



Living Rhine **60 years ICPR**

International Commission for
the Protection of the Rhine



Ceremony // 60 Years ICPR

■ Mainz, 30 June 2010 – The Great Hall is festively illuminated. Sometimes easily flowing, sometimes powerfully, sometimes calmly the voices of the four a capella singers AQUABELLA from Berlin fill the high rooms of the electoral castle in Mainz. Sounds like Rhine water, sometimes rushing, sometimes drowsily making its way from the Alps to the North Sea.

■ On this hot summer day the guests to the ceremony are cheerful. They have come from eight European states, from Switzerland, France, Germany, Belgium, Luxemburg, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands and Austria and are happy to see one another. All of them have spent parts of their careers working for the Rhine. Many of them worked in the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine for years, some of them even back in the 1970ies and 80ies. Today, they have reason enough to celebrate. The guests embrace one another, they pat one another on the backs, happily remember common tough negotiations and results causing quite a stir.

■ Spectacular success was achieved – the President of the ICPR, Mr. Jacques Sicherman (2008-2010) reminds of the Rhine considered to be a sewer in 1970 and which today ranges among the cleanest rivers in Europe to which salmons return. Even though a lot remains to be done it is justified to celebrate “60 years ICPR” and to praise and appreciate all those who have contributed to achieving these results. And what is just as important: In our open, peaceful Europe the Rhine has become a real connecting link.

■ This success was also achieved thanks to the efforts of the guests invited. “Just imagine you remembered us troupers!” Bernhard Jost, a former Swiss delegate is most pleased. He thinks it is wonderful to be able to meet the colleagues again he so much valued. And even Heide Groll, former ICPR interpreter is quite sure when talking about the “Alumni reunion” the evening before: “I am quite sure that never before have so many people embraced me during a party!”

■ Another guest finds it “exciting to take part not only in looking back, but in looking into the future”. The three panel discussions on the topics “Salmon 2000 – Salmon 2020”, Water quality: How clean is the Rhine? And on flood prevention show: Much, but not everything has been achieved and ... There are new challenges ahead of us! But the ICPR can draw upon a wealth of experience, patience and experts in all states.





■ “More than once we personally experienced birth pangs and teething troubles of European water and environment protection. Sometimes minor events brought about a U-turn, sometimes time had merely not come for a breakthrough. Today, things are different. Due to the influence of the media and internet societies have become more open and citizens take much more interest. And the ICPR knows, how to use this instrument,” says Lodewijk van Ulden, the Dutch Head of Delegation during 1986 to 1991.

■ Already the personal contacts show, to what an extent experts of different origins have been united by their common task. “Everybody is on first-name terms, we have somewhat become one Rhine-family.” says the former President of the ICPR, Mr. Dietrich Ruchay (1993-1995), radiant with joy. “I am really happy about that because I very well remember times when things were very different. Almost every line of the minutes drafted in the 1950ies and 60ies indicates precaution and concern. Many had witnessed World War II and there were still enemy images in people’s heads and hearts. We did not really know, “in how far we could trust the others.”

Facts ▶

Some 250 delegates are represented in the Commission – experts from ministries and administrations of the states in the Rhine catchment. Non governmental organizations have observer status and may participate in work. They meet up to 70 times per year – often at the ICPR head office in Koblenz at Rhine kilometre 590 about half-way down the Rhine on its way to the North Sea.

Apart from Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, Germany and Luxemburg belong to the ICPR founding states. In 1976, the EEC preceding the EU joined in as a Member. The ICPR Member States also co-operate on an equal basis with Austria, Liechtenstein, Italy and the Belgian region Wallonia which all have shares in the Rhine catchment and because EU legislation requires this co-operation since 2000.



■ **Paul Hansen,
Luxembourgian Head of Delegation (1991 – 2005)**

I always appreciated the uncomplicated cooperation in water protection – on a national as well as on an international scale. Formalism was much less in the focus than good results, and conserving healthy habitats with great species diversity.

The work in the ICPR made me appreciate topics which I formerly did not care for so much. River continuity for long distance migratory fish for example has really become one of my favourite topics. Even the secretary of the Luxembourgian Minister of Finances asked me during budget discussions: What happened to you, since you so much speak up for fishes?

■ **Patrick Weingertner,
French delegate since 1987**

All ICPR decisions must be taken unanimously, in consensus. This may sometimes be difficult. But these long discussions have made us understand the differences between and problems of the individual states. Thus, time passed on discussions is not lost. Often experiences made in one state serve as an example for others.

■ **Lodewijk van Ulden,
Dutch Head of Delegation (1986 – 1991)**

It is exciting to see that a small group of persons, the ICPR, may take a leading role for important topics regarding the future. We are not only talking about the Rhine, but also about the North Sea and the Wadden Sea; we are not only talking about the environment politics of the Rhine bordering countries, but about that of the entire EU. And that perhaps is the greatest success of the ICPR.



Personal Statements on “60 Years ICPR”

■ André Weidenhaupt, Luxembourgian Head of Delegation since 2006

In spite of sometimes differing national concerns of the ICPR Member States we do cooperate well and have a good mutual understanding of one another. Mentalities do differ – and that is why, from a human point of view, work is so interesting. And we have all been able to build on the reliable work of the most friendly and prudent secretariat – which by no means is a matter of course!



■ Karl Schwaiger, Austrian deputy Head of Delegation since 2001

With its ambitious and courageous project “Salmon 2000” the ICPR raised public interest. A great success for the Rhine bordering countries. We Austrians are always a bit envious of this exceptional Salmon 2000 programme. It really was a great idea to liberate millions with such a popular figure and to convince the population of such an ambitious and far-reaching environmental issue.



■ Michel Goppel, Executive Secretary of the ICPR (1985 – 1991)

All Saints Day 1986 marked the turning point for the ICPR. So far, the Commission had been busy with laborious negotiations on chlorides, thermal and chemical pollution of the Rhine. After the fire at the Sandoz AG in Schweizerhalle the ICPR suddenly moved into the avant-garde of environment protection. Due to further competencies in the areas of “Biological diversity” and “Flood protection” the Commission has been able to maintain its trailblazer role. For decades it has now served as an example for other (international) environmentalists.

The political support for the “Rhine” Action Programme triggered an enthusiasm for work in the ICPR and its secretariat which quickly made everybody forget past unsuccessful negotiations. The collaborators from those years – most of whom are still working for the ICPR – still evidence this enthusiasm.



■ Koos Wieriks, Executive Secretary of the ICPR (1995 – 2000)

The nice thing about the cooperation of the Rhine bordering countries is that, rather often we succeeded in achieving more than what was included in the mandates of the individual states. Often, the country with the most restrictive mandate is decisive for the whole group. Along the Rhine, pride was often implied! If, for example, the Dutch said: this is how far we can go – it was difficult for France and Germany not to follow.

But others, too, learnt from the ICPR! It is incredible, but the success story of the Rhine is known everywhere in the world. Be it Africa, Asia or South America – ICPR work is known and has often served as an example for the constitution of commissions along many other rivers - be it the Danube, Elbe or Odra and even the Mekong, Sambesi and Rio de la Plata.





1950 – 1986

■ In the years following World War II, the Rhine bordering countries became aware of the fact that a polluted Rhine poses a common problem. The few existing wastewater treatment plants had been destroyed during the war, distinctly increasing industry and municipalities discharged their wastewater directly into the river. The problems had been identified, but there was no suitable institution to address them. In April 1946, the existing Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine referred to the Salmon Commission, which, in 1948, stated in Basel that Rhine pollution was beyond its mandate. Switzerland proposed to the representatives of the Rhine bordering countries to mandate a new commission with this problem. On 11 July 1950 and following a diplomatic exchange of notes, all Rhine bordering countries gathered in Basel to discuss the problem posed by Rhine pollution. The International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) was born. But it took thirteen more years before the Rhine bordering countries signed a convention under international law, the so-called Bern Convention, as a framework for their cooperation.

■ In 1969 and 1971 spectacular chemical accidents occurred. "They made it quite clear that all Rhine bordering countries had to unite forces. The 1st conference of Rhine Ministers was staged. The public and the press had lost all confidence in authorities and industry, in their willingness or capability to improve water quality" says Peter Huisman, Executive Secretary of the ICPR during 1976-1981. "The "salt war" - this was how the press called the problem caused by discharges from the French potash mines - further kindled the fire. There were fierce political discussions with strong lobbying groups for agriculture, with the chemical industry and with public water suppliers – and all had different ideas, objectives and backgrounds." This is how Lodewijk van Ulden characterizes the situation then: "It was just like pushing a wheelbarrow full of frogs – all jumped in different directions."





Facts ▶

In 1972, the 1st Conference of Rhine Ministers charged the ICPR to draft three conventions under international law,

- ▶ One aimed at reducing the chemical pollution of the Rhine
- ▶ One aimed at reducing the chloride pollution of the Rhine
- ▶ One treating the thermal pollution of the Rhine.

The Convention on Chemical Pollution and that on Chlorides were signed in 1976.

Within the Convention on Chemical Pollution the contracting parties were obliged to run monitoring stations, to carry through monitoring programmes and to run a Warning and Alarm system.

The Chloride Convention was meant to reduce the high salt content of the Rhine due to discharges from French potash mines to such an extent that, at the German-Dutch border, concentrations remained below 200 milligrams per litre.

The Convention on Thermal Pollution was drafted, but not signed.



The Sandoz // fire in 1986 and its consequences

■ The signature of the Convention on Chemical Pollution in 1976 and fixing emission standards for 12 pollutants slowly but steadily improved water quality, as new wastewater treatment plants were built and old ones were renewed. However, the fire in a chemical plant in Switzerland on **1st November 1986** induced a principal rethinking process. During a warehouse fire at the Sandoz plant near Basel fire fighting water mixed with 10-30 tons of pesticides and flowed into the Rhine. Along hundreds of river kilometres, fish and other aquatic organisms died. Worldwide, the images of tons of dead eel in the Rhine were shown on the screens.

Within 11 months, the Ministers in charge in the Rhine bordering countries met three times to adopt the **"Rhine Action Programme"** the ICPR had drafted and which aimed at distinctly and sustainably improving water quality. Ulrich Schweizer, then Head of the Swiss delegation, today characterizes this event as "pure luck" for environment and water protection. "We immediately called for a Conference of Ministers, within one week," he remembers. This Conference of Ministers staged

in Zurich became a highlight of European environment policy at the time. "This incident startled the politicians who realized that the warehouse fire was not the main problem but that the Rhine urgently required basic rehabilitation. There were no distinct, verifiable pollution reduction targets and there was no functioning accident prevention."

"Acidic rain, Chernobyl in May 1986 and then Sandoz – that was just too much" says Lodewijk van Ulden, then Dutch Head of Delegation. "And it had happened in Switzerland, a country which couldn't be cleaner. And that was, when we realized: If something like that could happen in Switzerland, it could happen anywhere, at any time and in any works."

When flying from Zurich back to the Netherlands, the Dutch delegation presented an unusual idea to its Minister, Neelie Kroes: Salmon should return to the Rhine. Her enthusiasm was immediate and she convinced her Minister colleagues of this "symbol of Rhine rehabilitation". And was this realistic? "Many then believed we were completely crazy, that we would never succeed!" Bob Dekker, Head of the Dutch delegation since 1995 smiles when looking back.

■ Neelie Kroes charged a management consultancy to draft a powerful plan for the rehabilitation of the Rhine. And this consultancy immediately understood that all strategies followed so far and aimed at reducing the load of individual substances in the Rhine were much too slow and, as a matter of fact, inefficient. They suggested reducing, in one single act, the discharged amounts of the 34 most dangerous chemical substances by 50 %. This proposal was easy to grasp. During their 3rd meeting on **1st October 1987 in Strasbourg** the Rhine Ministers adopted it along with further **targets of the Rhine Action Programme** which became known under the slogan "Salmon 2000". The target of "50 per cent reduction" within 10 years proved to be powerful enough for the Conference for the Protection of the North Sea to equally adopt it the very same year.



■ The Rhine bordering countries had ten years to implement the required measures before results would have to be presented. "In the beginning, work was extremely tedious, people were highly opposed. Nobody wanted to disclose which works discharged which quantities of which chemical products. Evidently, the countries wanted to protect the name and good reputation of their industries", as Bob Dekker remembers. "And the industrial works knew all too well that, after the Sandoz accident, they really needed to improve their image. The new regulations on water protection gave them an appropriate possibility to do so. After some years of tough negotiations they changed politics and were more than willing to publish the information required. At that time it became clear that reduction aims were achievable by improving wastewater and process technologies in their works. As early as 1993 it became clear that the achievements were beyond the expectations. By the mid-90ies, most of the listed chemical products had been reduced by more than 90 per cent in cases where 50 per cent had been aimed for," says Bob Dekker.



Targets of the Rhine Action Programme ▶

- ✓ Species that had vanished, e.g. salmon – should return to the Rhine.
- ✓ The continuous pollution of Rhine water with direct discharges and diffuse inputs should be reduced
- ✓ In future, drinking water supply from Rhine water should remain possible
- ✓ Reduction of the pollutant content of river sediments
- ✓ Improve accident prevention





1995 – 2000 // Action Plan on Floods

■ With the Rhine Action Programme the ICPR had already extended its fields of activity to comprise the Rhine ecosystem. In 1993 and 1995 the floods of the Rhine demonstrated that the Bern Convention of 1963 did not cover aspects of water quantity. The extended Convention on the Protection of the Rhine signed on 12 April 1999 comprises aspects of flood and draught, sustainable ecosystem protection, water quality, alluvial areas of the Rhine and even ground-water. And, for the first time, NGOs may actively participate in ICPR work.

■ When Koos Wieriks came to Koblenz and took over as ICPR Executive Secretary in April 1995, one particular issue dominated the discussions: Floods. Just as the Christmas Flood of 1993, on 27 January 1995, the flood gauge rose to more than 10.70 m in Cologne. The tunnels along the banks of the Rhine were closed shortly before the water masses flooded the historic town centre. "Anybody who has witnessed such a flood event knows what it means", says Wieriks. "In particular, damages after the Christmas floods 1993 were enormous and gave rise to considerable respect for the power and the force of the river."

■ And why had the real causes for higher and more rapid floods – river training and settlements too close to the riverbanks - not been realized at an earlier stage? Presumably, time had not come. Since its foundation in 1950, cleaning the river water had been the focal point of ICPR work. "It is a good initiative, but not enough – that is, what we learnt from the floods." Of all rivers, it was the Elbe which put Dietrich Ruchay on the right track. "In 1990, when I took part in creating the Commission on the Protection of the Elbe, I remarked that in spite of the highly polluted character of this river, life in the water and on its banks was much more divers and much richer than along the Rhine and that alluvial areas were intact. And, as long as large natural alluvial areas exist, floods are a minor danger to people and their goods. The ICPR has learnt this lesson." On 22 January 1998, the implementation of the "Action Plan on Floods" was decided in Rotterdam. Its target: improving flood protection for man and goods by 2020 and extending and enhancing the floodplains of the Rhine.



■ And Paul Hansen, Luxembourgian Head of Delegation (1991-2005) adds "At that time – at the end of the 1990ies – much happened in water protection, particularly in our heads." "I am convinced that this not only applies to Luxemburg. We were experiencing an exciting transitional phase. In water matters, we in Luxemburg had been "engineers" for too long a time and had spent too little energy on "water protection". And that did not change before the Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC), in 2000, showed new ways of considering the river district."

Targets of the Action Plan on Floods

- ✓ Reduce damage risks by 10 % by 2005 and by up to 25 % by 2020.
- ✓ Reduce extreme flood stages downstream of the impounded part of the Upper Rhine by up to 30 cm until 2005 and by up to 70 cm by 2020.
- ✓ Increase flood awareness by drafting risk maps for 100% of the floodplains and for areas at risk of flooding by 2005.
- ✓ Short term improvement of flood forecasting systems due to international cooperation. Prolong forecasting periods by 100% by 2005





2001 – 2010 // Programme “Rhine 2020” and EC directives concerning river districts

■ In January 2001, the Conference of Ministers staged in Strasbourg had adopted the “Programme on the Sustainable Development of the Rhine – Rhine 2020”. It covers all areas: Quality and quantity of surface and groundwater as well as all ecological aspects. The development and successful implementation of the Rhine Action Programme (1987-2000) and the implementation of the Action Plan on Floods (1995-2020) have distinctly influenced the “water”-related discussions on a European level. At a time, when the EU was still far away, concern about “Father Rhine” gathered many European states around one table. And later on the ICPR has again and again been the trailblazer for trans-European solutions. “It might be justified to say that, on a small scale, we have contributed to constructing European environment protection,” says Anne Schulte-Wülwer-Leidig of the ICPR.

■ “Before the Water Framework Directive, five states were concerned with improving the Rhine ecosystem,” says Patrick Weingertner, French delegate to the ICPR since 1987: “Switzerland, France, Germa-

ny, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – the ICPR contracting Parties. With the Water Framework Directive, responsibilities are extended to all states in the river district, thus including Austria, Belgium, Italy and Liechtenstein.” Apart from a new integrated approach, new legal requirements are of particular importance. Patrick Weingertner: “For the first time, the countries must produce real, measurable results in water protection in order to achieve the good water quality status. For the states implied, this means a great change.”

■ In spite of the considerably time-consuming aspect, Theo Kindle, Head of Delegation from Liechtenstein (2001-2005) is enthusiastic: “I believe the EU Water Framework Directive and its river basin approach to be one of the major achievements in Europe. That really was a lucky strike! It is fundamental that European cooperation with the ICPR work as its precursor concerns the entire river district – including Liechtenstein, as the entire territory of this state is part of the Rhine catchment – which is not true of the other Member States.

■ Heide Jekel, German Head of Delegation since 2005 says: “Even from a legalistic point of view the states united by the Water Framework Directive had to begin by getting organized. They founded an additional Coordination Committee. In the beginning, the two bodies met one after the other, since 2006 meetings are held in common. We have now become a joint discussion and working unit, practically speaking, there is no difference. Austria has the same rights, just as Liechtenstein and Wallonia, this is really enriching.”

■ And Karl Schwaiger agrees: “Austria is part of the Rhine catchment and thus part of the mutually supportive community. We can contribute with our particular point of view as an inland area. With respect to this aspect we are marked by the work in the Commission on the Protection of the Danube so we are quite aware of our responsibility for protecting the seas into which the rivers flow, which, in case of the Rhine is the North Sea.



Future Core Areas ▶

1. Restore the biological continuity and increase habitat variety, i.e. the structures of river bottoms, river banks and alluvial areas
2. Further improve water quality, equally taking into account residues of pharmaceuticals, hormone active ingredients etc.
3. Further improve flood protection and flood prevention
4. Draft adjustment strategies to effects of climate change (hydrological regime, water temperature).



Prepared for the future

Today, 60 years after its foundation the question is, whether the ICPR is prepared to face future challenges.

■ Heide Jekel is convinced: “We are well prepared to be able to respond to future challenges by presenting good attempts at solutions. Let me name examples as the pollutant reduction and micro-pollutants.”

■ For Stephan Müller, Swiss Head of Delegation since 2003 “It is decisive for the future that the Rhine and all of its functions remain available to us in future – providing us with drinking water, serving as navigation lane, for recreational purposes and for power generation. The ICPR may base its work on the success of the past, but that will not be enough.” Technical evolution brings about new problems. “Today we are confronted with chemical substances our eye does not see very well. We are talking about micro-pollutants such as algaecides and biocides, pharmaceutical products and cleaning agents which do not conspicuously colour the water but are nevertheless highly active in our ecosystems and are mostly not degraded in wastewater treatment plants. They all have particular characteristics, for some organisms they may be mortal or they may have hormonal effects. No matter, whether households, agriculture or industry are concerned” – Stephan Müller believes all sources to be of such relevance that they have to be reduced. “Optimistically speaking

and from a technical point of view, we might have micro-pollutants under control in 15 to 20 years.”

For the former Head of Delegation from Liechtenstein, Theo Kindle, diverging interests concerning the use pose another problem. “Everybody is right in calling for regenerative or clean sources of energy and in one breath they refer to solar energy, wind energy and hydropower. That is problematic! In particular when talking about the use of hydropower people tend to forget that it has a strong impact on the hydrological regime. Each tributary which is cut off considerably impacts the ecosystem. It is of course in the interest of the Rhine to control problems related to climate change and to use regenerative energy. This must, however, not generate new ecological problems.”

■ And Stephan Müller adds: “For different reasons our main objective should be to protect habitats. From a design point of view it is thus important to implement the habitat patchwork connectivity. No matter whether salmon, eels or other animals and plants are living in the different habitats: The reproduction and future survival of these species must be granted. And salmon must be able to return to Basel and the waters restored in that area.”

■ Ben van de Wetering, present ICPR Executive Secretary adds: “What we need is a large time frame. In order to meet challenges such as climate change, a five-year-time frame is not enough. We need to go beyond the so often mentioned time frame 2020. We should consider the period up to 2050 and plan in advance.” In 30 to 70 years his home country, the Netherlands, will presumably have difficulties in providing sufficient drinking water all year round. This is part of the Dutch Delta Programme.

■ According to André Weidenhaupt, the Luxembourgian Head of Delegation since 2005, not only drinking water production is facing new challenges. “We already know: On average, air and water temperature are rising. Summers are becoming warmer and dryer. Water management must react to this fact and measures must be coordinated across the sectors.

■ Marieke van Nood, Head of the EU delegation since 2010 confirms that, from the point of view of the European Commission:

“The international cooperation in the Rhine area is far ahead of that in other European river districts. In the Rhine area, there is flood protection, there are measures aimed at improving water quality and there is an ecosystem management. I do not believe that climate change will change the present principles of sustainable water management in the Rhine district. Climate change will only make existing problems more acute. So we must be prepared for adjusting existing measures.”



Why I care for the Rhine?



■ **Koos Wieriks,**
Executive Secretary of the ICPR 1995 - 2000:

Every one of us has his very personal relationship with the Rhine: We for example like remembering the silence and the most wonderful view from the Hunsrück hills down on the romantic Middle Rhine and the four lakes.

■ **Paul Hansen,**
Luxembourgian Head of Delegation 1991 - 2005:

If, today, I discover that a re-natured river again looks like the river I knew in my childhood, I feel satisfaction. It is just wonderful – all the more because, as an engineer, I used to be very technique-oriented. Today, I am cured!

■ **Stephan Müller,**
Swiss Head of Delegation since 2003:

The Rhine has accompanied me throughout my life. I was born in Stein am Rhein and grew up in Schaffhausen. When I was a little boy, I was most impressed, when my grandfather took me along with his the barge on the Rhine. The kind of barge he had more or less looked like a banana lying on the water, all flat.

■ **Marieke van Nood,**
Head of the EU delegation since 2010:

My childhood memories of the Rhine are as up-to-date as ever. I grew up in the Netherlands and as a little girl I loved looking at the cargo ships gliding through the picturesque landscape of the Rhine. This image which I very much cherish is highly symbolic.

■ **Heike Jekel,**
German Head of Delegation since 2005:

I grew up in Mainz, on the banks of the Rhine and we often went for a walk along the river. The many ships and nature are still lively. For me, the Rhine is a real axis of life – for man and nature.

■ **Karl Schwaiger,**
Austrian Deputy Head of Delegation since 2001:

In Austria, particularly in Vienna, you are somewhat far away from the Rhine. My feelings are marked by frequent journeys to Koblenz. I am always most astonished about the frequency of ships navigating on the Rhine. Every few minutes pushing units pass by, which is must more frequent than on the Danube. This really gives a glimpse of the impressive economic dynamics along the Rhine.

■ **Theo Kindle,**
Liechtenstein Head of Delegation 2001 - 2005:

The Rhine means a lot to me. I learnt to swim in a small alluvial section at the Ellhorn, which is the Loreley of the Alpine Rhine: I held a piece of wood, had no rubber ring. My arms, my chest and my legs were always quite red, the piece of wood was rough and injured my skin. I particularly liked to see all the fish. As a little boy I caught minnows, observed them in the grass and then put them back into the water. Lake Constance salmon – the lake trout - particularly fascinated me. At that time, they still existed. They were big, impressive fish which we observed during their spawning migration.

■ **Jacques Sicherman,**
President of the ICPR 2008 - 2010:

It is great to be able to celebrate this 60 year long adventure with all those implied. The real miracle is that, during all these years we succeeded in merging opposite interests and interactions into one mutually supportive community. By doing so, we managed to develop a joint vision!

■ **André Weidenhaupt,**
President of the ICPR since 2011:

Personally, I am most pleased to work even closer with the Rhine during the years to come. Every time I come to the ICPR meeting room in Koblenz I sit down in a place from where I can see the Rhine.