



Internationale
Kommission zum
Schutz des Rheins

Commission
Internationale
pour la Protection
du Rhin

Internationale
Commissie ter
Bescherming
van de Rijn

Conference of Rhine Ministers

Ministerial declaration

29 January 2001 in Strasbourg

The members of the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) met at ministerial level in Strasbourg on 29 January 2001 under the presidency of Mrs. Dominique Voynet, French Minister of Spatial Planning and Environment.

Participants in the conference were:

For Germany, Mr. Dr.-Ing. E.h. Dietrich RUCHAY, under-secretary, representing Mr. Jürgen Trittin, Federal Minister for Environment, Nature Protection and Nuclear Safety

For France, Mrs. Dominique VOYNET, Minister of Spatial Planning and Environment

For Luxembourg, Mr. Paul HANSEN, director of the Environmental Administration, representing Mr. Michael WOLTER, Minister of the Interior

For the Netherlands, Mrs. drs. Monique de VRIES, Vice Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management

For Switzerland, Mr. Philippe ROCH, Minister of state, director of the Federal Office for Environment, Forestry and Landscape

For the European Commission, Mr Prudencio Parera MANZANEDO, representing Mrs. Margot Wallström, Commissioner for Environment

For the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine, Mr. Adriaan JACOVOBITS DE SZEGED, President of the Commission

As observers

For Wallonie, Ms Anne TRENTELS, Ministry of Wallonie

Representatives of intergovernmental and of non governmental organisations

The Ministers of the ICPR contracting states (Germany, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland) responsible for the protection of the Rhine and the European Commission met in Strasbourg on 29 January 2001 in order to draw the most important conclusions from Rhine protection actions taken within the last 50 years and to point out new perspectives of co-operation.

The Ministers and the European Commission underline the considerable improvement of the water quality and the progress made in the field of the ecological restoration of the Rhine ecosystem. On the whole they welcome the success of the different actions with a view to Rhine protection, such as the Rhine Action Program or the salmon program which both expired in the year 2000. It was stated that generally, point source pollutions (of industrial and municipal origin) are under good control. On the basis of the target values and according to the report on the state of the Rhine presented to this conference, the major number of substances no longer poses a problem in the Rhine. Efforts to reduce the inputs of diffuse sources have been less successful and, as a consequence, the share of diffuse nutrient and heavy metal inputs in the total inputs has risen.

The species diversity in the Rhine has also increased noticeably. The construction of fish passages as well as measures aimed at improving the structure of water bodies, e.g. by restoring alluvial areas and lateral water bodies of the Rhine to their natural state were prerequisites paving the way for the return of most of the 45 fish species and 38 species of waterfowl typical for the Rhine which may today again be observed in and along the Rhine, just as at the end of the 19th century. The Ministers and the European Commission are pleased to state that, in the summer 2000 Europe's biggest fish passage was put into service and works extremely well. They therefore speak up for constructing the Gamsheim fish passage, already fixed by contract, as soon as possible.

As stated in the report to the conference, the targets fixed for the first phase of the implementation of the Action Plan on Floods have largely been reached. Particular attention must however be paid to the reduction of damage risks in flood plains and flood-prone areas. Even though legal and planning guidelines concerning the protection and keeping clear of flood plains now exist in all ICPR member states, it has e.g. not been possible to stop further construction in these areas. There is great need for increased public awareness of this problem.

The next phase running until 2005 also comprises ambitious targets and probability rises that climate changes will lead to increased flood risks. Therefore, the Ministers and the European Commission again underline the necessity of implementing the Action Plan on Floods within the schedule. They ask all those responsible to prioritise the required measures, even in times of financial bottlenecks. The ICPR Action Plan on Floods which includes measures to be implemented by 2020 entailing total costs of about 12 billion Euro will also contribute to the further improvement of the ecological state of the Rhine and its tributaries.

The Ministers and the European Commission adopt the program on sustainable development of the Rhine which takes up these challenges by fixing an ambitious policy for Rhine protection for the period up to 2020. This program follows the guidelines adopted by the conference of Rhine ministers in Rotterdam on 22 January 1998.

Within the ICPR, a working plan until 2005 has been drafted. The Ministers' conference invites the ICPR to adopt this plan in its next Plenary Assembly after consultations with the territorial authorities and other bodies concerned in each country.

This plan will be one of the elements of the co-ordinated management plan to be drafted for the Rhine river basin district.

Among the remaining challenges in the Rhine catchment range the further reduction of emissions, particularly from diffuse sources, the protection of the ground water interacting with Rhine water, the granting of balancing ground water abstraction and recharge, the creation of a network of biotopes along the Rhine from Lake Constance to the North Sea, including the restoration of ecological river continuity and increased minimum flow in the old river bed, the interlocking of flood prevention and ecosystem improvement and – last but not least the intensified public involvement with the help of new forms of information supply and participation. These challenges are part of the program “Rhine 2020” and partly correspond to the requirements of the EU water framework directive or, as far as ecology and flood prevention are concerned, even go beyond it.

With this program, Rhine protection policy which so far was strongly oriented towards water quality improvement assumes a new dimension, as the program on sustainable development underlines the holistic approach to Rhine protection. The targets of the program unite the ecological, economic and social dimension in a balanced manner. Their implementation also contributes to put an end to the pollution by hazardous priority substances strived for within the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic (OSPAR).

The Ministers and the European Commission state that the exchange of information with non governmental organisations has become a permanent part of ICPR work and welcome this development.

At the same time, the Ministers and the European Commission underline that with the Directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy (water framework directive) which recently came into effect the harmonisation and new orientation of the European Community’s water policy has succeeded. The program “Rhine 2020” and the Swiss laws set similar targets. Against this background, the measures planned within the program “Rhine 2020” may serve as a basis for the programs of measures to be drafted by the EC member states as fixed in the water framework directive.

The Ministers and the European Commission approve of the mutual understanding of all states in the Rhine catchment regarding the co-ordinated drafting of one management plan for the entire international Rhine river basin district as fixed by the water framework directive and declare to agree to the ICPR secretariat logistically supporting the steering group within the available capacities.

The Ministers and the European Commission approve of the rapid progress of the ratification of the new Rhine Convention of 12 April 1999 and desire this Convention to enter into force as soon as possible.

They finally highlight the actual success of the international co-operation within the ICPR and will take care of the continued co-operation in the field of Rhine protection in the same atmosphere of confidence and efficiency as in the past decades.