PROTECTION, CONSERVATION, REHABILITATION IN THE LOWER DANUBE RIVER CORRIDOR

The fundamental marks of geopolitical position of Romania are given by the laying of Romanian territory in Carpathian, Danubian and Pontic place who represents the same durable point of social, cultural and political mould and affirmation of Romanian people. Like our famous scientist Grigore Antipa assumed, “Entire life of Romanian people is linked with the Danube and the Carpathians. The Danube River is our contact with nations from the middle of Europe; it also opens, the way to Oceans of world for trade with the most afar countries. Our biggest riches is with no doubt, the Danube River, even considering only its role of international thoroughfare of trade and navigation.” From oldest times the Danube represented for Carpato-Danubian place, an axis for polarization of material cultures appearing here.

The archaeologists established that beginning with the Neolithic man, the wetlands from river corridor were subject to the pressure of selective use of their biotic and mineral resources. Diversification of these forms along the millenniums did not avoid the actual space of Romania, territory which belong almost entirely to the Danube basin.

Danube river is the second river from Europe, after Volga, and their length is 2840 km from which 1072 km on the Romanian territory, covering their course: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova Republic and Ukraine. In comparison with the others danubian countries, Romania hold the most extensive surface from hydrographical Danube basin. Romania holds 38% from entire course of the big river and 45% from length of navigable Danube, which in her lower sector, from Braila to the river mouth, on cca. 175 km, is accessible to maritime ships.

Danube character of Romanian territory is accentuated of the existence, in east of country, of the mouth of the big river.

From geo-morphological point of view, the lower Danube basin on the Romanian territory includes the hydrographic basins of the rivers that flow into the Danube in the sector Bázias-Sulina. This region, that includes the basins of the rivers Near, Cerna, Jiu, Olt, Veda, Arges, Ialomita, Siret, Prut and Danube course, has a total area of 1.696.000 ha, representing 70% of the hydrographic system within the Romanian territory.

In the river corridor are situated 111 localities with about 1.600.000 inhabitants, out of which 3 towns with more than 100.000 inhabitants. They are in direct relation with the water volumes transported by Danube and with their physical, chemical specific features.

The territory of Danube meadow — Romanian sector- situated in the 12 county, include a series of protected natural areas, with an surface of 715.000 ha. The protected natural areas insular spread in the framework of the Danube meadow limits, aiming conservation and protection of birds, forests with original aspect and of some samples with distinct landscape. These protected natural areas are: National Park Iron Gates — 115.656 ha; Ciuperceni — Desa
Reserve (200 ha); Small Island of Braila (17.529 ha) and Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (580,000 ha) has treble protection statute: Biosphere Reserve through “Man and Biosphere” (MAB) UNESCO’s Program, wetland of international importance on Ramsar list and World, Natural and Cultural Patrimony. We can tell that through its impressive biodiversity of habitats and life forms, housed in a relative limited space, Danube Delta constitutes a real biodiversity museum, a natural gene bank of inestimable value for natural universal patrimony. A lot of vegetal or animal species were important natural resources, economic exploited by the humans since ancient times. The settlements established were main based on natural resources capitalized, developing traditional economic activities and characteristic social contacts. In the same time, Danube delta is a regional center for monitoring, research, education and training on natural ecosystems, in which peoples represent an integral component. Also in the Danube Delta we can find the most conclusive examples of ecological restoration, highlighted by successfully polder restoration of one of the biggest polders from Europe: Babina (2100 ha) and Cernovca (2580 ha). These were included in agricultural circuit in years ‘80, and because of economical circumstances were abandoned with serious consequences on soil and water quality. In 1994 begin the restoration of salted zone of Babina island. After two years it comes out that happened an spectacular restoration of the island, proving the huge power of the Danube in conquering lost lands. The second island, Cernovca it was also restored two years latter, like natural habitat for birds, fishes, and mammals. The objectives achieved after implementing ecological restoration projects of the two areas, were: rehabilitation of the initial statute of wetland like habitat for water birds; biodiversity conservation and removal of the nutrients; the restoration of the natural flood regime and of the biofilter capacity; improvement of water quality and of the trophic state of the ecosystems; the sediments control from surface water; recreation areas for ecotourism. The economical effects resulted after the restoration are: important quantities of fishes, rush and game; ecotourism; ecological education and improve of life conditions for local people.

Romania is the first candidate country to the European Union which attends, beginning with the 1999, to the second phase of Life Programme of the European Community, which represent an financial tool for environment, which aims the development and apply of comunitaire legislation and politics, which envisaged environmental protection, natural capital conservation and sustainable development. In the framework of Life — Nature programme develop projects which envisaged the elaboration and implementation integrated management plan and specifical habitats conservation in two wetlands of great importance: Natural Park Iron Gates and Small Island of Braila, the latter being proposed for the declaration Ramsar sit, as well as in strict protected areas from Biosphere Reserve Danube Delta. The project Natural Park Iron Gates- habitat management and conservation envisaged habitat and vulnerable species conservation, management and restoration. The project Integrating Management Plan for small Island of Braila aiming:

 infrastructure identification needed for management plan implementation, administrative framework development, organization biological diversity monitoring system, as well as awareness of local populations through different ways.

Other project addressing to a wetland of the special importance is the project entitled “The protection and conservation of biodiversity in the Iezerul Calarasi wetland”, aiming research studies in the protected area, elaboration of management plan, conservation of birds and animals species protected by the Bema and Bonn Convention, protection and maintaining of natural habitats, as well as monitoring of biodiversity from the area. This project it was propose in the framework of the projects financed by the “Small grant Ramsar, for the 2001, program launched by the Ramsar Convention Bureau, aiming conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.

Danube River cross diverse landscapes, important from the scientific and ecological point of
Many of them, with a significant national and international value were declared natural protected areas; their number are increasing in the last years. The most recent list of United Nations for the Danube basin emphasize 12,888 sites (bigger than 1 km²) which cover 8.8% from dried area, many being national parks, RAMSAR sites, Biosphere Reserves and World Patrimony sites.

The cooperation between Danube basin countries spread from the natural areas protected at national level to the transfrontier areas, involving two or many states in the management of respective border surfaces.

The wetlands from the transfrontier regions represent priorities of environmental politics from Romania, and their management, a biological diversity protection and conservation strategy in respective areas. In the lower Danube basin it was identified the possibility of collaboration between Romania and other border countries in the following areas:

Natural Parks Iron Gates (Romania) — National Parks Djerdap (Yugoslavia);
The Cama-Dinu islets area (Romania) — Luleac Island (Bulgaria);
Mostistea — Iezer Calarasi area (Romania) — Biosphere Reserve Srebrana (Bulgaria);
Lower River Prut (Romania - Moldova);
Biosphere Reserve Danube Delta (Romania — Ucraina).

Regional cooperation in the carpatho-danubian area have to materialize, projects with projection in Black Sea basin. Danube river must impose in ecological network connection from West, Central and East Europe and in natural capital protection of these region. Romania, signatory of certain conventions and agreements destined to contribute to the biological diversity reconstruction of riparian and aquatic ecosystems can’t operate alone in river corridor of Danube, but only conjugated efforts of many countries will be able to guide the protection and sustainable use of this areas.

The cooperation for the European territorial planning must get projection in the lower river Danube. Regional politics of the European Communities demonstrate that is the moment of engaging in diverse and concrete actions of European cooperation addressed for the one carrying the responsibilities of the Danube river corridor protection — states, regions, local collectivities, non-governmental organizations.