

Speech
of H.E. Péter Sztáray State Secretary for Security Policy of the MFAT
on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Danube Commission
2nd October 2018, „Budapest” Ship

Representatives of the Danube Commission, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentleman,

I am pleased to welcome you **to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Danube Commission**, it is especially it is my honour **to greet, the Representatives of its members states and the Secretariat.**

The Danube Commission is like a phoenix, we could see its rebirth from ashes in different forms since **1856** several times. The principle of **the freedom of navigation** on international waterways was already settled at the 1815 Vienna Congress. When it functioned well, it reflected the interests of the Danube states and guaranteed the right to free navigation. After WWII, in 1948 the great powers agreed to convene a special conference on the elaboration of a new convention on the Danube navigation. The result of the conference was **the Belgrade Convention**, which was signed **on 18th August 1948** by seven signatories: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Ukraine, Romania and the Soviet Union. **Since 1954, the headquarter of the Danube Commission and its Secretariat is located in Budapest, where today 11 member states work together in this framework.**

The Danube with its 2860 kilometres connects not only 10 Danube states, but also altogether 19 states in its basin. Since the **opening of the Danube-Main-Rhine canal in 1992**, the Danube has been one of the **vital European transport corridors**. Just by traveling on the Danube, we can travel **between Rotterdam and Sulina** or we can **sail from the North to the Black Sea.**

We have to mention the great sister river Commission, partner Commission of the Danube Commission, the **Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine** with its headquarter in Strasbourg, which **this month celebrates its 150th anniversary.** The Mannheim Convention, its legal foundation was signed on 17th October 1868. Congratulations!

The Danube is our common treasure, an ecologically friendly means of transport, but also our source of water, energy. It is important for our agriculture. We have to strengthen conditions for international cooperation, to underline the Danube's economic integrative function and on the other hand to guarantee sustainable development, the protection of environment. **Our task is to find the way how to accommodate conflicting interests through deepening and fostering international cooperation.**

We welcome the improvement of the cooperation between the Danube Commission and other **international organizations**, such as the EU Directorate-General (DG MOVE), ICPDR, Central European Initiative, the Sava Commission. We expect from these agreements, that in addition to the improvement in Danube navigation conditions, the

Danube countries will receive a greater role when designing the inland navigation regime.

The regional cooperation between the Danube and the Black Sea region is also important for us. Since 1 July 2018 Hungary became an observing member of **The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)** organization, with the headquarter in Istanbul.

Last year in October, Hungary hosted the 6th **Annual Forum of the Danube Regional Strategy** under the title “A secure, connected and prospering Danube Region” that has put a strong emphasis on discussing the challenges and perspectives of **energy security, clean connectivity and infrastructure development of the Region**. Furthermore, the Hungarian Presidency also aimed to find ways to **better integrate the non-EU countries participating in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region** – with a specific emphasis on the Western-Balkans – so that they have greater access to the opportunities provided by such macro-regional cooperation and benefit further from its implementation.

Hungary, as president of the **Preparatory Committee** revising the Belgrade Convention fully supports the work of the Danube Commission. We are committed to the modernization of the Commission and the revision of the Belgrade Convention. We need the active participation of each member state for further steps to have an organization able to respond to the new challenges.

We started this year with a commemoration on the 7th of March jointly with the Secretariat of the Danube Commission by opening **an exhibition „Danube Commission 70”** in the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary. Today we gathered to celebrate together with the head of diplomatic missions concerned, the representatives of the Hungarian sailor society, expert on navigation, flood protection, environmental protection, representatives of different ministries this important anniversary of our common Danube Commission. Furthermore this year we plan to organize a conference with the cooperation of the Institute of Foreign Policy and Trade on the issues of the Danube Commission and inland navigation. So, by showing the past, reflecting on the present tasks, we would like to speak also about our future, our visions, our strategical goals.

The Danube played sometimes strange roles: after WWII the bridge between **Esztergom and Štúrovo (Parkány)** was destroyed. Families, relatives, friends were divided, separated for a long time, there was no possibility to travel to the other bank of the river. So the people went to the bank of the Danube in the early morning or late evening, to escape from the attention of the soldiers, and whispered their message toward the other bank. We call it now aquaphone. And the waves of the Danube helped deliver the messages, these were the signs of hope across the river. I wish for us along the Danube, and for everyone who is responsible for the work in different aspects of our beautiful river to send, and receive good messages about our joint treasure: the Danube.

I wish for us, for the Danube Commission: **fruitful cooperation, better navigation on the Danube** and a **sustainable environment in the Danube basin**. Finally, I would like to assure you that you can count on our support and cooperation as a host country. Thank you for your kind attention!