



Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the participating States of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and of the European Commission

Brussels, 13 May 2015

The Foreign Ministers of the participating states of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the European Commission gathered today in Brussels in order to discuss the implementation of the EUSDR and to agree on arrangements on further developing the governance of the Strategy.

Ministers stressed their solid commitment to the macro-regional approach in the Danube Region and reiterated their willingness to closely cooperate in order to address common challenges in the region and to continue striving for economic, social and territorial cohesion. Ministers thus acknowledged the results achieved so far and thanked the Priority Area Coordinators and Steering Group members for their work. They committed to provide continuous political support and guidance in order to ensure efficient planning, strategic co-ordination and implementation of the EUSDR. In this regard, Ministers welcome the establishment of the Danube Strategy Point hosted by the State of Baden-Württemberg in its Brussels Representation.

Recalling the Council Conclusions of 21 October 2014 on the governance of macro-regional strategies and referring to the Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of the European Commission of 26 June 2014, Ministers committed to further strengthen the EUSDR governance and to enhance ownership of the Strategy within their states and regions, while calling on the Commission to continue playing an active strategic role in this field.

Ministers and the European Commission agreed that in order to make further progress in the implementation of the Strategy, a better use of all existing funds and programmes is crucial. In this regard, Ministers acknowledged the need for a better co-ordination between the implementation of the EUSDR and the relevant European Structural and Investment Funds programmes in their countries. Furthermore, Ministers and the European Commission recognised the need to establish stronger synergies between EU Macroregional Strategies and EU Programmes directly managed by the Commission (e.g. Horizon2020, Erasmus+, COSME, LIFE, CEF, EU Investment Plan).

Taking into account the European Commission Report on governance of macro-regional strategies of 20 May 2014 and the Council Conclusions of 21 October 2014, Ministers agreed on the following arrangements:

- In order to ensure greater continuity of the work, the rotating principle for the chair of the Strategy will be expanded to a Trio Presidency where the incumbent Presidency will prepare all major meetings and documents together with the outgoing and incoming Presidency. In this respect, the current Trio consists of Austria, Baden-Württemberg and Slovakia. The Presidency will be handed over from Baden-Württemberg to Slovakia in October 2015, followed by Hungary in autumn 2016.

- The Presidency will organise and chair at least two meetings of National Coordinators (NCs) between two Annual Fora. NCs serve as the link between the political level and the Priority Areas and take own decisions or prepare decisions to be taken at the political level. The meetings of the NCs will be prepared, chaired and followed up by the Presidency.
- The Presidency will also organise and follow up meetings of the Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) and support their initiatives for such meetings. These meetings can be organised back to back with the NCs' meetings, where appropriate.
- The Presidency convenes meetings of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and other Ministers in charge of the EUSDR at least once a year. Ministers will decide on issues of major importance and seek to find solutions where consensus cannot be found at the level of NCs. In addition, meetings of relevant line ministers shall be organised to deal with questions linked to the respective Priority Areas.
- The Danube Strategy Point (DSP) shall support the political and operational level of the EUSDR. It will serve as a strategic working unit and as a service centre supporting the implementation, communication, monitoring and evaluation of the EUSDR. Furthermore, it will help to ensure the linking of the Strategy to the Danube Transnational Programme and other EU financial resources.
- Following the Joint Statement of EUSDR Foreign Ministers of 26 June 2014, National Coordinators have discussed the added value of a Special Representative for the Strategy. Such a position could yield results particularly in contributing to a better visibility and external perception of the Strategy and in improving the access to additional financial sources for EUSDR projects. Ministers agreed to further examine the added-value of the Special Representative, taking into account the evaluation of the Danube Strategy Point and the question of financing beyond the funds currently available for the support of the EUSDR.
- The Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) plays an important role in order to foster transnational cooperation in the Danube Region. The link between the DTP and the EUSDR is thus crucial. Ministers welcome that the Danube Programming Committee and the NCs of the EUSDR agreed to mutually offer observer positions in their relevant meetings and to explore how to further foster the cooperation between the Strategy and the Programme.
- Unlocking of all available funds contributing to the EUSDR is needed for the full implementation of the Strategy through necessary investments. Ministers are committed to take the necessary actions to improve the coordination of funds available at EU, state, regional and local level. The participating states will put their efforts in coordinating the potential of the existing 2014 - 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds, Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance and the European Neighbourhood Instrument where appropriate and possible. In this respect, Ministers welcomed that the Ministers in charge of these funds in their countries will be invited to meet during the Annual Forum 2015. The Forum will also provide room for the exchange between Managing Authorities, Programme Secretariats and other fund coordinators with the EUSDR actors.

- Ministers are committed to take the necessary actions to improve also the coordination of other EU funds (but ESIF) available at the EU level. The participating states will put all efforts in coordinating the potential of the existing 2014 - 2020 Multiannual Financial Framework funds and financial mechanisms where appropriate and possible.