



The Danube River – Link of Cooperation and Dialogue

Filofteia Repez¹, Ștefan Gheorghe²

Abstract: The Danube River has a special significance for the states and localities through which it passes. Various events, historical, political, cultural, sports, etc. have been held over time in the Danube region; The Danube united and divided at the same time, being the silent witness of numerous events. Europe, the lady of the Danube, as Nicolae Iorga calls her, is the owner of the most international hydrographic basin in the world - the Danube river basin. More than 80 million people from 19 countries live and work here. The multiple importance of this river and the need to ensure its security is emphasized often and in various ways. Starting from the presentation of some aspects that highlight the importance of the Danube for the states and the places it crosses, we will continue with detailing some examples of cooperation and dialogue actions in the Danube region that contribute to ensuring Danube security and the formation of a Danube cult, and we will finish highlighting a remarkable aspect of the Danube, that of a source of inspiration. In this way, the article aims to pay homage to this cherished river, before which many have bowed.

Keywords: Danube; importance; cooperation; actions; source of inspiration

“The waters of any river carry with them the experience of the border. (...)

The Danube represents a natural obstacle to hope.” (Șarii, 2017, p. 24)

¹ Professor, PhD, Department of Political Sciences and International Relations, Faculty of Communication and International Relations, Danubius University of Galati, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., 800654 Galati, Romania, Corresponding author: filofteiarepez@univ-danubius.ro.

² Senior Lecturer, PhD, Department of Political Sciences and International Relations, Faculty of Communication and International Relations, Danubius University of Galați, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., 800654 Galati, Romania, E-mail: stefangheorghe@.univ-danubius.ro.

1. The Danube – a Connecting River

Since ancient times, the Danube has had a geopolitical and geostrategic importance recognized not only by the riparian states, but also internationally: border between empires (Scythians vs. Persians, Byzantines vs. Franks, Habsburgs vs. Ottomans) and states; international communication way used for civil and military purposes; settlement area of human communities; area with diverse potential (economic, hydropower, etc.); natural and cultural heritage; identity barrier.

It is the second longest river in Europe (2,845 km) (Șarîi, 2017, p. 10), after the Volga, and the only one in Europe that flows from east to west, crossing, from its source to its discharge into the Black Sea, ten countries (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) and four capitals (Vienna - the capital of Austria, Bratislava - the capital of Slovakia, Budapest - the capital of Hungary and Belgrade - the capital of Serbia), and, along the way, influencing the lives of millions of people; it is the only river in Europe whose measurement is made not clockwise, but in the opposite direction, the zero kilometer being marked in the Romanian part of the Delta on the embankment of the town of Sulina, and in the Ukrainian part on a concrete slab at the end of the river island Ankudinov (Șarîi, 2017, p. 10).

This complex river, with 16 long rivers, each more than 300 kilometers long, and about 300 smaller rivers with many channels and branches, has a basin of more than 800,000 square kilometers, representing 8% of the territory of Europe (Șarîi, 2017, p. 127). Apart from the countries it crosses, it also receives water from the surface of nine other countries, thus uniting 19 countries, its watershed has an important role in the political, social, economic and cultural context for the development of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

The Danube is “*an experienced witness of the pains and torments*” that Europe has gone through; on its banks the peoples “*raised pantheons for their immortal gods and fallen heroes, creating sublime or tragic Danube myths*” (Șarîi, 2017, p. 22).

This river with many names (*Danube, Danube, Duna, Dunărea, Dunav, Danubius, Danaistru, Danubius (meaning God of Rivers), Tuna, Istru*) is a river-treasure: witness of history, bridge between people and diverse cultures; important source for drinking water supply; water source for irrigation and industry; it houses a unique biodiversity; important TEN-T (Trans-European Transport Network) corridor; valuable economic resource; backbone for Europe; axis on which the

attention of many states and regional and international organizations is focused; source of inspiration for artistic creation; essential element in European integration strategies, etc.

We also add the fact that, in the relations between the riparian states and even more so, internationally, the special role of this river-treasure is highlighted not only in academic works but also in practice:

- it unites not only states and capitals, but unites people, destinies and cultures, so that over time the Danube region has become “*a common space for cooperation, exchange and integration, representing a symbol of European cultural diversity and its unity*”¹;

- it ensures the continental interdependence resulting from the canal system (Danube-Black Sea and Danube-Rhine-Main) which connects the Black Sea and the North Sea;

- regional integrative role - cooperation in the Danube region contributes to the stabilization and integration of the Western Balkans and to the co-interest of the states in the Extended Black Sea Area;

- global dimension – positioning itself relatively equally with the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, and flowing into the Black Sea, the Danube is part of a complex geopolitical and geoeconomic equation, allowing the opening of communication paths to Central Asia and the connection with the Planetary Ocean. Grigore Antipa stated that “*The Danube has a world importance and role*” (Brînză, 2012, p. 73).

If the opportunities of the Danube have been “*explored more peripherally, achieving functions of territorial separation and familiarization with the neighborhood*”, currently, experts claim, a high awareness is required at the level of the European Union of the fact that this river has a “*genuine geoeconomic and geopolitical potential*” (Nate, 2019).

The special importance of the Danube for the Romanian people is mentioned in many ways: it was the pavement and the protection under which the Romanian people developed - “*The Danube is the certificate of existence on the Carpatho-*

¹ *The Danube - a culture of solidarity in a time of isolation*, available online at <https://dri.gov.ro/w/comunicat-de-pres-a-dunarea-o-cultura-a-solidaritatiei-intr-un-time-of-isolation/>, accessed on 19.04.2023.

Danube-Pontic land, which it was born on and inhabits since the time of the Proto-Thracians until today” (Ionescu, 1989); *The classic King of the rivers is Romania’s patrol road, its physical benefactor and its moral patron*” (Oprescu & Moşneagu, 2019, p. 152). The Geto-Dacians considered it a sacred river like other rivers from antiquity (the Nile, the Ganges), and when they went to war they drank water from the Danube according to a certain ritual, “*like a holy wine and to swear that they will not return to their homes only after they have killed their enemies*”; by the anthropomorphic representation on Trajan’s Column in Rome; through the sacrifice made by the emperor Traian at the crossing of the Danube in Dacia at Drobeta (Oprescu & Moşneagu, 2019, p. 50).

2. Cooperation Actions and Dialogue - Examples

The communities in the Danube region get involved in various actions (ecological, educational, socio-cultural, sports, recreation), to mark the common desire to join forces in support of the protection of this unique river in Europe, to ensure its security, and in the end to contribute to the development of the Danube cult.

The Danube, or *the Amazon of Europe*, is a river that unites and divides in equal measure; it is the bridge between people and states, which, recognizing its importance, celebrate it annually on June 29 on the occasion of *the International Day of the Danube*¹.

Transnational projects, such as the *Danube Culture Platform*², reveal through a series of activities (transnational conferences and workshops, workshops and project meetings, etc.) forgotten or hidden aspects of the cultural heritage of the Danube region.

Another project aimed at encouraging relations of mutual knowledge between the states of this region through cultural cooperation and creation, by increasing cross-

¹ To mark the signing, on June 29, 1994, in Sofia, of the Convention on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River (ICPDR).

² *Danube Culture Platform Creative Spaces of the 21st Century*, available online at the website https://www.interreg-danube.eu/uploads/media/approved_project_output/0001/31/e2f737c87ae91f7f46924b87498dad43e5e2ad9e.pdf accessed on 27.02.2023

border dialogue and strengthening creativity in the region is the international arts festival *Dialoguri Dunărene*¹.

The DANURB+² project aims to reactivate the cultural heritage and less-used resources of localities located in the peripheral and border regions of the Danube, to make them more attractive from a tourist point of view and to promote the resilient use of cultural heritage in these localities.

Other actions, eloquent examples of rapprochement, cooperation and dialogue between cultures and people from the Danube region, through various components (gastronomy, folklore, sports) are the festivals, such as: *The Polenta Festival*, an international festival held in the town of Nova Cerna (Bulgaria); *The Mackerel Festival* held in Galați; the international folklore festival *Love Song along the Danube*, organized in Brăila or *On the shore of the Danube*, organized in Giurgiu; the festival of traditions, customs and crafts *Tradiții Cărașene*, organized in Moldova Nouă; *The Danube Villages Festival*, organized in Svinița village, Mehedinți county, etc.

Through other festivals, the tourist potential and the natural and cultural attractions of the Danube region are promoted and the role of the old river in the culture of the Danube states is honored, such as: *The International Rowing Boat Festival - RowmaniaFEST*, organized in Tulcea; *International Danube Festival* in Germany; *International Literature Festival "Poetry - Port La Danube"*, organized in Galați; *the "Dunafeszt" mini-festival* or the *Dun'ART* exhibition organized in Budapest.

The promotion of the Danube and the regions crossed through dialogue is the object of the *Danube Artist* contest, organized by Global Water partnership Romania and Grow Up Galați.

The cooperation and dialogue on the Danube also materialized in the exhibitions "*Challenges and answers on the Danube. Hungary and navigation on the Danube in the interwar period*" and "*History of navigation on the Danube*".

Through *the Danube Transnational Program 2014-2020*³, among other things, the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Danube region was pursued. Economic, social and territorial promotion and cohesion in the Danube Region

¹ Details on <https://centruldeproiecte.ro/proiecte-finantate/encounters-dialoguri-dunarene/>, accessed on 20.04.2023.

² Details on https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/danurb_plus, accessed on 20.04.2023.

³ Details on <https://www.mdlpa.ro/pages/dunarea20142020>, accessed on 24.04.2023.

constitute the objective of the actions carried out within *the Transnational Danube Program 2021-2027*¹.

The official meetings between local authorities (for example Chirnogi-Tutrakan², Drobeta-Turnu-Severin and Kladovo, Calafat-Vidin, Turnu-Măgurele-Nikopol or Giurgiu-Ruse) and between the citizens of the 47 localities (from the 10 countries) crossed by the Danube river are other examples of cooperation and dialogue.

Cooperation and dialogue for the Danube region are also embodied in *the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region* (SUERD)³, developed jointly by the countries and parties interested in this region and the European Commission. This Strategy encourages long-term cooperation and dialogue to solve local problems, comprising four pillars (interconnecting the Danube region, protecting the environment in the Danube region, increasing prosperity in the Danube region and strengthening the Danube region), each with specific areas of action. The SUERD Forum takes place annually and brings together government representatives from the 14 Danube states, European officials (Commission, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions), representatives of the Danube regions and cities, the academic and business environment, civil society as well as other project promoters; the agenda of the Annual Forum includes various topics, such as the sustainable development of the Danube Region, the coordination between the macro-regional strategies of the European Union, the challenges to energy, navigation on the Danube and food security.

Regional documents, such as *the Convention on cooperation for the protection and sustainable use of the Danube (Danube Protection Convention)*, in force on October 22, 1998, express the interest and cooperation of the signatory states for the sustainable and equitable management of the river's water.

¹ Details on <https://ogpae.gov.md/programul-transnational-dunarea-ii-2021-2027/>, accessed on 24.04.2023.

² For details, we mention the book *Chirnogi -Tutrakan Punte peste Dunăre*, author Relu Cotoban, 2022 - a chronicle of the 12-year cross-border activity between the two communities geographically located face to face on both banks of the Danube.

³ The European Council (heads of state or government) approved the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region on June 24, 2011. Fourteen states participated in the Danube Strategy: nine-member states of the European Union (Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Germany – the states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, Hungary) and five non-EU states (Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine).

Last but not least, the cooperation and dialogue actions in the Danube region are carried out within the framework of regional and subregional cooperation structures (the Danube Cooperation Process, Central European Initiative, etc.).

They are examples that contribute to ensuring security in the Danube region and to the formation of a Danube cult, which expresses attachment and appreciation for the Danube.

3. The Danube - a Source of Inspiration

This river, loaded with history, has always represented a source of inspiration for poets and composers, painters and storytellers, historians, diplomats and soldiers, etc.; many longings have been poured into its waters; its waters have witnessed many and various events throughout time and its course. The Danube is a symbol of pan-European culture and identity.

We will mention a few examples, but the list is much, much longer:

- the paintings by Jakob Alt, *View of Melk Abbey from the Danube* or *View of Belgrade from Zemun*, 1826;
- in September 1836, the premiere of Adolphe Charles Adam's ballet *The Danube Maiden* took place;
- in 1840, Ludwig Bechstein, a famous German folklorist and collector of fairy tales, publishes the work *Travels on the Danube and its wonderful landscapes*;
- in 1863, the premiere of the opera *The Zaporozhian over the Danube*, composed by Semion Gulak-Artiomovski, took place in Sank-Petersburg;
- Johann Strauss (the son) composed, in 1866, the waltz entitled *the beautiful blue Danube*";
- Iosif Ivanovici composed the waltz *Valurile Dunării*, in 1880, while he was the conductor of the 6th Infantry Regiment marching band stationed in Galați and this opera was offered to the wife of a music editor from Bucharest, Emma Gebauer (Șarfi, 2017, p. 244)¹;
- János Vaszaryi, *The Danube Promenade in Pest*, picture, 1930;

¹ Iosif Ivanovich won European recognition only a decade later, when the waltz, arranged by the French Émile Waldteufel, was performed in Paris.

- Marius Bunescu, *Danube at Cazane*, picture 1930-1935;
- Attila József publishes the poem *La Danube*, June 1936;
- Oana Ionel, *Danube - River as Experience*, painting exhibition, 2019; etc.

The Danube, “a river of everyone and no one, which embodies the idea of the tragic, uniting and separating languages and peoples” (Șarîi, 2017, p. 299), appears in the works of many writers, enchanted by its waves, for example: Mihai Eminescu, George Coșbuc, Panait Istrati, Alexandru Vlahuță, Eugeniu P. Botez, Petre Ispirescu, Radu Tudoran, Jules Verne, Đorđe Balašević, Evgheni Dolmatovski, Jan Willem Bos, Felicia Truffier, Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, etc. Nicolae Iorga approaches *the Question of the Danube*, a vast approach that includes all “the history of Eastern Europe - and Western Europe in relation to the East” (Iorga, 1913). Songs, articles, studies, books, films, photographs, paintings, exhibitions, etc. are other ways in which the love and respect for this river, called by Napoleon Bonaparte “the king of European rivers”, is presented to the general public.

Near the city of Donaueschingen (in translation Danube River descent), at 678 meters above sea level, two clear springs join - Brege and Brigach, the sources of the Danube. From here the Danube starts towards the Black Sea, crossing many localities, uniting and separating states, localities, people, destinies. The protection of the river and its ecosystems has become an important security issue, as interests in the Danube are multiple and have often exceeded the borders of Europe.

On its way, the Danube reveals many faces through which its importance can be deduced from a geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic point of view: “there is the historical and hydrographic Danube, the navigable and ethnographic, musical and literary, fishing and industrial, cinematic and mythological Danube, there is the river of hundreds of political events and there is the river of millions of human destinies” (Șarîi, 2017, p. 126).

Regardless of its image, we bow with appreciation through various ways of cooperation and dialogue to this river loaded with history, a binder of cooperation and dialogue.

References

- *** (2012). *Revista de Științe Militare nr.1/ Military Science Journal no. 1.*
- *** (2017). *Revista Dunărea de Jos nr.184/ The Lower Danube Journal.*
- *** (2019). *Revista Univers Strategic nr.4(40)/ Univers Strategic Journal no. 4(40).*
- Brînză, V. (2012). Securitatea dunăreană – o nouă valoare europeană/Danube security – a new European value. *Military Sciences Magazine*, 73.
- Cotoban, Ionel Aurelian (2022). *Chirnogi -Tutrakan Punte peste Dunăre/ Chirnogi -Tutrakan Bridge over the Danube.* Chirnoghi.
- Ionescu, I. (1989). *Hidronimul Dunăre/The Danube hydronym.* Retrieved 04 19, 2023, from <http://dspace.bcu-iasi.ro/bitstream/handle/123456789/7391/Ionescu,%20I.,%20Hidronimul%20Dunare,%20Limba%20romana,%20An%202039,%20Nr.%201%20ianuarie-februarie,%201990,%20p.%2049-56.pdf?sequence=1>
- Iorga, N. (1913). *The Danube Issue. Lessons held at the War School.* Valenii de Munte: "Neamul Românesc" Society Publishing House.
- Nate, S. (2019, 04 19). *De ce Uniunea Europeană trebuie să regândească Strategia pentru regiunea Dunării?/Why does the European Union have to rethink the Strategy for the Danube region?* Retrieved 04 20, 2023, from Contributors: <https://www.contributors.ro/de-ce-uniunea-europeana-trebuie-sa-regandeasca-strategia-pentru-regiunea-dunarii/>
- Oprescu, E., & Moșneagu, M. (2019). The Danube in the vision of Jean Bart. The contribution of Commander Eugeniu P. Botez to the defense. *The Danube in the vision of Jean Bart. The contribution of Commander Eugeniu P. Botez to the defense of the national interest at the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920)*, 152.
- Șarii, A. (2017). *Danube river of empires.* Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
- Pagini online accesate:**
- <https://dri.gov.ro/w/comunicat-de-presa-dunarea-o-cultura-a-solidaritatii-intr-un-timp-al-izolarii/>.
- <https://www.contributors.ro/de-ce-uniunea-europeana-trebuie-sa-regandeasca-strategia-pentru-regiunea-dunarii/>.
- <https://centruldeproiecte.ro/proiecte-finantate/encounters-dialoguri-dunarene/>.
- <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/danurb>.
- <https://www.mdipa.ro/pages/dunarea20142020>.
- <https://ogpae.gov.md/programul-transnational-dunarea-ii-2021-2027>.
- <http://www.icpdr.org/main/danube-basin>.
- <https://marinarii.ro/lnr-rmsf/>.

<https://www.festivalfinder.eu/festivals/international-danube-festival>.

<https://mek.oszk.hu/11900/11931/11931.htm#47>.

<https://danube-region.eu/>.

<https://gwpromania.ro/artistuldunarii/>.

<https://www.modernism.ro/2022/10/04/expozitia-provocari-si-raspunsuri-pe-dunare-ungaria-si-navigatia-pe-dunare-in-perioada-interbelica-muzeul-de-istorie-paul-paltanea-din-galati/>.