



REPORT ON APRIL 2006 FLOODS IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

This report is based on information obtained by the DPPI SEE Secretariat as of April 26, 2006 and reflects the situation and the information available at this time.

Background

While Balkans are still reeling from devastating floods which killed scores of people and left thousands homeless last summer, rapid rises in temperature, melting snow and heavy rainfall have pushed the Danube to its highest level for more than a century. Europe's second-longest river has swept across hundreds of thousands of hectares in Central and South Eastern Europe this month forcing people on the Danube's flood plains out of their homes.

Situation in Hungary

An emergency situation was declared in Hungary on April 3, 2006. The Hungarian authorities took the necessary preparedness measures. The level of the River Danube rose to 861cm in the early hours of April 5, higher than one of the highest water levels ever recorded (848 cm, in 2002). The two isles of the River Danube were closed. A shipping embargo was enforced all over the Hungarian section of the Danube. Waters began to subside by April 23.

Hungary reported that its second largest river, the Tisza, reached a record level of 9.8 meters on April 18, threatening some 160,000 people and over 50,000 homes. The Hungarian government extended a flood emergency to Hungary's three Koros rivers, the Feher Koros, Fekete Koros and Sebes Koros, in southeast Hungary. After weeks of flooding, around 138,000 hectares of fields are under water, 64,000 of which are grain field. Hungary plants grain on over 2 million hectares.

Disaster management, civil protection, water management, police agencies, fire-brigades, local governments are taking part in the emergency operations with almost 23,000 people.

Hungary requested assistance through the EU Community Mechanism for Civil Protection on April 7, 2006. It requested 600,000 sandbags, as well as thousands of rain gear, rubber boots and spades. Within a few hours, offers of assistance were already pouring in. With a day or two Austria, Slovenia and Romania dispatched sandbags. Sweden and Romania sent spades, rain gear and rubber boots. Denmark and Germany also offered sandbags but these were not taken by Hungary as they were not of the size requested.

Situation in Serbia

On April 13 and April 14, 2006 the Serbian Government declared a state of emergency over floods in municipalities of Zabalj, Titel and Zrenjanin, all in the province of Vojvodina, and in municipalities of Secanj, Negotin, Veliko Gradiste, Smederevo, Pozarevac and Golubac, after the Danube and its tributaries reached their highest level for a century, because of the danger posed by floods amidst severe weather conditions. The floods have submerged 3,000 houses, leaving 11,000 people displaced or homeless. Many refused to leave. Initial estimates show some 225,000 hectares, 5 percent of Serbia's 4.5 million hectares of arable land, were submerged by floods. Local authorities have estimated farm damage at €35.7 millions. With the Danube closed to shipping for almost the whole month, ships are said to have transported less than a third of the usual average monthly quantity of goods in April. The floods forced Djerdap 2 power plant on the border with Romania to stop producing electricity.

On April 19, 2006 the Serbian government opened at the Treasury Directorate of the Ministry of Finance a foreign currency account to help those affected by floods in the territory of Republic of Serbia. The Serbian government earlier opened a local currency account at the Treasury Directorate of the Ministry of Finance to help flood victims in the territory of Republic of Serbia. At the present, the Government has not launched an international appeal, as the relief needs appear to be at a level that national actors can address, but preliminary discussions between the Government and the Council of European Development Bank with regard to possible international loans for reconstruction (dykes, houses, etc.) in the affected areas have started. There is also a concern that further flooding may strikes as additional snowmelt occurs traditionally in May.



Situation in Romania

The Danube's level in Romania increased greatly, affecting the Tulcea, Braila, Constanta, Galati, Ialomita and Mehedinti counties with flood waters. Smaller damage was reported in the counties of Alba, Botosani and Maramures. Further downstream in the Danube delta, emergency teams began filling up a number of small lakes to ease water pressure and defend nearby villages. Romanian officials said the Danube reached double its average volume for this time of year, flowing at a record 15,900 cubic meters/second.

Romanian authorities report that around 15,000 persons were evacuated, over 5,000 households were damaged or flooded and 850 homes being destroyed. The floods damaged over 500 km of roads and more than 200 bridges. Some 73,000 hectares are submerged, 21,000 through controlled flooding. Wheat was lost on 10,000 hectares, 0.3 percent of the total wheat acreage. Barley was lost on 1,000 hectares. Thirteen provinces were affected. Thirteen dykes collapsed or were damaged along the Danube and its Romanian tributaries. The authorities have deliberately flooded 21,000 hectares of land to reduce pressure on inhabited areas. Only 4 of Romanian 9 main Danube ports are working.

Romania requested assistance through the EU Community Mechanism for Civil Protection on April 21, 2006. It requires high and medium capacity water pumps, boats, water purification units, waterproof suits, life vests, waterproof coats, disinfectants and sandbags. Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom offered assistance that same afternoon. International assistance in the form of pumps and sandbags has begun arriving, as Romania eventually accepted assistance from Austria, Denmark, Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden.

Situation in Bulgaria

The authorities said that, due to the high level of tributary rivers on the territory of Serbia and Montenegro, the water levels in the Bulgarian part of the Danube River were still rising and had, in one place, reached a new record high. On April 12, 2006 the Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the State Policy for Disasters and Accidents, Mrs. Emel Etem, declared a situation of disaster in seven regions along the Danube. In northern Bulgaria, 50 percent of the town of Nikopol was under water. Thousands of firemen, soldiers and volunteers spent battled to shore up dykes along the Danube, and along its tributaries, the Tisza and the Koros, in neighboring Serbia and Hungary. Bulgarian authorities report that over 1,000 houses were affected. Preparations for evacuating the endangered municipalities along the Danube River are being made and a tent camp for 3,000 to 4,500 evacuees was set up in the Vidin region. The floods damaged some 700 km of roads; public buildings; and tens of thousands of hectares of farmland. Twenty-three localities were affected.

Bulgaria requested assistance through the EU Community Mechanism for Civil Protection and through the NATO EADRCC on April 25, 2006. The request for assistance includes among others high capacity pumps and hoses; draining equipment for flooded dwellings; disinfectants, anti-mould latex and 500,000 sandbags. Some of this assistance is being provided by Denmark, Poland and Slovenia. More offers are currently being assessed.

Regional activities

The foreign ministries of Hungary, Romania and Serbia and Montenegro – Ferenc Somogy, Mihai Razvan Ungureanu and Vuk Draskovic, respectively - met on April 19, 2006 in Novi Sad, Serbia and Montenegro. The talks took place amid severe flooding that has inundated the region, causing millions of euros in agricultural losses and forcing a halt to shipping on the Danube. The three leaders stressed the need to join forces in coping with floods, repairing damage and achieving better organization in the future. The three governments agreed to launch consultations on joint efforts at flood prevention and response. One of the measures under consideration is the establishment of a trilateral fund to provide aid to the endangered population in all three countries. A meeting of natural disaster experts also has been proposed. Hungary and Romania had adopted a joint declaration in the sphere of flood protection, and Serbia and Montenegro is expected to join them soon.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev and Romanian counterpart Calin Popescu Tariceanu spoke by phone on April 21, 2006 discussing coordinated efforts against flooding. They focused on managing the situation along the Danube, where record levels caused disastrous flooding. Tariceanu and Stanishev decided to put the interior and administration ministers of the two countries in permanent contact regarding coordinated activities, so future damage can be minimized.



DPPI SEE activities in regard to current flooding

The DPPI SEE Secretariat had been monitoring the situation since the flooding started. It has established and maintained direct communication with the DPPI SEE Points of Contact in the countries at risk. Information has been obtained on regular basis and the initial report has been submitted to the SP SEE HQ on April 18, 2006. As a result of established interaction, on April 26, 2006 the DPPI SEE Secretariat has received from Bulgaria the Disaster Assistance Request, which was also submitted to the EU Community Mechanism for Civil Protection and the NATO EADRCC. The request has been immediately distributed through the DPPI SEE network and responses on actions undertaken from Hungary and Romania to the request have been already received.

DPPI SEE future activities in regard to floods

The DPPI SEE Secretariat will continue to observe current emergency situation, through direct communication with the DPPI SEE Points of Contact in the countries affected by floods and by monitoring relevant web-sites, such as EU Community Mechanism for Civil Protection and the Reliefweb.

At the same time, the DPPI SEE Secretariat has, in collaboration with Hungarian National Directorate General for Disaster Management, finalized the **Project Proposal for Support of Establishing “The Joint Emergency Response Units” in case of floods in South Eastern Europe**. The objectives of the Project are to improve and build joint capacities for coordination of disaster preparedness, prevention and mitigation and to establish disaster preparedness and prevention regional mechanism for regular information exchange on water and floods situation. Participating countries, with support from the Donors and the DPPI will create, equip and train Emergency Response Units capable to react in case of floods in the whole SEE region. The Joint Emergency Response Units will be able to cross state borders quickly in order to help out the teams from the flood affected areas in neighbouring countries. In order to discuss the challenges of the floods management, to provide adequate forum for experience exchange and lessons learned, and to obtain donors' support for the Project implementation, the **DPPI SEE International Conference on Flood Management in the South Eastern Europe** has been planned as a part of the Project and has been tentatively scheduled for September 2006. As per accepted Project timeline, the Conference will be followed by the Training for the ERU Operation Officers/Team Leaders tentatively scheduled for November 2006; and with the Initial, Main and Final Planning Conference to be concluded with the **Joint Emergency Response Unit Exercise**, tentatively scheduled for February, May and September 2007 respectively.

The DPPI SEE Secretariat has been also discussing the possibilities, in cooperation with the IFRC Regional Delegation for Central Europe, to organize one-day Regional Conference on Climate change and its impact on South Eastern Europe, with special focus on floods, bringing together the Heads/Directors of the Disaster Management/Civil Protection Agencies and the Red Cross Disaster Management Coordinators from the SEE region. Initial discussion indicates that the Conference will be most probably organized as a pre-event to the XIII DPPI SEE Regional Meeting, scheduled for October 2006 in Albania.

Further more, the DPPI SEE Secretariat has learned that Vienna-based International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, the ICPDR, will oversee the new integrated early warning system. The first “draft” version of this Danube flood alert system has been planned to be tested by the end of the year. Once in place, the new integrated early warning system will give 10 days' advance warning of expected floods. Initially it will be launched as a pilot scheme on the upper and middle reaches of the Danube. Subsequently, it will be extended to the entire length of the river and the DPPI SEE Secretariat would look to establish contact with ICPDR aiming to explore opportunities and possibilities for mutual cooperation, to facilitate and enhance the extension of the integrated Danube early warning system to the region of South Eastern Europe.

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In Sarajevo on April 27, 2006