



Rede

der Frau Staatsministerin Schopper

**Online Konferenz:**

**Sharing beyond borders  
New ways of care, communication  
and cooperation of older people  
along the Danube and in Europe in  
times of COVID 19**

am 10. Juli 2020, 10:45 Uhr

Entwurf: HOL

Dauer: ca. 8 Minuten Redezeit + Fragen

[881 Wörter]

## **Introduction**

*Dear Commissioner Gabriel,*

*Dear President Lambertz,*

*Dear Mayor Bendel,*

*Dear Mrs. Stadelhofer,*

*My dear guests from all across the Danube region,*

It is my great pleasure to meet you here today – precisely two years after I last had the opportunity to address a conference of the Danube Networkers, at the Danube Festival 2018 in Ulm.

For obvious reasons, today's ZOOM conference setting is a completely different affair – but I am nevertheless quite impressed, how quickly the organizers defined this new format in response to the cancellation of the Danube Festival.

And the questions you are raising today

- about the participation of the older generation
- about new models for care and inclusion
- about cross-border communication and common identity in times COVID-19

could not be more up-to-date in the face of a global pandemic, that has had such a deep impact on all our lives.

And it is far from over – despite the far-reaching, and costly efforts undertaken across Europe. So far, case numbers in the Danube region have been relatively low. But recent trends in some countries are rather worrying, and a second wave can never be ruled out.

In any case, measures of social distancing, partial lock-downs and different restrictions of free movement will remain with us for some time.

Hence, I strongly welcome this conference's aim

- to provide a positive outlook,
- to create bridges for the older generation in times of COVID-19
- and to continue the cross-border exchange among the Danube stakeholders in these trying times.

### **Main part**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

since its formal adoption in 2011, the State of Baden-Württemberg has taken on a leading role in the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube region.

In addition to our many economic ties, Baden-Württemberg has strong cultural and personal connections to this part of Europe. For example, today almost 800.000 citizens of our State have a migration background from the Danube region.

The EU Strategy for the Danube regions covers an area which stretches from the Black Forest to the Black Sea, including over 100 million inhabitants.

Many of the region's challenges don't know borders: flooding, transport and energy links, environmental protection and challenges in the field of security all demand a united approach.

Therefore, the 14 countries in the region, with the support of the European Commission, are cooperating to meet these challenges.

The current crisis is a major set-back for many existing projects – to an extent, which we don't fully understand, as the full scale of the impact of the crisis is yet to emerge.

However, in such a situation of uncertainty, it remains absolutely vital to continue the existing work in joint projects with our European partners.

This is certainly also the case for the field of support for the older generation debated today.

To name just a few challenges, which are relevant for the Danube countries:

- some older citizens, particularly from rural areas, feel lonely because their grown children have left for a job. Eastern European countries are particularly affected by this brain drain.
- professionals in the health and elderly care sector – leave their homes behind and work in western European countries.
- many face economic uncertainty due to low pensions.

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region provides a platform for interested stakeholders to discuss such questions and to develop joint solutions.

Often, it is the small, bottom-up civil society projects which provide inspiring ideas.

To give you an example: the Agapedia Foundation is running a project named “Health and social care in villages” in Moldova.

In rural areas of Moldova, many elderly people remain in rural villages, in quite poor conditions. Often, family members cannot take care of them because they left the country in search of work.

As a low-scale solution, younger, unemployed women from those remote villages got trained as care workers for three month at a nursing school.

They now care for elderly people directly at their homes. These nurses are often the only contact person for the people they help.

Currently, this pilot project aims towards its permanent integration into the Moldovan health and social sector.

New models of care and new forms of communication such as this one can be an opportunity to support people and bring them together.

And I sincerely hope, that today's conference under the umbrella of the EU Strategy for the Danube region allows you to discuss such ideas.

## **Conclusion**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

you have a very interesting programme ahead of you. I wish you great discussions and many new insights for future collaborations.

Beyond these professional contents, however, the Danube Networkers have always had a strong focus on simply bringing very different people together, across generations and across borders – using our rich joint cultural heritage as common ground for, essentially, friendships.

It is quite admirable how you are now,

- with this conference,
- with regular ZOOM sessions with live music and poetry each Sunday evening,

attempting to transfer this spirit, this community into the digital realm. Will this work? Please let me know.

Nevertheless, I look forward to hopefully repeat this again in the old-fashioned, analogue way of conferencing in the future – to share the bread, to exchange, to network, to shake hands in person again, maybe at Danube Festival 2022, when this crisis will hopefully be behind us. Until then, I want to thank our organizers for this very interesting and unique conference.

## **Antwortvorschläge auf Fragen der Moderatorin:**

### **1) a) In spite of all the negative consequences of COVID-19 – where do you see potential opportunities for the Danube region and its people?**

- With regards to the economy, the short term outlook is certainly bleak across the Danube region, as it is for most parts of the world – however, in the long run, the situation might also provide some opportunities for the Danube countries.
- The vulnerabilities of global supply chains, no matter if in car production or the pharmaceutical industry, have become obvious to all of us. Some economists expect, that after the current recession is over, many companies e.g. from Germany will focus even more on their neighboring countries instead of e.g. Asia for new investments – to the benefit of the Danube region.
- Digitalisation has received a big boost across the globe. The way we communicate has transformed almost overnight – and this will have an impact, on how we collaborate in the Danube region in the future.
- Events like today's conference are quite encouraging, as they demonstrate how we can almost seamlessly continue to work



across borders, but also across larger distances.

- Even after Corona, I could imagine that international cooperation in the Danube region and elsewhere will involve less traveling and instead a more frequent, continuous exchange via digital tools – and this transformation has many positive aspects, not least with regards to our Carbon footprint.

**b) In addition: where do you see potential for the older generation to get involved?**

- The cooperation in the Danube Region has always profited strongly from the involvement of the older generation. Across many small and large Danube projects, senior experts are constantly providing valuable input, in fields reaching from on-the-job training to agriculture, from culture to scientific cooperation.
- Many do this on a voluntary basis, with very high levels of personal engagement. Mrs. Stadelhofer as our host here today is a prime example of what can be achieved.
- Due to the demographic challenges all Danube countries are facing, the professional expertise of the older generation will only gain in importance in the near future.

## **2) How has your every-day life as a politician been affected by COVID-19?**

- Immediate reaction to crisis has been the dominating issue over the last months, many other subjects mostly disappeared of the agenda or are just now slowly moving back into focus.
- Many appointments and international travels have been cancelled; however, this does not mean, that our calendar is less full. Instead, like probably many of you, we spend a lot of time in phone calls or video conferences.
- I also noticed that negotiations have become more difficult, when you can only meet via screen and not directly look into each other's eyes - particularly, when difficult, controversial subjects arise.