

 **Federal Ministry**
Republic of Austria
Climate Action, Environment,
Energy, Mobility,
Innovation and Technology

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Mr. Vice President
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Dear Mr. Vice President Timmermans,

dear Frans!

With a view to the upcoming TEN revision and the repeated initiatives regarding a Danube-Oder-Elbe canal I would like to make the following statement in my capacity as Austrian Minister for the Environment, Climate Action, and Transport:

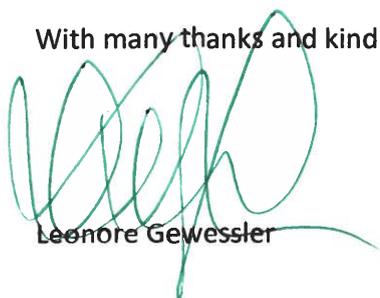
The territory between Vienna and Bratislava affected by such a project would cover an ecologically highly sensitive area. On the one hand it houses one of the last two free flowing stretches of the Danube in Austria with irreplaceable, high-quality habitats of manifold species. On the other it is directly surrounded by nature reserves including parts of the Donau-Auen National Park. It also houses the Ramsar and Natura 2000 protected areas in the March/Thaya marshlands imposing an international legal obligation on the Republic of Austria to preserve the status quo and improve quality in line with the conventions mentioned as well as with the FFH directive and as a European nature reserve. Austria highly values the objectives of the EU biodiversity strategy as well as of the EU Nature Restoration Plan providing for a restoration of natural river courses.

Any implementation outside Austria would definitely have far reaching environmental effects on Austrian waters and ecology. Austria therefore would not only have to be part of possible approval proceedings, but considering the severe and negative impact on flora, fauna, and ecology in Austria it is also highly unlikely that any positive decisions could be expected. Both I in my capacity as competent Minister as well as Austria consider the sustainable preservation, improvement, and securing of the variety of species and the general guarantee of nature protection absolutely necessary. Here we must point to the recent statement by President of the EU Commission von der Leyen on the occasion of the One Planet Climate Summit in which she expressly warned against the risk of new pandemics considering impaired species variety and pointed out the connection between the loss of biodiversity and Covid. Protecting our nature rather is a highly urgent necessity. The or a TEN Danube-Oder-Elbe canal project would be in clear contradiction with these objectives.

In recent years Austria repeatedly voiced these concerns in various bodies and bilateral talks through my Ministry. Therefore as Austrian Minister for Climate Action, Environmental Protection, Energy, Mobility, Innovation, and Technology I wish to make it very clear that we do not perceive any possibility for an implementation or an Austrian participation on Austrian national territory. Austria is rather already exploring alternative development scenarios for this highly sensitive ecological territory. The excellent ecological status according to the EU Water Framework Directive shall rather be restored through renaturation projects such as riverbank renaturation, reconnections of cut-off meanders etc. Work to this effect has already started.

Dear colleagues, I am herewith asking you for your commitment and support. This is about much more than the preservation and protection of an intact nature rich in species, it is about our future.

With many thanks and kind regards



Leonore Gewessler

