



Resolution 1444 (2005)¹

Protection of European deltas

Parliamentary Assembly

1. River deltas are part of Europe's natural heritage. Deltas are extremely rich in biodiversity, hosting thousands of animal and plant species that are, in many cases, rare or globally endangered and therefore internationally protected. The preservation of the biological, ecological and scientific potential of European river deltas is an issue of concern since deltas are areas particularly sensitive to environmental changes. Some European deltas are threatened by human activity and are seriously at risk.

2. For more than a decade, the Parliamentary Assembly has been committed to the sustainable development of European deltas. It recalls, inter alia, its [Resolution 1021 \(1994\)](#) on the preservation and development of the Danube Basin, [Recommendation 1330 \(1997\)](#) on the draft European charter of the Danube Basin, [Recommendation 1668 \(2004\)](#) on the management of water resources in Europe and [Recommendation 1669 \(2004\)](#) on transboundary water basins in Europe. It reaffirms its strong belief in and commitment to a responsible use and management of water resources in order to prevent any degradation of the environment and natural habitats of European deltas.

3. Local communities, which are dependent on the traditional use of land and natural resources, should be protected against the threat of damage to their environment. Accordingly, the traditional lifestyle of local communities should be preserved because it guarantees a minimal human intrusion into the deltaic environment. It should therefore be encouraged rather than extensive agriculture, industrial developments or mass tourism that may all lead to strong human interference and disruption of the ecological balance.

4. The Parliamentary Assembly insists on the need to ensure the effective consultation, participation and co-operation of all relevant stakeholders before any decision on human interference in the deltaic ecosystems is taken and implemented. Furthermore, it considers transboundary deltas as a particular case where international responsibility may be engaged. Their management should be based on co-operation between all parties concerned in order to identify the best environmental choices in terms of ensuring their sustainable development.

5. The Danube Delta stretches across the territories of Romania (about 90%) and Ukraine and has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage list since 1991. It is also one of the most extended wetlands in Europe (626 000 hectares) and a major destination for nesting, staging and wintering birds. In 2000 the Council of Europe awarded the European Diploma of Protected Areas to the Romanian Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve.

6. The Assembly is concerned by the Ukrainian project to build a deep-water navigation canal on the Chilia arm of the Danube, following the Bystroe channel into the sea, the latter cutting across the Ukrainian Delta Biosphere Reserve. This initiative may yield serious consequences for the entire Danube Delta ecosystem. Of course, the Assembly is aware of the Ukrainian Government's commitment to improving the economic and social conditions for the inhabitants of the delta, but these measures should be taken within the framework of a sustainable development of the Danube Delta.

1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee acting on behalf of the Assembly on 6 June 2005 (see [Doc. 10542](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur : Mr Platvoet).



7. Work was carried on in spite of the growing international concern for the environmental impact of the project and in disregard of the relevant international environmental conventions that Ukraine is a party to : the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention, ETS No. 104), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention), the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention), the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention), the Convention on Co-operation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River (Sofia Convention) and the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

8. The Assembly also refers to the requirements of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, the 2004 report of the joint fact-finding mission of the European Commission and international organisations and the UNESCO Programme on Man and the Biosphere.

9. However, for a balanced approach, the Assembly wishes to emphasise that the Danube Delta is also threatened by other human activities, such as pollution of the river upstream and the dredging activities in the Romanian part of the delta.

10. The Ebro Delta (33 000 ha), Spain's second largest wetland, is a natural region that has been transformed over the centuries by human activity. It now has a population of 50 000 people and 65% of the area is dedicated to rice-growing. In 1983 the Catalan regional government set up the Ebro Delta Natural Park, covering 7 800 ha.

11. The Ebro Delta suffers, however, from the impact of measures taken upstream. Some 150 dams, and particularly two of them located in the lower Ebro River, have had the serious effect of keeping back the sediment that used to nourish the delta.

12. The river also carries industrial waste which may endanger the delta and hosts invasive alien species which modify the ecosystems. The delta is also facing subsidence and marine erosion.

13. The Po Delta in Italy is one of the largest in the Mediterranean (130 000 ha) and a wide portion of it has been recognised as an internationally important wetland according to the Ramsar Convention and as a special protected area according to the Bird Directive.

14. The Emilia-Romagna Region instituted the Po Delta Natural Park to preserve the park's natural resources, protect the delta's cultural heritage and identify innovative management methods.

15. Even if the park co-operates with the Emilia-Romagna Region, the Provinces of Ferrara and Ravenna and the European Union, there is not enough co-operation with the neighbouring region of Veneto. Furthermore, the management of the Po Delta is the responsibility of a number of political and administrative authorities together with various technical bodies, which makes integrated management difficult.

16. The Assembly invites member states with delta ecosystems to take all necessary and appropriate measures to preserve them and to ensure a sound use of their natural resources, in accordance with the principle of sustainable development, by paying particular attention to accommodating the objectives of economic development with the imperatives of preservation of the environment.

17. The Assembly invites member states and the international bodies dealing with river deltas to co-operate and find the best practices for developing ecotourism as a new economic activity which benefits local communities within the framework of sustainable development.

18. It also invites member states to take measures in order to reduce river pollution by putting into practice strict controls on the waste dumped into rivers.

19. Concerning the Danube Delta, the Assembly encourages Ukraine, Romania and Moldova to co-operate for the best management of the delta and urges Ukraine :

to stop immediately the work on the construction of the deep water navigation canal until an international environmental impact assessment has been conducted and to implement its conclusions ;

to provide complete documentation on the canal project to all stakeholders ;

to envisage alternatives to the construction of the deep water navigation canal ;

to respect the provisions of the international agreements it is party to, in particular :

- a. the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats ;*
- b. the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals ;*
- c. the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance ;*
- d. the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters ;*
- e. the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context ;*
- f. the Convention on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River ;*
- g. the UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage ;*

to observe the recommendations of the relevant international organisations (European Commission, Council of Europe, UNESCO, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, etc.) and to effectively co-operate with the international community in order to identify a responsible solution to prevent any further damage to the ecosystem of the Danube Delta ;

to fulfil the internal procedures required for the entry into force of the agreement between the Moldovan Ministry of Environment and Territorial Planning , the Romanian Ministry of Waters, Forests and Environmental Protection and the Ukrainian Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources for the creation and management of a cross-border protected area between Moldova, Romania and Ukraine in the protected areas of the Danube Delta and the lower River Prut, the agreement having already been ratified both by Moldova and Romania.

20. The Assembly invites the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to hold a parliamentary debate on the environmental consequences of the project of building the deep water navigable canal through the Danube Delta and on other possible alternatives.

21. Concerning the Ebro Delta, the Assembly invites Spain :

to take measures to stop the delta from receding, particularly by allowing the flow of sediments, and to maintain its environmental and cultural potential ;

to create an agency for the co-operation and co-ordination of activities in the delta integrating all administrations, authorities and economic sectors concerned ;

to encourage the Catalan regional government to consider expanding the Ebro Delta Natural Park to cover the whole delta area, on the understanding that it would allow traditional activities, compatible with the preservation of the delta, to continue.

22. Concerning the Po Delta, it invites Italy to consider implementing measures for an integrated management of the delta to include all the relevant administrations and authorities, in order to ensure a better preservation of its environmental and cultural heritage.