

The EU supported removal of the sunken WWII German fleet in Danube River

The Danube River, one of the largest in Europe, is a lifeline for the countries it flows through and an irreplaceable natural resource for energy, food, water, economy and tourism. Unprecedented heat waves and record low rainfall in 2022 across Europe have caused several months of drought and drop in river levels; the European Union's research center speaks of "the worst drought in the last 500 years". Old churches and formerly submerged villages pierce through low water rivers and lakes. So called "hunger stones" appear at the bottom of rivers which represent something like "if you can see me, then cry"; according to a myth these hunger stones were left behind by people who have experienced such dramatically low water levels and left these stones behind as a warning for future generations.

The old Danube River also holds many secrets. One such secret came out into the public after 78 years and some of the nearly 200 sunken German warships from World War 2 surfaced near Prahovo, on the border between Serbia and Romania. In 1944, the retreating German army sunk its own warships, to prevent these from falling into the hands of the advancing Red Army. A esteemed local historian **Velimir Miki Trailović** reflects: *"The German army was trying to get out in the direction of Kladovo. But, when they realized that they could not get through, the order was to sink the ships. At that moment they had only two options. Either they should wait for the Russian navy and to be captured together with the ships or sink the ships so that Russia cannot use them".*

BENEFICIARIES

Ivica Škadić
Local Fisherman

"Sunken ships probably contain explosives, and we can actually see the barrels with dynamite on some of them."

Velimir Miki Trailović
Historian

"Nowadays up to 1,000 cruise ships and many more cargo ships pass this spot on the Danube every year."

Damir Vladić
Prahovo Port Director

"Prahovo is the first entry port to Serbia from Romania and Bulgaria, and now only very experienced sailors can pass here."

The Danube is navigable along its entire course throughout Serbia (588 km). Yet, in the Djerdap Gorge, just below the port of Prahovo, the river's waterway narrows from 180 to just 100 meters, due to the sunken ships. Some of the ships are positioned within the fairway and passing vessels need to sail cautiously, especially during periods of low water levels. Removal of these ships is a complex operation, also due to the explosive

materials still stored on some of the sunken ships.

The estimated overall costs of this project are €29.1 million, made up of blending investment through the WBIF - EU contributions over €16.6 million and a respective loan by the European Investment Bank through the WBIF. This project will free the flow of the river and facilitate safe navigation on this part of the Danube.

"Transportation by inland waterways is economical, energy efficient and suitable for preserving the environment. It is very suitable for transporting a large amount of goods. As an example, one ship can carry the same amount of grain as 120 trucks. The same apply when building materials are transported. These investments are practical examples of the EU's commitment to the Economic and Investment Plan as well as the Green Agenda, which is in focus in both member states and partner states," says European Union Ambassador in Serbia **Emanuel Giaufret**.

Rhine-Danube Corridor: Removal of WWII ships @WBIF August 2022

"I am really proud that we managed to ensure the navigability of the Danube along its entire length on the territory of our country in these record-low water levels, because the river remains a European corridor and for cargo and freight traffic, if it is not passable it does not have its full efficiency," said the Minister of Construction, Traffic and Infrastructure **Tomislav Momirović**.

"With this fund, in addition to local economic development, we will provide a wider, save, and more reliable navigable channel", said the regional director of the European Investment Bank, **Alessandro Bragonzi**.

"On this boat, you can see the barrels with explosives that supposedly contain dynamite," says **Zoran Janković**, a fisherman.

STAKEHOLDERS

Emanuele Giaufret
Ambassador of the EU to Serbia
"Inland waterway transport is cost and energy efficient, and suitable for preserving the environment."

Tomislav Momirović
Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure of Serbia
"Danube is one of important European corridors and should be easily passable to be utilized in its full capacity."

Alessandro Bragonzi
Head of Western Balkans office European Investment Bank (EIB)
"The investments into waterways will improve the regional transport routes and contribute to local economic development."

The project has been identified as one of [24 flagship projects](#) for €3.4 billion investments in the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans 2021-2027. The European Union and bilateral donors contribute €1.2 billion in grants to these investments.

The 14 flagship projects (out of 24) in the first batch of investments are for sustainable transport. The EU contributes to these projects with €1 billion in grants under the EIP, which is expected to leverage €1.4 billion in loans from WBIF partner financial organisations for over €2.7 billion in investments in the region.

Demining of the Sava river and addressing bottlenecks on the Danube river will be completed or advanced to improve the sustainable transport mode of these important waterways as part of the TEN-T network, and to facilitate further development of intermodal exchanges.

[The Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans](#) aims to spur the long-term recovery of the region, accelerate the twin green and digital transition, and foster regional cooperation and convergence with the EU. The Plan sets out a substantial financial package of up to €9 billion in EU funds, identifying 10 investment flagships to support sustainable transport, clean energy, environment and climate, digital future, human capital and private sector.

RHINE-DANUBE CORRIDOR:

REMOVAL OF WWII GERMAN SUNKEN VESSELS
FROM THE DANUBE, PRAHOVO SECTOR

FLAGSHIP 1 • CONNECTING EAST TO WEST
TRANSPORT SECTOR - WATERWAYS 



EU GRANT €16.6 MILLION



EIB LOAN €13.2 MILLION



EXPECTED COMPLETION 2027

Impact



21 SHIPWRECKS TO BE REMOVED



5 KM BOTTLENECK ELIMINATED



SHIFT FROM ROAD TO WATERWAYS



ENHANCED REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

More photos [here](#)



Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans 2021-2027

Flagship 1 Connecting East to West

Major east to west connections will be **completed or advanced by 2024**.

- The **"Peace Highway" in Kosovo** (linking Pristina with Niš in Serbia) will be **finished with the Serbia section substantially advanced**.
- While the (core network of the) road corridor (Corridor IX) south-east from Hungary through the region to Bulgaria, Greece and beyond has been practically completed, including with EU support, the parallel rail corridor will be fully modernised. In particular, the Niš railway, bypass in Serbia will be finished in this timeframe. The project on Corridor X is to upgrade the rail connection between Serbia and Croatia, which is a vital link in terms of rail freight, will be considerably advanced, as will the project to upgrade the rail link to North Macedonia.
- **Rail Corridor VII between Skopje and the Bulgarian border** will be substantially advanced to connect Skopje and Sofia.
- **Demining of the Sava river and addressing bottlenecks on the Danube river** will be completed or advanced to improve the sustainable transport mode of these important waterways as part of the TEN-T network, and to facilitate further development of intermodal exchanges