



European Parliament discusses Sava River

**++ Opportunities for and threats to one of the most valuable rivers of Europe ++ ++
Unique potential for natural flood control identified ++**

Brussels, Radolfzell, 28 March 2017. Today one of the last living rivers of Central Europe received valuable attention in Brussels. Nature conservation foundation EuroNatur and the European Association of Wetlands International made the Sava River an issue in the European Parliament. “The Sava is one of Europe’s ecologically most precious rivers. Nonetheless, it is massively threatened by a range of infrastructure projects”, says EuroNatur CEO Gabriel Schwaderer.

The conference was hosted by MEP Igor Šoltes (Greens/EFA). The European Commission attended the conference, as did the SavaParks Network – an association of nature conservation organisations and administrations of protected areas along the Sava. The Network, of which EuroNatur is a member, is the first cross-border voice for the protection of the Sava River. “The Sava is at the crossroads. We have the opportunity and the knowledge to preserve this lifeline and at the same time improve flood control. We just have to put this knowledge into practice, which urgently needs support at the European level”, says Gabriel Schwaderer. After all, four Sava riparian states (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia) are EU member states or candidate countries.

Previously, representatives of NGOs and protected area administrations had only been reacting to interventions damaging nature. Instead, now the SavaParks Network developed an ecologically sound vision for the river as a whole, which allows moving conservation efforts proactively in a positive direction.

The European Parliament today saw the presentation of the “[Sava White Book](#)”. In more than one year, the Vienna-based consultancy FLUVIUS compiled data about the Sava and its tributaries, analysed satellite imagery and made area calculations in cooperation with EuroNatur, Riverwatch and the SavaParks Network as part of the “Save the Blue Heart of Europe” campaign. The White Book gives the first consolidated description of the ecological importance of this unique river and the imminent threats by flood protection dams, hydropower projects, waterway construction and gravel mining. More significantly, however, the White Book precisely highlights the opportunities for improving flood control and preserving the Sava as a lifeline. Protection from floods is a major issue along the Sava not just since the flooding in May 2014. The White Book gives concrete proposals for a modern flood control working in tune with nature, not in opposition to nature. It identifies 143 areas along the Sava that qualify for natural regeneration. Following renaturation, a total of 185,000 hectares of former floodplain forests and meadows could be flooded on demand and thus mitigate flood waves. During a flooding event, 3.1 billion cubic metres of water could be retained naturally.

Background information

- The Sava is the longest river on the Balkan Peninsula. Along its 926 kilometres from the source in Slovenia to Belgrade where it discharges into the Danube, the river is accompanied by 103,800 hectares of floodplain forests and 25,000 hectares of floodplain meadows. This is unparalleled within Europe and is mirrored by the impressive biodiversity: About 900 pairs of white stork breed in the villages along the Sava, and more than 80 pairs of white-tailed eagle breed in the extensive floodplain forests. Further information: <http://balkanrivers.net/en/key-areas/sava-river>
 - Download of the “Sava White Book”: [main study](#); [map annex](#)
 - The SavaParks Network comprises 21 members and aims to make the work of protected area administrations more effective and to support the river across borders along its entire length. SavaParks works for the protection and sustainable use of the river landscape.
 - Wetlands International – European Association is a coalition of eight European NGOs (including EuroNatur) working to protect Europe’s wetlands, bogs and rivers. Find more information at <https://europe.wetlands.org/our-network/members/>
 - The campaign “Save the Blue Heart of Europe” aims to preserve the most valuable rivers on the Balkans. Coordinated by EuroNatur and Riverwatch, it is carried out in cooperation with partner organisations in Balkan countries. Find more information at www.balkanrivers.net
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- **Photos attached:** The attached photo material can be used once in connection with this press release and indicating photo credits. Photos in print quality on request.
 1. The floodplains of the Sava offer a unique potential for natural flood retention. © Goran Šafarek
 2. The Sava received important attention in the European Parliament today. The event was hosted by the Member of EU Parliament Igor Šoltes (The Greens/ European Free Alliance; 4th from the left in the photo) © EuroNatur

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