

International Stakeholder Conference

To Invest in People and Skills: Empowerment through Co-operation and Networking in the Danube Region

13-14 June 2012 | Vienna

Locations:

Urania (Public Educational Institute), Uraniastraße 1, 1010 Vienna

Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Stubenring 1, 1010 Vienna

Programme

Day one Wednesday 13 June 2012

08.00 – 09.00 Registration

09:00 – 13.30 Plenary Session I: *Urania*
Moderation: Corinna Milborn

09.00 – 10.00 **Welcome and Introduction**
Rudolf Hundstorfer, *Federal Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria*
Claudia Schmied, *Federal Minister for Education, Arts and Culture, Austria*
Loretta Handrabura, *Vice Minister of Education, Republic of Moldova*
Wolfgang Streitenberger, *European Commission, Directorate-General (DG) Regional Policy*

10.00 – 11.00 **Keynote Speeches**
“The Human Face of Development”
Vladimir Gligorov, *The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies*
“When Economic Growth is Not Enough”
Dessislava Gavrilova, *The Red House Center for Culture and Debate, Sofia*

11.00 – 11.30 Coffee Break

11.30 – 12.15 **The EU Strategy for the Danube Region: Roles, Challenges and Opportunities**
Introduction to the Conference and Working Groups
Roland Hanak, *Priority Area Coordinator*
Jürgen Schick, *Priority Area Coordinator*
Ion Gumene, *Priority Area Coordinator*
Andriana Sukova-Tosheva, *European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion*
Klaus Körner, *European Commission, DG Education and Culture*

12.30 – 13.30 Lunch, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection,
1st floor, Foyer & Marmorsaal

Day one **Wednesday 13 June 2012 (Afternoon)**

13.30 – 17.00 <i>(including 30' break)</i>	Parallel Working Groups WG 1: <i>Urania</i> WGs 2-8: <i>Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK)</i>
WG 1	To enhance performance of education systems through closer cooperation of education institutions, systems and policies (Urania, 2nd floor, Klubsaal)
Moderator	Johanna Rasch
Rapporteur	Predrag Lažetić, <i>ERI SEE Interim Secretariat, Centre for Education Policy, Belgrade</i>
WG 2	To foster cooperation between key stakeholders of labour market, education and research policies in order to develop learning regions and environments (BMASK, 1st floor, Alfred Dallinger Saal)
Moderator	Roland Hanak, <i>Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria</i>
Rapporteur	Barbara Willsberger, <i>L&R Social Research, Vienna</i>
WG 3	To support creativity and entrepreneurship (BMASK, 1st floor, Josef Hesoun Saal)
Moderator	Doris Regele
Rapporteur	Denise Loughran, <i>European Training Foundation, Torino</i>
WG 4	To support lifelong learning and expanding learning mobility (BMASK, 4th floor, meeting room 185)
Moderator	Herbert Strobl
Rapporteur	Dana Stroie, <i>National Centre for Vet Development, Romania</i>
WG 5	To promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through education and training (BMASK, 2nd floor, meeting room 170)
Moderator	Ulrike Lehner-Stift
Rapporteur	Edina Elter, <i>Ministry for National Resources, Hungary</i>
WG 6	To improve cross-sector policy coordination to address demographic and migration challenges (BMASK, 1st floor, Marmorsaal)
Moderator	Jörg Leitner, <i>Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria</i>
Rapporteur	Tanja Dedovic, <i>International Organisation for Migration, Vienna</i>
WG 7	To fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalised communities in the Danube Region, especially the Roma communities (BMASK, 1st floor, Marmorsaal)
Moderator	Mirjam Karoly, <i>OSCE/ODIHR - Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues</i>
Rapporteur	Dominique Bé, <i>European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion</i>
WG 8	To promote gender equality on the labour market, especially in payment (BMASK, 1st floor, Radetzkysaal)
Moderator	Ester Bergmann, <i>Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria</i>
Rapporteur	Nadja Bergmann, <i>L&R Social Research, Vienna</i>
19.00	Dinner, Restaurant Marina, Handelskai 343, 1020 Vienna

Day two **Thursday 14 June 2012**

09.00 – 14.00	Plenary Session II: <i>Urania, Uraniastraße 1, 1010 Vienna</i> <i>Moderation: Mauro Novello, INTERACT Point Vienna</i>
09.00 – 09.40	Panel 1: Results of Working Groups 1, 3, 4, 5 Rapporteurs
09.40 – 10.20	Panel 2: Results of Working Groups 2, 6, 7, 8 Rapporteurs
10.20 – 10.45	Coffee Break
10.45 – 11.45	Panel 3: Funding and Financial Aspects, Project Development Marlene Hahn, <i>METIS Vienna</i> Eva Nussmüller, <i>European Commission, DG Regional Policy</i> Łukasz Wardyn, <i>European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion</i> Klaus Körner, <i>European Commission, DG Education and Culture</i>
11.45 – 12.15	Overall Results and Future Prospects; Discussion Peter Schlögl, <i>General Rapporteur, Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Training</i>
12.15 – 12.30	Conclusions of the Stakeholder Conference Eva Nussmüller, <i>European Commission, DG Regional Policy</i> Ion Gumene, <i>Priority Area Coordinator</i> Jürgen Schick, <i>Priority Area Coordinator</i> Roland Hanak, <i>Priority Area Coordinator</i>
12.30 – 14.00	Lunch, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Stubenring 1, 1010 Vienna, 1 st floor, Foyer & Marmorsaal

International Stakeholder Conference

To Invest in People and Skills: Empowerment through Co-operation and Networking in the Danube Region

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CONCEPT

General Information

The International Stakeholder Conference „To Invest in People and Skills: Empowerment through Co-operation and Networking in the Danube Region“ is going to take place on 13 and 14 June 2012 in Vienna, Austria.

The conference aims at furthering discussions in the fields of education and labour market in the Danube Region and thereby implementing Priority Area 9 “To Invest in People and Skills” of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). Working Groups are meant to identify policy fields for strengthened co-operation and develop project ideas related to these fields. These project ideas should adequately respond to the needs and challenges in the Danube Region and foster smart, inclusive and sustainable growth.

The Priority Area’s objective is to improve the co-operation within education and labour market policies, foster creativity and entrepreneurship and support strategies of lifelong learning and mobility. Furthermore, the Priority Area encompasses topics of social inclusion of marginalised groups, migration and gender equality.

The conference will convene stakeholders from European institutions and international organisations, Ministries responsible for Education, Labour and Social Affairs from all 14 Danube Region countries, non-governmental organisations active in the field of human capital building, education and labour market experts, researchers, international donors and media representatives.

Organisers of the conference: The Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK) and the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK), as Priority Area Coordinators within the framework of the EUSDR.

Funding: The conference is financed by European Union funds, the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (Austria) and the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (Austria).

Background of the Conference

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) follows a ‘macro-regional’ approach. It intends to improve coherence between Danube Region countries and to boost their development. Priority Area 9 of the EUSDR “To Invest in People and Skills” is led by Austria in co-operation with the Republic of Moldova and aims at smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by investing in education, training and the labour market.

In the Danube Macro-region, there is a need to connect people and their ideas in order to comply with their specific needs. This is particularly true for the fields of education and the labour market, since investing in human capital is of utmost importance for overcoming disparities in education and employment as well as the current challenges posed by the financial and economic crisis.

The Danube Region faces several challenges, with uneven socio-economic development being one of the major concerns. Better coordination in education and labour market policies between the Danube Region countries could contribute to address these challenges. By working together on the economic issues, education, social inclusion and innovation the region will become more prosperous to the benefits of its inhabitants.

Policies in the fields of education, labour market, research and innovation are to be mutually reinforcing, and prominence given to the empowerment of people and capacity building on all levels, whether individual, organisational, regional, national or macro-regional. The implementation of Priority Area 9 will include the development of key competencies and organisational skills, promotion of innovative partnerships, and governance in the regional/national context. Existing regional co-operation, networks and initiatives should be integrated in the EUSDR.

EU-Member States endorsed the EUSDR at the General Affairs Council on 13 April 2011. Priority Area 9 “To Invest in People and Skills” constituted itself at a kick-off meeting on 28 June 2011. The Priority Area’s Steering Group is mainly composed by public officers from labour market and education ministries of the Danube Region, as well as some representatives of NGOs from the Danube Region.

At the second meeting of the Priority Area on 5 and 6 December 2011, the Steering Group set targets that contribute to the respective strategies EU2020 and ET2020. The Steering Group of Priority Area 9 also adopted a Working Plan defining the policy fields for further action.

The development of the work areas of Priority Area 9 will contribute to common catalogues of measures of the participating countries („ownership“). Particular attention should be paid to the use of synergies at the interfaces of education and culture („creative partnerships“). Furthermore, prominence needs to be given to the provision of resources and to the question of how programmes can respond to the needs of project leaders (e.g. through the establishment of a small project fund).

Objectives of the Conference

The general objective of the stakeholder conference “To Invest in People and Skills: Empowerment through Co-operation and Networking in the Danube Region” is to enhance EUSDR co-operation both on strategic and operational levels, in particular in the fields of education and labour market policy. It will support the coordination and interaction between PACs, line ministries, NGOs, EC, EU programmes and other experts with diverse backgrounds. Thus, the conference should identify policy areas and project options for the Danube Region that can contribute to overcoming the impact of the global economic crisis in the short-term and to building prosperity through smart, sustainable and inclusive investments in education and training, labour market and marginalised communities.

In particular, the conference will:

- Improve information flow and transfer best practices in the design and implementation of policies and projects among actors in the Danube Region in the fields of education and labour market
- Highlight key policy issues with long term impact on the prosperity of the Danube Region
- Discuss how to generate synergies and how to create links between different networks
- Create a basis for the development of new projects and networks in the field of education and the labour market
- Kick-off thematic Working Groups corresponding to the PA 9 work plan
- Raise awareness and ownership over EUSDR Priority Area 9
- Contribute to the development of roadmaps and benchmarks for the implementation of actions/work areas
- Discuss ways of utilising available EU funds and possibilities for ensuring the alignment of funding towards EUSDR Priority Area 9

The main benefits of attending the conference include the following:

- **Networking and Peer Dialogue:** The participant will have the opportunity to engage in debate with other government officials, CS representatives and international experts from the Danube Region and beyond.
- **Capacity Building:** The range of topics, issues and ensuing discussion between participants will raise the capacity of all participants to develop and implement more effective policies and projects in their countries and wider Danube Region.
- **Find Project Partners:** Project leaders will have the opportunity to get to know potential partners for joint activities.

Format

There will be plenary and working group sessions. Each working group will correspond to one of the eight defined work areas adopted by the Priority Area 9 Steering Group in December 2011. This also entails identifying deficits and needs in implementation and examples of good practice. Each working group will therefore be designed and carried out along the following questions (see also separate working group paper):

- What examples of good practice in regional/transnational/cross-border co-operation have been specified so far and can be specified on an ad-hoc-basis by the working group?
- Which are the key thematic fields within this particular action line where further work should be focused on, in particular by the working group members and by their respective institutions and states?
- Which lessons learned can be shared in view of moving from a fragmented to an integrated approach? Which examples of good practice exist, which support coherency, coordination and complementarity of education, innovation and labour market policies and strategies?
- Which new projects can be developed that respond to needs in the region? How will ideas be generated? Which concrete operational projects will be drawn from the action line and abstract targets? Who will - and how - transform the action into projects that will be funded/financed?
- Which roadmap and benchmarks for the implementation of the action/work area can be developed (who does what, when and how)? Who will commit to this kind of roadmap?
- How can existing partnerships and networks be best used - and by whom? Who will create strong partnerships - and how? Which incentives need to be developed? What should regional networks and initiatives include on their agendas to support the implementation of the action?

Location and Venue

All plenary sessions and Working Group 1 (13 June 2012, 9:00 - 14 June 2012, 13:00)
Urania, Uraniastraße 1, A-1010 Vienna

Working Groups 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 (13 June 2012, 13.30-17.00) & lunch (13 and 14 June 2012)

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection
Stubenring 1 A-1010 Vienna, Austria

Dinner on 13 June 2012: tba

Maps and area information are available [here](#).

Participation

Participation in the conference is by invitation only. No fee is charged.

The conference will convene about 160 participants representing European institutions, international organisations, donors and funding institutions, social partners, decision-makers from Ministries of Education, or Labour and Social Affairs, non-governmental organisations and public institutions active in the field of education and labour market policies, research institutions and representatives from the media.

Each Danube Region country should have a delegation of up to 8 participants, as follows: representatives from education and/or labour ministries, and other participants with diverse backgrounds such as experts in education and the labour market, social partners (employees organisations as well as employers organisations), NGOs, regional and local authorities, private sector, civil society, researchers and lead partners and partners of projects (particularly in the projects submitted to Priority Area 9 as EUSDR projects).

Working language

Conference languages are English and German (German in Plenary I only).

Registration

Registration to the event will be done through the platform of Priority Area 9 of the conference: <http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu/item/278779>.

Accommodation and travel

International travel and accommodation will be covered by EUSDR-PAC9 only for participants from non-EU Member States and in line with its internal rules. All bookings for this group of participants will be done by the organisers of the conference.

Please note that EUSDR-PAC9 will not be in a position to cover travel and associated costs to attend this event for participants from EU Member States and Institutions as well as International Organisations.

For self-payers, a range of hotels are pre-booked by the organisers of the conference **until 20 April 2012** (for details see separate practical info sheet).

Contact

For general questions regarding **overall organisation** and content of the conference, especially **Working Groups 1, 3, 4, 5**, please contact:

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For questions related to **Working Groups 2, 6, 7, 8**, please contact:

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International Stakeholder Conference

**To Invest in People and Skills:
Empowerment through Co-operation and Networking in the Danube Region**

WORKING GROUPS

13 June 2012

Locations: Urania (Working Group 1) & Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (Working Groups 2,3,4,5,6,7,8)

Each working group corresponds to one of the eight defined work areas adopted by Priority Area 9's Steering Group in December 2011 (for description see below).

Each working group should elaborate on the following questions:

- What examples of good practice in regional/transnational/cross-border co-operation have been experienced so far and can be specified on an ad-hoc-basis by the working group?
- Which are the key thematic fields within this particular action line where further work should be focused on, in particular by the Working Group members and by their respective institutions and states?
- Which lessons learned can be shared in view of moving from a fragmented to an integrated approach? Which examples of good practice exist which support coherency, coordination and complementarity of education, innovation and labour market policies and strategies?
- Which new projects can be developed that respond to needs in the region? How will ideas be generated? Which concrete operational projects will be drawn from the action line and abstract targets? Who will - and how - transform the action into projects that will be funded/financed?
- Which roadmap and benchmarks for the implementation of the action/work area can be developed (who does what, when and how)? Who will commit to this kind of roadmap?
- How can existing partnerships and networks be best used - and by whom? Who will create strong partnerships - and how? Which incentives need to be developed? What should regional networks and initiatives include on their agendas to support the implementation of the action?

Short description of work areas:

Work area 1

“To enhance performance of education systems through closer cooperation of education institutions, systems and policies”

Fostering efficiency, innovation and good governance in education and training is crucial in the face of the challenges posed by globalisation, demographic changes, rapid technological developments and increasing pressure on public budgets. This should be done in particular through the exchange of best practices of different education and training systems through transnational cooperation, joint development of programmes and materials, promotion of research on the economics of education, peer learning, and capacity building, i.e. for evidence-based policy and practice and for facilitating the policy learning process, strategy formulation and policy action. Specific added value lies in the inclusion of third countries and best use should be made of already existing programmes and cooperation structures.

Work area 2

“To foster cooperation between key stakeholders of labour market, education and research policies in order to develop learning regions and environments”

To increase innovative capacities of the labour force in the Danube Region, new forms of partnerships and cooperation among key stakeholders (labour market, education and training, research and employers) need to be further developed. Employers (private, public and voluntary) have an important role to play in identifying the knowledge, skills and competences needed in working life. To increase the employability and entrepreneurial potential of all learners, communication and active cooperation should be further developed between education and training institutions on the one hand and employers on the other.

Work area 3

“To support creativity and entrepreneurship”

A reorientation towards entrepreneurship and creativity, which constitutes a prime source of innovation, is important as a prerequisite for businesses, in particular for small and medium sized enterprises, and thus for Europe's competitiveness. This could be achieved through the introduction of innovative learning programmes to support creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship at all levels of education, through the promotion of intercultural dialogue or through language training, making use of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Danube Region. Broader learning communities and creative partnerships, involving representatives of cultural actors, civil society and other stakeholders, should be promoted with a view to creating a climate conducive to creativity and professional and social needs, as well as individual well-being.

Work area 4

“To support lifelong learning and expanding learning mobility”

Comprehensive LLL strategies and their implementation have been identified as a priority for the development of knowledge societies. Making these effective and increasing their impact for individual learners remains a critical challenge. Institutional capacity building of LLL bodies is a prerequisite for implementing these policies. Countries in the Danube Region will coordinate on the development of National Qualification Frameworks. Specific added value lies in supporting non-EU Member States in drawing up their National Qualification Frameworks. Specific attention should be drawn to rural areas and to developing alternative employment opportunities and economic diversification for people occupied in traditional sectors where restructuring is still under way such as agriculture.

Work area 5

“To promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through education and training”

Education and training systems should enable all individuals to acquire and develop skills and competences required for their employability and to foster tolerance, intercultural dialogue and non-discrimination. Equal opportunities in learning can contribute towards the social inclusion of individuals from minorities and vulnerable groups, and active citizenship. Barriers for drop-outs to return to education and training need to be removed as well as preventive approaches and cooperation between education sectors strengthened. Mutual learning on best practices should be developed.

Work area 6

“To improve cross-sector policy coordination to address demographic and migration challenges”

Enhanced efforts should be pursued to develop knowledge on the status quo, on drivers and impacts of migration flows and demographic change, so to develop a basis for enhanced cooperation of different policies at all levels of governance. Cross-sector policy coordination between relevant government departments, education authorities, social services, healthcare services, cultural policy authorities, housing and spatial planning authorities as well as asylum and immigration services at local, regional and national level, as well as dialogue with civil society are essential to ensure an adequate level of support. Spatial consequences of migration-induced social, economic and cultural changes and possible responses in the framework of urban and rural development should be considered. Cooperation with existing organisations, such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), with their existing analysis and recommendations, would be particularly useful.

Work area 7

“To fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalised communities in the Danube Region, especially the Roma communities”

To make full use of the Danube Region's population specific focus needs to be put at empowering in particular groups in risk of poverty and ensuring them access and opportunities. Children, old people, mentally and physically disabled, immigrants, homeless, representatives of marginalised ethnic groups are the most vulnerable. Actions to reduce the number of people in risk of poverty need to complement each other, applying an integrated approach. Especially on Roma communities, whose living conditions are often especially dire and with no place in 21st century Europe, special attention must be paid. Hence the coordination of efforts between existing initiatives and actors such as the Roma Decade (2005-2015), European Roma Platform for Roma Inclusion, EURoma network and NGOs active in this field in the Danube Region is indispensable for improving the situation for Roma.

Work area 8

“To promote gender equality on the labour market, especially in payment”

Equality between women and men is one of the European Union's founding principles. The principle of equal pay for equal work dates already back to 1957, when it became part of the Treaty of Rome. To create equal opportunities for women and men on the labour market, discrimination, educational stereotypes, labour market segregation, precarious employment conditions, involuntary part-time work and the unbalanced sharing of care responsibilities with men must be overcome. The full realisation of women's potential and the full use of women's skills must be fostered with the emphasis to facilitate a better gender distribution on the labour market and to allow the number of quality jobs for women to be increased. Besides the discrimination against women in career opportunities, the discrimination against female employees with regard to their wage level is imminent. The so called gender pay gap (the average difference between men's and women's hourly gross earnings across the economy as a whole) in the EU remains at 17.8%, with heights around 30% in some EU Member States.

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PRACTICAL INFORMATION SHEET

Location and venue of the conference

All plenary sessions and working group 1 (13 June 2012, 9:00 - 14 June 2012, 13:00)
Urania, Uraniastraße 1, A-1010 Vienna (see [map](#))

Working groups 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 (13 June 2012, 13.30-17.00) & lunch (13 and 14 June)
Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection
Stubenring 1 A-1010 Vienna, Austria (see [map](#))

How to reach it

Most trains from Vienna Airport arrive at Landstraße/Wien Mitte in the vicinity of the venue. Other public transport stops:

Subway

U1 Schwedenplatz
U3 Stubentor
U4 Landstraße
U4 Schwedenplatz

Tramway

1: Julius Raab Platz
2: Julius Raab Platz

Bus

1A: Stubentor

Accommodation and travel

A limited number of rooms in different hotels for self-payers has been reserved at the travel agency stated below. In case of interest, please contact:

Christiane Tronigger
ctronigger@vienna.nethotels.com
Regional Director NetHotels Austria
Reisnerstrasse 37, A-1030-Vienna
tel: +43(1)7101919
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Contact

For general questions regarding accommodation and board, please get in touch with:

Jörg Leitner
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International Stakeholder Conference. To Invest in People and Skills: Empowerment through Co-operation and Networking in the Danube Region

Funding and Financial Aspects, Project Development, Panel 3

Marlene Hahn, Metis GmbH

Background of the Analysis of needs for financial instruments in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

With the start of the implementation phase of the EUSDR, the question of how to finance the actions planned under the Strategy became ever so relevant. The main objective of this Analysis was the identification of existing gaps in the implementation of the Strategy.

The study is based on an analysis of the current project landscape of the EUSDR informed by the Strategy's Action Plan and a series of interviews with key stakeholders (project leaders, Priority Area Coordinators, Steering Group Members, etc.). The key finding here is that most of the 124 project examples from the Action Plan are still at the stage of an idea or in the preparation phase (88%) which highlights the importance of identifying the persisting needs for implementing the Strategy.

Furthermore, the analysis consists of a screening of existing financial instruments relevant for the Danube Region. We identified a number of 38 financial instruments available throughout the Danube Region including non-repayable grants, repayable loans or guarantees.

Key outcomes of the Analysis

Composing the existing financial instruments with the results of the interviews, we identified however a reasonable amount of gaps:

- (1) **Financial resources are arguably limited**, especially addressing capacity building projects and Technical Assistance as well as very small projects (under 200.000 EUR).
- (2) **Incompatibility of regulations for funding** instruments in the Member States and outside the EU (IPA, ENPI) inhibiting cooperation across some Danube Region Countries.
- (3) **Bureaucratic barriers**, such as administrative burden, timing of calls (e.g. 4th call of the Central Europe Programme only open from June to October 2011), lack of qualified/ experienced staff, etc.
- (4) The **lack of pre-financing** poses major challenges for many applicants who have to finance preparation and implementation from their own resources until reimbursed, frequently after more than 6-8 months.
- (5) **Co-financing** involves complex process everywhere, and it has become increasingly difficult especially in the context of the economic recession.
- (6) **(Very) small projects** face significant difficulties in finding the appropriate funding mechanism and overcoming administrative barriers.
- (7) **Project preparation** requires further support given that the study has demonstrated that the large majority of planned projects are still at conception stage or face difficulties in being launched.
- (8) **Information about financing opportunities** is insufficiently well disseminated.
- (9) The **commitment** of Danube Countries to the EUSDR is unevenly distributed in the Danube Region.

Opportunities and bottlenecks in financing projects related to the EUSDR

Very small projects ranging from 10,000 up to about 200,000 EUR cannot afford the numerous bureaucratic challenges or time-consuming procedures involved for accessing funding but because barriers to apply for any EU funding are too high. These “very small” transnational or cross-border cooperation projects and activities are however highly relevant for generating the value-added of the Strategy through network and cooperation activities, transfer of know-how, and so forth, throughout a wide range of sectors. Therefore a Danube Region **small project fund** should be established possibly outside the SF framework should support such projects at a very early stage.

Given that 88% of the project examples are still at conception or preparation stage, there is a strong need for early support of project ideas. The study therefore recommends to launch a **Technical Assistance Implementation Facility** to support project preparation (financial analysis, cost-benefit analysis, procurement planning), the application process (conception of the project, grant applications, budget) or provides advice on compliance with EU law (e.g. competition). Evidently this facility should target projects with a volume below EUR 25 mill. in order to avoid overlap with JASPERS.

In order to attract potential applicants and to inform applicants about existing opportunities and application processes, **new transparent and user-friendly information tools** should be developed to support information dissemination. The study recommends that, in addition to an integrated information tool for the entire Danube Region, the management and implementing bodies of existing OP organise project generation seminars focusing on the EUSDR. The study also recommends that “one-stop shops” are developed to offer applicants a range of information about funding opportunities. They may take the form of a web-space which provides an overview of the funding opportunities offered by the EU along with the conditions.

Based on the finding that the private sector and, in some of the Priority Areas also non-governmental organisations (NGO) are underrepresented in implementing the EU Strategy of the Danube Region, a **matchmaking platform** could be set up to bring together mainly the private sector with financiers such as the European Investment Bank, the European Investment Fund, the World Bank, the European Council Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

First steps recommended when searching for an appropriate financing instrument

(1) Internet research

- Tools for funding opportunities: <http://www.danube-region.eu/pages/useful-tools-for-funding-opportunities>
- EU Funds: http://europa.eu/policies-activities/funding-grants/index_en.htm
- Support for Small Businesses: <http://portal.enterprise-europe-network.ec.europa.eu>

(2) Talk to people and disseminate your ideas

- Visit network meetings, matchmaking-platforms or conferences: <http://www.danube-region.eu/pages/calendar>
- Contact the respective Priority Area Coordinator of the EUSDR: <http://www.danube-region.eu/pages/priorities>

(3) Trainings

- Welcome Europe: <http://www.welcomeurope.com>
- Europa Media: <http://www.eustrainingsite.com>
- Center of Excellence in Finance: <http://www.cef-see.org>

Contact details

Marlene Hahn

Project Manager

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Coordination of Priority Area 10

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