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**POST RELEASE****A canal between Belarus and Poland has to be built in order to connect the Baltic and the Black Seas**

Navigation along the rivers of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine can be restored in case a new canal is built between the Vistula in Poland and the Dnieper-Bug Canal in Belarus. This was the main conclusion put forth by the experts of the Commission on the Development of the E40 Waterway on the Dnieper-Vistula section who came together for a working meeting in Lutsk (Ukraine) on June 15-17.

The water artery E40, which flows through Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine, connects the ports of Gdansk and Kherson through the Vistula, Western Bug, Pripyat, and Dnieper. However, today the E40 is partly unnavigable, namely, along its section between Warsaw and Brest. If revived, the E40 waterway would enable the three neighboring countries to exchange annually up to 4 mln. tons of cargo and develop logistics centres for shipping goods in any corners of Europe or even Asia.

The cross-border Commission, which includes representatives of local authorities, ministries, research institutes, as well as transportation, logistics, and environmental organizations from the three countries, was formed in 2014 thanks to the financial support of the European Union as part of the project "Restoration of the E40 Waterway: From Strategy to Planning".

The project resulted in the launch of work on pinpointing the most efficient way to revitalize the E40 waterway. An international consortium, formed in 2015 and headed by the Maritime Institute in Gdansk, has been performing this task.

The experts and scientists working for the consortium presented their preliminary results in Lutsk, on June 15-17. At the beginning of their work, the specialists were considering 8 scenarios, including the possibility of straightening up the tortuous and unnavigable section of the Western Bug. However, the Polish Ministry of the Environment and environmental organizations harshly criticized this option.

*"The Western Bug in Poland goes through a nature protection area Natura 2000. Massive works on the river may undermine the existing ecosystem. Therefore, the experts believe it a more suitable solution to build a 'roundabout' water connection between the Vistula in Poland and the Mukhavets in Belarus. Financial costs and environmental impact associated with such building should be assessed in detail. Furthermore, it is important to consider a number of issues that have special importance for Belarus and Ukraine, for example, the question of how to provide water supply for the new canal. The experts will provide their answers in November 2015,"* – noted Nikolai Kotetski, Head of the Belarusian enterprise Dnepro-Bug Waterway, who manages the project on the E40 restoration.

As a result, at the meeting in Lutsk, the Commission agreed upon three realistic scenarios to restore navigation along the E40 waterway that presuppose building an artificial canal between Poland and Belarus. The consortium will further study these scenarios and outline them in a feasibility study. When ships restart sailing between Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine, this will engender opportunities for creating new jobs and developing industry in the border regions of the three countries as well as for bolstering cross-border tourism. Moreover, inland water transportation is less energy consuming and more environmentally friendly than automobile and railroad transportation.

In order to present these and other benefits resulting from the restoration of the E40 water artery the Commission is going to mount a number of big events this year. For instance, environmental organizations and the ministries of the environment will be invited to an international forum. The forum is expected to happen in November; it will provide voice to all sorts of environmental concerns and suggestions associated with the restoration of the E40 waterway.

At the same time, the idea of the E40 waterway restoration will be promoted more actively in Poland, where most construction works are to take place. In July, the Commission is going to invite to Warsaw representatives of ministries regulating environmental, transportation and infrastructure issues in Belarus, Poland, and Ukraine. And in fall, Warsaw is expected to host a joint conference of the Polish voivodships located along the E40 waterway.

*Continues on page 2***Project "Restoration of the E40 waterway on the Dnieper-Vistula section: from strategy to planning"**

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*“There are now five voivodships – Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Mazowieckie, Lubelskie, Pomorskie, and Warmińsko-Mazurskie – that signed a special agreement on cooperation to improve the navigation conditions on the Vistula and to revive the E40 waterway. This agreement will serve as a framework for the conference. Our voivodship has been coordinating the activities within this agreement”, – noted Stanisław Wroński, the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Marshal’s Plenipotentiary for Waterways. – “These activities complement the project to restore navigation along the Polish section of the international waterway E40 and along the entire water artery between the Baltic and Black Seas. Our goal is to adjust this waterway to the parameters that make it suitable for navigation and that will help to create transportation platform between two parts of Europe in accordance with the policies of the European Union. I believe that new results of work on the feasibility study to revitalize the E40 waterway, which are going to be presented at the conference in Warsaw, will make it possible to prepare and adopt a comprehensive document. It will give an impetus to further actions of our governments and will facilitate the development of water transport and economies of our countries”.*

More about the project: <http://e40restoration.eu/en/>

Project on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/e40restoration/>

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