goal required three decades of all types of effort. There were many opponents, especially the



Goods transport via the Main Danube canal. Hilpolstein lock

Greens, and then bringing together €3 billion is also no mean feat. The new canal opened on 25 September 1992. It allows the navigation of boats of 195 metres long and 12 metres wide, with a draught of 2.70 metres. Although it is impossible to transport containers due to the low clearance of the bridges more than a thousand passenger boats and countless barges take the canal. Each barge replaces thirty to fifty trucks, transporting a total of 3 million tons.

This canal is therefore the centrepiece of the major European Marco Polo Programme intended to equip our old continent with a network of navigable waterways.



River tourism between the North Sea and the Black Sea

Once again, I think of these travellers who can go from the North Sea to the Black Sea without leaving their boats, thanks to this Main canal. Once again, I look at the map of our Europe. Once again, something missing catches my eyes: the link that a French Prime Minister refused to weave between the Rhine and the Rhone at the very end of the 20th century. Because the "Greens" didn't want it and he needed them to build his "mixed" majority.

Once again, I am bewildered and feel a strange cold anger. How can one call oneself a "friend of nature" and refuse to bring different waters together? Once again, I tell myself that only vision is political.



