

## **E40 waterway – environmental catastrophe exacerbating climate change and water shortage impacts**

***Briefing for UNECE Inland Transport Committee,  
Working Party on Inland Water Transport, 58<sup>th</sup> session  
17-19 February 2021***

### **Summary**

- E40 inland waterway (E40) would connect the Black Sea and the Baltic and at 2000km in length be 25 times longer than the Panama Canal.
- To construct E40 some of Europe's last major undamaged rivers would need dredging, damming, straightening and deepening. This could have [disastrous impacts](#) on the natural and cultural heritage and people of [Polesia – Europe's Amazon](#) - and worsen the global carbon balance, dry out rivers, lead to more droughts and decrease the availability of water.
- In light of global responsibilities to combat climate change, construction of E40 cannot be justified.
- But despite this governments of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine appear to be progressing individual elements of E40 prior to '*comprehensive assessment of the environmental impact along the E 40 waterway with public discussion*'<sup>1</sup> . More information [here](#).

### **Actions**

- **UNECE Working Party on Inland Water Transport** – we call upon the Secretariat to look into the environmental and climate implications of E40 and convene a workshop on the topic at the next meeting.
- **Poland, Belarus and Ukraine:** we ask the Parties:
  - o to progress the comprehensive strategic assessment of the entire E40 waterway; and
  - o to reconsider whether it is appropriate to include E40 in the AGN network given the environmental damage and climate change implications.

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### **E40 impacts**

Constructing the E40 IWW could have a range of [devastating impacts](#) on local communities, global carbon balance and world class nature. In particular:

- *Vast amounts of greenhouses gases could be released* as important carbon sinks dry out due to changes in hydrology of water ecosystems damaged by E40 construction. At the same time, the effects of climate change such as *shortage of water and droughts are likely to limit the navigation of ships* through E40<sup>2</sup>.
- *Water shortages*, for people, agriculture and nature are very likely given the changing climate and water volumes needed to fill and operate the E40 channel<sup>3</sup>.
- Europe's most pristine river the Pripjat, could be irrevocably damaged by conversion in to a engineered channel and the introduction of invasive species. This would *destroy the heart of Polesia*, Europe's largest wetland wilderness – an area with immense tourism (and hence

<sup>1</sup> Key next step reported in the 2016 update on the E40 project ECE/TRANS/SC.3/WP.3/2016/13.

<sup>2</sup> [https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SavePolesia\\_Factsheet\\_Impacts-of-E40-in-Belarus-and-Ukraine.pdf](https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SavePolesia_Factsheet_Impacts-of-E40-in-Belarus-and-Ukraine.pdf) and [https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Grygoruk-et-al\\_Possible-impacts-of-E40-waterway-in-Belarus-and-Ukraine.pdf](https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Grygoruk-et-al_Possible-impacts-of-E40-waterway-in-Belarus-and-Ukraine.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SavePolesia\\_Factsheet\\_Impacts-of-E40-in-Poland.pdf](https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SavePolesia_Factsheet_Impacts-of-E40-in-Poland.pdf) and [https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Grygoruk-et-al\\_Possible-impacts-of-E40-waterway-in-Poland.pdf](https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Grygoruk-et-al_Possible-impacts-of-E40-waterway-in-Poland.pdf)

economic) potential and undermine current initiatives to develop tourism such as the *Bug Unites Us* project<sup>4</sup>.

- 60 internationally protected biodiversity sites on the E40 route would be directly impacted.
- Implementing E40 IWW is likely to *conflict with a range of international environmental legal obligations* e.g. Bern, Ramsar, Aarhus, Espoo conventions and in Poland also EU obligations.
- E40 will be extremely expensive (over \$12 billion), particularly the Polish and Belarus sections and the *economic case for it is weak*<sup>5</sup>.

### **Comprehensive strategic assessment of the whole E40 corridor needed**

In the 2016 update to the Working Party comprehensive assessment was highlighted as a key next step (para 15). Before the Parties progress E40 further, proper assessment of the whole E40 corridor is urgently needed as required by national/international law. This should consider cumulative and transboundary environmental impacts and enable full public participation<sup>6</sup>.

### **Alternative solution**

We fully respect and support the desire of the Parties to improve transportation links, but E40 is not the only option. For example, further investment in rail links (as identified in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative with the EU<sup>7</sup>) may have fewer negative social and environmental impacts and be more cost effective.

Hence instead of E40, we encourage national governments [to boost local and regional economies](#) through investing in existing rail infrastructure and using the huge potential for nature-based tourism in Polesia. This position has also been adopted by the EaP Civil Society Forum in the Declaration "*To stop the ecological and economically inexpedient project of the continental waterway E40 Gdansk-Kherson*" approved by Working Group 3 of the National Platforms of Ukraine and Belarus<sup>8</sup> in April 2019.

### **Save Polesia partnership**

[Save Polesia](#) is an international partnership of six civil society organisations – APB-Birdlife Belarus, Bahna, Frankfurt Zoological Society, OTOP- BirdLife Poland, National Ecological Centre Ukraine (NECU) and Ukrainian Society for the Protection of Birds (USPB).

### **Further information**

For more information see <https://savepolesia.org/>

### **Contacts**

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<sup>4</sup> [https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SavePolesia\\_Factsheet\\_Polesias-enormous-tourism-potential.pdf](https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SavePolesia_Factsheet_Polesias-enormous-tourism-potential.pdf) and <https://www.bugunitesus.eu/about-the-projects/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SavePolesia\\_Factsheet\\_No-economic-case-for-E40.pdf](https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SavePolesia_Factsheet_No-economic-case-for-E40.pdf) and [https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BUJEE\\_E40-waterway\\_Economic-assessment.pdf](https://savepolesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BUJEE_E40-waterway_Economic-assessment.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Over 56,000 people have already signed petitions calling for E40 to be reconsidered. Eg see <https://www.change.org/p/stop-e40-let-us-protect-our-rivers-together> and <http://www.godzinadlaziemi>

<sup>7</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/2018-11-09-ten-t-eastern-partnership-maps.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://eap-csf.eu/working-group-3/>