
EU Strategy for the Danube Region
Priority Area 1a – To improve mobility and multimodality: Inland waterways

SUMMARIZED RESULTS

of the

SURVEY ON BORDER CONTROLS

along the Danube and its
navigable tributaries

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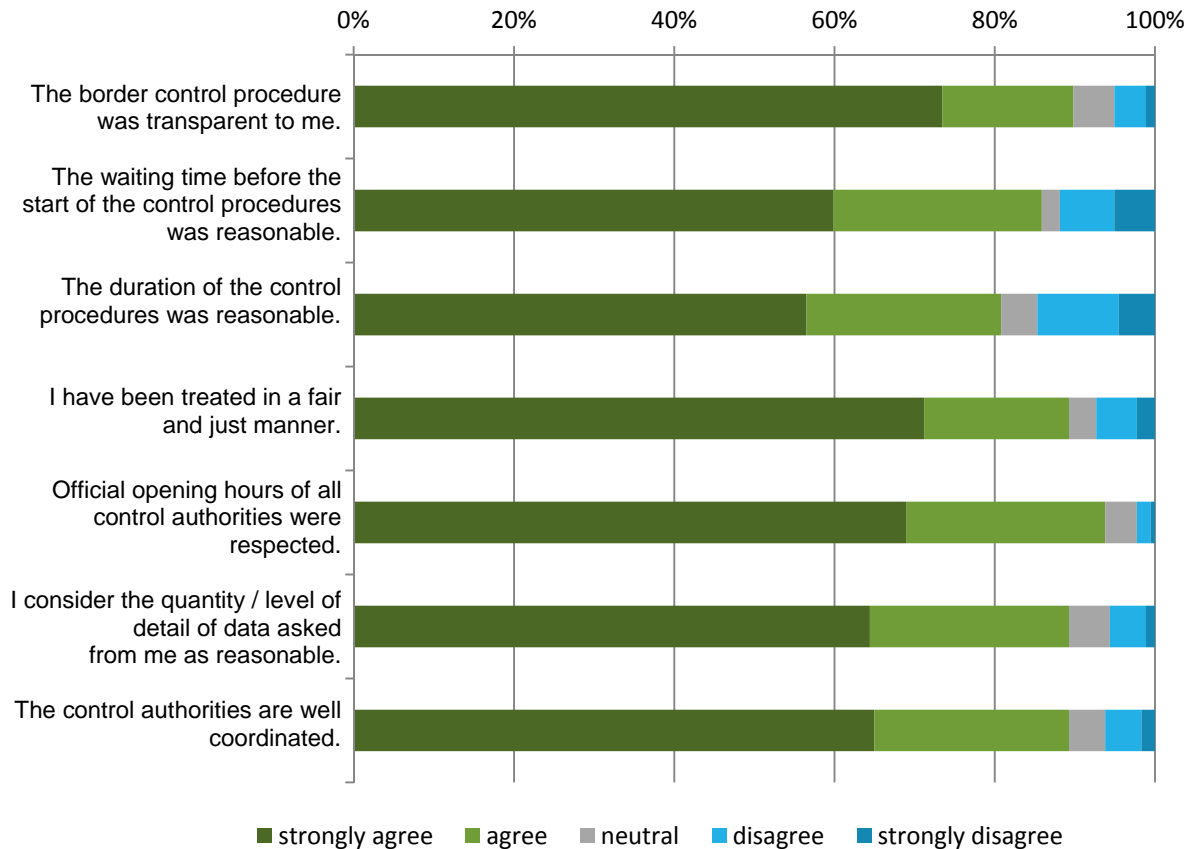
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Summarized feedback

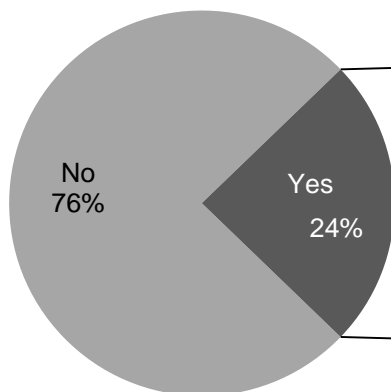
All together 177 feedback forms were completed validly, whereby the majority (143 forms) were filled in as paper based version at the border control points directly. The most meaningful feedback was received for Mohács, where the number of forms and the language variety was the highest. The large number of feedback forms received for Romanian control points influenced the overall outcome of the survey substantially (122 out of 177 forms).

In summary, the feedback of transport companies and ship brokers on control procedures is quite positive. Nevertheless, improvements related to the waiting time before controls and the duration of the control itself seem to be important in order to ensure more efficient administrative processes and to eliminate unnecessary hindrances for transports on the Danube waterway and its tributaries. Also other aspects, like the transparency of the procedures, the coordination between control authorities, the harmonisation of administrative forms, the way how skippers are treated as well as the amount of required data can be improved substantially at a number of places.

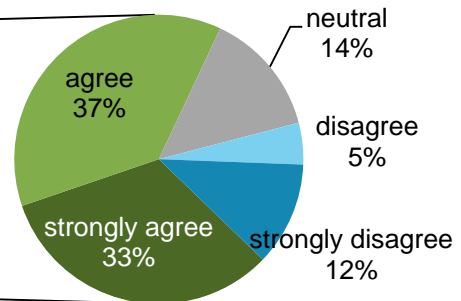


A quarter of all the survey participants had to pay a fee or fine. While most of them agree, that the payment was justified, 17% dispute that it was legitimate. The percentage of skippers who had to pay a fee or fine differs considerably between the control points. In Bechet, for example, all 20 survey participants (100%) had to make a payment. Approval of the required payments varies as well, half of the penalized survey participants strongly disagreed, when they were asked if the payment was justified.

I had to pay fees or fines.



The payment was justified.



Difficulties and inconveniences

Time consuming controls

Survey participants stated repeatedly, that the waiting times prior to the control are too long. Extensive durations of the actual controls add up to the total idle time and are reason for dissatisfaction. Especially the duration for the control of empty ships seems unreasonable.

Single responses, referring to only one control point highlighted that combined controls of several authorities lead to additional delays (Mohács), the duration of passport controls seems arbitrary (Vukovar) as well as extreme long waiting times due to restrictive opening hours (Giurgiu).

Required documents

Certificates, patents and other required documents are often-monolingual and therefore cause difficulties for the control authorities. The acceptance of these documents therefore varies from country to country. At the same time control forms requested to be filled out by the skippers are not harmonised along the whole Danube meaning that they are often not available in a multilingual version or request for different data and information. Repeated in-depth controls of static information (e.g. time of validity of ship certificates) seem to be without merit but are source of annoyance. At the same time consistent standards for the implementation of border controls are said to be lacking.

Improper treatment by the authorities

Both, in connection with controls in Mohács and Bezdán survey participants mentioned repeatedly that they felt treated improperly and incorrect by the authorities. Numerous control personnel entering the ship was described as intimidating. The insulting environment and arbitrariness in the interpretation of laws contradicts the service oriented attitude, which is expected from the control bodies.

Unreasonable control procedures

Facial controls of passengers leaving the EU do not seem reasonable and cause dissatisfaction among tourists. Also passengers aboard of incoming ships from Serbia are obliged to undergo a facial control. Coordination between Border Control Points could be improved; one example is the absence of customs clearance in Batina (HR) which caused confusion at Mohács (HU).

Unjustified payments

Several participants reported unjustified a payment of fines at Mohács. Also complaints at the Ministry did not show any effect. One feedback form complained about bribe money being asked at Veliko Gradište.

Suggested improvements

Reduce idle time at control points

As time efficient controls were the most pressing issue to the majority of the survey participants several suggestions for improvements were made. By far the loudest voiced was to enable the submission and subsequently the processing of ship, freight and passenger related data in advance and thus reducing the duration of the control. A suggestion, in connection with the reduction of waiting times, was to use additional personnel to control several ships at the same time. In addition the AIS system could be used to schedule the arrivals.

Simplify and harmonize forms and documents

In general, the number of documents to be filled in should be reduced. It was strongly recommended to develop harmonized forms for all authorities and countries along the entire Danube. As the required documents are used in an international environment, they should be issued in multilingual versions. Rarely changing standard information on ships should be stored in a database, accessible to the control authorities, avoiding for example the repeated control of certificates validity. The submission and evaluation of ship, freight and personal data should be enabled in advance to the actual control.

Conduct controls service-oriented

Skippers wish to be treated in a respectful and polite way. The number of officials entering the ship should be limited, as they intrude upon the privacy of the ship's crew. Obligations and requirements towards the transport companies should be communicated in a transparent and service-oriented way to the skippers in order to ensure effective and efficient control procedures (for instance through a website or a publicly available manual). Improved language skills of the control authorities would be beneficial for communication.

Improve the control processes

The AIS system could be used to schedule arrivals of ships at the control points and thus avoid lengthy waiting times. Information on the ship certificates including their time of validity and other rarely changing information may be stored in a database in order to avoid redundant controls. Improvements to the Pannonris should include an increased compatibility with on-board systems and a possibility to making the completion of passenger and crew lists more time-efficient. Working hours of control bodies should be 24/7 in order to avoid competitive disadvantages compared to other modes of transport.

Two propositions referred to the control process in Mohács specifically. One was to separate border revisions from the controls by the water police, which can be done more efficiently under way, may save time. The other was to inspect passenger ships also by service boat to save time.

Conclusions and next steps

In conclusion, a great number of feedback forms were returned and meaningful results have been retrieved for several Border Control Points, notably for Mohács.

Responses to the questions referring to general information on the controls showed that Border controls are time consuming, with waiting times prior to the control often exceeding the actual duration of control. Dangerous goods inspections take even twice as long as standard controls. The number of involved control authorities varies from place to place and shows a strong interconnection with the average duration of controls.

The feedback on the control process itself was positive in summary but revealed several aspects which have been strongly recommended to be improved. The results show the specific strengths and weaknesses of all the evaluated control points. However, some important suggestions are applicable for the whole Danube. The most pressing issues were the reductions of waiting times as well as the duration of controls. A simplified and harmonized set of forms should be used throughout all the involved authorities and countries. On top of that, the submission and processing of the requested information should be enabled in advance to the control. But also a respectful interaction with the controlled skippers, crew and passengers was demanded.

Serving as a valuable starting point, the results of the survey will be used to set further steps. First of all, the Technical Secretariat of PA1a decided to make this report publically available on its website www.danube-navigation.eu. In addition, it will be brought to the attention of PA11, the members of the DARIF project and the evaluated Border Control Points. Also the shipping sector will be informed about the outcomes of the survey. Reactions from whichever side are welcome.

As documented in the related work plan of PA1a, the next steps include a practical manual on border control procedure and final recommendations. The manual on control procedures is planned for summer 2015 and will describe the control processes along the Danube at the numerous Control Points. It will also include the forms requested to be filled in by the control authorities. The final recommendations will be made by autumn 2015 and shall serve as basis for further initiatives in coordination with decision makers and responsible control authorities.