



International
Association of Water
Service Companies
in the Danube Region



**DANUBE
WATER
PROGRAM**

2026 DANUBE WATER FORUM

FROM VISION TO ACTION: BUILDING A WATER RESILIENT DANUBE REGION

20-22 May 2026 / Sofia, Bulgaria

Supported by:

 **Federal Ministry
Republic of Austria
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Sofiyska Voda



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I. CONFERENCE SUPPORTERS

The organization of the 2026 Danube Water Forum has been made possible through institutional support from:

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II. SESSION OVERVIEW

Business Meetings Hotel Rosslyn	Tuesday 19 May			
	09:00 – 12:00	Joint ICPDR PM EG and Tethys Workshop		
	12:00 – 13:00	<i>Lunch</i>		
	12:00 – 17:00	UBP Danube Hub Workshop	YWP Danube Regional Workshop	Joint ICPDR PM EG and Tethys Workshop
	Wednesday 29 May			
	09:00 – 12:00	IAWD General Assembly	UBP Danube Hub Field Trip	Donors and IFIs Meeting
	12:00 – 13:30	<i>Lunch / Transfer to Venue</i>		

2026 DWF Toplocentrata	Wednesday, 20 May	
	13:00	<i>DWF Registration</i>
	14:30 – 16:00	2026 Danube Water Forum Opening: Building a Water Resilient Danube Region
	16:00 – 16:30	<i>Networking Coffee in Lobby/Exhibition Area</i>
	16:30 – 18:00	Spotlight on Bulgaria: Status Quo and the Region's Road to Resilience
	18:00 – 19:30	<i>Welcome Reception and Drinks</i>

2026 DWF Topocentrala	Thursday 21 May	
	08:00	<i>DWF Registration</i>
	09:00 – 10:30	Resilient Assets: Build smart of fail expensively
	10:30 – 11:15	<i>Networking Coffee in Lobby/Exhibition Area</i>
	11:15 – 12:45	Efficiency First: Cutting Water Loss to Build Resilience
	12:45 – 13:45	<i>Lunch Break in Lobby/Exhibition Area</i>
	13:45 – 15:15	Wastewater and Sludge Management: Examples for Resilience from the Danube Region
	15:15 – 16:00	<i>Networking Coffee in Lobby/Exhibition Area</i>
	16:00 – 17:30	Securing Skills and Talent: Building the Water Workforce of Tomorrow
	19:30	<i>Conference Dinner</i>
	Friday 22 May	
	09:00 – 10:00	Poster Breakfast
	10:00 – 11:00	Resilience Starts at the Top: Utility Leadership Practices Supporting Smarter Management and Stronger Governance
	11:00 – 12:00	Partnership Matters: Utility-to-Utility Collaboration as a Catalyst for Stronger Service Delivery
	12:00 – 12:15	Closing

III. ABOUT THE DWP

World Bank / IAWD Danube Water Program

The World Bank / IAWD Danube Water Program supports **smart policies, strong utilities and sustainable water and wastewater services** in the Danube region by partnering with regional, national and local stakeholders, promoting an informed policy dialogue around the sector's challenges and strengthening the technical and managerial capacity of the sector's utilities and institutions.

Governments and water professionals in the Danube region face a double challenge of meeting their citizens' demand for universal, good quality, efficient, and financially sound or - in one word - sustainable water and wastewater services, while catching up to the environmental requirements of the European Union *acquis communautaire*. To address this double challenge, the World Bank and the International Association of Water Service Companies in the Danube Region (IAWD) have partnered in the frame of the Danube Water Program, with financing from the Government of Austria.

The Danube Water Program was formally launched in May 2013 in partnership with line ministries, regulators, water utility associations, and local government representatives of more than a dozen countries in South-East Europe. Since the launch of the Program, knowledge exchanges among more than a thousand sector professionals and policy makers in the region and beyond has taken place. In 2015 a State of the Sector report was launched (SoS 2015), and updated in 2018 (SoS 2018) and 2025 (SoS 2025), which are flagship products of the Danube Water Program, next to additional analytical pieces exploring status and trends in wastewater management, rural water supply and sanitation, agglomeration of utilities and broader water security aspects. Capacity building programs benefiting over 700 utilities have been undertaken under the region wide Danube Learning Partnership (D-LeaP) involving cooperation with all the national water utility associations. Numerous local initiatives worth more than € 1,000,000 through competitive grants have been supported.

www.iawd.at

www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water

www.danube-water-program.org

Danube Water Conference and Danube Water Forum

Since its start, the Danube Water Program has been working on the establishment of an international network of water sector institutions and experts, becoming a well-known resource for vitally needed capacity building, knowledge sharing, analytical and advisory services. In that context, the bi-annual Danube Water Conference (DWC) and Danube Water Forum (DWF) have become signature events for the Program and the Danube region and rotate on a yearly basis. While the DWC is hosted in Vienna (Austria), the DWF is organised in the region with the support of a strong partner. Both events serve as an international platform convening sector professionals from the Danube region and beyond to discuss the latest challenges and opportunities in the Danube region water sector.

Context and objective

The upcoming Forum, themed "Building a Water Resilient Danube Region", will explore the EU Water Resilience Strategy and what its priorities mean in practice for water and wastewater utilities across the region. A spotlight on the host country's state of the sector will outline its progress and place it in context with neighbouring developments. The program will also address key technical areas shaping resilience - such as smart asset management, improved water efficiency, and resource-conscious wastewater treatment - showing how innovation boosts both operations and long-term sustainability. The agenda will close with a focus on the human dimension of resilience, highlighting workforce development, strong utility partnerships, and empowered leadership as essential drivers of future-ready services.

IV. WEDNESDAY, MAY 20TH

2026 Danube Water Forum Opening: Building a Water Resilient Danube Region

Date: Wednesday, 20 May 2026

Time: 14:30 – 16:00

Location: Toplocentrala, Hall 1

Chairs: **Ms. Katerina Schilling**, IAWD and **Mr. Raimund Mair**, World Bank

Context and objective

The opening session will feature welcoming words from senior and young representatives of the various institutions organizing, hosting and supporting the 2026 Danube Water Forum and providing an overview of the event's structure. It will be followed by a keynote speech and a panel discussion on the EU Water Resilience Strategy.

Session structure

Time		Content	Speaker
14:30	5'	Introduction	Ms. Katerina Schilling , Secretary General, IAWD, Austria and Mr. Raimund Mair , Senior Water Resource Management Specialist, DWP Program Leader, World Bank, Austria
14:35	5'	Welcome words from the Austrian Ministry of Finance	Ms. Elisabeth Gruber , Director for International Financial Institutions, Austrian Federal Ministry of Finance, Austria
14:40	5'	Welcome words from the Bulgarian Water Association and Sofia Water	Mr. Ivan Ivanov , President, Bulgarian Water Association, Bulgaria and Mr. Francois Debergh , Country Director, Veolia, Bulgaria
14:45	15'	What to expect – a quick guide through the 2026 Danube Water Forum	Ms. Katerina Schilling , Secretary General, IAWD, Austria and Mr. Raimund Mair , Senior Water Resource Management Specialist, DWP Program Leader, World Bank, Austria
15:00	5'	Video Messages from YWPs	National YWP Representatives: - Mr. Petko Boyadzhiev, BWA YWP Bulgaria - Ms. Denisa Cadkova, IWA YWP Czech Republic - Ms. Armela Gremshi, YWP Albania - Mr. Albert Salitakaj, IWA YWP Kosovo

15:05	15'	Keynote: The EU Water Resilience Strategy and its impact for the Danube region	Mr. Luca Perez , Deputy Head of Unit, DG Environment, European Commission, Belgium
15:20	40'	Framing the Debate	moderated by Ms. Katerina Schilling, IAWD and Mr. Raimund Mair, World Bank Panelists: - Mr. Alessandro Bratti, Vice President, European Water Regulators (WAREG), Italy - Mr. Francois Debergh, Country Director, Veolia, Bulgaria - Mr. Arthur Guichet, Secretary General, European Water Association (EWA), Germany - Mr. Luca Perez, Deputy Head of Unit, DG Environment, European Commission, Belgium - Ms. Birgit Vogel, Executive Secretary, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), Austria - Mr. Winston Yu, Practice Manager, World Bank, Europe and Central Asia - Representative of the Ministry for Regional Development, tbc
16:00		End of session	

Spotlight on Bulgaria: Status Quo and the Region's Road to Resilience

Date: Wednesday, 20 May 2026

Time: 16:30 – 18:00

Location: Toplocentrala, Hall 1

Chairs: Mr. Dobromir Simidchiev, Hydrolia, and Aleksandrina Tsvetkova, BWA YWP Bulgaria

Context and objective

This session will present Bulgaria's State of the Sector in a regional resilience context, using diagnostics from the World Bank's 2025 State of the Sector Report to stimulate a fact-based discussion among regulators, utilities, financiers, and associations. The objective is to move beyond data and prioritize next steps that enhance financial sustainability, operational performance, climate preparedness, and equitable service delivery. By situating Bulgaria within broader Danube trends, the session will clarify where resilience is already emerging and where action is still required.

Session structure

Time		Content	Speaker
16:30	5'	Introduction	Mr. Dobromir Simidchiev , Executive Director, Hydrolia, Bulgaria and Ms. Aleksandrina Tsvetkova , Chair, BWA YWP Bulgaria
16:35	40'	Keynote: Bulgaria's State of the Sector in a regional context Including Quick Takes from Panelists	Mr. Raimund Mair , Senior Water Resource Management Specialist, DWP Program Leader, World Bank, Austria
17:15	30'	Feedback Round and Panel Discussion	Panelists: - Mr. Ljubo Georgiev, Deputy Mayor, City of Sofia, Bulgaria - Ms. Jelena Janevska, Programme Director, NALAS, North Macedonia - Ms. Gerta Lubonja, Chair, Water Regulatory Authority, Albania - Mr. Raimund Mair, Senior Water Resource Management Specialist, DWP Program Leader, World Bank, Austria - Mr. Ilian Milev, Manager, Ruse Water Utility, and Member of Management Board, Union of Water Supply and Sewerage Operators, Bulgaria
17:45	15'	Questions & Answers	moderated by Mr. Dobromir Simidchiev , Hydrolia and Ms. Aleksandrina Tsvetkova , BWA YWP Bulgaria
18:00		End of session	

Welcome Reception and Drinks

Date: Wednesday, 20 May 2025

Time: 18:00 - 19:30

Location: Toplocentrala

Context and objective

Next to interesting presentations and professional networking, the Danube Water Forum also includes opportunities for participants to enjoy themselves and socialize with fellow “water people” in a nice atmosphere. The Welcome Reception will be hosted at Toplocentrala.

V. THURSDAY, MAY 21ST

Resilient Assets: Build smart or fail expensively

Date: Thursday, 21 May 2026

Time: 09:00 – 10:30

Location: Toplocentrala, Hall 1

Chairs: **Mr. Rado Russev**, Wadata and **Mr. Ognjen Govedarica**, IWA YWP Serbia

Context and objective

Resilience in the water supply and sanitation (WSS) sector ultimately rests on the reliability of its physical assets: networks, treatment plants, pumps, reservoirs, and control systems that must withstand shocks, aging, and increasing performance demands. Asset management is therefore not merely a technical discipline, but a strategic function of linking engineering choices, ownership models and contractual modalities, financing mechanisms, material innovation, and digital maturity. Building on the 2025 discussion on infrastructure stewardship, this session deepens the focus on three critical dimensions: how ownership structures and contractual modalities influence accountability and long-term care, how advances in materials science are reshaping durability expectations, and how digital tools, from hydraulic models to full digital twins, translate data into actionable resilience. By combining governance, technology, and innovation perspectives, the session will clarify what it truly means to “build smart” to avoid failing expensively.

Session structure

Time	Speaker	Speaker
09:00	5' Introduction	Mr. Rado Rusev , Wadata, Bulgaria and Mr. Ognjen Govedarica , Committee Member for Cooperation with Industry, IWA YWP Serbia
09:05	30' Interactive Roundtable: Asset ownership and contractual modalities as a factor for resilience	Speakers: - Ms. Evis Gjebrea, Deputy General Director, Tirana Water, Albania - Ms. Ana Manyarova, Senior Manager for Regulation and Concession Compliance, Sofia Water, Bulgaria - Ms. Patricia Lopez, Senior Water Specialist, World Bank, USA
09:35	20' Interactive Roundtable: Evolution of materials – the “chemistry and physics of longer-lasting assets”	Speakers: - Ms. Patricia Lopez, Senior Water Specialist, World Bank, USA - Mr. Anton Mintov, Regional Manager Central and SEE Region, Molecor, Bulgaria - Ms. Mojca Ogris, International Sales Manager, Tiroler Rohre, Austria

09:55	25'	Interactive Roundtable: Digitalizing the physical infrastructure – GIS tools, hydraulic models and plant twins	Speakers: - Ms. Miglena Kuzmanova, General Manager, ESRI, Bulgaria - Ms. Patricia Lopez, Senior Water Specialist, World Bank, USA - Ms. Marina Nikolic, Asset Management and Hydraulic Modeling Specialist, Belgrade Waterworks, Serbia - Mr. Jindrich Prochazka, Founder, AquIQ, Czech Republic
10:20	10'	Question & Answers	Mr. Rado Rusev , Wadata, Bulgaria and Mr. Ognjen Govedarica , IWA YWP Serbia
10:30		End of session	

Efficiency First: Cutting Water Loss to Build Resilience

Date: Thursday, 21 May 2026

Time: 11:15 – 12:45

Location: Toplocentrala, Hall 1

Chairs: Mr. Teodor Popa, IAWD, and Ms. Denisa Cadkova, IWA YWP Czech Republic

Context and objective

Reducing non-revenue water (NRW) is one of the fastest and most cost-effective ways to increase water security in the Danube region. With climate variability intensifying and investment resources constrained, utilities must prioritize efficiency before developing new supply sources. This session brings together utilities and technology providers to showcase practical NRW reduction strategies from national action plans to advanced leak detection and digital monitoring. Real-world case studies will demonstrate how sustained commitment, data transparency, and targeted investment can deliver measurable results. The objective is to translate ambition into replicable approaches that utilities across the region can realistically implement.

Session structure

Time		Content	Speaker
11:15	5'	Introduction	Mr. Teodor Popa , Vice-President, IAWD, Austria and Ms. Denisa Cadkova , Chair, IWA YWP Czech Republic
11:20	12'	Setting the Scene: Romanian NRW project	Mr. Teodor Popa , Vice-President, IAWD, Austria
11:32	12'	Presentation: Development of NRW Reduction Action Plan for Utilities	Ms. Vesna Grizelj Simic , Deputy Director, Hidroprojekt-Ing d.o.o., Croatia
11:44	12'	Presentation: NRW Reduction Progress Report	Mr. Veselin Dimitrov , Technical Director, Sofia Water, Bulgaria
12:56	12'	Presentation: Innovative tools and applications for leak detection	Mr. Vladimir Pavlita , Regional Sales Manager Badger Meter, Austria
12:08	12'	Presentation: Campaigns on water efficient usage	Mr. Sava Koev , Head of Business Planning and Investments, Water Supply and Sewerage Varna, Bulgaria
12:20	25'	Questions & Answers	moderated by Mr. Teodor Popa , IAWD and Ms. Denisa Cadkova , IWA YWP Czech Republic
12:45		End of session	

Wastewater and Sludge Management: Examples of Resilience from the Danube Region

Date: Thursday, 21 May 2026

Time: 13:45 – 15:15

Location: Toplocentrala, Hall 1

Chairs: **Mr. Adam Kovacs**, ICPDR, and **Ms. Sara Molnar**, Danube Youth Council

Context and objective

Across large parts of the Danube region, incomplete sewerage coverage and insufficient wastewater treatment remain as major risks to public health, environmental protection, and long-term water resilience. As climate pressures intensify, resilient wastewater systems must be designed not only for compliance but also for reliability under flooding, drought, and energy stress. This session focuses on practical solutions for expanding and upgrading collection and treatment infrastructure, informs about strategies for sewage sludge management and introduces case studies for stormwater reuse and wastewater peer exchanges.

Session structure

Time		Content	Speaker
13:45	10'	Introduction	Mr. Adam Kovacs , Technical Expert for Pollution Control, ICPDR, Austria and Ms. Sara Molnar , Member, Danube Youth Council
13:55	10'	Insights: NBS for Rural Wastewater and Stormwater Management – experiences from D-CLEAN	Mr. Guenter Langergraber , Head of Institute, Institute of Sanitary Engineering and Water Pollution Control, BOKU University, Austria
14:05	10'	Insights: Challenges and opportunities in building resilient wastewater infrastructure	Ms. Sanja Ursanic , Process Engineer, STRABAG, Croatia and Mr. Daniel Lamprecht , Process Engineer, STRABAG, Austria
14:15	10'	Questions & Answers	moderated by Mr. Adam Kovacs , ICPDR and Ms. Sara Molnar , Danube Youth Council
14:25	10'	Insights: Sewage sludge management in the Danube Region	Mr. Marton Pesel , Coordinator, EUSDR Priority Area 4, Hungary
14:35	10'	Insights: Managing sludge from a country perspective – the case of Hungary	Mr. Karoly Kovacs , President, Hungarian Water Association, Hungary
14:45	10'	Questions & Answers	moderated by Mr. Adam Kovacs , ICPDR and Ms. Sara Molnar , Danube Youth Council

14:55	10'	Insights: Reuse of stormwater – the case of Circus Lake Bucharest, Romania	Mr. Omid Bornay Zonouzi , Research Assistant, TU Bucharest, Romania
15:05	10'	Questions & Answers	moderated by Mr. Adam Kovacs , ICPDR and Ms. Sara Molnar , Danube Youth Council
15:15		End of session	

Securing Skills and Talent: Building the Water Workforce of Tomorrow

Date: Thursday, 21 May 2026

Time: 16:00 – 17:30

Location: Toplocentrala, Hall 1

Chairs: Ms. Elisabeta Poci, IAWD, and Mr. Jose Cordero, IWA YWP Switzerland

Context and objective

This session shifts the focus of the remaining program of the forum to the human dimension of resilience, including workforce development, empowered leadership, and utility partnerships to drive reliable, future-ready water services. Infrastructure alone does not deliver resilience; but skilled and motivated professionals do. Across the Danube region, utilities face aging staff, outdated curricula, and increasing competition for technical talent. This session explores how academia, utilities, young professionals' networks, and private partners can collaborate to modernize education pathways, promote careers in the sector, and strengthen workforce retention. Concrete examples from university partnerships and youth initiatives to digital learning platforms will highlight scalable approaches. The objective is to identify practical measures that ensure the water workforce is equipped to manage increasingly complex and climate-sensitive systems.

Session structure

Time		Content	Speaker
16:00	5'	Introduction	Ms. Elisabeta Poci , Association Development Manager, IAWD, Austria and Mr. Jose Cordero , IWA YWP Switzerland
16:05	15'	Keynote: Youth Involvement in Water Management in the Danube Region	Mr. Primoz Skrt , Project Manager, Global Water Partnership Central and Eastern Europe (GWP CEE), Slovakia
16:20	30'	Feedback Round & Ignites	Speakers: - Ms. Denisa Cadkova, Chapter Chair, YWP, Czech Republic - Ms. Sanja Ursanic and Ms. Dora Hecimovic, Process Engineers, STRABAG, Croatia - Mr. Dobromir Simidchiev, Executive Director, Hydrolia, Bulgaria - Mr. Albert Salltakaj, Chapter Chair, YWP, Kosovo
16:50	25'	Intergenerational Dialogue	Discussants: - Ms. Denisa Cadkova, Chapter Chair, YWP, Czech Republic - Ms. Sanja Ursanic and Ms. Dora Hecimovic, Process Engineers, STRABAG, Croatia - Mr. Dobromir Simidchiev, Executive Director, Hydrolia, Bulgaria

			- Mr. Primož Skrt, Global Water Partnership CEE, Slovakia - Mr. Albert Salltakaj, Chapter Chair, YWP, Kosovo
17:15	15'	Showcase: The EU Water Academy	Mr. Bernd Gawlik , Portfolio Manager, European Commission, Belgium
17:30		End of session	

Conference Dinner

Date: Thursday, 21 May 2026

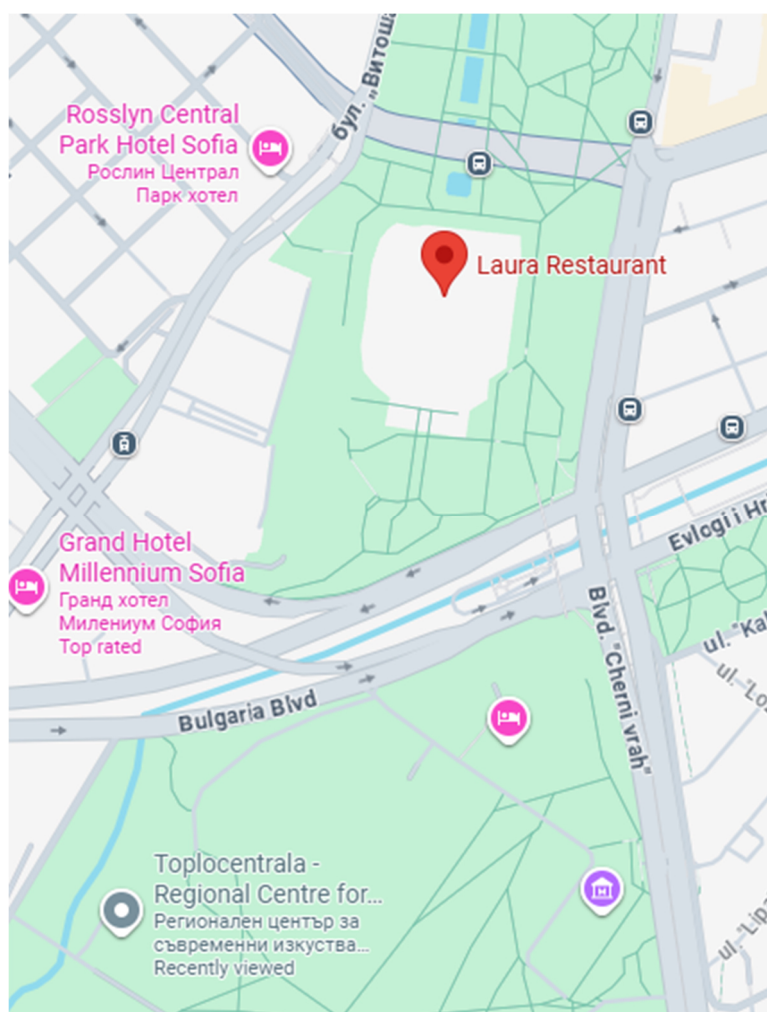
Time: 19:30 – 22:30

Location: Laura Restaurant, National Palace of Culture, 2nd Floor, Sofia 1463, Bulgaria

Context and objective

The Conference Dinner will be held on Thursday, 21 May at 19:30-22:30. The location of the dinner is the restaurant Laura at the National Palace of Culture, Sofia 1463, which is walking distance from the conference venue and surrounding hotels.

Please bring your conference dinner ticket!



VI. FRIDAY, MAY 22ND

Poster Breakfast

Date: Friday, 22 May 2026

Time: 09:00 – 10:00

Location: Toplocentrala

Chairs: Ms. Lena Schober, IAWD and Mr. Pietro Antonio La Vena, IAWD

Context and objective

In the relaxed setting of a “conference breakfast and coffee”, poster contributors will get the chance to pitch their projects in front of the participants. Within 1-minute presentations, key findings and most important facts will be delivered. Following the presentations, there will be enough time for networking and exchange between poster contributors and participants to chat in a relaxed atmosphere.

Session structure

Time		Content	Speaker
09:00	5'	Introduction	Ms. Lena Schober , Communication and Engagement Officer, IAWD, Austria and Mr. Pietro Antonio La Vena , Project Manager, IAWD, Austria
09:05	1'	Pitch: Risk-based drinking water safety plan for RBF sites	Ms. Evelin Izso , Water Production Engineer, Budapest Waterworks, Hungary
	1'	Pitch: Artificial Intelligence for Resilient Water Utilities	Mr. Mitar Tepic , Teaching Assistant, Alfa BK University, Serbia
	1'	Pitch: Setting up a Circular Economy Think Tank in water sector	Mr. Ciprian Nanu , Partner, BD Group, Romania (Water Wise HUB Project)
	1'	Pitch: Circular economy in practice at the Budapest Central WWTP	Ms. Bernadett Lemaire , Operation Engineer, Budapest Waterworks, Hungary
	1'	Pitch: Introduction to OT security	Mr. Marton Bor , IT Architect, Budapest Waterworks, Hungary
	1'	Pitch: Practical Water Education for Schools and Utilities	Ms. Denisa Cadkova , Chair, YWP Czech Republic, Czech Republic
	1'	Pitch: How to select the least-cost solution for arsenic-removal	Mr. Karoly Kovacs , President, Hungarian Water Association, Hungary
	1'	Pitch: Integrated Approach to Data Management in the Utilities Sector	Ms. Mariana Damova , CEO, Mozaika, Bulgaria

	1'	Pitch: Removal of Perfluorinated Compounds Using Photochemical Water Treatment Methods	Mr. Kornel Erdos , Student, University of Szeged, Department of Molecular and Analytical Chemistry, Hungary
	1'	Pitch: The Danube in the Climate Change Context of the Next 25 years	Mr. Stanko Stankov , AI Engineer, Mozaika, Bulgaria
	1'	Pitch: Riverbed incision and water availability loss	Ms. Sara Molnar , PhD Student, Research Assistant, Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME), Hungary
	1'	Pitch: Water Resilience through Youth Participation in the Danube and Seine Regions	Ms. Salma Mouaid , Policy Officer, International Community: Internationale Politik fur Junge Profis NGO, Austria
	1'	Pitch: Non-Revenue Water - Supervision Boosts Efficiency	Mr. Pal Bartok , Operation Control Engineer, Budapest Waterworks, Hungary
	1'	Pitch: GIS-Based Methodology for Detecting Illegal Connections and NRW	Mr. Amir Rexha , RWC Hidromorava JSC Gjilan, Kosovo
	1'	Pitch: Lessons from North Macedonia's Groundwater Management Programme	Mr. Jan Kwiatkowski , Team Leader of the Groundwater Management, Use and Protection Programme in North Macedonia, SKAT Consulting, Switzerland
09:20	40'	Networking and Q&A	
10:00		End of session	

Resilience Starts at the Top: Utility Leadership Practices Supporting Smarter Management and Stronger Governance

Date: Friday, 22 May 2026

Time: 10:00 – 11:00

Location: Toplocentrala, Hall 1

Chairs: **Ms. Vesna Arar Maricic**, Zagreb Water, and **Mr. Marko Mutavdjikj**, Chair, ADKOM YWP North Macedonia

Context and objective

Strong leadership and sound governance are decisive factors in determining whether utilities can adapt to financial, regulatory, and climate pressures. Resilient utilities require transparent decision-making, performance monitoring, professional boards, and management practices grounded in data. This session explores how governance frameworks, leadership development, and benchmarking tools contribute to smarter management and institutional stability. Drawing on regional case studies and international experience, the discussion will examine how leaders can navigate reform, drive performance improvement, and manage change effectively. The objective is to demonstrate that resilience begins with capable leadership and accountable governance structures.

Session structure

Time		Content	Speaker
10:00	5'	Introduction	Ms. Vesna Arar Maricic , Head of Support Service and EU Projects, ViO d.o.o., Croatia, and Mr. Marko Mutavdjikj , Chair, ADKOM YWP North Macedonia
10:05	15'	Presentation: NewIBNET Management Practices Chapter	Ms. Berta Macheve , Co-Team Leader of the New International Benchmarking Network, World Bank, USA
10:20	15'	Presentation: UoF Leadership and the Human Dimension of Change Management	Mr. Zael Sanz Uriarte , Team Leader of the Utilities of the Future-Center of Excellence, World Bank, USA
10:35	15'	Presentation: Talent Development – Experiences with the Utility Management Training	Mr. Rado Russev , UMT Coordinator, IAWD, Bulgaria
10:50	10'	Questions & Answers	moderated by Ms. Vesna Arar Maricic , ViO d.o.o. and Mr. Marko Mutavdjikj , ADKOM YWP North Macedonia
11:00		End of session	

Partnership matters: Utility-to-Utility Collaboration as a Catalyst for Stronger Service Delivery

Date: Friday, 22 May 2026

Time: 11:00 – 12:00

Location: Toplocentrála, Hall 1

Chairs: **Ms. Rita Studniczki**, Budapest Waterworks, and **Ms. Roxana Alexandru**, YWP Romania

Context and objective

No utility builds resilience alone. Peer-to-peer partnerships, regional communities of practice, and structured Water Operators' Partnerships have proven to accelerate knowledge transfer, strengthen institutional capacity, and improve service delivery outcomes worldwide. In an increasingly complex operating environment, cooperation enables utilities to learn faster, avoid costly mistakes, and leverage shared expertise. This session highlights practical experiences from the region and beyond, illustrating how data sharing, joint problem-solving, and targeted capacity support translate into measurable improvements. The objective is to show how structured collaboration can become a cornerstone of long-term resilience in the Danube Region.

Session structure

Content		Content	Speaker
11:00	5'	Introduction	Ms. Rita Studniczki , Foreign Relations and Proposals Group Leader, Budapest Waterworks, Hungary, and Ms. Roxana Alexandru , Chair, IWA YWP Romania
11:05	10'	Context Setting: Building a Water Operators Platform for South-East Europe - WOP SEE	Ms. Ana Badhofer , Benchmarking and Partnerships Manager, IAWD, Austria, and Ms. Emrah Engindeniz , Program Management Officer, GWOPA, Germany
11:10	10'	Presentation: Water Operator Partnerships for Resilience -WOP4R	Mr. Yang Villa , Strategy & Partnerships Team, Asian Development Bank, Philippines
11:20	10'	Case Study: WOP Example from the Region	Ms. Malak Soud AL-Ma'aitah , WOP Project Manager, Miyahuna Water Company, Jordan
11:30	5'	Questions & Answers	Moderated by Ms. Rita Studniczki , Budapest Waterworks and Ms. Roxana Alexandru , IWA YWP Romania

11:35	20'	Adding Perspective	Speakers: - Mr. Emrah Engindeniz, Program Management Officer, GWOPA, Germany - Ms. Malak Soud AL-Ma'aitah, WOP Project Manager, Miyahuna Water Company, Jordan - Mr. Mladen Nikolic, Wastewater Trainer, UTVSI, Serbia
12:00		End of session	

2026 Danube Water Forum Closing Session

Date: Friday 22 May 2026

Time: 12:00 – 12:15

Location: Toplocentrala, Hall 1

Chairs: **Ms. Katerina Schilling**, IAWD and **Mr. Raimund Mair**, World Bank

Context and objective

This session will summarize the key messages delivered and finally conclude the 2026 Danube Water Forum.

Session structure

Content		Content	Speaker
12:00	5'	Key take aways from YWP and Feedback from the audience	all Young Water Professionals
12:05	10'	Closing	Ms. Katerina Schilling , Secretary General, IAWD, Austria and Mr. Raimund Mair , Senior Water Resource Management Specialist, DWP Program Leader, World Bank, Austria
12:15		End of 2026 Danube Water Forum	

VII. SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

- ▶ **Ms. Roxana Alexandru** is an engineer at Aquatim S.A., where she specializes in organizational performance and internal audit, contributing to the improvement of internal processes and operational efficiency. She is actively involved in the Romanian Water Association (ARA), supporting communication, stakeholder engagement, and the coordination of technical initiatives. She also serves as President of the ARA Young Water Professionals (YWP) Chapter, a developing structure focused on creating opportunities for young professionals through workshops, technical events, and networking. At regional level, Roxana is a member of the IAWD YWP Committee, where she holds the position of Secretary, contributing to coordination and collaboration across YWP chapters in the Danube region. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Environmental Engineering and Management in Industry. Her professional interests include sustainable water management and strengthening collaboration between utilities and young professionals.



- ▶ **Ms. Malak Soud AL-Ma'aitah** is the Manager of the Performance Monitoring Unit at Jordan Water Company – Miyahuna. With over a decade of experience in the water utility sector, she leads multidisciplinary teams in performance analysis, NRW monitoring, energy efficiency, and data-driven decision-making. Malak coordinates the strategic water operator partnership between Miyahuna and Hamburg Wasser, fostering knowledge exchange and operational excellence. She is also a passionate advocate for digital transformation in the utilities sector. Malak currently serves as Project Manager for a Smart Utility Transformation initiative, driving the integration of AMI, SCADA, and ERP systems with AI and digital twin technologies to modernize Amman's water distribution network. Malak holds a Bachelor's degree in Mechatronics Engineering and a Master's degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Jordan, and is currently a PhD candidate in a joint programme between the University of Jordan and Technical University of Hamburg in Mechanical Engineering.



- ▶ **Ms. Vesna Arar Maricic** Mag.iur. is the Head of Service for Support and EU projects at Vodoopskrba i odvodnja d.o.o., (ViO) Zagreb, the largest water and sanitation company in the State, employing over 1,200 people. With more than 25 years of professional experience – initially in waste management and later in water management – she has spent over a decade in senior role at the ViO utility. She currently leads legal, and personnel services, oversees quality control and manages EU projects applications. Originally from Dubrovnik, she has lived in Zagreb for more than half her life. She holds a Master of Laws (mag.iur.) from Zagreb Law University. Her professional focus is on strengthening ViO company's position as a leading water service provider while promoting ongoing education and support for water sector professionals.

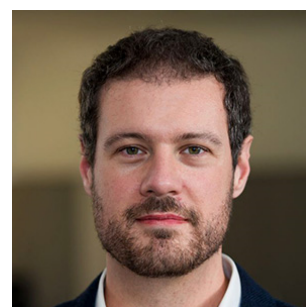


- ▶ **Ms. Ana Badhofer** joined IAWD in 2024, and has since managed the partnership with the New International Benchmarking Network of the World Bank, as well as the Utility Benchmarking Program. Since 2026, she took on the coordination of the cooperation with UN-Habitat/GWOPA to establish a Water Operators Partnerships Platform in South-East Europe. Before joining IAWD Ana worked as a Consultant for the World Bank Group. In this position she has been supporting the Danube Water Program since July 2022, and the Climate Support Facility since October 2023. From 2020 to 2025, Ana was an elected official in the 4th district council of Vienna. She holds a master's degree in environmental technologies and international affairs at the Technical University and the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, and a bachelor's degree in economics from the Vienna University of Economics and Business.

- ▶ **Mr. Pal Bartok** has been an operational control engineer at Budapest Waterworks for 25 years. He is a mechanical engineer, who coordinates the potable water distribution activities and supports developments. He is a member of the inner water security and energy management workgroups and an energy auditor since 2021. He took part in SCADA upgrade, energy audits and introduction of ISO50001 Energy Management System at BWB, where the current challenge is to support increasing self-sufficiency of the company by using renewable energy sources. Mr. Bartok participated in several international consultancy projects as water distribution, energy management, SCADA or Non-Revenue Water expert. Last topic was a feasibility study of SCADA introduction as a part of GWOPA cooperation Pakistani utilities. In his opinion, the centralized and detailed supervision is the key to the efficient operation and resilience.

- ▶ **Mr. Marton Bor** is an Information Technology Architect at Budapest Waterworks. He has 10 years of experience working in industrial environments, during this period he also participated in different international projects as part of Budapest Waterworks team such as developing smart water meters, designing operational technology networks or building capacities in developing countries. His day-to-day work focuses on designing and deploying operational technology networks for water treatment and wastewater systems, doing vulnerability assessments in traditional IT and OT environment, designing different IT systems. He holds a Master's degree in Computer Science from Obuda University - John von Neumann Faculty of Informatics (Hungary).

- ▶ **Mr. Omid Bornay Zonouzi** is a Research Assistant at the Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, where he has been engaged since May 2024 in research on surface runoff modeling in urban environments, with a focus on Bucharest. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Mining Engineering from Sahand University of Technology (Iran) and a Master of Science in Hydrogeology from the University of Tabriz (Iran). His expertise centers on groundwater contamination assessment and remediation, with a specialization in bioremediation of oil-contaminated sites. His master's thesis investigated groundwater contamination resulting from effluent discharge associated with a sodium carbonate production line. He has also gained practical experience in assessing soil and groundwater contamination in mining environments and in designing dewatering systems for mining operations. In his current



role, he is extending his work toward urban hydrology and sustainable stormwater management.

- ▶ **Mr. Petko Boyadzhiev** is a water sector professional specializing in the digitalization of water utilities and automated meter reading (AMR) systems. With experience dating back to 2009, he has developed expertise across all stages of utility operations, from field installation to project coordination and team management. Since 2018, he has focused on designing and deploying integrated AMR solutions that support utilities in reducing water losses, improving operational accountability, and optimizing performance through smart digital ecosystems. Alongside his professional activities, Boyadzhiev has been actively involved with the Bulgarian Water Association since 2021. In 2025, he was appointed Vice-Chairman of the Association's Youth Section, where he works to promote the engagement of young professionals in the water sector and to encourage innovation and long-term sustainability within the industry.



- ▶ **Mr. Alessandro Bratti** is a Member of ARERA Council and Vice-President of WAREG (European Water Regulator). He holds a degree in Agricultural Sciences University of Bologna and a PhD in Agricultural Entomology and Phytopathology and was a Senior Researcher at University of Ferrara Department of Chemical, Pharmaceutical and Agricultural Sciences, associated with the National Council of Research. He was a Professor at University of Ferrara where he taught Agricultural Entomology, Biological Control in Agriculture and Sustainable Development. He attended, as part of a Bilateral Project C.N.R. Italy-USA the Biological Control of Pests Research Unit "of the U.S. S.D.A in Weslaco and College Station USDA Lab Texas, U.S.A. working on innovative projects of biological control techniques in Agriculture. He has participated as a speaker at over 220 conferences and published 80 articles on different scientific journals. He was Director general of the Environmental Prevention Agency (ARPA) at Emilia Romagna Region; General Secretary of Basin Po River; Vice President of the European Environmental Agency (EEA) and Director General of ISPRA (Institute of Research Environment). He was elected to Italian Parliament in the Chamber of Deputies as a Member of the VIII Environment and Territory Commission and during this mandate was appointed President of the Bicameral Commission of Inquiry on illegal activities related to the waste cycle.



- ▶ **Ms. Denisa Cadkova** is a water professional specializing in water technology and public engagement within the water sector. She serves as Chair of Young Water Professionals Czech Republic and Vice-Chair of the IAWD YWP Committee, connecting young professionals across the Danube region. She actively contributes to organizing international conferences, webinars, and capacity-building activities within the IWA community, and is a member of the Programme Committee of the Emerging Water Leaders Forum at the IWA World Water Congress and the 2nd European YWP Conference 2026. Professionally, she is Head of Project Development at H2Ospodař!, an initiative promoting sustainable water use through education and outreach. She holds an MSc in Water Technology from the University of Chemistry and Technology in Prague and has gained experience in both research institutions and the commercial sector.



- ▶ **Mr. Jose Cordero** is a chemist by training, holding a Master's and PhD in Environmental Science from Kyoto University. His research focuses on drinking water quality, particularly the prediction of disinfection byproduct formation, where he applied cheminformatics and machine learning methods to link molecular structure with disinfection byproducts formation, enabling more accurate prediction across diverse water sources. In 2023, Dr. Cordero joined the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology (EAWAG), where his work centers on modeling the breakthrough of micropollutants from wastewater treatment plants using monitoring data. Dr. Cordero currently focuses on granular activated carbon filtration, developing mechanistic models and implementing hybrid approaches that combine process-based understanding with machine learning to enhance predictive accuracy and support improved water treatment design.

- ▶ **Ms. Mariana Damova** is the CEO of Mozaika, a company specializing in data science, natural interfaces, and semantic information infrastructures across verticals including business intelligence, human resources, cultural heritage, and water resources management. Her background spans natural language processing, Semantic Web Technologies, and AI, with a strong academic and industrial record in Europe and North America. She has taught graduate courses, conducted research at multiple universities, and led international interdisciplinary teams on knowledge-intensive projects such as virtual customer service systems, speech-to-speech machine translation, and expert systems for child protection services. At Mozaika, she drives strategy and project execution from both management and engineering perspectives. Her clients include the European Space Agency, the European Commission, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia Municipality, and Rittal GmbH, among others. Dr. Damova holds a PhD from the University of Stuttgart, Germany, and a mini MBA from McGill University, Canada.

- ▶ **Mr. Francois Debergh** is a seasoned entrepreneur with extensive experience managing medium to large companies and a strong appetite for development. As Veolia's current Country Director for Bulgaria and Greece, Francois has broad knowledge of designing and operating environmental services for industrial and municipal customers. His main focus remains on accelerating the deployment of tailor-made, innovative, and sustainable solutions to help customers tackle their challenges in decarbonization, pollution treatment, preservation, and regeneration of essential resources while enabling them to fully embrace the circular economy. Francois is a true visionary, dedicated to creating and running businesses through the different steps of a company's lifecycle. With over 24 years of experience in Central and Eastern Europe, he has been instrumental in helping his customers achieve their ecological transformation goals, providing Veolia's expertise to local authorities and business customers.

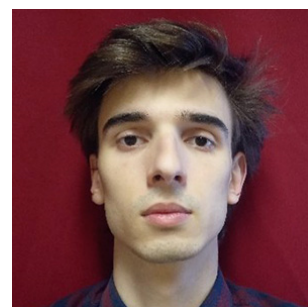


- ▶ **Mr. Vesilin Dimitrov** is the Technical Director at Sofiyska Voda, part of Veolia, where he manages the engineering strategy and technological development related to the capital city's water cycle. Veselin also plans and controls the investment program for the modernization of the network and facilities, with the aim of guaranteeing the security of water supply and the effective sanitation and treatment of wastewater. A key priority in his work is the implementation of innovations to reduce water losses and increase the company's energy efficiency in accordance with the highest operational standards. He holds a Master's degree in Water Supply, Sewerage and Water Treatment from University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy in Sofia. Veselin has an over 25 years of experience in the field of water supply and sewerage infrastructure design and operations.

- ▶ **Mr. Emrah Engindeniz** is a Programme Management Officer at the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA) / UN-Habitat, based in Bonn, Germany. He serves as the climate focal point for GWOPA and regional focal point for the Caribbean, Pacific, and MENA regions, while managing EU-funded Water Operators' Partnerships across Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. With over 15 years of experience in the UN system, he specializes in urban development, focusing on informal settlements upgrading, climate resilience, local governance, and urban water systems. His work spans global programmes across the Pacific, Caribbean, MENA, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

- ▶ **Mr. Kornel Erdos** is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Environmental Engineering, at the Department of Molecular and Analytical Chemistry at the University of Szeged, specialised in the photochemical degradation of persistent organic pollutants. His main field of research is the treatment of perfluorinated compounds but he has been involved in other projects which focused on antibiotics and nanoplastics. Looking ahead he plans to continue his academic journey by pursuing a PhD in Environmental Chemistry.

- ▶ **Mr. Bernd Gawlik** is Co-Leader of the JRC Portfolios for *Water Resilience* and *Better Preparedness and Response to Crises* at the European Commission's Joint Research Centre. He provides scientific support for the design, implementation, and monitoring of EU water-related policies and works closely with a broad range of stakeholders. He has contributed to more than 100 publications and reports for the European Commission. His work focuses on the central role of water in societal processes, including public health. A major area of activity is the expansion of wastewater-based surveillance, linking it with data on demography, migration, behaviour, and health to establish Used-Water Intelligence (UWINT) as a complementary intelligence source to OSINT. This work has already influenced key EU legislation, including the recast Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, the Cross-border Threat Regulation, and the Medical Countermeasures Strategy, which established the EU Wastewater Observatory for Public Health. Since this year, he has also been tasked with overseeing the design and construction of the European Water Academy, a flagship initiative under the EU Water Resilience Strategy addressing skills gaps in the water sector.



- ▶ **Mr. Ljubo Georgiev** has been trained as an architect and urban planner. In the course of the years he accumulated design, activist and management experience. He began studying architecture at IUAV in Venice (Italy). He received his master's degree in Architecture, Urbanism and Building sciences from TU Delft (the Netherlands) in 2007. Ljubo Georgiev has built-up an international experience by working in diverse countries and contexts: Scotland, Italy, the Netherlands, China and his native Bulgaria. He has authored a number of articles and has lectured at different conferences and events around Europe. Between 2014 and 2016 he was director of One Architecture Week, an international festival for contemporary architecture and the built environment. From the beginning of 2017 until the end of 2019 he led the team, which created the long term development plan for Sofia, Vision Sofia 2050. Parallel to this, between 2017 and the end of 2021 he was the director of Sofiaplan - Sofia's municipal strategic and spatial planning body. Since the beginning of 2022 he leads the Team Sofia initiative. Since the beginning of 2026 he has been serving as deputy mayor on Urban Planning and Development at Sofia Municipality.



- ▶ **Ms. Evis Gjebrea** is the Deputy General Director at the Tirana (Albania) Water and Sewerage Utility. In this role, she addresses aspects related to commercial and financial policy and represents the Utility to third parties and international institutions. Before joining the Water Utility in March 2016, Evis worked at the Municipality of Tirana, the Albanian Ministry of Finance, the European University of Tirana, the University of New York Tirana, and the World Bank in Washington D.C. and Tirana. Evis has a PhD in Economic Sciences from the European University of Tirana, a master's in banking and finance for development from Bocconi University in Milan-Italy, and both a bachelor's and a master's in Economy from the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest-Romania. In 2007, she was a Visiting Scholar at George Washington University in Washington D.C., where she studied Public Administration and Policy. She is a certified trainer in public administration, pedagogical methods, and Regional Capacity Development Network for Water and Sanitation Services.



- ▶ **Mr. Ognjen Govedarica** is a PhD student and Teaching Assistant at the Department of Hydraulics and Environmental Engineering, Faculty of Civil Engineering, University of Belgrade. His research, professional, and teaching work is focused on water supply, urban drainage and sewerage, stormwater management, drinking water treatment, wastewater treatment and environmental engineering. His particular area of interest is urban drainage, with an emphasis on SUDS and NBS systems. He has participated in numerous research and professional projects supported by national, EU and UNDP funding, several which are currently active. Within these projects, he collaborates with interdisciplinary teams. He is a member of IWA and IAHR, and plays an active role in the IWA YWP Serbia chapter as a Committee Member for Cooperation with Industry.



- ▶ **Ms. Armela Grëmshi** completed her higher education at the Polytechnic University of Tirana, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Hydrotechnical Department. She has six years of experience in project management, maintenance, and coordination in the water sector at the Regional Water Utility of Berat. Her main role has been overseeing both domestically and internationally funded projects during the feasibility and implementation phases. Currently, she serves as an Engineer in the Sector of Planning and Standards at the Regional Water Utility of Berat. Her work has significantly contributed to the company's progress. She is part of the YWP Albania.
- ▶ **Ms. Elisabeth Gruber** is Director of the Department of International Financial Institutions at the Austrian Ministry of Finance in Vienna since 2017. Previously, she was Senior Advisor at the same department responsible for the World Bank Group portfolio and working on issues related to multilateral development finance. From 2008 to 2010 she served as Alternate Executive Director at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, DC. Prior to this, she was dealing with policy issues of the Asian and the Inter-American Development Bank and was responsible for multilateral debt relief at the Ministry of Finance in Vienna. Before joining the Ministry of Finance, she worked for nine years as University Assistant at the Department of Economic Development at the University of Economics in Vienna. She graduated in Business Administration and holds a Doctoral Degree in Development Economics from the University of Economics in Vienna. She also earned a Diploma of International Relations from the Johns Hopkins University in Bologna, Italy.
- ▶ **Mr. Arthur Guichet** is the Secretary General of the European Water Association (EWA), having officially taken up the role on 1 June 2024. He joined EWA in May 2022 as Water Policy Officer, representing the association in European events and working groups while strengthening the EWA member network and coordinating key activities. Arthur brings an interdisciplinary background with Master's degrees in Peacebuilding (Marseille-Aix-en-Provence University) and European Law (University of Bordeaux). His international experience includes work in South Africa as an EU Project Officer for the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development, followed by research roles at the University of Bonn (ZEF) focused on climate policy and science diplomacy. Fluent in French, German and English, he leads EWA's strategic implementation, financial stability, communications, events, projects and standing committees.
- ▶ **Ms. Dora Hecimovic** graduated from the University of Zagreb Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology with a Bachelor's and Master's degree in environmental engineering. She started working at Strabag Water Technologies as soon as she graduated, initially as a student trainee in March 2025 followed by being offered a permanent position since October 2025. As a result, she promotes the idea that academia and business should and need to work together. Dora is highly motivated young professional, who aspires to learn and is always looking for new chances, challenges, and answers to the ever-changing problems in the water area. She is particularly interested in the use of new and creative technologies and solutions, as well as environmental protection



and sustainability, because she believes that these areas are crucial to the success of a process engineer.

- ▶ **Mr. Ivan Ivanov** is Chairman of the Bulgarian Water Association (BWA) and an experienced leader in the water sector with over 25 years of professional experience. He is actively involved in international projects related to environmental and water protection, including BOOST-IN, Danube Water Balance, UDIH4EU, InnoWATCCH and WATERWILL. He has held senior expert and management positions in key institutions, including procurator of Sofiyska Voda AD (part of Veolia), Chairman of the Board of the Bulgarian VK Holding, Manager of the Dams and Cascades enterprise at NEK, and Executive Director of the Industrial Cluster Underground Infrastructure. Ivanov holds a master's degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy in Sofia, as well as an MBA from IFAG and the American University in Bulgaria. He also specialized at ENSIGC in Toulouse. He also is editor-in-chief of BULAQUA Magazine and Director of a Professional Training Center.



- ▶ **Ms. Evelin Izso** is a Water Production Engineer at Budapest Waterworks. She has been working as a Water Production Engineer at Budapest Waterworks since 2021, having joined the organization earlier as an intern during her studies at the University of Miskolc. She obtained her Master's degree as a Hydrogeologist Engineer in 2025. Budapest Waterworks is responsible for providing water supply and wastewater treatment services to the capital of Hungary. Over the past years, Evelin has gained extensive experience in riverbank filtration drinking water production. Her professional responsibilities include water quality analysis, data management and provision, technical assessment, and hydrodynamic modelling.



- ▶ **Ms. Jelena Janevska** is a development worker with over 24 years of professional experience in international development, regional cooperation, programme and project development and management. She currently works as a Knowledge Manager of the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS). In the past she has worked for various international organizations, in the areas of decentralization, good governance, local development, civil society development and rule of law. Ms. Janevska is also a university lecturer, teaching Project Management, Crisis Communication, Public Relations and Business Communication. She has extensive consultant and training providing experience, with hundreds of missions across Europe. She holds a MSc in Local Development from the University of Trento, Italy and a BA in Journalism and Communications from Skopje University.

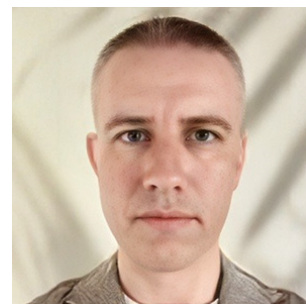


- ▶ **Mr. Walter Kling** worked for the City of Vienna, Vienna Waterworks until his retirement in early 2023. In 2011 he was appointed as Deputy Managing Director of Vienna Waterworks. He serves as IAWD Secretary General since 1993 and currently also as IAWD president since 2017. Walter Kling joined the work of the Austrian Water Association and in 1993, when he was delegated to represent Vienna within IWSA. Since the launch of IWA in 2000, Walter Kling supported the development of the new association in the region of Eastern Europe by organizing a number of events. Maintaining an excellent network of contacts, he applied to



organize the IWA – World Water Congress 2008 in Vienna. Starting from 2003, the Congress President Walter Kling served with great commitment to secure best circumstances for IWA, IAWD and the City of Vienna to run a successful conference. In September 2010 he was elected IWA – Vice-President, re-elected in Busan 2012 and served in this position until 2014. In 2010 he initiated the development of the Danube Water Program, which was launched jointly by the World Bank and IAWD in 2012.

- ▶ **Mr. Sava Koev** is an experienced business planning and investment professional with a strong track record in the water and utilities sector. He currently serves as Head of Business Planning and Investment Development, as well as Head of the Project Proposal Preparation Unit at Water Supply and Sewerage in Varna, Bulgaria, where he drives long-term strategy, evaluates investments, and manages financial and operational risk. In parallel, he is Chairman of the primary trade union organization at CITUB, contributing to policy development and industry-focused initiatives. Koev also holds leadership roles in the private sector as a member of the Board of Directors and Audit Committee at Regala Invest AD. With earlier experience in real estate management and financial analysis, he brings a well-rounded perspective to infrastructure and investment projects. He holds degrees from Regent's Business School in London and the University of Economics in Varna, and is fluent in several languages, with a keen interest in water infrastructure and public speaking.



- ▶ **Mr. Adam Kovacs** is a civil engineer with specialization in water quality management. He graduated from the Budapest University of Technology and Economics and received a PhD in water resources management from the Vienna University of Technology, where he worked in the academic sector as professor and research assistant for 12 years focusing on water quality modelling and management. Since 2013, he has been working as the Technical Expert on Pollution Control at the Permanent Secretariat of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River. He coordinates the technical work of various expert groups dealing with pollution management, accident prevention and river basin management.



- ▶ **Mr. Karoly Kovacs** past president and honorary member of the European Water Association (EWA), chairman of the working group on economics of EWA, member of the Strategic Council of the African Water and Sanitation Association (AfWASA), member of several EU level water-related organisations (Joint Programming Initiatives, European Innovation Partnership on Water, Strategic Coordination Group (SCG), etc.) and member of the European Commission's Platform on Sustainable Finance, and vice president of ASEM WATER Academic and Development Committee, he has been working for decades in the field of sustainable and affordable water infrastructure development, having the value of water and the water smart society in the focus. His strengths, qualifications and expertise and his holistic, coherent knowledge of the European Commission's sustainability mission and values will help to understand the importance of the need for an EU Blue Deal and water smart strategies at national and international levels. With his knowledge, skills, experience in the field of drinking water and wastewater treatment solutions he contributes to addressing the challenges and issues the water and sanitation sector is facing



today with.

- ▶ **Ms. Miglena Kuzmanova** is a distinguished expert with more than 15 years of experience applying Geographic Information Systems (GIS) across critical sectors, including environment, transport, security, land administration and cadastre, energy, and education. At Esri Bulgaria, she leads nationally significant projects that drive digital transformation across both the public and private sectors. She holds a bachelor's degree in Computer Science, a master's degree in Economics, and an MBA -combining deep technical expertise with strong business acumen. A frequent speaker at conferences on information technology, space research, and cartography, she has been a driving force behind Bulgaria's national "GIS in School" program since 2021, which now reaches 400 schools, 1,400 teachers, and 16,000 students. Miglena believes geospatial technologies are essential to sustainable development and effective resource management. Her mission is to make GIS accessible and impactful for society, education, business, and public institutions in Bulgaria.



- ▶ **Mr. Jan Kwiatkowski** has many years of experience in a broad array of water-related domains. He has worked in major water-oriented organizations: the World Bank (Water Practice), DHI, Nalco, Kemira, currently the Swiss-based 'SKAT Consulting', in which he has performed various roles covering program management, environmental consulting, business development, consultative sales and administration. His key areas of expertise include river basin management, flood management, environmental impact assessment, water chemistry & pollution, wastewater treatment and industrial process optimization. He has advised key national water institutions in several European countries, worked with large industrial clients, and served water operators in major cities. Over the last 10 years he was deeply involved in the development of Flood Risk Management Plans and River Basin Management plans in Poland Bulgaria and North Macedonia coordinating and leading multidisciplinary teams of experts. In recent years he has contributed to the Polish Supreme Audit Office's report on the Oder river ecological catastrophe which occurred in 2022, and has been the Project Coordinator of the EU HORIZON scientific project titled: "Physically-Based Integrated Soil Health Simulation Platform". Currently he is permanently based in Skopje and fully engaged in the process of driving the progress of the Swiss funded Groundwater Management, Use and Protection Programme.



- ▶ **Mr. Pietro Antonio La Vena** joined IAWD in 2024 as a project manager. There, he handled the Regional Capacity Development Network project in partnership with GIZ, the Danube Learning Partnership and six Associations of Public Utility Companies from the Western Balkans. In this role, he supported organizational development for regional Young Water Professionals groups, and worked with them on a position paper. The piece (available on IAWD's online library) tracks the state of the local water sectors from the perspective of young professionals. Over the summer of 2025, he coordinated Just Add Water, a sensibilization campaign in three different languages, which served as a platform for utility professionals to communicate sector perspectives. In 2026, he developed IAWD's advocacy strategy and supported the rollout of IAWD's flagship Utility Management Training. Prior to working for



IAWD, he worked as a research assistant at IHE Delft, where he also obtained an MSc in Water Governance.

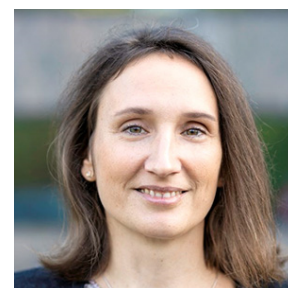
- ▶ **Mr. Daniel Lamprecht** received his technical education at the Higher Technical Federal Education and Research Institute Villach, specializing in civil engineering. He subsequently studied Land & Water Management and Engineering at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) in Vienna. From 2006 onward, he worked at an engineering consultancy for Land & Water Management and Engineering, where he was involved in the design and execution of a wide range of municipal water management projects. These included flood protection, stormwater management, drinking water treatment and supply, wastewater treatment, and sewer systems. Since 2012, he has been working for STRABAG in the business field WATER. His responsibilities span the entire project lifecycle, from planning and process engineering design to execution, commissioning, trial operation, and performance and guarantee testing. Through this role, he has gained experience contributing to a variety of national and international projects.



- ▶ **Mr. Guenter Langergraber** is Head of the Institute of Sanitary Engineering and Water Pollution Control at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna (BOKU University) in Austria with more than 25 years' experience in wastewater and sanitation related research. His main research topics focus on small and decentralized systems in particular on treatment wetlands, nature-based solutions, and resources-oriented sanitation systems with. Günter Langergraber holds a PhD in Civil Engineering and Water Management and as habilitation (professional dissertation) in the field of Sanitary Engineering, both from BOKU University. He is an International Water Association (IWA) Fellow and is and was active in various positions in the IWA. Since 2025 he is Co-Chair of the newly started IWA Nature-based Solutions Cluster.



- ▶ **Ms. Bernadett Lemaire** is an Operations Engineer with a PhD in bio-environmental and chemical engineering, and has eighteen years of experience in wastewater treatment process control, working alongside the engineering team at Budapest Waterworks Ltd. She is responsible for operating the side-stream nitrogen removal facility at the Budapest Central Wastewater Treatment Plant. In addition, she plays a key role in the Plant's energy management, focusing on improving energy efficiency, reducing operational costs. She is actively involved in monitoring energy consumption, identifying optimization opportunities, and contributing to sustainable and resource-efficient plant operation. She also has experience utilizing wastewater modelling software, as well as laboratory work including microscopic analysis.

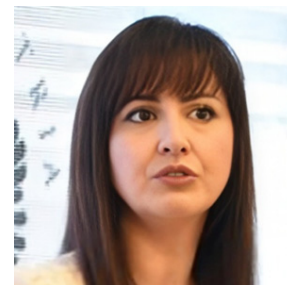


- ▶ **Ms. Patricia Lopez** is a Sr. Water Specialist in the *World Bank Group Knowledge Bank* with more than 20 years' experience in water financing operations. Within the World Bank, she has worked from Washington DC and different country offices, leading Bank lending operations, analytical work, and policy dialogue from various field offices in the Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe region, and currently at global level. Patricia also served as Program Manager for the Danube Water Program in Vienna from 2016-2019. For the last few years, she has been part of the core leadership of the Water Finance and Mobilization team where she



works advising clients and World Bank teams on the use of private sector solutions and private capital mobilization working closely with the IFC, MIGA and other development partners. Her experience includes preparing and managing the implementation of a varied range of sector reform and infrastructure development projects with World Bank client countries, with a focus on water sector financing and institutional areas. Patricia holds a M.Sc. in Business and Economics with a two-year specialization in Financing from *Colegio Universitario de Estudios Financieros (C.U.N.E.F)*, Madrid, Spain. Before joining the World Bank, Patricia worked with various consulting firms and investment banks on project and corporate finance operations in different sectors, with a focus on private sector participation in public services and infrastructure.

- ▶ **Ms. Gerta Lubonja** currently serves as Chair of the National Regulatory Commission of the Water Regulatory Authority in Albania and brings over 20 years of professional experience in engineering, water management, and public policy. She holds a degree in Hydraulic Engineering from the Polytechnic University of Tirana and has completed advanced training in Japan, Austria, and Turkey. She has worked across both the private and public sectors, contributing to major infrastructure projects and holding senior leadership roles, including Director General of the Water Resources Management Agency (2017–2024) and National Water Secretary. She has played a key role in developing national water legislation, aligning it with the EU acquis, and implementing international agreements. Ms. Lubonja has represented Albania internationally, including as Focal Point to the UNECE Water Convention, and has been actively involved in cross-border cooperation initiatives. She is also the author of several scientific publications in the field.



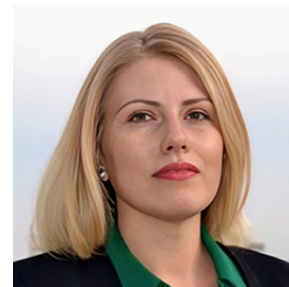
- ▶ **Ms. Berta Macheve** joined the World Bank Group in 2012 and supported the IBNET initiative at a Global Level from 2012 to 2015 before moving to support implementation of project implementation in East Asia and Pacific Region (EAP). Currently serving as Senior Water Supply and Sanitation Specialist, Berta is a task team leader for water projects in Angola and continues to support the NewIBNET since its redesign in 2020. She holds a degree in Civil Engineering and Masters Degree in Water Supply.



- ▶ **Mr. Raimund Mair** joined the World Bank Group Water Global Practice in January 2019. In his position as Senior Water Resource Management Specialist he is involved in addressing aspects related to Water Security in the Europe and Central Asia region, as well as leading the 3rd Phase of the Danube Water Program. In his previous occupations at the European Commission and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, he was working on the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive and transboundary cooperation. Mr. Mair holds diplomas in Engineering from the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna and Water Policy from Cranfield University, United Kingdom.



- ▶ **Ms. Ana Manyarova** is a senior manager at Sofiyska Voda and leads Regulation and Concession Compliance department. With over 15 years of experience in the water sector, Ana has held a range of leadership roles spanning regulation, sustainability, innovation, and project management. She specializes in the strategic alignment of regulatory frameworks with infrastructure resilience. As a guardian of the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) for Sofia's water cycle, Ana oversees the asset management lifecycle—from strategic business planning and performance monitoring to complex reporting and auditing. Her diverse background includes roles as Sustainability Manager, where she spearheaded circular economy and water loss reduction initiatives. Ana also coordinates EU-funded projects and fosters innovation. She holds an MSc in Water and Environmental Management (University of Brighton, UK) and a Bachelor's in Economics (Eckerd College, USA). Ana is a committed mentor for Junior Achievement and WWF Panda Labs, championing the next generation of smart environmental leaders.
- ▶ **Mr. Ilian Milev** is Manager of "Vodosnabdyavane i kanalizatsiya" OOD – Ruse, Bulgaria since 2022 and is an established professional with many years of experience in the water sector. He has a Master's degree in Water Supply and Sewerage from the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, Sofia. With more than 20 years of expertise, he has a key role in the design, preparation, implementation, supervision and monitoring of significant infrastructure projects in the field of water supply and sewerage, funded under European programs such as ISPA, PHARE, SAPARD and Program "Environment". Mr. Milev actively participates in the development of the sector as a member of the Management Board of the Bulgarian Water Association and a member of the Management Board of the Union of Water and Sewerage Operators. His professional focus is on the modernization of water and sewerage services through the implementation of smart technologies, sustainable management practices and innovative solutions for more efficient management of water and sewerage networks.
- ▶ **Mr. Anton Mintov** has more than 20 years of experience in the water and infrastructure sector. From 2007 to 2012, he served as General Manager of Wavin Bulgaria, where he was responsible for the company's operations and market development in Bulgaria. Since 2012, he has been part of Molecor, contributing to the advancement of innovative and sustainable piping solutions for water infrastructure projects. Throughout his career, Mintov has been actively engaged in supporting the modernization and development of the water sector in the region.
- ▶ **Ms. Sara Molnar** is a PhD student and research assistant at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering and a joint Erasmus Mundus Master's degree in Ecohydrology, adding a holistic, nature-based perspective to her engineering background. Her research focuses on hydromorphological processes, sediment dynamics, and connectivity to support sustainable river restoration. She is involved in several international projects in the Danube River Basin, including Danube4all, iNNO SED, SUST DARA, and DanubeSediment_Q2, contributing to modelling, monitoring, status assessment, citizen science, and stakeholder engagement. She is also a member of the



Danube Youth Council, contributing to Priority Areas 4 and 5 and supporting youth engagement and environmental awareness. Her work bridges scientific research and practical implementation, with a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration and stakeholder involvement.

- ▶ **Ms. Salma Mouaid** is a Brussels-based professional with a track record in EU policy, environmental and youth advocacy, and project management. She currently volunteers as Policy Officer in the ENVI Working Group of the International Community NGO, where she represents youth perspectives in EU-level water resilience discussions. In this role, she has engaged with MEPs and EU officials, co-authored policy papers, developed a water resilience board game, and presented policy recommendations to DG ENV and DG MARE. She was further selected, along with her colleagues, to showcase a youth-led water resilience project at the Water Resilience Forum Pavilion 2025. Alongside her advocacy work, Salma works as a Project Manager (consultant) in EU Medical Affairs at “GlaxoSmithKline (GSK)”. She previously gained experience in EU policy evaluation at “ADE – Aide à la Décision Économique”, and in EU-funded environmental and climate projects at SINLOC SpA (Italy). Salma holds a Master's degree in ‘International Relations’ from the University of Groningen, and a Bachelor's degree with honours in ‘Philosophy, International and Economic Studies’ from Ca' Foscari University of Venice.



- ▶ **Mr. Marko Mutavdjikj** is from North Macedonia. He finished his pre-graduate studies at the university of Civil Engineering in Skopje, in the field of construction. Currently, he is finishing his master's studies (hydrotechnics) at the same university, and his thesis involves a simulation model for improving water supply in the city of Skopje by redistributing and repositioning reservoirs and pump stations and adding new alternative water supply sources. He works as an independent engineer in the technical sector in the design, development and ecology department at the Public Enterprise for Water and Sewerage Skopje. Through ADKOM, he is a member of the North Macedonia chapter of young professionals. As its chair he strives and advocates for the chapter to become an official International Water Association Young Water Professional country chapter. He is also a member of the Strategic asset management specialist group of the International Water Association.

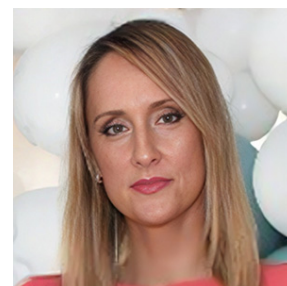


- ▶ **Mr. Ciprian Nanu** is an experienced expert and senior consultant at Business Development Group Romania, specializing in strategic growth, organizational development, and market expansion for organizations on the Danube River basin. With a strong background in business advisory in energy and water, he has supported companies across various industries in improving performance, optimizing operations, and identifying new business opportunities participating in international programs. Ciprian is known for his practical approach, combining data-driven insights with hands-on guidance to deliver measurable results. Over the years, he has collaborated with both local, regional and international clients, helping them navigate complex business environments in various countries in Eastern Europe. His work reflects a commitment to sustainable development and long-term value creation, making him a trusted partner for organizations seeking to strengthen their



competitive position.

- ▶ **Ms. Marina Nikolic** has 17 years of experience at JKP BWS within the Asset Management Center, specializing in hydraulic modeling of water systems. Her core mission is driving system optimization and providing technical support for maintenance, with a strong focus on Non-Revenue Water (NRW) reduction. Beyond her roles at BWS, she serves as a regional consultant for IAWD and GIZ projects, implementing Asset Management methodologies and enhancing system operations. Additionally, she is a certified trainer in the Utility Management Training (UMT) program.



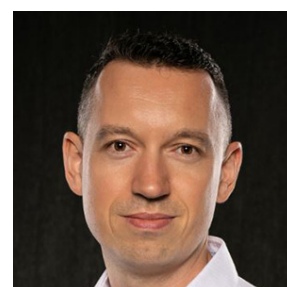
- ▶ **Mr. Mladen Nikolic** is one of the founding members of the Wastewater Community of Practice (CoP), established within the UTVSI association, and an active contributor to its development. As a trainer within the UTVSI Wastewater CoP, he supports knowledge exchange, peer-to-peer learning, and the strengthening of professional capacities among wastewater sector professionals. He serves as Director of the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) at PUC Vodovod Krusevac. Mr. Nikolic holds a degree in Environmental Engineering and has more than seven years of professional experience in wastewater and drinking water treatment. Through his work within UTVSI and the CoP, he is engaged in delivering capacity-building programs focused on wastewater treatment and operational efficiency.



- ▶ **Ms. Mojca Ogris** is a Senior International Sales Manager and Project Manager at Tiroler Rohre GmbH (TRM). She joined the company in 2021 and has since been responsible for clients in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, while also specializing in soft loan projects worldwide. Tiroler Rohre GmbH (TRM) is a leading manufacturer and foundry company based in Hall in Tyrol, specializing in high-quality pipe and pile systems made of ductile iron. With over 75 years of experience, the company serves projects worldwide in the fields of water transport (water supply and wastewater) and special civil engineering (pile foundations). Mojca's core responsibilities include sales activities, managing customer relationships, driving strategic development in collaboration with partners, representing TRM at international trade fairs, and fostering synergies across markets. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics from the University of Ljubljana. Prior to joining TRM, she worked on various international projects, gaining valuable experience that supports her current role in managing global soft loan projects.



- ▶ **Mr. Vladimir Pavlita** is Regional Sales Manager at Badger Meter for Baltics, Central and Eastern Europe. His role is managing and supporting the sales channels and enabling the sales partners to solve the customers problems in the municipal and industrial water market with online monitoring solutions. His working experience included almost 20 years in analytical chemistry and water quality monitoring instrumentation. He holds a master in chemistry and environmental engineering in 2005 from the Technical College (BUT) in Brno (Czech Republic).



- ▶ **Mr. Luca Perez** is currently Deputy Head of Unit for Sustainable Freshwater Management at the European Commission's DG Environment, where he is responsible for the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and the Floods Directive. Previously, he served as Deputy Head of the unit responsible for bilateral and regional environmental cooperation, where he also acted as the EU's focal point for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the UNECE Water Convention. Mr. Perez has worked for various United Nations agencies (UNEP-WCMC, UNDP), non-governmental organizations, and the private sector in Europe, Africa, and Latin America. He holds a master's degree in Tourism Economics and Sustainable Development and a bachelor's degree in International Relations and Development Studies.



- ▶ **Mr. Marton Pesel** has an academic background of civil engineering and economics and is the Head of the International Department of the General Directorate of Water Management of Hungary. As such, he is involved with the transboundary water management issues, bilateral relations and water diplomacy issues. He is active in EU funded projects not only as project manager but as project consortium leader in Horizon Europe and Interreg projects. He plays a significant role in shaping the Danube river basin management as coordinator of Priority Area 4 (water quality) of the EU's Strategy for the Danube Region and as member of several Expert Groups of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River.



- ▶ **Ms. Elisabeta Poci** has joined IAWD in the role of an Association Development Manager on a part-time basis at the end of 2022. In addition, she is the Executive Director of the Water Supply and Sewerage Association of Albania (SHUKALB) since 2013. She has been working with SHUKALB for over fifteen years, playing a significant role in building up the professional image of SHUKALB among the stakeholders in the water sector in Albania and the region, as well as in the growth of SHUKALB as a sustainable organization. She is a Member of the Board of Directors of IWA and a member of the Management Committee of EWA. Ms. Poci holds a bachelor's degree in environmental engineering from the Polytechnic University of Tirana and a Master of Science Degree in Environmental and Water Resources Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin, USA, under a Fulbright Scholarship.



- ▶ **Mr. Teodor Popa** with more than 30 years of experience in the water sector and 24 years as finance manager of Compania Apa Brasov, one of the Romania's leading water utilities, prominent Romanian Water Association (ARA) member, he played an important role in Romania's water sector reform and modernization consisting in regionalization, institutional restructuring, and strategic sector development. Promoting the regional and international co-operation, Mr. Teodor Popa is a long-standing IAWD active member, currently serving as its Vice President. At the same time, he is Treasurer of the International Water Association (IWA). Mr. Popa has contributed to the Danube Water Forum held in his hometown, Brasov in 2024 and IAWD learning program promoting. Expert for World Bank and EBRD projects focused on water sector strategy, institutional transformation, and EU Water Directive compliance. He currently leads the World Bank's local team for the EU project on Water Loss Reduction for Sustainable Water Management in Romania. He is a frequent speaker,



moderator, and panellist at conferences worldwide, known for his expertise in tariffs and finance, non-revenue water management, institutional arrangements and regulation.

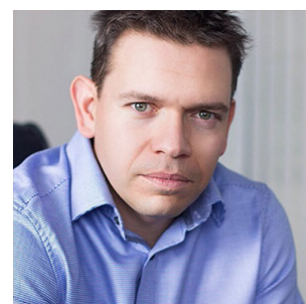
- ▶ **Mr. Jindrich Prochazka** is a water technology consultant and founder of AqulQ, specializing in the digital transformation and optimization of water and wastewater treatment systems. His work focuses on combining process engineering, data analytics, advanced process control, digital twins, and operational intelligence to improve treatment performance, energy efficiency, and decision-making in utility operations. Before founding AqulQ, he gained practical experience as a process engineer in a water utility and later worked at Xylem Vue, focusing on the optimization and digitalization of wastewater treatment plants. He is also affiliated with the University of Chemistry and Technology in Prague, where he contributes to teaching and applied research, focused on digital optimization of water treatment plant operation.



- ▶ **Mr. Amir Rexha** is a GIS expert with over 10 years of experience in geographic information systems, urban planning, and water infrastructure management. He holds a master's degree in Geography from the University of Prishtina and has strong expertise in spatial analysis, geospatial data management, and GIS technologies. Currently working as Development Planning and Project Management Manager at Hidromorava, Amir focuses on integrating GIS into infrastructure planning and decision-making processes. He has contributed to various municipal and regional projects, particularly in the water sector, improving efficiency through data-driven solutions. He is also actively engaged in professional development and scientific research, with participation in international conferences and publications in the field of geoinformatics.



- ▶ **Mr. Radoslav Russev** is a water-utility person with experience in operators' management, policy making, consulting, training, and entrepreneurship. For more than 10 years, Rado has been engaged in expert and management roles in Sofia Water and Dobrich Water (general manager's role). In the period 2014-2015 but also currently in 2026 he has been part of the political cabinet of the Ministry or Regional Development and Public Works in Bulgaria in the roles of a deputy minister or advisor to the minister. As a consultant to the World Bank and other institutional stakeholders, Radoslav participates in various projects globally, typically ones focused on institutional development, water utility support and investment planning. Within IAWD, Rado is deeply involved in the design and delivery of capacity-building programs with specific focus on the Utility Management Training (UMT) program.



- ▶ **Mr. Albert Salitakaj** is Head of the Projects Section at RWC Hidroregjioni Jugor JSC, where he leads infrastructure and development projects while contributing to asset management and benchmarking processes. Since joining the company in 2017, he has played a key role in the digitalization of water and wastewater systems, including the development of network databases and maintenance management systems. He is actively engaged in the water sector as Chairperson of Young Water Professionals Kosovo and Chair of the IAWD Regional YWP Committee and in this role representing YWP at the IAWD Board. His work focuses on capacity building, innovation, and strengthening the next generation of water



professionals. Mr. Salitakaj holds a degree in Water Engineering from the University of Prishtina and has completed the Utility Management Program supported by the World Bank.

- ▶ **Mr. Zael Sanz Uriarte** is a Senior Water Specialist with the World Bank. He has a background in the management of development lending operations, economic sector work, technical assistance, capacity building and institutional strengthening of utilities and water sector authorities across multiple countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and Central Asia and North Africa and the Middle East. Before joining the Bank, he worked extensively in the desalination and wastewater treatment industry across geographies, managing different aspects of infrastructure development, finance and operation. Zael Sanz is currently coordinating the World Bank New Water Community of Practice, and he is leading the Utilities of the Future Balkans Center of Excellence. Zael is a civil engineer by the Polytechnical University of Madrid and holds a Master in Global Finance from the City University of London.



- ▶ **Ms. Katerina Schilling** joined IAWD in 2016 in the role of the Knowledge Management and Capacity Building Coordinator. Since then, she has worked in several positions in the association and was strongly involved in the implementation of D-LeaP as well as the Knowledge Sharing and Outreach activities. Since September 2025, Katerina has been the Secretary General of IAWD. She has earned a Master's degree in Biology with a specialization in freshwater ecology from the University of Vienna and obtained her PhD within the framework of "The Vienna Doctoral Program on Water Resource Systems" awarded by the Vienna University of Technology, where she was employed more than ten years at the Institute for Water Quality, Resources and Waste Management as a Research Assistant. Since 2006 she has also been actively involved in the national and international activities of the International Water Association (IWA) and was appointed an IWA Fellow in 2016. She is co-founder of the Austrian Young Water Professionals Chapter and Member of the IWA Strategic Council.



- ▶ **Ms. Vesna Grizelj Simic** is Deputy Director at Hidroprojekt-Ing Ltd, Croatia, a company providing engineering and consulting services in water management, construction, and environmental protection. With over 20 years of experience across the public and private sectors, her expertise covers the implementation of EU water acquis, the preparation of national water management programs, and the mobilization of EU funds for infrastructure projects. She has extensive experience in infrastructure projects financed by international financial institutions, as well as in affordability assessments at both national and project levels. Her work is further characterized by a strong understanding of national policy and bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region, including key stakeholders and the legal and institutional frameworks shaping the water and water services sector.

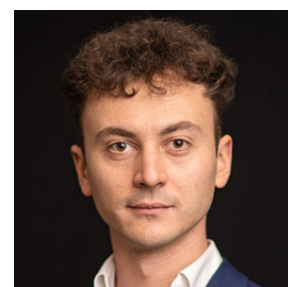
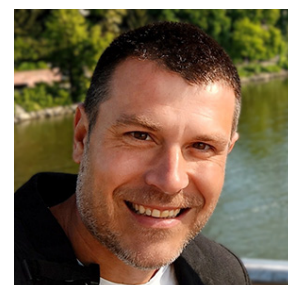


- ▶ **Mr. Dobromir Simidchiev** is an internationally recognized expert and manager with rich experience in the areas of policy making, strategic and investment planning as well as change management. He is a proven expert in the effective long-term management of assets and engineering services in the water sector. He also served as a deputy minister of regional development and public works in the period 2011-2014 during three different governments. Dobromir graduated with honors and academic awards from the University of Architecture, Construction and Geodesy – Water Supply and Sanitation being his major with specialization in Water Treatment. He has a Master in Business Administration, Financial Management from the University of Seattle, USA. In the early years of his professional career he started as a designer of treatment plants on a number of key projects under ISPA pre-accession programme.

- ▶ **Mr. Primož Skrt** is a geographer and project manager at Global Water Partnership Central and Eastern Europe, with over 15 years of experience working across Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, and Germany. His professional journey has been shaped by diverse cultural and environmental contexts, all connected by one common thread—water. From local initiatives to transnational projects in the Danube Region, he has focused on bringing people together to better understand and respond to shared water challenges. He specialises in stakeholder engagement, working closely with communities, institutions, and young professionals. Primož strongly believes in the power of sharing knowledge and learning from each other and sees education as a powerful tool for driving meaningful change. He actively promotes green skills, citizen engagement, and youth participation as essential elements for a more sustainable future. He is currently involved in projects such as DANUBE4all, D-CLEAN, and DANUrely, contributing to collaborative approaches that connect people, ideas, and action across the region.

- ▶ **Ms. Rita Studniczki** has gained more than 15 years' experience in the water utility sector in Hungary. Having started to work for Budapest Waterworks in 2009, she joined the international business development section of the company at its set-up, in 2012. In her present position as Foreign Relations and Proposals Group Leader, as well as in her previous assignments, she has become familiar with water utilities, the water utility sectors, difficulties, similarities, ways of cooperation in several countries from the Western Balkans region to Pakistan. Ms. Studniczki uses her skills establishing strong relations with institutions, organisations and private companies to contribute to the cause of bringing efficient services of healthy drinking water and sanitation to increasing numbers of population.

- ▶ **Mr. Mitar Tepic** is a PhD candidate in Computer Science and a high school teacher of IT-related subjects in Bosnia and Herzegovina. His work focuses on the application of artificial intelligence in water resource management, with a particular emphasis on water quality prediction, system optimization, and the development of smart solutions for water utilities. As part of his research, he develops machine learning models and IoT-based systems for real-time data collection and analysis. He actively participates in international initiatives and projects aimed at improving the resilience and efficiency of water utilities in the region. In addition to his research, he is dedicated to educating young people in the field of



information technology and promoting the practical application of digital solutions in everyday and industrial systems.

- ▶ **Ms. Alexandrina Tsvetkova** is a Water Supply and Sewerage (WSS) Engineer and serves as Chair of the Young Water Professionals Section in Bulgaria at the Bulgarian Water Association. A member of the section since 2019 and part of the Association's team since 2025, she plays an active role in strengthening collaboration and supporting the development of the next generation of water professionals. Her work focuses on engaging young experts through targeted initiatives, capacity-building activities, and knowledge-sharing platforms. Ms. Tsvetkova coordinates the national utility benchmarking project for water utilities in Bulgaria, contributing to improved operational performance, accountability, and transparency across the sector. She is also involved in a range of projects in the field of water supply and sanitation, with a focus on sustainable solutions and enhancing the quality of the living environment. Her professional interests include sector development, innovation, and the application of best practices in water services management.



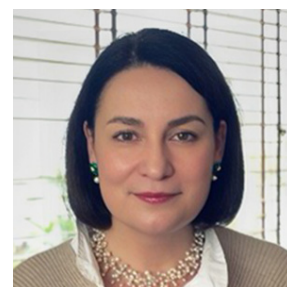
- ▶ **Ms. Sanja Ursanic** is an experienced professional in environmental engineering and joined STRABAG Water technologies in 2020 as a process engineer. She holds a Master's degree in Biology (Faculty of Natural Sciences) and is a Postgraduate specialist in Environmental engineering (Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology) from the Zagreb University. Her 17 years of professional background and experience working within civil, public, international and private sectors enabled her to gain a specific set of know-how, experiences and skills. Hence Sanja is involved in the whole project lifecycle of the waste water treatment plant including procurement, design, implementation, commissioning and trial phase.



- ▶ **Mr. Yang Villa** is currently a consultant to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) where he is the Water Organizations Partnerships for Resilience (WOP4R) Program Manager. WOP4R is ADB's flagship twinning partnership program that builds the capacity of water organizations and agencies across Asia and the Pacific through peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing. Over the last 17 years, Yang has worked with the World Bank, Isle Utilities Asia-Pacific, Metro Pacific Water, and Maynilad Water Services on utility transformation, strategic innovation, and public-private partnership (PPP) investments. Yang serves various roles within the International Water Association and is the co-founder of the Philippine Young Water Professionals.



- ▶ **Ms. Birigt Vogel** is the ICPDR Executive Secretary since August 2022, the first woman to take on the role, and the 4th Executive Secretary since the ICPDR's establishment. An Austrian native and water resources manager, she has a very elaborated multicultural and international expertise and work experience in river basin management and transboundary cooperation. Over more than 20 years, she has worked on these topics across Europe, India, South-East Asia, China, Africa, and the South Caucasus, covering many transboundary river basins like the Danube, Mekong, the Ganga, the Okavango. Ms. Vogel previously worked as Chief Technical Advisor for IWRM for the Secretariat of the Mekong River Commission, as well as she was posted in India with GIZ to support the European



Union to successfully manage the India-EU Water Partnership.

- ▶ **Mr. Winston Yu** is the Water Practice Manager for the Europe and Central Asia Region at the World Bank. He has extensive experience working on technical and institutional challenges in the water sector and has carried out several investment projects in a variety of developing countries (e.g. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Ethiopia, Ukraine, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Poland). Prior to joining the World Bank, he was a Senior Researcher at the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) working on water and climate change modeling studies for river basins in China and California. He also served as a Science Officer at the US Department of State where he worked on water issues in the Middle East. He is currently serving as a technical member of the Water and Society Committee of the American Geophysical Union and serving on the Technical Committee of the Global Water Partnership. He is currently also an Adjunct Professor at the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University where he teaches a course on international water issues in development and on the water-energy-food nexus. He holds a PhD and MS in environmental science and engineering from Harvard University.



VIII. BUSINESS MEETINGS (TUESDAY 19TH MAY AND WEDNESDAY, MAY 20TH)

Joint ICPDR PM EG and Tethys Workshop

Note: This meeting is by invitation only.

Date: Tuesday, 19 May, Wednesday, 20 May, Thursday, 21 May

Time: see separate Agenda

Location: Hotel Rosslyn, Room Dymiat and Toplocentrala

Chair: Mr. Adam Kovacs

YWP Danube Regional Workshop

Note: This meeting is open for Young Water Professionals.

Date: Tuesday, 19 May

Time: 12:30 – 17:30

Location: Hotel Rosslyn, Room Thracia 1

Chair: Ms. Albert Salltakaj, YWP Kosovo

UBP Danube Hub Workshop

Note: This meeting is open for UBP Danube Hub members.

Date: Tuesday, 19 May

Time: 13:00 – 17:00

Location: Hotel Rosslyn, Room Thracia 2

Chair: Ms. Ana Badhofer, IAWD and Ms. Katerina Schilling, IAWD

IAWD General Assembly

Note: This meeting is open for IAWD members.

Date: Wednesday, 20 May

Time: 09:00 – 12:00

Location: Hotel Rosslyn, Room Thracia 1

Chair: Mr. Walter Kling, IAWD

Donors and IFI Roundtable

Note: This meeting is by invitation only.

Date: Wednesday, 20 May

Time: 12:45 – 14:30

Location: Hotel Rosslyn, Room Thracia 2

Chair: Ms. Ana Badhofer, IAWD and Ms. Elisabeta Poci, IAWD

IX. LOGISTICAL DETAILS

Registration

A registration desk, where you can register and receive your welcome folder and name tag, will be open at the Conference venue on:

- ▶ **Wednesday, 20 May** from 13:00 – 18:00
- ▶ **Thursday, 21 May** from 08:00 – 14:00

Meals

All meals and coffee breaks at the conference venue are included.

2026 DWF Group Photo

The Group Photo will be taken at the Welcome Reception on Wednesday, 20 May. The Group Photo and all other official photos of the Conference will be available at the IAWD website (www.iawd.at) after the conference.

Internet Access

Wireless network name: WiFi Toplo Public

No user and password name are needed.

Electronic Voting and Questions

During most of the Conference sessions an electronic voting system will be in place. Anyone with access to internet (mobile or WIFI), either through a laptop, a tablet or a smartphone, can participate. You are encouraged to make use of this opportunity. To connect to the electronic voting system simply type in your browser:

- ▶ <http://pollev.com/2026dwf250>



Conference Dinner

The Conference Dinner will be held on Thursday, 21 May at 19:30-22:30. The location of the dinner is the restaurant Laura at the National Palace of Culture, Sofia 1463, which is a 15-20-minute walk from the conference venue.

GDPR Disclaimer

The event will be fully recorded, and pictures will be taken throughout the event. We reserve the right to use the recording as well as the pictures for publication on our websites (iawd.at, danube-water-program.org, d-leap.org, worldbank.org), and social media channels. By participating in the event, you agree to the disclaimer above.

For further information, please download the data privacy statement of IAWD on our website: www.iawd.at

X. CONFERENCE VENUE

Regional Centre for Contemporary Art, Toplocentrala

Sofia 1408, ul. Emil Bersinski 5

<https://toplocentrala.bg/en>

info@toplocentrala.bg

The airport of Sofia is located close to the city center of Sofia and can be reached via taxi and public transport. Sofia Airport Metro Station is in close proximity to the airport terminal building. To reach it, follow the blue line on the floor in the public area of Terminal 2. Bus line №84 connects the city center (Gen. Gurko St.) with Terminal 2 and Terminal 1 of Sofia Airport. Information on tickets can be found here: Transportation To And From Airport - SOF Connect. In case you want to use a taxi, the official provider of Sofia Airport is the taxi operator Yellow!

Contacts

In case of any problem or question with the logistics of your participation, please contact the organizers at the conference venue or through email:

- ▶ IAWD: Lena Schober (schober@iawd.at), Pierantonio La Vena (lavena@iawd.at) or Ana Badhofer (<mailto:badhofer@iawd.at>)



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c/o World Bank
Praterstraße 31, 1020 Wien
<https://www.danube-water-program.org>