



**4TH MEETING OF NATIONAL CONTACT POINTS AND PRIORITY AREA COORDINATORS
Vienna, 11 – 12 March 2014**

Summary Report

General points/Conclusions

- Starting phase is over; now it is time to re-sharpen and develop a new perspective for a more mature phase, including a new balance between the EU and the countries.
- Main challenges ahead include programming, governance/implementation, and how to bring results/added value.
- Many projects and initiatives with high value added being developed/strengthened in the framework of the Strategy.
- Embedding of the Strategy in the 2014-2020 programmes is possible with good internal coordination.
- There will be continuous support of EC with a focus on strategic facilitation and ensuring EU involvement (e.g. participation of line DGs in Steering Groups).
- The EC report on governance must be translated in the specific Danube context – first discussions to take place linked with the 3rd Annual Forum (Vienna, 26-27 June 2014).

EUSDR Implementation: State of play

Tour de table : PAC presenting their main achievement in 2013 in terms of actions and/or projects implementation

PA 1a 'Inland navigation':

- After the June 2012 Declaration on waterway maintenance, the objective is now to reinforce political commitment on the highest level.
- Some "flagship" projects have been identified:
 - NEWADA duo, an active network of waterway operators
 - HINT dealing with harmonisation of education and training in the field of inland waterway transport.
 - CO-WANDA dealing with the treatment of waste coming from inland vessels.
- The study into "innovative Danube vessels" resulted in a range of promising technological innovations that can be applied to inland vessels operating on the Danube. These innovations are ultimately aimed at making Danube navigation economically more competitive and less polluting. Results of the study will be presented at the occasion of the 3rd Annual Forum.

PA 1b 'Rail, road and air':

- Coordination between SG members and stakeholders continued on "higher level".
- Workshop on rail freight corridors offered a valuable debate on state-of-play expressing a need for a new corridor linking EU and non-EU member states.
- Seminar on air transport development and connectivity showed a potential of this region with many underused airport infrastructure; stakeholders (among others Aviation authorities, airports and air carriers) agreed that a study on air connectivity would be an important instrument for future activities.
- Projects: monitoring of progress on projects received and listed in PA1b database was carried out. In addition: efforts for a project on "a common transport vision" continued with the aim to find a financier, new project on "transport infrastructure assessment and needs until 2020" was initiated in joint cooperation with EIB-BDCP and need to be ready for implementation in 2014.

PA 2 'Energy':

- Emphasis was on gas-related issues, continued with a region-wide gas analysis, transnational spill-over effects.
- Smart Grids and biomass plans were developed, support from DG ENER.
- Geothermal: project proposal, workshop with the participation of 19 institutions from 10 Danube countries.
- Participation in a seminar in Stockholm on 2nd April to exchange best practices with EUSBSR.

PA 3 'Culture & tourism':

- Successful active discussion with ETC programmes was held.
- End of May/ June: Floating conference very successful: BG, RO and Serbia, view of setting up EGTCs in the field of tourism and culture.
- Steering group realized PA3 should focus more on culture (project on culture supported by TAF-DRP).
- Transnational Culture Route: HR, RS, BG, RO → DG ENT-decides if project will continue.
- Joint Marketing Initiative: 10 countries, countries see each other as competitors.
- Strengthened cooperation with PA 8. Joint workshop will be proposed for the 3rd Annual Forum.

PA 4 'Water quality':

- Strengthened relations and involvement of all stakeholders incl. ICPDR, DG ENV, JRC.
- After structured dialogue with main actors, main issues and priorities have been identified: buffer strips, early warning systems, gaps in "Blueprint" options.
- Exercise on collecting joint priorities for the programming 2014-2020 is on-going.
- Cooperation with research sector has been enhanced.
- Big Stakeholder Conference in Budapest in September 2013 with a focus on trans-boundary water issues.

PA 5 'Environmental risks':

- Flood survey (multilateral evaluation) carried out after 2013 flooding.
- Scientific stakeholders are increasingly involved (flood protection external group).
- Underlined need for cooperation on civil protection.

PA 6 'Biodiversity':

- Biodiversity issues have been raised in many other PAs.
- Flagship project: Sturgeon 2020: strategy was finalized, received TAF-DRP funding.
- Green corridors projects further developed.
- PA 6 is developing a "vision" to be handed over to politicians (no focus on individual projects): This could be developed as well by other PAs.
- Cooperation with 1a: integrated approach for nature protection and inland navigation. Joint Statement: Sava Commission, Danube Commission, ICPDR.
- Different stakeholders have been increasingly involved (authorities, NGOs, scientific community). Local level and NGOs is still a gap to address.

PA 7 'Knowledge society':

- Part of pillar III: PA 7-8-9 are working closely together – integrated approach, many joint projects, common SG meeting in Bratislava.
- The EUSDR is more and more recognized in this priorities and gets better visibility among local and regional stakeholders + new stakeholders have been reached and are onboard, e.g. through stakeholders meetings. Other countries are cooperating, even outside the EUSDR area, like Poland, or Northern Italy.
- Key Projects/initiatives :
 - Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund (DRRIF) feasibility study progressed
 - DANUBIUS
 - DREAM
 - Master programme for Danube Region students
- Full support from Danube Rectors Conference (now a legal entity: 65 participating universities with an established secretariat, representing 2 (out of 3) million students in the region.
- Very useful support by the JRC to work on smart specialisation in the region.

PA 8 'Competitiveness':

- Objective is to promote economy and education.
- More political support is needed from Steering Group members.
- SMEs work and clustering works (DanuClas) are progressing.
- 7 working groups are developing concrete projects.
- Socio-economic study: second progress report.
- Triple helix conference successful.
- Focus is on Dual education and Knowledge transfer in entrepreneurship: 9 countries are included, financing via IPA.

PA 9 'People & Skills':

- Common Steering Group in Bratislava with PA 7 and 8, 2nd SG in Bucharest back to back with 2nd Annual Forum.
- Stakeholder Forum: 120 participants from 13 countries: Topics: Vocational training (e.g. VET cooperation project between AT-RO-BG), Roma, education, Erasmus, Migration.
- Working group on migration.
- Project level: interesting cooperation with Ukraine, on know-how transfer in the field of labour market and employment.
- Ukrainian colleagues were in Vienna on 19/20 February: seminar of cooperation.
- Moldova: project supported by AT Development Agency, working with ex-street-children.



- Project "Empowering young people-Connecting Europe".

PA 10 'Institutional capacity & cooperation':

- Covers 4 areas: capacity building, civil society, financing options, regional cooperation. Urban issues have been added.
- Danube Financing Dialogue continues, meetings with EIB.
- Other pilot actions: TAF-DRP, START

PA 11 'Security':

- Danube security Conference and Cyber Crime Symposium were held.
- Dialogue with PA 1a on customs service control.
- Project Rule of Law finished.
- Danube River Forum/DARIF: 3 joint operations on the Danube.

Tour de table: NCP to present the 2014-2020 programming processes in each MS and non-MS and what provisions were included in the Partnership Agreements / Operational Programmes regarding the EUSDR

Austria:

- Partnership agreement is almost ready. References to Danube and Alpine Strategies: government arrangements, starting points for future cooperation. Integrated approach is included
- OP: 1 single programme for the IfGJ objective, owned by 9 AT Länder. It does not foresee a cooperation element or activities (not strict links), it will focus on supporting enterprises.
- ETC programmes will have a thematic focus.
- At Austrian level the network of programmes meet regularly to exchange information

Bulgaria:

- Preparation of national programmes is proceeding. OP Competitiveness focusing on Bulgarian enterprises, OP Transport and Infrastructure to develop intermodal connections, new intermodal terminal in the port of Ruse.
- Good cooperation with RO and RS to draft CBC programmes.
- Memorandum of Understanding signed at ministerial level with RO in the field of regional development.
- TN cooperation as a priority (transfer of experience with other MS)

Croatia:

- National Committee of Coordination: 2014-2020, priorities for cooperation
- Main priorities are Investments in energy infrastructure and in Climate change

Germany:

- Baden-Württemberg: Dialogue with programming people started in Stuttgart (21 June) continued in BW. OP is finished, very small ERDF programme focusing on innovation and CO2 emissions. Strong linkage for knowledge transfer. ESF: focus on education and mobility of labour force.
- Bavaria: ERDF programme main focus is innovation and environment.

**Romania:**

- Inter-ministerial body for coordination and thematic coordination groups were established for preparing the Partnership Agreement.
- Partnership Agreement in consultations now → projects in all programmes are required to be assessed against EUSDR relevance.
- PA 8-11 have cross-sectorial, integrated projects, which is an added value of the strategy
- There is still a need to involve other EC DGs in the implementation of EUSDR

Slovenia:

- Being involved in two macro-regional strategies require good coordination
- Main focus on TO 5, 6, 7. Strong cooperation with Sava River Commission and ICPDR.
- Too early to know what macro-regional aspects will be included in CBC OPs.

Moldova:

- Want to be financially part of the Danube Transnational Programme with IPA funds, question is still open.

Hungary:

- Systematic embedding of EUSDR in Partnership Agreement and all OPs, based on links of EUSDR to Europe 2020.
- Inter-ministerial group to plan and coordinate the programming exercise.
- HU SG members checked the draft OPs.
- Follow-up mechanisms are being established.

Serbia:

- Country Strategy paper finalized, EUSDR is included.
- Main objective: to support accession process (driving element).

Slovakia:

- Partnership Agreement: synergies with the Danube Strategy are considered mainly in innovation, environment, infrastructure. Aim is also embedding it in all relevant OPs
- Managing Authorities to ensure complementarity of specific calls with the objectives of the Danube Strategy.

Financial support for the implementation

- EC introduced the tools available in the regulations including possibility for country-specific OP to cooperate transnationally (art. 70, art. 96 CP), the need to strengthen links between OPs and EUSDR bodies (PACs, SGs) and the connections with other funding sources (Horizon 2020, LIFE, COSME etc. but also national funding, grants and loans, etc.).
- The MA of Danube Programme presented the state-of-play of preparation and use of TO 11 to support the governance of the Strategy (incl. support to PACs, seed money, technical/focal point).
- PAC 6 presented a concrete proposal to link PAC/SG with the future Danube programme by including a chapter on EUSDR relevance in the project application form.
- Support of TAF-DRP and START was presented by PAC 10.

Discussion on the value of the Letter of Recommendation (LoR):

- Main concerns: PACs might be faced with too many projects which they cannot realistically assess, cross-cutting projects must be evaluated by all concerned PAs, the whole SG (and not only PACs) should issue LoR, differences between ETC programmes (where linkages could be easier) and other programmes, PACs should have more experience & knowledge about funding opportunities. These issues need to be systematically addressed.
- EC stressed that there needs to be a common agreement on a harmonised way of issuing LoR, so that the process can be useful to programmes/other DGs.
- Need for better involvement of non-Member States which will support member states in better EUSDR implementation e.g. strategic discussion in transport (interest is there but they need money for being involved in implementation). EC underlined their efforts for including UA and MD, however, called for support from member states e.g. official letters explaining the needs for funds for these countries

EUSDR Governance

Parallel sessions for PACs and for NCPs

Main messages in PACs group were:

- Overall support on the content of the EC's report on governance.
- SG members – need to improve participation, mandate, motivation and involvement. NCPs to support this.
- Need to have contacts to all (EU, national, regional) funds managers.
- Need to have a support 'system' (e.g. technical point) for both daily work but also cooperation among PACs.
- Support for initiatives like TAF, START and other which facilitate projects implementation + for seed money facility
- Need of DG REGIO support for involvement of others DGs

Main messages in NCP group were:

- A one-size-fits-all solution is not possible, NCPs position depends on national institutional settings. A 'dual' NCP (Foreign Affairs Ministry + Ministry dealing with funds/regional development) could eventually be recommended as good practice.
- NCPs key role is to support and mobilise PACs, members of the Steering Groups and highest political levels. PACs should have a direct link to the sectorial Ministers, and ministerial meetings must be encouraged when useful to de-block issues.
- Good practice of PACs being from the same institution responsible for a specific policy and programme/s.
- Strong claim for respecting the 'three no's', even going beyond (no new structures).



- Rotating presidency: it can only be on a voluntary basis, and scope still to be defined. Functions of a potential 'Special Representative' remain unclear.
- Need to have assistance to support the overall joint work, but tasks should be elaborated carefully taking into account what is realistically feasible with the available budget in the transnational programme.
- EC should keep a leading strategic role in all stages. DG REGIO as the equivalent to an NCP (coordinating role inside EC). No division of labour between EC/MS, but an 'organic' system with everyone working as one body.

Technical point for the Strategy

- After a presentation of the support to governance through a technical point in the Danube programme (supporting the implementation of the Strategy) and INTERACT (supporting the overall macro-regional approach), a debate took place focusing on the functions/tasks of the technical point, and the limits of its support taking into account the budget available. The role played by INTERACT was widely acknowledged.
- EC suggested drafting a concrete proposal of functions of the Strategy point, to be agreed between NCPs/PACs and then submitted to the programming committee of the Danube programme.

Annual Forum 2014

- The concept and draft programme of the 3rd Annual Forum organised by the City of Vienna, the AT Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission, was presented by Europaforum Wien (responsible for the programme management and the logistics of the conference).
- The outline of the Danube Cosmos was presented, including the proposals submitted by PACs and other stakeholders.
- Deadline to confirm the different activities of the Cosmos is 7 April. Launch of registrations is planned for end- April.