

**GEOGRAPHICAL PARALLELS TO THE REACHES OF THE
RIVERS THE DANUBE AND THE DOURO (RIVERS OF DESTINY
BY DESTINY OF RIVERS)**

**COMPARAȚII GEOGRAFICE PRIVIND PARTICULARITĂȚILE
ARTERELOR HIDROGRAFICE DUNĂREA ȘI DUERO (RÂURI
ALE DESTINULUI PRINTR-UN DESTIN AL RÂURILOR)**

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Abstract: The Danube and the Douro rivers are geographic objects of international importance as a result of their direct influence on the territories surrounding them.

The present article attempts to make a geographic parallel on the importance of both rivers in their respective geographic locations - Southwest Europe and Southeast Europe. It explores the influence of Douro River on Northern Portugal and the Atlantic, as well as the history of the Eastern-European people who resided alongside the Danube River. Moreover, it also examines the future of the lands they occupy.

Key-words: integration, rivers, the Danube, the Douro

Cuvinte cheie: integrare, râuri, Dunărea, Duero

During the last decades of the 20th century, humankind enters upon a new information era when globalization in all spheres changes the conditions for existence of the elements of the social system – politics, science, education, economics and culture. The Danube River is not only a natural Northern border of Bulgaria, but also a main socio-cultural axis and a bridge connecting it with the European family. It is a window on the culture of the Old continent and a connecting section in contemporary integration processes.

Bulgaria is the Southeastern gateway of Europe to the Near East. Its territory acts like a bridgehead to the European values, and also a condition for the more effective uniting of the continent in global aspect. Geographically situated in the periphery, this position has some advantages – direct contact with other continents, other cultures, generating a buffer territory effect, which can have a strengthening influence on the state.

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The diversity of cultures, the result of different manners, customs and traditions involves a lot of spectra, but also demands consolidation. It is based on the main infrastructure lines of communication in Europe, one of which is the Danube. The river has uniting functions and “takes care of” straight corresponding with its state territories as well as remote lands.

The Danube is the longest European river after Volga, but it is most cosmopolitan. The outlet to its banks offers incredible chances to many countries. Through the river they project in the spiritual and economic life of the continent and the planet.

The Danube has the role of a uniting life-giving force for Bulgaria. Through it, in our country comes the whiff of European culture – first in Vidin and Ruse and later in the interior of the country.

The topic examining the Danube has a huge scientific file and presenting whatever aspect of it is too obliging.

It demands two main questions to be clarified: to clarify the meaning of the term ‘borders’ as a cultural and political marker of human development and to compare the definition of ‘our’ Northern, historical, geographical and cultural border with the emblematic meaning of the river as a factor of the trans-border cultural, political and economic activity of the countries from Central and South-Eastern Europe.

Comparative and descriptive methods, as well as actual statistical data from the National Statistical Institute and Eurostat have been used.

Etymology and Geography

There is no other river in the world with so many names – *Istros, Danuvius, Dunaj, Duna, Duná, Tuna, Dunav, Dunărea...* and having such a rich biography – both geographical and historical. Its riversides have been crossed by Thracians, Celts, Scythians, Romans, Hellenes, Bulgarians... The river curve has been the outline of empires, the beginning of a new life for many peoples, but also a reason for conflicts and wars.

The Danube is the only river, flowing from the West to the East, crossing the continent against the logic of geological structures. That’s why it is difficult to find a better symbol of natural unity of Europe. The distance from its sources in the Schwarzwald Mountains in Germany to its delta, where it flows into the Black Sea through three branches – Chilia, Sulina and Saint George – is 2,859 km.

The Danube becomes navigable after it receives a lot of Alpine tributaries. About 30 from its 300 feeders are also navigable. Its tributaries come from seven other countries, besides these through which it flows. Some of them are important rivers, navigable for barges and shallow-draft river ships. More important are: the Inn (flowing into the Danube near Passau), the Morava, the Drava, the Tisa, the Sava (influx near Belgrade) and the Prut. In some places, the Danube reaches more than 30 m in depth.

Many of the Bulgarian rivers run into the Danube and the majority of them are artefacts of the social and economic development of the country. In that sense, they are also historical and geographical cultural markers.

- ✦ **The Timok river** has a specific position in the Bulgarian space and time. Its name derives from the Thracian ‘dark’, i.e. dark river. The Roman castle Tierna was situated on its mouth.
 - ✦ Afterwards, the following rivers are: the **Topolovets, the Voinishka, the Vidbol, the Lom, the Skat, the Ogosta** (named after the Roman fortress Augusta).
 - ✦ **The Iskar river** (*Oskios*, later *Eskus*), is the biggest Bulgarian feeder and is in many ways unique: the oldest river on the Balkan peninsula and the only one which kept its initial flow after the big changes of the earth surface; the only river that rises from South Bulgaria (the Rila Mountains), crosses over the Stara Planina, forming the incredible Iskar gorge (an inspiration for many popular Bulgarian poets and writers); and the only catchment area on the Bulgarian territory that is situated between the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea.
 - ✦ **The Vit river** has a relatively large catchment basin and asymmetrical valleys. Close to its mouth traces of the Roman fortress Utus have been found.
 - ✦ In 1877 at the mouth of the **Tekirdere river** the Russian army crossed the Danube.
 - ✦ **The Yantra river** has the biggest catchment basin (7,861 sqkm). The river forms picturesque curves around the hills of the old Bulgarian capital Turnovo (Tsarevets, Trapezitsa, Sveta Gora); before it runs into the Danube, the Yantra river makes the confluence with its left feeder, the Studena river. Close by, the Roman castle Yatrus is situated.
 - ✦ **The Rusenski Lom** is the Danube’s largest feeder in the eastern part of the Danube plain. The nature park of the ‘Rusenski Lom’ in the vicinity of Ivanovo village is the home of the monastery St. Archangel Michael, which is one of the UNESCO world heritage sites.
- The islands in the Bulgarian section of the Danube:**
- ✦ Bulgaria has 57 Danube islands which are estimated to 86 square km.
 - ✦ The **Vardim island** is 4.9 squarekm (right after Belene). The reserve ‘The old oak’ is situated on its territory.
 - ✦ Opposite to Batin island, the remains of the Roman castle Sakidava can be found.
Close to the city of Ruse is the island Lulak (Lilac).

Historical notes

A bridge to Western Europe, but also between Western Europe and the Black Sea, the road giving access to Constantinople, as if the Danube has accumulated in itself the main history of the Balkans – “historical”, as well as mythologized. If we paraphrase the most generalized meaning of the name of the

Danube river – “flow, run through”, the flowing “through time, space, people”, the Danube is the “eyewitness” of the earliest civilization activities of peoples, inhabiting from antiquity the wide geographical region through which it flows. Being a main waterway through mainland and at the same time border, dividing this mainland, it has attracted to itself in its valley different ethnoses. For the time of its existence, at least in the memory of people (mythological and historical), the Danube unites and disunites, disunites and unites unusually wide conglomeration of peoples, languages and traditions. In this sense, it has always been and it remains a giant bridge/mediator and in the same time – a border.

Especially significant is the role of the Danube river in the Slavonic history. During the centuries of Ottoman rule, when the inconstant political borders from the time of the Balkan Middle Ages lose their concrete outlines, in Bulgarians’ opinion, the Danube is the only one, exactly fixed, and not an imaginary border line, which closes the Bulgarian space.

As a merchant connection, the Danube begins to be used during the 18th century, preserving this significance until now. Mary Theresa, the queen of Hungary from the Habsburg dynasty, forms a group, which had to regulate sailing along the river. It has been considered that the first commercial ship sailing took place in 1830 from Wien to Budapest. During the XIXth century, the Danube becomes an important commercial connection between the Western and the economies of the Balkan peninsula.

Area

The border between Bulgaria and Romania stretches on the distance of 610 km, and 470 km of them follow the stream of the Danube River.

Eight Bulgarian provinces are situated alongside the Bulgarian-Romanian border. They are administrative units (level NUTS III), which belong to the following three regions (level NUTS II):

- provinces Vidin, Vratsa, Montana and Pleven (Severozapaden region);
- provinces Veliko Tarnovo, Ruse and Silistra (Severen tsentralen region);
- province Dobrich (Severoiztochen region).

They cover an area of 32,613 sqkm.

Population

The number of population is 1,841,701, and the average density is 66 people per sqkm. (NSI, 2010).

There are significant differences among the distribution of population between urban and rural inhabited regions, in the presence of high-urbanized provinces on one hand (in Ruse more than 70% of the population lives in towns) and low-urbanized provinces on the other hand (only 45% of the population of Silistra live in towns). The percentage distribution between urban and rural

inhabited regions is almost 2/3 to 1/3. The demographic tendencies for the region as a whole, show that its population is aging and the labour force is decreasing.

The low density of population and the model of scattered settling outline the peripheral and rural character of the bigger part of the region. The economic status (wage rate, income and employment) of the rural areas is low as a whole. The general character of changes during the last decade supposed the concentration of population around larger settlements. In the whole cross-border region, especially rural areas suffered from the constant migration.

Economics

The economic results of border territories are very weak, as compared to the average standards of the European Union member states. GDP per capita of the population in the region is 3,400 euro (2008) lower compared to the average GDP of Bulgaria – 4,700 euro and that of the EU – 28,100 euro (Eurostat, 24.02.2011).

In the economic structure, traditionally dominates agriculture (especially under irrigation). The specialisation is based mainly on production of grain crops, vegetables, grapes and fruits, complemented by the stock-breeding sector. The predominant small family farms are distinguished by low productivity.

Industry develops mainly in town centres. In many cases, industry is represented by enterprises, connected with worsening production and they need reorganization. There are main economic centres as Pleven, Vratsa and Ruse, in which enterprising activity, foreign investments and productivity are relatively high.

There are good opportunities for the development of economic tourism (The Baba Vida Fortress, The Belogradchik Rocks, The Rock-Hewn Churches of Ivanovo, Lake Srebarna - a biosphere reserve under the protection of UNESCO and others.)

The Bulgarian Danubian settlements – cultural-historical markers

Vidin, Lom, Russe, Svishtov, Nikopol, Silistra play a vital role in Bulgaria's culture and urban development.

Vidin is the first big Bulgarian port, down the Danube. It emerged over the ruins of the old Celtic settlement of Dunonia. Later on, the Romans built a fortress and named it Bononia, called Bdin by the Bulgarians and Vidini by the Greeks. Since the second half of the 13th century, it became the main town of the Vidin Protectorate and during the second half of the 14th century was the capital of the Vidin Kingdom.

Vidin is the home of a few of the symbols of multiethnic symbiosis, political and cultural development: the wholly preserved medieval fortress Baba Vida; the oldest synagogue in Bulgaria; the mausoleum of exarch Antim I, who was the first Bulgarian exarch and the first chairman of the Bulgarian parliament.

- **Lom** – is founded by the Thracians, who called it Artanes. Later on during the years of the Roman empire the name changed to Almus. Its present name was first mentioned in 1704.

- ✦ **Nikopol** – is a successor of the ancient settlements Sekuristika and Nikopolis ('A City of Victories'). It became an important place during the Ottoman rule due to its strategic location.
- ✦ **Svishtov** is the successor of the Roman castle Nove.
- ✦ **Ruse** is the biggest and the most 'European' city among the Danubian towns. During the 1st century, the ancient fortress of Sexaginta Prista was built on its grounds. During the IXth–Xth century, it was restored as a medieval Bulgarian settlement called Rusi (Russe). It gradually transformed into a well-embattled fortress, later on called Giurgevgrad. After the XVIth century, the town became Ruschuk.

Ruse was a part of the defence quadrangle Ruschuk-Silistra-Varna-Shumen during the Ottoman rule.

In 1935, Ruse became the headquarters of the state-owned company Bulgarian river sailing.

The construction of the Danube Bridge as well as the expansion of a ferry line contributed to the economic development of the city.

During the Middle Ages, Silistra pertained the role of an important fortress and a pillar for the Christianization of the population.

During the Ottoman rule, Silistra was a strategic administrative centre as well as one of the main ports along the Danube. After the World War IInd, Silistra was industrialized and industries such as electronics, chemical, textile and furniture production were developed.

The Srebarna Reserve (1997) is a UNESCO world heritage site.

- ✦ **Kozloduy**, a hometown to the first and so far only Bulgarian Atomic Power Station; **Tutrakan**; **Archar**; **Oryahovo**; **Gigen**; **Belene**.

They had their prime during the Roman empire rule, however, they are of secondary importance during the urbanization along the Danube nowadays.

Only Belene is an exception, due to the fact that the second Atomic Power Station is planned to be built in its vicinity.

The Danubian ports

- ✦ **Lom** – The Lom Port Complex, encompassing the ports Lom and Oryahovo is an important transport link to Western Europe and the Rhein-the Main-the Danube Channel.
- ✦ **Svishtov** – there are projects major industrial units to be built such as the Hydro-technical complex Nikopol–Turnu Măgurele, the Second Atomic Power Station, etc.
- ✦ **Ruse** is second regarding the shipment volumes. It is a focal point of two of the major European corridors – Seven and Nine.

The Bridges

- ✦ The first Bulgarian Danube bridge was built between Eskus (village of Gigen) and village Celei (Romania). It was opened for land traffic from Constantinople through the Troyan passage to Dacia in 328 AD and was destroyed in 376 AD. Until the middle of the 20th century, attempts for the construction of a new bridge were never made.

- ✦ The bridge Ruse-Giurgiu (The Bridge of Friendship) was built in 1954. Its meaning increases even more now, with the development of the European Corridor Number Nine (Helsinki–Aleksandropolis).
- ✦ Negotiations between Bulgaria and Romania led to the agreement of the construction of a new bridge between Vidin and Calafat and are considered to be an important precondition for the development of an European Corridor Number Four (Central Europe-Vidin-Sofia-Thessaloniki), which will arguably stimulate the economic, social and cultural development of Western Bulgaria.

The Danube has been and will be important, because it is:

- ✦ A ‘river highway’ for transport and shipment.
- ✦ A local factor for industrialization, in close connection to the import and export along the river.
- ✦ A factor for the development of agriculture on the productive lands alongside the Danube.
- ✦ An important factor for the development of industrial and sport fishing, recreation, sport and tourism.

In short, the Danube has been and still is a bridge/mediator and in the same time a border.

That is why when speaking about the Bulgarian cultural and historical heritage and its dimensions, we should acknowledge the main influences - ancient, Roman, the most determinative the Byzantine, later on the Ottoman/Islamic, which have developed mainly Southwards of the Danube and the Central European, which were oriented towards the Habsburg Monarchy but have also made an imprint on the Danube.

Geopolitical challenges

We can find them in the sense of the words Aristotle spoke more than 2,300 years ago: “It is not borders that protect rivers, but people!”

In a contemporary geopolitical aspect, the river will not play a dividing barrier role, but the role of an axis of integration, uniting the Danubian countries. The evidence lies in that they are the economic zones which are being built in its lower course, in the intensification of traffic, expansion of the geography of the European Union in the area of the Lower Danube (Photo 1), the realisation of supraregional and supranational infrastructure, the cultural and socio-economic projects with the active participation and partnership of neighbours, the well-intentioned stretched hand to economic introvert states like Moldova for example.

When we speak about the Bulgarian cultural-historical heritage and look for its Eurocivilization dimensions, we must give an account of the two directions of influence – antique, Roman and mostly determinative Byzantine and later Ottoman-Islamic – which spread out mainly South of the Danube, and Middle-European, orientated towards the Habsburg monarchy, which left its mark on the Danubian space, or, in other words, on the Northern part of Southeastern Europe.



Photo 1. The Danube River

Maybe the most precise and magnificent illustration of the role the Danube has as a mediator, a symbol of communication and sociality and also, of an unusual type of cultural activity, gives the Nobel prize winner Elias Canetti in his book “The Tongue Set Free” (Die gerettete Zunge). He himself, emblematic for the Balkan-Danubian type of culture – Sefard, who was born in Ruse and wrote in German, presents his “Bulgarian-Danubian childhood” in Ruse (Ruschuk) among Bulgarian, Turks, Sefards, Greeks, Albanians, Armenians, Gipsies, Russians in a unique way:

“Ruschuk, in the lower course of the Danube river, where I came into the world, was a marvellous town for a child, and when I say it was situated in Bulgaria, I don’t give the full idea of it, because there lived people of most different origins and in only one day you could hear seven or eight languages... And from the opposite riverbank Romanians were coming.”

These impressions are the base for the conclusion: “Everything I experienced later, had already happened in Ruschuk.” This is the ethnical, linguistic and therefore cultural diversity, which sets up a puzzle, forming the unique Balkan-Danubian aspect.

The Douro River, a historic waterway in Northern Portugal

The Douro River (Photo 2), the second largest in Portugal, rises in the Urbion Mountain in northern Spain, at about 2,080 meters in altitude, and flows to the sea in Porto, Portugal. Summing up 927 km in length, only 213 run through Portuguese territory, while 112 correspond to the International Douro, a stretch crossed by the border with Spain. It is currently navigable for the last 325 Km, which only became possible after the construction of 5 dams with floodgates, between the 1950s and 1970s, as the only way to overcome the differences in altitude throughout its course, creating large reservoirs with wide-ranging potential (Gonçalves, 1978).

Considered dangerous and “untameable” for centuries, the Douro did however serve as the main access route to the Douro winegrowing region (NE Portugal) for centuries, given the lack of safe land routes. Indeed, it was only

during the 20th century that strategic investments were to be made in access routes, particularly roadways, since the existing ones were scarce and unsafe, subject to regular ambushes, as well as highly deficient technically. Thus, the Douro region was supplied via the Douro River, with provisions, commercial products (among which textiles, metal and chemical products, etc.), and even passengers, and by which regional products were transported, such as fruit, olive oil and cereals, as well as wine, brandy and vinegar (Pina, 2007). However, there were many narrow, silted canals throughout its course, as well as rapids, which made navigation difficult for the boats (Pereira, 2001).

Given its importance to regional development, the Douro River was regularly travelled on, even though the task was quite epic in difficulty, subject to tragedy associated with the need to overcome countless physical obstacles (sandbanks, strong undercurrents, narrow canals), but only thus it was possible to connect Porto to the Douro region until the 19th century.



Photo 2. The Douro River

The importance of this waterway was such that as early as 1502, during the reign of King Manuel I (D'Abreu, 2007), it was determined that all the canals considered necessary were to be opened from its mouth in Porto to the town of S. João da Pesqueira, where the Cachão da Valeira (waterfall) was located. The advantages of navigating beyond S. João da Pesqueira were also considered at the time, extending navigability to Ribacôa upstream, and perhaps even as far as the kingdom of Castile. There were boats carrying 1,500 to 1,800 bushels of grain which, having reached S. João da Pesqueira, could go no further because of the Cachão da Valeira. The demolition of this waterfall in 1792, as well as other

obstacles, opened up navigation to the border, making the river navigable to the mouth of the Sabor River in 1809 and Barca de Alva in 1811 (Pereira, 2001).

It was however the production of wines of excellence, particularly Port, that drew international renown to the region. The vineyards were expanded to produce this nectar which rapidly conquered England and then the entire world, and once again the Douro River, despite the obstacles along its course, was the means by which, as well as other types of wine, brandies, and vinegars, were transported on small wooden boats called “Rabelos”, built to overcome the “rapids”, to Porto, from where they were exported.

Despite deficiencies in terms of access routes, it was only during the 19th century that investments were to be made in the railway, reaching Régua in 1879. As for the road system, only at the beginning of the 20th century, under the government of João Franco, some efforts were made to expand it, reason by which the Douro River, although having been partially substituted by the “via acellerada” (‘rapid route’) (Pina, 2007), the railway 2, in the second half of the 19th century, remained a major route between Porto and the Douro region. The road network was only really expanded in the 1960s, leading to the transport of wines by truck, and finally to the end of the Douro River as the main access route to the Portuguese NE.

Currently, the main strategy for the Douro is tourism, despite several attempts to increase the waterway’s profitability, such as for example the direct export of granite from northern Portugal to Germany on barges. In 1985, the *Gabinete de Navegabilidade do Douro* (Douro Navigability Office) was established, lasting until 1994, substituted then by the *Instituto de Navegabilidade do Douro* (Douro Navigability Institute). The institute’s main goals comprise management of river traffic and several projects which aimed at revitalizing the river banks, apart from the maintenance and signalling the navigable canal.

However, tourism is the main factor underlying the Douro River’s recent revitalization. In all its various dimensions, this activity has boosted the superb heritage surrounding the river. In 1999, over 100,000 tourists travelled the river, and by 2009, the number had risen to about 350,000 (IPTM, 2009), providing these visitors with a sublime scenario, not only in terms of a magnificent landscape, but also a rich architectural, cultural and oenological heritage. The landscape displays human intervention over the centuries, in multiple dimensions such as the economic, social, cultural technical and morphological (Pina, 2008).

The Demarcated Douro Region, a heritage to preserve

The Douro Demarcated Region is a paradigmatic area extending over 250,000 hectares, of which 45,000 are covered by continuous vineyards, offering unforgettable, highly varied landscapes where the terrace dominates. Indeed, it is the only technique possible to overcome the steepness of the slopes surrounding the Douro River, in a valley where schist soils and a Mediterranean-type microclimate

² The railway did not totally substitute the ‘Rabelo’ boat, merely for financial reasons, since it was quite expensive.

are home to specific, regional grape varieties, producing wines of excellence such as Port. Classified as World Heritage by UNESCO in 2001, the region was the first to be delimited and regulated as the producer of this nectar as far back as 1756. This measure led to profound interventions on a harsh landscape where the forests framing the river disappeared, to be replaced by a landscape carved with terraces laden with vines.

Another aspect worth noting is the region's landscape diversity, derived from different degrees of vine coverage and its morphological characteristics, distinct according to the period analyzed. The terrace as the only technique to grow vines was used in the Douro region for centuries, whereas, as from the 1970s, new technologies and economic imperatives, namely the need to mechanize the vineyards, led to new types of vine morphologies on the landscape. Thus, the traditional terraces, enclosed by dry stone walls, were substituted by the "vinha ao alto" (vertical planting of rows of vines up the face of the slopes) or the "vinha em patamares" (narrower terraces), diversifying the scenario.

But there are many other points of interest along the Douro River's banks. Although the vine will always be the region's economic mainstay, other potentialities have emerged, holistically taking advantage the different spatial dimensions (Pina, 2010). This is the case of a vast and diversified cultural and built heritage. Leaving the historical city of Porto with its 240,000 inhabitants (INE, 2001), Portugal's second largest city, and travelling upstream to the Douro Demarcated Region, manor houses from the 18th and 19th centuries appear, dispersed throughout the slopes, part of wine estates and surrounded by vineyards. In other places, one can find a concentration of buildings from those same centuries, offering a remarkable wealth of fine architecture. There are also urban centres, home to an outstanding architectural heritage, as well as classified and protected areas. Centres such as Vila Real, the district capital that developed on the crossway of the main regional access routes. The town underwent profound development dynamics in the 1970s following the establishment of the Polytechnic Institute, today the University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro. Religious architecture abounds (churches, chapels, etc.) from different eras, apart from the Mateus Palace, located in the parish next to the urban centre, a prime example of Baroque architecture in northern Portugal, built under the aegis of Nicolau Nazoni; the town of Peso da Régua, called the "Port wine capital", or Torre de Moncorvo and Vale da Vilariça, and still Freixo de Espada à Cinta, a Manueline (Portuguese late Gothic) town close to the border with Spain. On the river's left bank, there is Lamego, an episcopal town with a remarkable history and heritage covering different periods. Going further East, we come across the towns of Tabuaço and S. João da Pesqueira, with their manor houses and cultural wealth. Lastly, one cannot ignore the Côa Valley Archaeological Park, also classified by UNESCO, and the Douro International Natural Park, with its cliffs and promontories, aimed at preserving the local fauna and flora. It is the valuable landscape and architectural diversity that stands out in the Douro Valley, in which the Douro Demarcated Region undoubtedly occupies a privileged place.

A few concluding remarks

To sum up, the strategies historically associated with the Douro River were based on the trade of merchandise as a means to revitalize and boost NE Portugal, whereas, as from the 1980s, tourism came to be seen as the “magical” solution to development, contributing to achieving the goals set out in regional spatial planning proposals, namely the “Plano de Desenvolvimento Turístico do Vale do Douro 2007-2013” (Douro Valley Tourism Development Plan 2007-2013) (Magalhães, 2008). The aim is the growing enhancement of the Douro and, most particularly, of the Douro Demarcated Region, viewed as a priority ‘hub’ in the development of tourism in northern Portugal.

Despite the existing deficiencies, the Douro River presents a heritage full of history, successes and difficult moments, derived from its natural setting, particularly the steepness of its slopes, and where this waterway played a crucial role within the regional dynamics. Having received differing degrees of attention throughout its history, including periods where it was practically ignored, the river today enjoys a new opportunity to revive the experiences rooted in its banks. Apart from the tourism dimension, advantage should be taken of the river’s hydroelectric potential (Leitão, 2001), dissected by dams with floodgates, thus also contributing to the development of a modern, safe communication route able to boost and preserve the cultural and social identity of the Douro wine country. The potential of the landscape as well as the environmental, social, cultural, oenological and gastronomic dimensions can thus be taken advantage of and enhanced.

The Douro River, bearing in mind the different scales, presents similarities with the history and dynamics of the Danube River, but also great differences. It was for centuries the main access route to the Upper Douro and, following the delimitation of the Douro Demarcated Region in 1756, comprised the prime means by which wine products were transported from the region, particularly Port wine. Its importance gradually declined with the construction of the railway as from 1879, and later, from the 1960s given the government’s preference for roadways. However, following the construction of several dams to regulate its discharge and, particularly, the winegrowing region’s classification as World Heritage in 2001, in recognition of its landscape, architectural, cultural and oenological heritage, the river has been revived as a strategic axis, particularly from a tourism perspective.

Thus, the preservation/revitalization of the Douro region can be boosted.

If Bulgaria is the Southeastern gateway towards Europe, Portugal is the Southwestern one. And one house must have some exits leading to the world. We Bulgarians and the Portuguese are predestined by one fate – to revive hopes and to give benevolent shelter to anybody, who recognizes us as friends. Both peoples, at least in our mind, are such. This makes us members of one family, grown and preserved due to our common affection.

The Danube and the Douro Rivers, two watercourses surrounded by distinct landscape and cultural settings, but whose destiny reveals many similarities.

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