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## **“Bystroye Canal” / Danube-Black Sea Deep Navigation Channel**

Since 2004, the Ukrainian government has been constructing a canal in the Danube Delta referred to in the official documentation as the Danube-Black Sea Deep Navigation Channel, or “Bystroye canal” as it widely known as an alternative to the Sulina Channel on Romanian territory. The project has been carried out with a number of breaches of international commitments. Local and international stakeholders and environmental organisations have been highly concerned about its likely negative environmental impacts on the unique species and habitats of the Delta, which is protected under the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme (*for chronology of events please, see [www.panda.org/dcpo](http://www.panda.org/dcpo)*). The decision to construct the canal has been based neither on solid socio-economic and environmental analysis nor on proper assessment of alternatives

**WWF therefore calls for a halt to all further works on a deep sea canal along the Bystroye arm. WWF recommends joint operation of the existing Sulina Channel by Romania and Ukraine as the most economically and environmentally viable option. Should the Ukrainian government not give up its plan to construct a navigation channel on national territory, WWF proposes the careful consideration of alternatives outside the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve.**

### **Project poses severe threat to Danube Delta biodiversity**

Further works on a deep sea canal along the Bystroye branch presents a severe threat to the Danube Delta’s biodiversity as the canal cuts through the heart of the Ukrainian Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve – an environmentally sensitive area protected by several international agreements. This area is an important and internationally recognized habitat for important flora and fauna species. Planned large-scale dredging (both for construction and maintenance of the canal) and operation (navigation of the large ships through the canal) will negatively impact these habitats. Moreover, any further unilateral canal works lying inside the Ukrainian Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve are considered to be unacceptable due to infringement of international law (e.g. Espoo convention, Bern convention, Ramsar convention).

### **No proper socio-economic assessments justify deep sea canal**

The Ukrainian Danube Delta is of special interest for transport development due to (1) competitive pressure from the Romanian transport system (i.e. Port of Constanta), and (2) its location within the effective area of three international (and EU) transport corridors. This geo-political situation is one of the drivers for the construction of the deep sea link Black Sea - Danube River that cuts through the heart of the Ukraine’s Danube Delta Reserve.

However, WWF questions the necessity of such a deep sea canal, i.e. shipping needs with draught of 7 m through the Ukrainian Danube Delta. No detailed investigations exist on the “larger picture” of ship traffic flow, i.e. no real needs assessment or credible forecast for transport of the entire south-western Ukrainian shoreline, to justify the need of a canal with a draft of 7 m. Not enough socio-economic information has been gathered to justify building new or finishing current canal projects in the Ukrainian Delta. The Bystroye route together with the break wall into the sea will significantly alter the delta forming processes and put the internationally protected area and its unique biodiversity at

high risk. In addition, the quality of the Environmental Impact Assessment is questionable and not complying with international standards.

### Sulina route has the least impacts

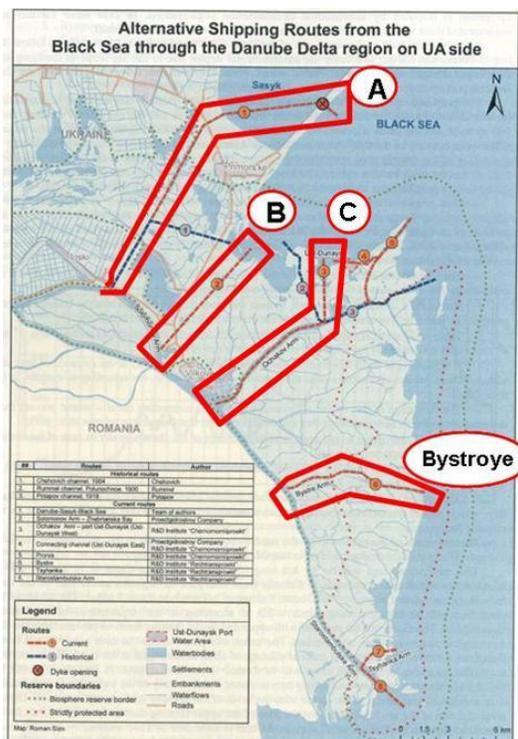
Therefore, WWF’s recommendation is to use the existing Sulina route as it has the least impact on the Danube Delta and large ships do not pass through the strictly protected areas of the Ukrainian Danube Delta. Based on a common agreement between Romania and Ukraine on traffic regulations and tariff rates, this option would need the least investments, no new infrastructure and be the most viable for navigation purposes; a solution which is good practise in many international estuaries.

### Alternatives to the Bystroye Canal on Ukrainian territory identified

Although WWF recommends the use of the existing Sulina Channel as an access route to the Ukrainian Danube, we understand that a negotiation process between Ukraine and Romania on the common use of the Sulina Channel may need time and political commitment as well as support from international institutions.

Therefore, if Ukraine remains committed to building a deep sea canal on its own territory in the near future, WWF recommends careful consideration of the following alternatives to the Bystroye canal (see Figure 1), all of which lie outside of the strictly protected zones of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and do not put at high risk the delta ecosystem, thus presenting a better environmental option:

- A) Danube-Sasyk Channel
- B) Solomonov-Zhebrianskaya Bay Channel
- C) Ochakov Arm-Ust Dunaisk Channel



**Figure 1: Recommended alternatives to the Bystroye canal: (A) Danube-Sasyk Channel, (B) Solomonov Channel, and (C) Ochakov Arm-Ust Dunaisk Channel. (Map credit: Roman Sizov for WWF Germany)**

**Option A (Danube-Sasyk channel):** This design consists of adaptation of an existing drainage channel that connects the Kiliya Branch of the Danube to Sasyk Lake (a former marine liman closed off to create fresh irrigation water, which is often too brackish to use). Channels would need to be dredged through the lake and the spit that separates the lake from the Black Sea. Locks would be located at the connection to the Danube and/or where the lake and sea meet.

**Option B (Solomonov channel):** This design connects the Kiliya branch to the shallow Zhebrianskaya Bay in the Black Sea. As no channel exists now, a new one would need to be constructed. The channel would require a lock and



sluice complex at the connection with the Kiliya Branch. Due to the shallow bay, a long access channel would need to be dredged and maintained.

**Option C (Ochakov Arm-Ust Dunaisk Channel):** This alternative includes dredging of the old navigation routes along the Ochakov arm and a connecting channel to the Ust Dunaisk port, which would be revitalized and existing facilities upgraded. To ensure 7 m draught, a lock has to be built as in the previous options.

### Advantages and disadvantages of alternative channels

ALTERNATIVE	+ ADVANTAGES	- DISADVANTAGES
<b>(A) Danube-Sasyk Channel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chance to improve water quality in Sasyk Lake</li> <li>- Room for port development</li> <li>- Sediment and water stays in Danube system</li> <li>- Lower (relative) dredging maintenance costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highest (relative) construction costs</li> <li>- Potential operational and navigational difficulties due to lock/sludge system</li> </ul>
<b>(B) Solomonov-Zhebrianskaya Bay Channel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chance to improve surrounding reed beds by compensation measures</li> <li>- Room for port development</li> <li>- Rail connection, i.e. workforce nearby</li> <li>- System of gates on the main canal may prevent sedimentation problems in Zhebrianskaya Bay only if other eastern Vilkovo arm is closed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creates additional barrier for people/wildlife to the UA hinterland, e.g. bridge to connect Vilkovo is needed</li> </ul>
<b>(C) Ochakov Arm-Ust Dunaisk Channel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chance to rehabilitate surrounding marshlands by removal of dikes</li> <li>- Revitalisation of existing port, i.e. economic and employment benefits for locals</li> <li>- Lowest (relative) construction costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Potential navigational difficulties due to the canal's many bends</li> <li>- Higher (relative) maintenance costs for dredging</li> </ul>

The decision on any of the alternatives above need to be based on detailed studies/assessment (including SEA of existing and/or new navigation and transport plans and programmes). For more information on these alternatives, please consult the reports mentioned under sources of information.

### Proper Environmental Impact Assessments and Public Participation essential

Any new waterway in the Delta, as well as additional works on the current Bystroye canal (Phase 2), must have no negative transboundary environmental impacts and no net negative impacts on the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve. This must be proven through internationally-accepted EIA and monitoring processes.

Any canal project needs to include a transparent, public dialogue procedure, whether based on current designs or new alternatives. This procedure should give all interested parties (including civil society) the opportunity to express their opinions and concerns on the project with adequate preparation time.



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Although the above-mentioned alternatives are likely to have less impact on the Danube Biosphere Reserve, all include the construction of new infrastructure and/or dredging works; any possible impacts on the Delta environment as a whole need to be considered with extreme caution.

### **Integrated planning in the ICPDR framework recommended**

The investigation of these impacts, and corresponding mitigation/compensation measures, should be integrated into a management plan for the Delta, i.e. the Danube Delta Management Plan to be prepared under the framework of the ICPDR (International Commission for Protection of the Danube River) in accordance with the EU Water Framework Directive.

In addition, existing and/or new navigation and transport plans should be integrated into an updated strategic development plan that includes various socio-economic aspects. This planning should be based on modern approaches to regional and local development based on best practice, as well as the “Joint Statement on Guiding Principles for the Development of Inland Navigation and Environmental Protection in the Danube River Basin”, which Ukraine has endorsed. The need for an updated strategic development plan is also justified by the fact that all existing programmes of the Ukrainian Danube Region Development, in particular the National Programme of the same name, are inadequate as they are still based on the principles of a centralised economy.

### **Sources of information**

WWF bases this position on its expertise from working on conservation projects in the region over the past decade. Moreover, WWF commissioned two reports on shipping in the Danube Delta by independent experts to provide unbiased background information on the situation. *(Please note that these reports do not necessarily reflect the position of WWF.)*

- “Actual Situation of Shipping Business in Ukrainian-Black Sea With Special Relation to the Danube River” by the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Oleg Rubel, main author), September 2006
- “Sustainable Navigation in Ukraine: Alternatives in and around the Ukrainian Danube Delta” by DHV Consultants (Daan Rijks, main author) with the contribution of local Romanian and Ukrainian experts, March 2008 (final version available soon)

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