

5th Steering Group Meeting of Priority Area 9 - Draft Agenda

15 - 16 May 2013 | Bratislava, Old Building of the National Council of the Slovak Republic,
Župné námestie (Župné Square) 6, Bratislava

Chair: Jürgen Schick, *Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, Austria*
Roland Hanak, *Federal Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria*
Ion Gumene, *State Chancellery, Republic of Moldova*

Day one Wednesday 15 May 2013

09.30 - 10.00	Welcome coffee and registration
10.00 - 10.20	Welcome and introduction <i>Priority Area Coordinators; Júlia Štěpánková, Slovak Republic; Tour de table</i>
10.20 - 10.25	Adoption of agenda
10.25 - 12.00	State of play and new initiatives - <u>Priority Area 9 overall</u> <i>PAC team</i> - <u>Working Area 3 “Creativity and Entrepreneurship”</u> <i>Christina Kasparyan, Bulgaria (tbc)</i> - <u>Working Area 4 “Lifelong Learning and Mobility”</u> “Innovative VET schools network” <i>Felicia Sandulescu, TVET Centre Romania</i> “LLL Cluster / Mobility in VET” <i>Hartmut Mattes and Rolf Ackermann, Germany (Baden-Württemberg)</i> - <u>Working Area 5</u> “ <i>EUSDR Youth Platform</i> ” <i>Marco Frimberger, Interkulturelles Zentrum, Vienna (tbc)</i> - <u>Working Area 2 “Cooperation in Labour Market”</u> - <u>Working Area 7 “Poverty and Social Inclusion”</u> <i>Roland Hanak, Austria</i> - <u>Working Area 6 “Demography and Migration”</u> <i>Tanja Dedovic, International Organization for Migration (tbc)</i> “Central European Knowledge Platform for an Ageing Society - Green Paper” <i>Tanja Bogner, Austria</i> -Discussion
12.00 - 12.15	Update Work Plan -Decision
12.15 - 12.30	Main messages for the common meeting with PA7 and PA8
12.30 - 13.30	Lunch
13.30 - 17.15	Common meeting with PA7 and PA8 - Please see separate agenda!

Day two Thursday 16 May 2013

09.00 - 09.30	Conclusions of the common meeting with PA7 and PA8 -Discussion
09.30 - 10.00	Report of the European Commission on the EUSDR with special focus on Priority Area 9 <i>Ann-Jasmin Krabatsch, European Commission, DG Regio</i>
10.00 - 10.30	Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects (TAF-DRP); Danube Programme (2014-2020); outlook upcoming financial framework <i>European Commission</i> <i>Elise Lindner (WH-Beschaffungs- und Service GmbH, Vienna, tbc)</i>
10.30 - 11.00	Coffee Break
11.00 - 11.45	Priority Area Report 2013 <i>Priority Area Coordinators; European Commission, DG Regio</i> -Contributions by the SG -Discussion
11.45 - 12.00	Upcoming Meetings -Working Group 4 “To support mobility and Lifelong Learning”, Bucharest -Working Group 2 “Cooperation in Labour Market” -Working Group 6 “Demography and Migration” -2 nd Annual Forum of the EUSDR, Bucharest -6 th Meeting of the Steering Group of Priority Area 9, Bucharest -2 nd Stakeholder Forum of Priority Area 9 of the EUSDR, Vienna -Other
12.00 - 12.15	Any other business
12.15 - 12.30	Conclusions <i>European Commission</i> <i>Priority Area Coordinators</i>
12.30	Lunch buffet

4th Meeting of the Steering Group (SG) of Priority Area 9 (PA9) of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

29 November 2012; 09.00 - 16.00

Salzstadel Conference Venue, Weiße-Lamm-Gasse 1, D-93047 Regensburg, Germany

Chairpersons

Jürgen Schick, Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, Austria

Ion Gumene, State Chancellery, Republic of Moldova

Jörg Leitner, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria, replacing Roland Hanak

Countries present (for participants see attached list)

Representatives of the following countries of the Danube Region: AT, BG, CZ, DE, HR, MD, ME, RO, RS, SK (condition for quorum fulfilled).

Missing: BA, HU, SI; UA (has not nominated SG member)

European Commission (EC/DG Regio); European Training Foundation (ETF)

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0. Welcome/acceptance of the agenda

Chair welcomes SG. New SG members and/or other new participants introduce themselves: Rolf Ackermann (DE), Loredana Maravić (HR), Ljiljana Mugoša (ME) and Janicije Jeremić (RS)

Agenda accepted.

1. 1st Annual Forum (AF) of the EUSDR - Workshop 5; Outcomes and Results, Future Perspective/Relevant Programmes for EUSDR/PA9
2. Future Approach regarding “Labelling” and “Letter of Recommendation”
3. Implications on Silence Procedure and Decision-making/ Relevant Programmes for EUSDR/PA9

SCHICK (AT, CHAIR) illustrates organisation of workshop 5 of the 1st Annual Forum of the EUSDR (AF) which took place in Regensburg on 27 and 28 November 2012. Priority Coordinators were invited to plan this workshop entitled “Promoting Empowerment, Smart Skills & Inclusive Growth.” The workshop has led to a fruitful mutual exchange between education institutions, the economy and evidence-providing research institutions. The discussions at the AF also showed that it remains a challenge to position PA9 topics in the overall EUSDR and to highlight their key role.

MARAVIĆ (HR) introduces herself as a new SG member on behalf of the HR Ministry for Education and points out that the SG has a very good structure. Question arises, what the benefit of the letter of recommendation (LoR) is. Many institutions in HR cannot consider it, e.g. the National Agency for Lifelong Learning or IPA4 managing authority. Maravić concludes that there might be a missing link and the need for a project preparation facility. SG members should ask themselves what can be done in order to have some real funding. The benefit of the EUSDR is probably the fact to have a platform for finding partners. Within the framework of “Erasmus for all”, as well as in the Regional Funds in the upcoming budget period, LoR should be considered.

DAMYANOVIC (ETF) underlines the good impressions and the political commitment which the Annual Forum has delivered. The EUSDR should be considered as a philosophy, whereas funding is a tool. It is important to reach a maximum of clarity and to ensure that Education & Training are on top of the agenda.

IVANKOVIĆ KNEŽEVIĆ (HR) is in favour of projects to have additional points with a LoR. The EC should support the SG in order to support the EUSDR.

VLADUȚ (RO) stresses that the topics of PA9 are a horizontal area and that the right people are required to make the necessary efforts to ensure the importance of PA9.

KASPARYAN (BG) has participated in workshop 4 “Innovative action for successful Danube Enterprises” of the Annual Forum. Synergies with the respective Priority Area 8 “To support the competitiveness of enterprises” should be used. A potential fund for the EUSDR could only be the seed money for the further use of other funding.

NUSSMÜLLER (EC) emphasises the positive impression of the Annual Forum, its positive ambiance and the political commitment. The Annual Forum has been covered in the media. The discussion in workshop 5 was very interesting and it is impressive what is already ongoing. As regards the upcoming budget period and legislative proposals for

regional funds, it is one main achievement that there will be one partnership agreement for these funds (ERDF, ESF, CF, EAFRD, fishery fund). Each Operational Programme in the Danube Region is relevant for the EUSDR, but there is a need to lay out how it will be supported. The EUSDR is mentioned in the regulation proposals, but the concrete support for the Strategy is not defined. The cooperation perspective of the Strategy should not be forgotten. PA9 SG members should talk to their ministries that draft ESF and upcoming CBC programmes and ask themselves what text should be in the Operational Programmes. Within European Transnational Cooperation, a new “Danube” programme will replace the current Southeast Europe programme. The geographic scope of this new Danube programme will comply with the EUSDR. One out of four priorities will be the support to the EUSDR. This priority will support mainly the governance structure; the entire programme aims rather at the preparation of projects.

At the end of January, there will be a meeting of the PACs and the NCPs with the EC.

The LoR is a “stamp” for a project which contributes to the EUSDR. There is a need to reflect on the instrument of the LoR and to discuss it.

ŠTĚPÁNKOVÁ (SK) points out that there are a lot of overlaps with the other priorities of pillar 3 (PA7 & PA8) of the EUSDR and contacts with these PAs should therefore be strengthened, as many initiatives are of the same nature.

DAMYANOVIC (ETF) sees potential synergies and complementarities with many other initiatives, e.g. the SEE Strategy 2020 of the former Stability Pact countries which was endorsed in Tirana. This strategy already includes many thematic areas that are also relevant for the EUSDR, such as inclusive growth or a higher employment rate. In this respect, existing initiatives should be combined.

ISAC (MD) points out that MD is not eligible for every programme. Moreover, it is very difficult to receive new project proposals.

SCHICK (AT) stresses that EUSDR projects have to match the criteria of PA9. Only international projects can be considered. There is an urgent need for the new Danube programme in the framework of the ETC to consider all the thematic priorities of the EUSDR, including PA9 and education, training and labour market issues. Furthermore, there is a potential contradiction with the thematic concentration of programmes foreseen in the draft regulations for the next financial framework. The Danube programme would be the only one to include all the DR countries. SG members are therefore requested to talk to their responsible colleagues.

NUSSMÜLLER (EC) points out that the European Transnational Cooperation (ETC) addresses thematic challenges and prepares more strategic long-term projects. Regional policy must already be justified vis-à-vis policy makers and EU citizens. The Council has already stated that the thematic focus will remain; now it is up to the EP and the GAC to agree.

NUSSMÜLLER adds that the ETC also involves IPA and ENPI funding. Nonetheless, PA9 cannot focus exclusively on Structural Funds.

SCHICK (AT) highlights the fact that Structural Funds also have the possibility to finance projects in the field of PA9 and more precisely education, especially the ESF and the ERDF.

DAMYANOVIC (ETF) claims that the EUSDR should also be integrated into national programmes.

SCHICK (AT) underlines that transnational cooperation is a core element for the implementation of the EUSDR and might also serve as a project preparation facility.

ACKERMANN (DE) proposes to develop a common strategy to integrate the EUSDR into national strategies.

NUSSMÜLLER (EC) asks how PA9 would like to proceed with the LoR in the future.

IVANKOVIĆ KNEŽEVIĆ (HR) proposes to integrate it in the respective Operational Programmes of each country of the Danube Region.

SG agrees. Katarina IVANKOVIĆ KNEŽEVIĆ (HR) agrees to draft note and to send it to the PACs who will then forward it to the SG.

KASPARYAN (BG) adds that this could be done in cooperation with PA7 and PA8 once the note has been finalised.

SCHICK (AT) states that it is necessary to have further discussions on the role and the aim of LoR in the upcoming budget period.

STROIE (RO) doubts that the LoR can be used due to very restrictive selection criteria.

DAMYANOVIC (ETF) states that the LoR should mainly contribute to mark success stories.

SCHICK (AT) asserts that it cannot be the PAC's task to evaluate projects. This would duplicate the work of National Agencies and Operational Programmes. PACs can only focus on the essential question if the project contributes to the EUSDR and the project criteria of PA9.

KASPARYAN (BG) agrees that the SG cannot take over the function of Managing Authorities of project evaluation.

NUSSMÜLLER (EC) mentions that some programmes do already consider the LoRs. The SG of PA9 should do more than just a silence procedure.

NUSSMÜLLER disagrees with the fact that the LoR is not working and emphasizes that there are different approaches in different priority areas.

4. Decision on Amendment of the Guidelines for the Functioning of the Steering Group

SCHICK (AT) proposes to amend the guidelines for the functioning of the Steering Group.

No objections, change is approved, this includes the following additional paragraph:

“3(i) For decisions on labelling of or issuing a letter of recommendation for a project or an initiative, only comments that explicitly relate to a potential non-compliance with the agreed and valid project criteria will be treated as an objection. Any other comments will be considered as recommendations to the project partners”

5. Discussion and Decisions on Current Requests for Labelling/LoR

- “Roma Responsibility Project”

SG recommends project and agrees to make use of the term “Kosovo”.

6. Civil Society Platform of the EUSDR

Following a request by PA10, SCHICK (AT) asks whether civil society platforms should be invited to the SG.

SG agrees to invite only civil society organisations with strategic relevance. SG members send their ideas for organisations that could be involved by 25 January 2013. Proposals should have a maximum length of ~ 1000 characters.

7. EC Technical Assistance (TA), Outlook for 2014 - 2015

NUSSMÜLLER (EK) states that the TA is being processed and due to be signed by the end of 2012. EP suggests pilot projects and preparatory actions. TA will be used to bridge the period without specific assistance from European Transnational Cooperation. The new Danube programme could be used for 7 years. As regards future pilot projects, EP proposes projects to the EC and EC figures out to which PA they would fit. Eva Nussmüller mentioned also that the TA in 2014-2015 will include also money for smaller pilot projects.

8. Overview of Major Developments since SG 3 - Current Update of the Working Groups

BERGMANN (AT) reports on the meeting held in November in Budapest of the Work Area 7 “*To fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalised communities in the Danube Region, especially the Roma communities.*” Working Group decided to apply for a transnational project within an Austrian ESF call. SG agrees to forward institutions that might be interested in participating in this project.

BERGMANN announces meeting organized by herself for Work Area 8 “*To promote gender equality on the labour market, especially in payment*” in spring 2013, probably taking place in Bratislava.

LEITNER (AT) refers on meeting held in November in Belgrade of the Work Area 6 “*To improve cross-sector policy coordination to address demographic and migration challenges.*” This Working Group decided to create a platform and to organize two meetings per year. Several project ideas were discussed.

IVANKOVIĆ KNEŽEVIĆ (HR) announces meeting organized by HR for Work Area 2 “*To foster cooperation between key stakeholders of labour market, education and research policies in order to develop learning regions and environments*” in March or April 2013. The meeting will take place in the East of HR and it is intended to show good practices.

SCHICK (AT) refers to Non-paper on Working Areas linked to education (see annex). On 17 and 18 October 2012, a strategy meeting with selected WG members and other stakeholders took place in Vienna in order to further develop the implementation and to

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

identify responsible persons/institutions for the Working Areas linked to education. With regard to the broad thematic scopes of the Actions foreseen in the Action Plan of the EUSDR, various modes of work should be taken into account. In this respect, several Working Groups are going to implement the Work Areas. Currently, within Work Area 4 *“To support lifelong learning and expanding learning mobility”*, the Romanian Centre for TVET intends to steer a cluster on LLL in cooperation with the Ministry for Education of Baden-Württemberg. A Working Group linked to Work Area 3 *“To support creativity and entrepreneurship”* will be coordinated by the SME Centre in Ruse (BG) and within Working Area 5 *“To promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through education and training”*, Interkulturelles Zentrum, the Austrian National Agency for the “Youth in Action” programme of the EU, considers to be in charge of a Working Group on a Youth Platform in the Danube Region. As regards Working Area 1 *“To enhance performance of education systems through closer cooperation of education institutions, systems and policies”*, currently separate events, ad hoc meetings, project-development meetings or project fair events will contribute to its implementation. In addition to this, networking events across Work Areas should be considered, as some of the treated topics or activities of the Work Areas are strongly connected to each other and should not be analysed in an isolated manner.

In relation to this, SCHICK (AT) announces Peer Learning event on VET which will take place on 5 and 6 December 2012 in Vienna, upon invitation of the EU coordination of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture to the Education Committee and in cooperation with the European Commission and PA9 of the EUSDR. Eight countries from the DR will participate, of which three are third states.

KASPARYAN (BG) announces meeting of WG3 in spring 2013. Synergies will be sought with PA8.

NUSSMÜLLER (EK) proposes to foster mutual exchange of Working Groups with thematic overlaps with PA8.

DAMYANOVIC (ETF) agrees that it would be useful to create an interface with PA8, especially with regard to SEECCEL, which has accomplished a major work. Databases cannot be the output of the Working Groups.

KASPARYAN (BG) draws the attention on the fact that existing projects should be considered, but agrees with Ms Damyanovic that databases cannot be the outcome. It matters to bring the topic of creativity closer to the businesses.

ACKERMANN (DE) brings forward the idea for a Lifelong Learning cluster related to WG4. In the reflection paper for the 1st Annual Forum of the EUSDR, not a single word about education could be found. It would be good to establish a network in the field of lifelong learning and combine it with other networks, e.g. PA8 and PA7. In this respect, a feedback in the upcoming weeks is requested. The Ministry for Education of Baden-Württemberg could provide interesting partners. The first meeting of WG4 could probably take place in Ulm. WG4 would cover a wide range of topics.

SCHICK (AT) states that coordination with other PAs will be pursued where useful and feasible and adds that due to the complexity of the issues concerned, there is a need for diverse approaches and different institutions to work on one and the same topic.

SCHICK (AT) introduces the template for terms of references for the implementation of Working Groups. Regarding their financing, the participation of 1-2 persons from third countries can be ensured through the TA.

9. Internet Platform of PA 9

MIRTL (AT) gives a short overview of current developments on PA9's website¹, which is one of the most visible of all PAs of the EUSDR and the EUSDR in general. SG members are encouraged to make use of a network of more than 500 stakeholders and to interlink websites of projects or institutions with the website of PA9.

10. Next Meeting and A.o.B.; Final Conclusions, Deliverables and Next Steps

SG discusses its next meeting.

ŠTĚPÁNKOVÁ (SK) proposes to hold the next meeting back-to-back with the SG meeting of PA8 in Bratislava and will check if SG of PA9 can be invited by the SK Ministry for Education.

GUMENE (MD) also invites to a SG meeting in Chişinău.

JEREMIĆ (RS) invites to a meeting in Belgrade.

Short overview of final conclusions, results and deliverables

- **1st Annual Forum of the EUSDR:** SG welcomes the results, the positive ambience and the political commitment at the 1st Annual Forum of the EUSDR and workshop 5 “Promoting Empowerment, Smart Skills & Inclusive Growth” and calls for education and labour market issues to be included on top of the agenda of the EUSDR.
- **Letter of Recommendation (LoR):** Decisions of the SG for LoR can only focus on the compliance of projects/initiatives with the project criteria of PA9² decided at the 2nd SG meeting in Zagreb in December 2011.
- Katarina Ivanković Knežević (HR) drafts **common position paper of the SG** to integrate LoR of the EUSDR-PA9 in the programmes and sends it to the PACs.
- SG agrees to issue a LoR for the “**Roma Responsibility Project**”.
- **Invitation of civil society organisations to SG** (Proposal by PAC10): SG agrees to invite only civil society organisations with strategic relevance. **SG members send their proposals for organisations that could be involved by 25 January 2013.** Proposals should have a maximum length of ~1000 characters.
- **Work Plan:** SG agrees on Work Plan update as proposed by the PACs.
- **Guidelines for the Functioning of the Steering Group:** SG agrees to amend the Guidelines as proposed by the PACs.
- **Summary of activities since SG3:**
 - Austrian National Agency for Lifelong Learning event for Comenius project development in the Danube Region in Vienna, October 2012

¹ <http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu/>

² See <http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu/pages/projects>

- WGs 1,3,4,5: Strategic meeting of WGs related to Education & Training in Vienna, October 2012
- WG6: Meeting in Belgrade, November 2012
- WG7: Meeting in Budapest, November 2012
- **Upcoming activities:**
 - Peer Learning event on VET in Vienna, December 2012
 - NCP-PAC meeting in Brussels, end of January 2013
 - The first meeting of WG3 will be organised by BG in spring 2013.
 - The first meeting of WG2 will be organised by HR in March or April 2013.
 - The first meeting of WG8 will be organised by AT in spring 2013.
 - RO takes over coordination of activities in the framework of WG4.
 - Follow-up event to Stakeholder Conference (June 2012), second half of 2013
- **Next SG meeting:** SG agrees on the following options for SG meetings in 2013:
 - Bratislava in May/June 2013, jointly with PA8 (and maybe PA7)
 - Chişinău
 - Belgrade

Minutes taken by Jörg Mirtl.

Attachment 1: Updated Work Plan of PA9

Attachment 2: Amended Guidelines for the Functioning of PA9

Attachment 3: List of Participants of SG4

Attachment 4: Project Criteria of PA9

Attachment 5: Report from workshop 5 of the 1st Annual forum of the EUSDR (organised by PAC9)

Attachment 6: Terms of Reference for Working Groups

Attachment 7: Request by PA10 on Civil Society

Attachment 8: Non-Paper for Working Groups related to Education & Training (WGs 1,3,4,5)

Attachment 9: Results of Working Groups related to Labour Market and Marginalised Communities (WGs 6 and 7)



3RD MEETING OF NATIONAL CONTACT POINTS AND PRIORITY AREA COORDINATORS

Brussels, 30-31 January 2013

SUMMARY of DISCUSSIONS

General Points:

- The EUSDR is in the process of moving from ambitious visions to realistic and concrete steps.
- At the same time, it is necessary to achieve a good understanding of the interrelation of different objectives. There is a need to move away from individual project thinking to integrative strategic initiatives and policies.
- The first Report on the implementation has identified some achievements but also issues that need attention. The reporting mechanisms (PAC and NCP reports) have proven useful and will be maintained.
- The year 2013 will be key in ensuring the sustainability of the Strategy, especially in terms of alignment of funding (fully embedding in the 2014-2020 programming), but also in terms of governance and implementation. The expectations are high concerning the 'full start' of the EUSDR as regards the next funding period 2014-2020.

Governance and support:

Factors for success:

- + High-level political commitment to the EUSDR and strong support from national and regional governments, which has been a major achievement of the EUSDR. This includes:
 - Sustainable coordination mechanisms that ensure good communication and cooperation between line ministries.
 - Mechanisms that integrate the national and regional levels.
 - The establishment of specific units dealing with the EUSDR on national or regional levels.
- + Having an active national coordinator for the Danube Strategy to boost the institutional work.
- + Technical Assistance provided by the European Parliament and Commission.
- + Support by DG Regio and other sectoral DGs.

Open issues/bottlenecks:

- High-level political commitment does not always translate into concrete actions and financial support.
- In some cases there is a rather passive attitude, a lack of real commitment, low interest on the side of line ministries and/or insufficient continuity of support. Some line ministries are overburdened with other tasks and have no backing from hierarchy.
- A shortage of financial resources and human resources as well as technical skills and support.
- Expectation for PACs to do everything.
- Lack of equal treatment of MS/non-MS.
- Lack of harmonization in legislation on many levels. Macro-regional strategies are not sufficiently integrated.



- Insufficient link to overall EU policies and various DGs.
- A need to further explore the parliamentary dimension of cooperation in the Danube Region.

Implementation of the Action Plan:

Factors for success:

- + Concrete and unique projects are becoming reality.
- + There is a new level of policy coordination that has very high potential, especially as regards integrated approaches across countries, economic sectors and different levels of government. Projects and projects under development are keeping up the momentum.
- + Funding specifically for Danube Region projects has been made available, such as the Technical Assistance projects, the FP7 calls and private funding (foundations).
- + The transnational programme Danube is expected to be an implementation instrument for the Strategy. It has to be kept in mind that the financial resources of the Danube programme will be limited. An agreement is needed on the types of projects that will be funded by the Programme such as e.g., integrative projects of strategic importance.
- + Clear targets have been set for some Priority Areas.
- + The setting-up of the Technical Assistance Facility Danube Region Projects by PA 10 has advanced.
- + The Budapest Danube Contact Point as an EIB initiative to support EUSDR projects has advanced as well.

Open issues/bottlenecks:

- Many experience a gap between good project ideas and availability of project funding. For example, many soft projects are being prepared now, but funding will not be available before 2014. In the case of some infrastructure projects the current funding gap may be less of a problem since they require years of preparation.
- It remains difficult to convince programmes to finance Danube projects in the current period. The added value and impact of Letters of Recommendation has not been clarified.
- Basic criteria for the selection of EUSDR projects are not available, especially because of the extremely heterogeneous nature of PAs. Harmonised criteria for all PAs might be too broad, thus not very useful. On the other hand it might be possible to develop harmonized criteria with sub-sections for individual Priority Areas.
- In the future, more Danube-specific calls would be needed, not only for ETC programmes but also in other EU programmes (e.g., Horizon 2020) and national and regional programmes.
- Further clarification of financing options is needed. For example, there is a lack of a clear identification of funding sources for non-Member States as well as transnational projects.
- More support would be needed to turn good ideas into projects. Support for project preparation is needed.
- Targets are rather broad and some need to be revised.
- Some actions of the Action Plan need to be revised or merged with other Actions.



- A socio-economic study on the state of the Danube Region will be launched by PA 8. Further discussions on the topics, objectives and methodology among PACs are necessary.

EUSDR networks

Factors for success:

- + Many new international and national networks, platforms, personal contacts and cooperation with stakeholders have developed.
- + A bottom-up process has started in which external actors such as NGOs start addressing PACs.
- + Cooperation on a horizontal level has started (environmental pillar, transport, etc.).
- + Many PACs have shown and maintained a high level of commitment and cooperation.
- + Involvement of additional actors and multipliers has increased and these new players have been maintained involved and informed.
- + Many existing networks have been strengthened.

Open issues/bottlenecks:

- NCP/PAC meetings have proven useful but other settings should be explored (e.g. separate PACs and NCPs meetings). Better cooperation and more exchange are needed on horizontal levels/actions.
- There is a need for meetings between PACs, NCPs & Managing Authorities of programmes (ETC and country-specific) organised with the support of the European Commission. This is also crucial for the preparation of the next funding period.
- Different partners on different levels can find it hard to cooperate.
- There are some overlapping meetings.

Communicating the strategy and its achievements

Factors for success:

- + The Annual Forum as the main event for getting together all key stakeholders and sending political messages.
- + Stakeholder conferences.
- + PA websites and national websites.
- + Unconventional means of discovering the region such as promotional or biking tours.

Open issues/bottlenecks:

- The visibility of the added value of the Strategy needs to be improved. The strategy has not been introduced yet (e.g into mainstream society), and its value added is not recognized widely. There is still a perception that Strategy is about the river only.
- There is a misunderstanding of the objectives of macro-regional strategies. Some stakeholders think that the Strategy is against their national interests.
- Some PAs are not as visible as others and communication of achievements is not always balanced.
- Some PAs do not have well-developed websites.



- Real and concrete projects are needed to communicate the achievements of the EUSDR:
 - Projects should be in the implementation phase.
 - Should every PA have at least one visible project?
 - What criteria should be applied to select projects?
 - What about projects that address more than one PA?
 - Should there be different lists for different target groups?
- It is also necessary to communicate joint initiatives (not only single projects) that are a product of the EUSDR.

PA Steering Groups

Factors for success:

- + Participation of Commission services in Steering Groups.
- + Back-to-back meetings of Steering Groups.
- + Steering Groups have to find their own 'true believers', i.e. highly committed people, who are the driving force.
- + Paying travel costs for SG members of PA 9 from non-EU countries has proven useful.

Open issues/bottlenecks:

- Insufficient participation of some Danube region countries, e.g., non-EU countries (partially due to lack of money for traveling).
- Lack of commitment to EUSDR. Insufficient mobilization and involvement. Slow responses.
- Lack of mandates on the side of some SG members.
- Missing project leaders and promoters in SG.
- Role and tasks of the Steering Group are not clear, nature of Steering Groups is extremely heterogeneous.

Minutes

EU Strategy for the Danube Region | PA 9 „People and Skills” | Working Group 3: “To support Creativity and Entrepreneurship” Meeting

16 April 2013, Sofia

Venue: Applied Research and Communications Fund, 5 Alexander Zhendov St.

Opening and Welcome

Ms. Christina Kasparyan (WG3 Coordinator, BSC SME – Ruse, Bulgaria) welcome participants at the meeting and apologised for the absence of Mrs. Nikolina Nikolova, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of regional development and public works, EUSDR National contact point in Bulgaria, who had to participate in a summit in Romania.

Mr. Jörg Mirtl (KulturKontakt Austria, PAC representative, Austria) welcome participants and excused Mr. Jürgen Schick, the PA Coordinator from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, for not being able to participate due to a heavy schedule.

Tour de table

All participants have presented themselves and the organization they represent in PA 9|WG3. A total of 12 participants, representing 9 organizations and institutions from 5 EUSDR countries took part in the meeting (ref: List of participants).

WG Rules of procedure

A proposal for WG Rules of procedure was presented by Ms. Kasparyan (BG) stressing that these rules aim at achieving efficiency of the WG to really support the work of the Steering group (SG) of PA9. She pointed out that the members of the working group should be sustainable – the participation in the WG is an engagement and members make some kind of commitment.

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Mr. Mirtl (AT) specified that the continuity of the SG and WGs was strongly underlined as very important in the first yearly report of the European Commission on the Danube Strategy (EUSDR). He noted that BSC SME – Ruse (i.e. coordinator's) tasks include also a thematic input, not only organizational and communicational responsibilities.

The other WG members did not have any other observations and the WG Rules of procedure were accepted.

Discussion and adoption of the WG terms of reference

Objectives

Ms. Kasparyan (BG) announced that comments on the WG terms of reference have already been received by some WG members and called these members to share them with the other members.

Ms. Csanadi (AT) asked why creative industries and green business are highlighted in the Terms of reference. Ms. Thielmann (AT) added if this mean that the WG will limit its scope to only these two kinds of industries (creative industries and green business) or it is open also to other industries.

Ms. Kasparyan (BG) answered that these industries are somewhat capsulated from the other industries. However, they incorporate creative methods, which are a good source to learn from and they have a spill over effect on other sectors of economy, if their potential is used.

Mrs. Stefica (HR) made a proposal point 3) of 'Objectives' to be modified to "*Supporting continuous education and training for SMEs, with special focus on creative industries and green businesses.*" It was accepted by WG members.

Mr. Mirtl (AT) noted that it is good to keep the focus of the WG rather than leave it open and missing the focus in its activities.

Ms. Thielmann (AT) wanted to know how innovation and entrepreneurship are linked to education. She received an answer by Mrs. Draganova (BG), Mr. Ackermann (DE), Ms. Kasparyan (BG) and Mr. Mirtl (AT), who explained the work of PA7 and PA8 Steering groups and how the activities of these priority areas of the Danube strategy are interrelated with the activities of PA9.

Ms. Kasparyan shared information on a flagship project that was identified under PA8, which is about the development of a creative cluster. An integral part of this cluster should be also the education and training of creative industries representatives.

Conclusion: All participants gathered around the conclusion that all levels and layers of stakeholders like ministries, PAs should work jointly, but at the same time PA should be keeping in mind their own specifics and have their own specialisations so that overlapping is avoided.

Thematic focus / topics

Ms. Thielmann (AT) said that cross-cultural learning should be included as a separate objective. According to her there should be a multidisciplinary approach in entrepreneurial education (e.g. people with special needs – disadvantaged people). Ms. Thielmann also added that school cannot cover all learning fields and for this reason the thematic focus of the WG should be changed as follows: “Entrepreneurial education at all levels of and forms of education (schools, universities, vocational training, informal training, etc.)”. WG members agreed.

Ms. Kasparyan (BG) answered to a question of Mrs. Stefica (HR) that creative industries are specifically included, because they have special needs and necessities to be met in regard to entrepreneurial education.

Mr. Ackermann (DE) suggested that primary school is added to the thematic focus. He made an observation, as point 15 of ‘Thematic focus/topics’, that guidance is a form that completes the other forms of education and lifelong learning. He also proposed that ‘mobility’ and ‘aging population’ are included among topics.

Mr. Mirtl (AT) noted that mobility and lifelong learning is a subject to another working group of PA9, which will have a meeting in June in Bucharest.

Ms. Thielmann (AT) said that WG3 should still keep in mind ‘aging population’ as they also may need entrepreneurial or creativity education.

Conclusion: ‘mobility’ and ‘aging population’ are included among WG3 thematic focus/topics.

Policy context

Mrs. Stefica (HR) proposed that Small Business Act is included among the listed policy papers, because it has an influence on education too. Her proposal was unanimously adopted by the group members.

Main outputs

Ms. Csanadi (AT) proposed to include an 'online platform' beside 'handbook' and 'manual' to point 4) of 'Main outputs' - "*Handbook or manual with good practices and innovative methods, that is easy to transfer and multiply within the macro-region.*", because otherwise this will look somehow static. She also proposed a new output „*Network of entrepreneurship initiatives*“.

Mrs. Stefica (HR) shared the experience of SEECCEL project where a 'practice pool' was created. She shared her concern that apart from the WG3 members nobody will access and make use of the online platform and the network that will be established.

Mr. Ackermann (DE) expressed an opinion that it is very important to link the results of the WG3 activity to other initiatives, projects etc., so that these results do not remain unknown.

Ms. Kasparyan (BG) proposed that the WG3 can use the website of PA9, as well as the Enterprise Europe Network to promote the results of the WG activity.

Mr. Milev (BG) proposed point 4 of 'Main outputs' to be changed to "*Identification and better linking of existing networks*".

At the end of this discussion, Ms. Kasparyan (BG) informed the participants that planning of operational programmes to support EUSDR should be included in the new programming period for Bulgaria and Romania. Ms. Kasparyan also added that at all levels of EU programmes – for territorial cooperation, framework programmes – it is expected to include the macro regional strategies of the EU.

Milestones and work plan and Reporting

These sections of the WG Terms of reference were accepted without any objections.

Additional remarks

Ms. Kasparyan (BG) pointed that the interrelations with PA8 and PA7 of the EUSDR have already been discussed, but PA3 is also very important in terms of creativity. She asked participants in the meeting if they have any other observations.

A discussion on the 'mobility' topic followed. Ms. Ondrouchova (CZ) asked if 'mobility' should really remain among the topics. Mr. Ackermann (DE) answered that it is important for the structure and the network he is representing. Mrs. Stefica (HR) stated that it is a good idea to keep 'mobility' among topic, because there are possibilities to link it to other programmes (e.g. Erasmus for young entrepreneurs). Then Mr. Mirtl proposed if it would be better if 'mobility' it placed in the policy context part of the document, rather than being a topic for the work of the WG. Mr. Ackermann and Ms. Ondrouchova agreed with him. Mrs. Draganova

(BG) made a suggestion to add 'mobility' in the objectives section of the document. All participants agreed, but proposed that 'mobility' should be left also in the policy context section.

Participants (Countries, Institutions)

Mrs. Stefica expressed an opinion that not all persons in the list of participants are present at the meeting. Ms. Kasparyan (BG) answered that the list will be updated according to the participants who have signed during the meeting. In relation to this Ms. Kasparyan also noted that all members of the WG3 could consult to experts outside this group, because nobody is competent in every field, so on specific topics members can consult the opinion of different experts.

In conclusion Mr. Mirtl (AT) added that members could consult the strategic document on the work of the WG that was elaborated in the autumn.

Discussion on a questionnaire for consulting the terms of reference with relevant stakeholders

Mr. Ackermann (DE) expressed his compliments to the idea and the development of this questionnaire.

As a suggestion for its improvement, Mr. Ackermann proposed that the questionnaire is sent by e-mail to all members for comments. Mrs. Stefica (HR) asked if this questionnaire is dedicated only to the participants of this working group or she can send it also to other stakeholders and she was answered that this is exactly the purpose of this document.

A decision was taken by the WG participants that the final version of the Terms of reference are sent to all participants, and later on both the Terms of reference and the questionnaire are sent to relevant stakeholders for collecting their opinions. Each participant of WG3 will have to gather opinions from 4 to 6 organizations. Ms. Csanadi (AT) asked if they have to send it by e-mail or they can also organize a local meeting. Ms. Kasparyan (BG) explained that this is a personal choice and each WG member should use whatever method best suits his/her organization/institution.

Discussion on the start of inventory of existing directly transferable models and practices

Ms. Csanadi (ET) proposed that the possible obstacles to models and practices transfer should be identified – e.g. language, cross-cultural issues, etc. She expressed an opinion that there should be a definition of 'directly transferable models and practices'. Mr. Ackermann (DE) supported her and proposed key words to be included in the Models fiche. A discussion on if the identified models and practices to be of national or international level followed.

It was cleared out that the fiche would be used to identify any national or international model that can be useful and transferable to other countries within EUSDR.

Ms. Kasparyan (BG) proposed to include the key words in the fiche for a good practice, which are taken from the Terms of reference, as well as to include in the key words the term 'useful for other countries'.

Ms. Thielmann (AT) proposed to be added in the fiche that it would be used also to identify international projects, so that it is known what have already been done.

Mr. Ackermann suggested that a description of what exactly has to be identified as a model or a good practice is added in the fiche. This suggestion was accepted.

Mr. Mirtl (AT) informed the participants that there would be a stakeholders' conference on the 5-6 December 2013 in Vienna.

Planning of Programmes 2014-2020

Ms. Kasparyan (BG) informed what has been done so far in Bulgaria related to the planning for the new programming period 2014-2020. She pointed out that BSC SME – Ruse participates in several working groups for the planning on governmental level and announced that supporting creativity has already been included in some strategies.

Ms. Radonova (BG) presented the planning process for the programming period 2014-2020 in Bulgaria.

Mr. Mirtl (AT) made an important observation that Priority area Coordinators will have the opportunity to push projects, but there is a problem with the currently existing programmes that they cannot finance projects under the EUSDR (e.g. the ESF cannot finance transnational projects). This is the reason why programmes and funds should be modified for the new programming period. This will be the most complicated and important task to do, but with the establishment of a special programme devoted to the Danube Strategy projects this problem can be solved to a certain extent.

Mrs. Stefica (HR) informed the participants that she has participated in several such planning working groups in Croatia, incl. on entrepreneurship. At the end of next month there will be a final draft of the Operational programme "Human resources" for the new programming period in Croatia.

Ms. Ondrouchova (CZ) noted that in principle the process of planning is the same more or less in all countries, but shared that in the Czech Republic they have problems with the organization of work – they want to do things, but they are not supported (?). Now they have third level working group for the new programming period planning.

Ms. Kasparyan (BG) explained that the role of EUSDR Steering groups is becoming more and more important. SGs provide letters of recommendation to projects, but the question is which programme will support these projects. So now is the moment for the relevant planning of priorities, programmes and funds. Even now this process has started, she continued, as the FP7 Programme has had already a special call dedicated to the Danube Strategy. Mr. Mirtl (AT) added a comment that there was also an effort to support the EUSDR also under SEE Programme.

Ms. Domoustchieva (BG) asked when there would be a clear view what the priorities are for the EUSDR on EU level for the new programming period. Ms. Kasparyan (BG) answered that this is a very complex matter, because the priorities of all 14 states have to be taken into account. Mr. Mirtl (AT) informed that there are several meetings planned during this year – in Sofia, Ljubljana, etc. so by the end of this year there will be a clear view on the EU priorities for the Danube Strategy.

Linking WG3 activities to other Priority areas

WG3 could be of an added value to the Creative Cluster project under PA8, Ms. Kasparyan (BG) said. She added that as coordinators of this WG, BSC SME – Ruse would keep the WG members informed of the Creative Cluster project development.

Mrs. Draganova (BG) shared an opinion that the strategic meeting in Bratislava for PA7, PA8 and PA9 will be a good opportunity to clearly define the focus of each PA, especially of PA7, where the focus on education is overlapping that of PA9.

Ms. Kasparyan (BG) and Mr. Mirtl (AT) made a proposal a discussion to be carried out during the meeting in Bratislava on the possibilities for cooperation on different projects (i.e. Creative Cluster project).

Planning of tasks and deadlines

1. Minutes of this meeting – deadline: **22 April 2013**
2. Terms of reference – the WG coordinator makes a final version and sends it to WG members, deadline: **22 April 2013**
3. Comments on the Minutes and the Terms of Reference by WG members – deadline: **28 April 2013**
4. Stakeholders feedback on Terms of reference – **15 July 2013**
5. Amended good practice/model fiche - the WG coordinator makes a final version and send it to WG members, deadline: **22 April 2013**

6. Model collection by WG members – continuous process; first round deadline: **end of September 2013**

Other business issues

Mr. Ackermann (DE) expressed an opinion that it will be good if members gather project ideas too, not only project that already exist. Mr. Mirtl (AT) proposed the EUSDR PA9 - project data sheet to be used.

Ms. Csanadi (AT) proposed to add to the WG3 outputs the gathering of information on EU calls for proposals suitable for the EUSDR, because this will be the networking effect of this working group (and others too). Mr. Mirtl (AT) answered that there is such a section already on the website of the PA9. Ms. Kasparyan said that members should concentrate on the calls that are suitable for WG3 and Ms. Csanadi (AT) suggested adding a section in the good practices/ models fiche regarding possible future partnerships for this WG.

Mr. Mirtl reminded the participants again about the date of the upcoming events and meetings under EUSDR PA9 till the end of year 2013 saying that information about all of them is available on the PA9 website.

Presentation of i.e. SMART project and SEECEL project

i.e. SMART project was shortly presented by Ms. Csanadi (AT) and SEECEL project by Ms. Stefica (AT). Two short videos of the projects were shown to the participants of the WG meeting and the expected results, which are of interest to WG3, were outlined and discussed among members.

With the completion of the agenda the meeting was closed.

Minutes taken by Iliana Draganova (BSC SME – Ruse)



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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

concerning the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region

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concerning the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region

1. INTRODUCTION

The Danube Region covers 14 countries, eight of them EU Member States. It is home to more than 100 million people, a fifth of the EU's population. The countries are different in terms of economic strength, but the Region is strongly interlinked, with potential for further integration and growth.

The Region has been transformed by the two last rounds of EU enlargement: Croatia is soon to join. There are a further five countries developing their political, socio-economic and sectoral links with the EU in various ways. The Region has a strategic position, opening the EU to its neighbours, the Black Sea region, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. It hosts the world's most international river, which is a major transport axis, a vital inter-connected hydrological basin and a world-renowned ecological corridor.

The Region is thus connected through opportunities and challenges. The policies of the countries are interdependent. They could however benefit greatly from further improved cooperation, for example, in completing missing transport links, reducing pollution and danger from floods, lowering dependency on energy providers from outside the Region, and addressing demographic change or brain drain. The competitiveness of the Region could also profit substantially from joint action in the fields of SME, labour market policies, education and security. There is a need to improve institutional capacity at all levels.

The European Council requested the Commission to prepare an EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), in the Presidency Conclusions of 18 June 2009. The Commission responded to the Council request in its Communication of 8 December 2010. In April 2011, the Council endorsed the Communication with its annexed Action Plan, which identifies concrete actions and examples of projects in 11 thematic Priority Areas. It follows the approach pioneered by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The Strategy provides a robust integrated framework for countries and regions to address issues which cannot be handled satisfactorily in an isolated way, but instead require transnational strategic approaches, projects and networking. It allows for better cooperation to improve the effectiveness, leverage and impact of policies, at EU, national and local level, utilising existing policies and programmes and creating synergies between them.

The Strategy operates at an intermediate level between national and EU-wide work on topics such as research and innovation, migration or security. It strengthens the integration of countries with the EU, and brings countries in the Western Balkans, Moldova and regions of the Ukraine closer to the Union.

After 18 months of implementation, significant achievements are evident. The Strategy:

- promotes concrete transnational projects with impacts on the Region and gives new impulse to action in the Region;
- supports the coordination of different national and EU policies and funds, and paves the way for more coherence and better results, with more impact for 2014-2020;

- develops a wide-ranging cooperation platform, addressing challenges that have been identified as needing joint attention. There are 24 Priority Area Coordinators and 14 National Contact Points driving implementation forward;
- highlights the political importance of the Region, through strategic support at ministerial level and concrete advances in terms of implementation;

The following chapters report on these achievements, giving concrete examples, while identifying areas that need more attention. Chapter 5 summarises lessons learnt and Chapter 6 suggests recommendations for the future.

2. PROJECTS, POLICIES AND NETWORKS FOR THE DANUBE REGION

The Strategy focuses particularly on concrete and strategic projects and initiatives with a macro-regional impact. The Strategy and its Action Plan are organised around four pillars to address the major issues. It facilitates new projects, gives new momentum to existing projects and supports networks for the Region¹.

2.1. Connecting the Danube Region

New projects

- New research projects on innovative vessels, such as the project NEWS, are developing technological solutions to renew the Danube fleet, with more competitive and environmentally friendlier approaches, e.g. through more efficient, cleaner engines, and better ship body design. This contributes to the overall goal to increase sustainable cargo transport on the river by 20 % by 2020, compared to 2010;
- Shipwrecks are being removed from the Danube, Sava and Tisa, improving navigation and ecological conditions. The project to remove wrecks totalling some 15 000 tons, initiated by the Serbian Chamber of Commerce as part of the Strategy, also involves the private sector;
- Work on the Bulgaria-Serbia gas interconnector project has advanced, linking the Baltic Sea area to the Adriatic and Aegean Seas and further to the Black Sea. The gas pipeline will be 150 km long. It contributes to gas supply diversification, ensures gas supply security and completes the important regional gas supply ‘ring’.

New momentum to existing projects

- The cooperative approach has facilitated the completion of the Calafat-Vidin Bridge, linking Romania and Bulgaria. The bridge is co-financed by European Funds and is only the second bridge along the 630 km river section of the border, providing an important missing link in the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).

New policy coordination initiatives

- At the invitation of the Commission, the ministers of transport of the Danube Region on 7 June 2012 adopted a Declaration on maintenance of the Danube waterway, committing themselves to concrete measures, including surveillance of water depth and signalling navigation routes in shallow sections. This has in turn led to an agreement between Romania and Bulgaria to plan work together jointly and to share equipment;

¹ A full report by each Priority Area can be downloaded on the website of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (www.danube-region.eu/pages/reports)

- A Danube Region Gas Market Model has been developed to quantify the regional impact of the gas infrastructure projects planned in the Region, resulting in the Danube countries now agreeing on a set of policy recommendations for future such projects.

2.2. Protecting the environment in the Danube Region

New projects

- The Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation has launched a call for research projects, to design environmental research and improve the uptake of results in the Region. This has mobilised significant actors and resources from public (national and EU) and private sources for efficient river-delta-coast-sea management overall;
- The Danube Sturgeon Task Force has been created to secure viable populations of this important fish in the river, facilitating projects, measures and initiatives for bringing sturgeon back. It promotes a cross-cutting approach, linking biodiversity to policy areas such as water quality, permeability of habitats, economic development, environmental education, and even prevention of crime (related to the illegal caviar trade).

New momentum to existing projects

- The DANUBE FLOODRISK project explores methods and databases on which countries can work together jointly. In all, 19 institutions in 8 Danube countries are participating, and accelerating progress towards shared databases and flood mapping. The European Flood Awareness System (EFAS) is also carrying out complementary work.

2.3. Building prosperity in the Danube Region

New projects

- The Commission Directorate General for Communication Networks, Content and Technology has launched a new e-infrastructure project under the 7th Framework Programme to improve access to and provision of advanced computing services to researchers. The new e-infrastructure will act as a bridge to the supercomputer facilities of the European PRACE initiative for countries in the Danube region, and indeed also for some Caucasus countries. The SEERA-EI project capitalises on this, placing it and other work on a Danube regional agenda;
- The Danube Region Business Forum, coordinated by the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, provides an important networking platform for over 300 SMEs. It encourages business-to-business meetings, and supports links with knowledge providers such as research institutes and universities.
- Technology transfer centres are being established in the Danube Region, with five pilot projects attached to important Danube Region universities, to improve links between academia and the private sector;
- In another pilot project, Danube schools and students are jointly developing innovative training courses and creative educational programmes to promote transnational contacts between cultures, with an emphasis on active citizenship and commitment to sustainable development. An innovative guide for teachers is being developed to apply throughout the whole Danube Region.

New policy coordination initiatives

- Work has started to create a Danube Research and Innovation Fund, pooling national and regional funds, building on the experiences of the BONUS programme in the Baltic Sea Region. A joint Declaration of Danube Region Ministers for Research was signed in Ulm on 9 July 2012, paving the way for preparatory work. The Directorate General for Research and Innovation and the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy supports this work, notably through a Danube INCO.net and other assistance.

2.4. Strengthening the Danube Region

New projects

- The Joint Research Centre has launched an initiative to provide scientific support to the Strategy, in cooperation with key scientific partners from the Region. Work has started on setting up a Danube-wide reference data and service infrastructure on common challenges such as environment protection, navigability, irrigation and agricultural development and energy production. Four thematic scientific clusters are being launched to foster scientific cooperation and to streamline research activities. A special focus on Smart Specialisation Strategies supports countries and regions in setting up regional innovation strategies;
- With the aim to improve the access to finance in the Region, the Danube Financing Dialogue matches project ideas to funds, bringing project promoters, such as SMEs, together with banks, international financing institutions and funding programmes.

New policy coordination initiatives

- A police chief meeting in January 2012 launched an initiative to intensify cooperation among police authorities in the Danube Region, improving measures against river-related crimes (including organised crime), and setting up a transnational law enforcement platform. In addition, EUROPOL has developed a specific project on threat analysis for the Danube Region.

3. MAKING THE MOST OF WHAT IS THERE: ALIGNING FUNDING SOURCES AND CREATING SYNERGIES

The work has been achieved through improving the way in which resources and knowhow, often already available to the Region, are utilised through better coordination. Building on this approach, the Strategy aims to achieve better results and greater impact by aligning existing funds and policies at EU, national and regional level. Examples include:

- infrastructure projects, such as the wastewater treatment plant in Budapest, ensuring better water quality throughout the Region, financed from European Structural and Investment Funds;
- cross-border programmes, such as Romania-Serbia, and Hungary-Serbia, are increasingly aligned with the Strategy, using specific calls or attributing extra points in selection procedures. Serbia alone earmarked EUR 19 million for Strategy-specific projects in the 2011 IPA cross-border cooperation component;
- transnational cooperation programmes, such as South East Europe and Central Europe, have financed new Danube Strategy projects;
- the 7th Framework Programme for Research has launched three calls specifically addressing Danube Region challenges, on an innovative fleet, on environmental solutions, and on the coordination of science and technology policies;

- projects co-financed by the Directorate General for Enterprise and Industry have supported transnational sustainable tourism in the Danube Region;
- the entire length of the River Danube is now taken into account in the draft revised guidelines for the Trans-European Transport Network;
- in the context of the Western Balkans Investment Framework funded under the Instrument for Pre-Accession, priority is given to projects that comply with the Strategy;
- the European Parliament supports pilot projects and preparatory actions for the Danube Region, providing Priority Area Coordinators with technical assistance, and encouraging innovative approaches for implementing the Strategy;
- regions, such as Baden Württemberg, have themselves set aside funds to support the Strategy, including for the initial phase of projects with an explicit macro-regional impact;
- the European Investment Bank has, together with Hungary, set up the Budapest Danube Contact Point to facilitate the development of transnational investment projects;
- similar work is on-going towards an overall Danube Region Technical Assistance Facility, facilitating the project preparation phase.

With regard to the important upcoming programming period 2014-2020, it is crucial that programmes and policies can be further utilised to implement the Strategy:

- macro-regional strategies are being highlighted in the Common Strategic Framework covering the coordination of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). This provides the programming process with strategic direction, and facilitates sectorial and territorial linkage for funds under shared management, namely the Cohesion Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund;
- the macro-regional approach is being featured in Partnership Agreements, for the individual countries, to ensure that national/regional and cooperation programmes all take the approach into account. This provides funding for the Strategy in future through ESIF, and thus ensures sustainability for the coming years;
- a re-defined and specific transnational cooperation programme is created for the Danube Region, to finance networking projects, and to provide institutional support for implementation and governance.

4. A COOPERATION PLATFORM

For the first time in the Region, therefore, following conflicts and divisions, and building on enlargement, the Strategy puts in place an operational cooperation structure to address challenges the Danube Region shares in a cooperative way. As well as consisting of projects and programming, this is also an important new platform, involving a wide range of stakeholders, including countries of the Danube Region politically committed at the overall level.

Without creating new institutions, this platform allows key stakeholders of national and regional administrations to drive the day-to-day implementation forward:

- the Strategy is organised in 11 functional Priority Areas bringing together expertise and responsibility: (1) Inland waterways and rail, road and air transport; (2) Energy; (3) Culture and tourism; (4) Water quality; (5) Environmental risks; (6) Biodiversity; (7) Knowledge society and information technologies; (8) Competitiveness and cluster development; (9) Investments in people and skills; (10) Institutional capacity; (11) Security.
- These are run by Priority Area Coordinators (PACs), high-level officials of national and regional administrations, experts in their thematic areas. They are supported by counterparts from the Danube Region, and are organised in 11 Steering Groups, one per Priority Area. These are important new cooperation platforms in their own right;
- at national and regional level, implementation is ensured by National Contact Points (NCP), embedding the Strategy in national and regional settings and making policy-makers ‘think macro-regional’. Political commitment is obtained through meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs as well as sector ministers, and through initiatives by cities and regions;
- the European level facilitates implementation, as well as embedding the Strategy in EU policies, through contact with stakeholders in the Danube countries, establishing links to EU decision makers, for example, through regular fora for members of the European Parliament, by having Commission officials regularly taking part in Danube-wide meetings, and through institutional support provided by the EU budget;
- the EU programme INTERACT provides capacity-building and organisational support, as well as communication tools (e.g. visual identity, website, newsletter) publicising results of the Strategy in the media and to the general public;
- building on what has already been established, the Strategy also gives prominence and operational support to existing institutions in the Region, such as the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), addressing environmental and water quality issues, and the Danube Commission, working on navigability. Civil society actors are included in the work, including in stakeholder seminars, Steering Groups and the Annual Forum, and particularly in Priority Area 10, ‘Institutional Capacity’.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

After the initial period of implementation, the following key lessons learned can be identified:

Implementation structure

- National Contact Points, Priority Area Coordinators and their Steering Groups form the implementation core of the Strategy. Their work needs further embedding in political and administrative structures. Their visible, central role requires institutional stability, political recognition and allocation of sufficient human resources. Adequate staff and support from ministries to enable them to fulfil their role is crucial;
- Experience shows that national coordination works better in countries that have set up inter-ministerial working groups for coordinating Danube work at national level, particularly where platforms have been set up at political or senior civil servant level, and where a technical secretariat supports their work. This is good practice, which should be encouraged throughout the Region;
- The EU budget can provide limited direct funding for the implementation structure until 2014. However, as funding is not guaranteed after that, other means of support

need to be found, such as national sources, the future Danube transnational cooperation programme and the future INTERACT programme.

Political support

- High-level political support launched the Strategy and remains crucial for its implementation. Ministerial meetings (on transport, research and innovation, energy) have significantly advanced maintenance of the River Danube, coordination of national and regional research and innovation policies and support for non-EU Member States implementing the 3rd Energy Package under the Energy Community;
- Meetings of Foreign Ministers have emphasised overall political support for the Strategy. The active role of Hungary during its Presidency accelerated the work. This is particularly useful when the political level is linked to the cycle of Strategy events.

Financing concrete actions

- Making best use of existing policies and programmes, such as European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), the Instrument for Pre-Accession, the TEN-T programme, the Framework Programme for Research and Development or private funds is crucial. With regard to 2014-2020, it is essential to integrate the Strategy systematically in programmes. There needs to be a joint effort from Danube countries, regions and the European Commission;
- Important initiatives have been launched to support projects in their preparation phase and to improve access to finance, such as the Danube Region Technical Assistance Facility, funds from the State of Baden-Württemberg, the Budapest Danube Contact Point or the Danube Finance Dialogue. Links between the initiatives should be enhanced.

Strengthening existing initiatives

- Synergies with existing bodies and initiatives, such as the ICPDR, the Energy Community or the International Organisation for Migration have been established, and need to be strengthened. Involving existing institutions, bodies and networks builds on positive experiences elsewhere, notably in the Baltic Sea Region. This is increasingly being facilitated by the High Level Group, set up for macro-regional initiative guidance, advising on this work, which reinforces available expertise, avoids parallel structures and makes best use of available resources.

Result orientation and targets

- Targets, milestones and roadmaps prioritise work, contribute to timely implementation and facilitate communication of the Strategy's potential. They should be continuously reviewed and monitored.

Integrating policies and funds

- There is specific value in integrative approaches, for example in combining navigation and environmental interests in the development of the river, such as on the stretch east of Vienna. The Commission facilitates cross-sectoral cooperation, for example in the scientific field through the activities of the Joint Research Centre, involving the relevant services and multiple funding sources. In general, more use should be made of EU-level frameworks, emphasising that the Danube Region comprises much more than just the river.

Integration of non EU countries

- The Strategy involves six non-EU countries at an equal level, supporting integration processes and increasing cooperation in the Region. Innovative solutions to facilitate the participation of these countries and to finance project implementation need to be found and strengthened. This already includes full participation in Priority Area coordination and in Steering Groups, where support in relation to participation is receiving special attention. Funds have been identified from EU allocations for Danube Strategy activities by at least one non-EU countries and this is good practice for others to follow.

Communication

- The common visual identity, the comprehensive website covering all Priority Areas, the newsletter, and promotional material developed with the strong support of the programme INTERACT, have increased visibility and facilitated communication. It would be useful to centralise information about Danube meetings and conferences to allow more concerted communication of these.
- The first Annual Forum, held in Regensburg in November 2012, confirmed political support for the Strategy and provided an opportunity to showcase and discuss its implementation. There is added value in holding such a conference on a regular basis and as the main event for the Strategy, combined with a meeting of ministers for Foreign Affairs.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region has demonstrated clear potential in its first phase of implementation. It has put the spotlight on a Region with considerable potential for development and further integration, addressing joint challenges such as sustainable use of resources or climate change in a cooperative way. To ensure continued work on the main issues facing the Region, and based on the experience reported here, as well as in the discussions at the first Annual Forum, the Commission recommends that participating countries and regions:

- strengthen their internal implementation structures, providing adequate financial support, political backing, and increased institutional stability;
- ensure continuity and adequate mandates for representatives sent to the Steering Groups, utilising the European Structural and Investment Funds programmes of 2014-2020 to support implementation structures;
- establish sustainable leadership and strategic planning for the Strategy, assisted by the European Commission, so that participating countries and regions fully assume their responsibilities. The implementation of the Strategy should be made more self-sustaining with its structures ensuring continuity even if persons involved change;
- continuously monitor the implementation of all Priority Areas, including commitment at political level and in terms of concrete achievements, with a view to concentrating on specific challenges, and ensuring focus as well as providing the basis for prioritisation and a leaner, more results-oriented structure;
- ensure there is more focus on results through paying further attention to appropriate targets and indicators, milestones and roadmaps;
- ensure systematic embedding of the Strategy in EU, national and regional programmes for the period 2014-2020, especially European Structural and

Investment Funds, Horizon 2020, COSME and the Connecting Europe Facility, using the expertise of Danube networks and key stakeholders in programming and implementation;

- strengthen the Strategy's contribution to Europe 2020 through concrete Danube Region actions linked to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth;
- reinforce the coherence of Danube actions with EU policies by ensuring that Strategy work is discussed by existing institutions, in relevant sectoral Councils, and where necessary in specific ministerial meetings;
- increase communication activities to reach a broader audience;
- establish the Annual Conference as the main event of the year, giving strategic direction, creating linkages and common approaches, and publicising achievements;
- strengthen, together with the European Commission, coordination and coherence with existing and possible future EU initiatives of this or similar macro-regional and sea-basin type.

**EUSDR PA7 SG + PA8 SG + PA9 SG JOINT MEETING
15. 5. 2013 – BRATISLAVA**

BACKGROUND PAPER

BUSINESS, EDUCATION, RESEARCH - FINDING A COMMON LANGUAGE

DANUBE STRATEGY COMMON GOALS: = GOALS OF THE MEETING	to connect people, their ideas and needs
	to share commonalities in policies
	to initiate projects / investments across borders
BUILDING PROSPERITY ACTIONS:	to build on considerable research and innovation perspectives
	to interconnect education and employment
	to improve planning and funding of action
	to share costs and benefits
	to modernise economic development / progress
	to transform ideas into marketable products / services

Problems to be tackled¹:

- different education, research and innovation systems
- fragmented research and development
- limited mobility of researchers and students
- limited labour market mobility
- uneven ICT coverage
- different conditions for competitiveness of enterprises
- gaps in Single Market
- uneven performance in education and training
- gaps in meeting labour market needs
- deficiency in highly skilled employment
- social exclusion

PA7, PA8, PA9 CHARACTERISTICS

PA7 FOCUS SUMMARY²:	
Main issues:	Centres of Excellence Smart specialization in countries and micro-regions Funding possibilities for R&D projects Coordination of funds to create the Danube Research Area Mobility schemes, “brain drain” vs. “brain circulation” Cooperation among universities and research to upgrade research and Education outcomes by focusing on unique selling points
Targets:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to invest 3% of GDP in Research and Development by 2020 - broadband access for all EU citizens in the Region by 2013 - increase the number of patents obtained in the Region by 50% - greater share of EU population age 30-34 with tertiary education – aiming towards 40% by 2020 - to reach 20% of academic mobility by 2020

¹ ref. to www.danube-region.eu

² ref. to PA7 Implementation Report

Perspectives / fields for cooperation with PA8, PA9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ networking in education, research, innovation (for technology transfer, centres of excellence, clusters...) ➤ exchange of students and researchers (career & skills development, promotion of excellence, e. g. BAYHOST project) ➤ Smart Specialization Strategies as a platform for cooperation
Major obstacles until now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - political support in home institutions - lack of communication with stakeholders in home countries - handling of the “EUSDR Three No’s”
Major achievements until now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establishment of DRRIF planned - Danube Region INCO.NET - use of CEEPUS mobilities - support to regional smart specialization strategies - cooperation with JRC and its initiative for Danube Strategy on water, land and soil, air and bio-energy

PA8 FOCUS SUMMARY³:	
Main issues:	Clusters of excellence Smart specialization Competitiveness in rural and urban areas Innovation and technology transfer VET
Targets:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to establish a cluster network for the EUSDR by 2014 - to make better use of environmental technologies through determination of the regional decision-makers concerning submission of the applications - to improve the technological transfer through establishing measures like consulting services by chambers and other institutions or organizations - to improve vocational training, subject to participation by the private sector (a dual system of practice and theory) through pilot projects (identifying potential institutions, as well as the partners and projects)
Perspectives / fields for cooperation with PA7, PA9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ to seek and achieve policy support in EUSDR ➤ common projects and applications for funding ➤ identification of new possible fields of cooperation
Major obstacles until now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - link of the Danube Strategy to other EU policies
Major achievements until now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - setting up networks of stakeholders in all 14 participating countries - 50 projects initiated (7 “flagship” projects) - Flagship project Danube Technology Transfer Centre (DTC) already supported by regional / national governments - establishment of an advice network – “Task Force Baden-Württemberg for the promotion of competitiveness in the EUSDR” of business organizations in BW - setting up a special fund to promote selected EUSDR projects making use of expertise available in Baden-Württemberg

³ ref. to PA8 Implementation Report

PA9 FOCUS SUMMARY⁴:	
Main issues:	Performance of education systems Cooperation in labour market Creativity and entrepreneurship Lifelong Learning and mobility Equity, social cohesion & active citizenship Demography and migration Poverty and social inclusion Gender equality
Targets:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to contribute to the 'Education and Training 2020' strategic framework and its four strategic objectives - to contribute to the achievement of EU 2020 targets, in particular with regard to smart and inclusive growth - efficient cooperation between relevant actors through involvement and extension of existing regional cooperation networks and initiatives - to foster creative partnerships at the interface of education, training and culture - to contribute to the improvement of labour markets and social inclusion in the region - to contribute to higher synergies of education systems and labour market demands on all levels - establishment and implementation of a small project funding mechanism
Perspectives / fields for cooperation with PA7, PA8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Organising information exchange upon request ➤ Access to thematic events where appropriate
Major obstacles until now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clarification of responsibilities of Danube Region countries (among stakeholders, local and regional authorities, national ministries etc.) for the implementation of the Strategy - similarity of ideas / initiatives - limited possibilities to implement international projects, especially for non-EU countries, different access to funds of EU and non-EU countries - lack of the transnational element in the ESF - lack of specific funding aligned to the EUSDR - limited consideration of the EUSDR outside context of structural & cohesion policy/limited consideration of education and labour market issues within EUSDR/ETC
Major achievements until now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - synergies created with intergovernmental institutions and regional networks (ETF, cedefop, RCC Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital, ERI SEE, CECE, IOM), as well as with other PAs - networking among public and identification of private stakeholders - setting up list of criteria for projects to be labelled as EUSDR projects and setting up a rolling stock-taking process of both existing and new projects - Working Groups kicked off

⁴ ref. to PA9 Implementation Report



AREAS OF COMMON INTEREST	
TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFER	VET
ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING	LIFELONG GUIDANCE
ESTABLISHING CLUSTERS	SMART SPECIALIZATION

Topics for discussion:

- **What are the potentials of cooperation and the target areas of region development in the responsibility of the PAs 7, 8 and 9?**
- **How to convert actions implemented by separate PAs into more focused regional strategies?**
- **How to produce benefits for everyone involved in the implementation of the DS, and what should be the main benefits?**
- **How to stimulate innovative ideas for socio-economic development of the Danube Region?**
- **What is the best way to coordinate the work among PAs 7, 8 and 9?**
- **How to make the best use of funds and resources to implement the DS?**