

## WEBINAR

# GREEN DEAL FOR THE BLUE DANUBE: THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DANUBE REGION

---

On 12 May, the Danube Water Program hosted a “KnowNow” webinar on the European Green Deal and its implications for the water sector in the Danube region. To sum up 75 densely information-packed minutes, change is coming fast – and it will be huge.

IAWD’s Philip Weller and World Bank’s Raimund Mair hosted the third “KnowNow” webinar presenting the European Green Deal. This new growth strategy for the EU aims to create a climate-neutral, fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy. It promotes the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy, restore biodiversity and cut pollution. The plan outlines investments needed and financing tools available and explains how to ensure a just and inclusive transition.

Ms. Bettina Doeser, Head of Unit, DG Environment, European Commission walked the audience through the related water policy. Her fast-paced 30 pages presentation covered 15 separate strategies, 19 water-relevant initiatives and their implications for the future of the water sector, from Circular Economy Action Plan, Biodiversity Strategy and Farm to Fork Strategy to Energy System Integration, Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Zero Pollution policies. Targets set for 2030 and 2050 demand fast change in many fields, and the European Union does not only provide the motive and the opportunity, it also provides the means: The Next Generation EU instrument is an investment of 1,8 trillion Euros dedicated to rebuild a post-COVID greener, more digital and more resilient Europe. The investment plan for the period

2021 – 2024 alone is 750 billion Euros, and it brings huge investment opportunities for the water sector.

At the end of her presentation that left the crowd breathless, Ms. Doerer invited all stakeholders to take part in the current public consultation processes on altogether five water-related EU Directives and encouraged decision-makers to take the Green Deal as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for water-related actions and investments. She said:

**“This is Europe’s moment to repair and prepare for the next generation!”**

Next to take the stage was Mr. Marco Beros, representing the European Investment Bank (EIB), the world’s largest lender to the water sector. His presentation provided examples to clarify the implications of the Green Deal, showing four current green investment projects in European countries. In Germany, Europe’s largest river restoration, the Emscher Project, restores 350 kilometers of river and creeks, introducing wastewater collection and treatment for more than 2 million inhabitants and providing flood protection for 327 square kilometers situated below the river level.

In Belgium, a project aims to restore the habitats of the threatened species European Freshwater Pearl Mussel. In Luxemburg, a flood protection and river restoration project for the Alzette and Pétrusse rivers will provide flood protection for approximately 35,000 inhabitants in the Luxemburg city area, while improving biodiversity and visual quality of the area.

In Croatia, an intermediated Natural Capital Financing loan program enables the Croatian Bank for Development & Reconstruction to support small conservation, restoration and nature-based projects like eco-tourism, agriculture, forestry and green infrastructure for cities. Marco Beros pointed out:

**“Support for climate action and environmental sustainability will exceed 50% of the EIB overall lending activity by 2025.”**

Panelist Simon David Ellis, the World Bank’s Western Balkans Program Leader, then added the practical perspective of a region that wrestles with multiple challenges, especially post-COVID, and facing additional demands implementing the Green Deal. Referring to the ongoing analytical work the World Bank is carrying out in the regions, he categorically states that the Green Deal as the EU’s new growth strategy needs to create jobs to succeed. “This needs to be more than a narrative shared between the EU and the national governments. We will have to reach out to the private sector, to the civil society, we have to understand the key issues that drive policies in the region, especially post-COVID, and one key issue is how they can make their societies more resilient.”

Mr. Ellis is aware that as a financing bank, the World Bank will have to reorient its lending programs: “There is a whole series of issues here, beginning with the energy sector and its transition away from coal. Also, green motorization means turning around a whole region that has just moved from rail to road.” Urban infrastructure will be a key issue: “The cities need to drive growth in the region, but they can’t at the moment, because their infrastructures are not up to scratch. There are cities where the air quality resembles that of Beijing.”

More specifically dealing with the water sector, Mr. Ellis noted that implementing the Green Deal will be extremely demanding for many countries, making far-reaching policy changes necessary:

“Adaptation to climate change will be a huge issue. Already, flooding happens every year and droughts as well in countries that are heavily dependent on agriculture.” In the face of these challenges, Mr. Ellis calls for an integrated approach:

“Water is a key part of making economies more resilient, and we have to view it as an integrated issue including flood protection, navigation, tourism, hydropower and agriculture. We also have to integrate across borders. Good regional cooperation is the key to solving water issues.”

Questions from the audience dealt mostly with the practicalities of achieving goals like zero pollution, the implications for the energy sector and the current changes to the relevant EU directives.

Ms. Doeser wrapped the discussion up with her final statement:

“We all want zero pollution and above all climate neutrality. Now the opportunity is here. Let’s make the best of it. We do not even have to invent it all from scratch. So much is already in place and the Danube cooperation is an excellent example of how cross-border cooperation can work.”

Further information, including the presentations and recording of the webinar, can be found on our [website](#)!