



EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Consolidated Input Document of the Danube Countries
for the Revision of the EUSDR Action Plan



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PRELUDE

This “Consolidated Input Document of the Danube Countries” was elaborated by the Danube Strategy Point (DSP) in its role as process facilitator, jointly agreed and approved by the EUSDR National Coordinators and handed over to the European Commission / DG Regio, on 5th July 2019. This document compiles and contextualizes the outcomes of multifaceted consultations. As it stems from the actors directly concerned with steering and implementing the EUSDR, it constitutes the primary basis for the revised Action Plan, which is to be elaborated by the European Commission / DG Regio until autumn 2019.

The document consists of two parts:

- Part A of this document describes the envisaged strategic and operational framework for of the revised Action Plan (scope and description of the revision process, results and recommendations of the Operational Evaluation, thematic orientation of the EUSDR, governance and interplay with funding facilities).
- Part B then transfers “words into action” and demonstrates envisaged future foci at Priority Area level (targets, actions, strategic projects / activities).

PART A:

1. Scope of the Revision Process of the EUSDR Action Plan

1.1. EUSDR History

In 2008, the Prime Ministers of Austria and Romania introduced the idea of creating a strategy for the Danube Region in a letter to the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso. The actual start of EUSDR is 19th June 2009, when the European Council requested the European Commission to prepare a European Union Strategy for the Danube Region before the end of 2010 (Scoping Paper for the public consultation 2010). On 8th December 2010, the European Commission adopted two main documents: the *Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (COM(2010) 715)*, and an accompanying *Action Plan (SEC(2010)1489/3)*, a Commission Staff Working Document which complements the Communication.

The Communication (*COM(2010) 715*) describes the challenges and opportunities of the Danube Region, recommends an integrated approach, proposes the Action Plan (AP) (*SEC(2010) 1489/3*) and asks for a strong commitment from the participating countries and stakeholders. In the Communication, 4 Pillars and 12 Priority Areas (PAs) are listed. The Action Plan facilitates the transfer from 'words to actions' by identifying concrete actions for each of the 12 Priority Areas. On 13th April 2011, the European Council endorsed the Council Conclusions on EUSDR (3083rd GENERAL AFFAIRS Council meeting) thanks to the efforts of Hungary during its EU Presidency. The Action Plan states that each Priority Area allocates the coordination to a Priority Area Coordinator (PAC). The Danube Region countries established for each of the 12 Priority Areas 2 Priority Area Coordinators from different countries. A Steering Group as board consisting of representatives of the Danube Region countries accompanies each of the Priority Areas.

In 2012, each Priority Area specifies actions to tasks and summarizes them to their Priority Areas' Targets and Actions adopted by their Steering Groups. In May 2016 a new/updated set of targets per Priority Areas was validated by the National Coordinators (NCs) and Priority Area Coordinators at a joint meeting held in Bratislava (Slovakia).

For enhancing the coordinative capacity, the Danube Strategy Point (DSP) was established in 2015. The DSP implemented communication tools and helped to harmonize activities and reporting of PACs. The work of DSP stopped in 2017 and was re-established and re-organized in autumn 2018 as supportive body for all actors of EUSDR.

Both acting bodies, the PACs and DSP are funded by the Danube Transnational Programme (DTP), which facilitates the necessary organizational structure for EUSDR activities, thus acting in the framework of transnational projects.

Another tool for enhancing cooperation, which also offers the opportunity for exchanging important thematic issues are the Annual Fora (AF), organized by the respective year's Presidency of EUSDR. Usually the Annual Fora are a market place for ideas and important events e.g. for political conferences.

1.2. The Reasons for revising the Action Plan

The EUSDR Action Plan was designed to remain stable for a certain period. However, over the years, the priorities evolved and hence, some of the actions and projects became outdated. Therefore, as the valid Action Plan states “actions and projects may be updated, transformed or replaced. The Action Plan is therefore “rolling” and will be regularly reviewed.”

In 2016, during the Slovakian EUSDR Presidency, discussions on the need of a revision of the Action Plan were held. The National Coordinators however, agreed to postpone the process in order to prepare a more thorough revision of the EUSDR Action Plan, possibly as an outcome of the *first EC Report on the Implementation of Macro-regional Strategies*, completed in December 2016 (SWD(2016) 443)¹.

The first EC Report lines out the achievements of the EUSDR:

- Overall, a rich set of **initiatives are on the way under the umbrella of the EUSDR**, which show that the strategy is delivering results.
- One of the most visible results of the EUSDR is the setup of an **Interreg Danube Transnational Programme** matching exactly the geographical area of the Danube Strategy providing support to its governance (via technical assistance to PACs the DSP) and contributing directly to the Strategy’s implementation through its thematic priority axes (aligned with the Strategy’s priorities).
- A dedicated website of the EUSDR (www.danube-region.eu) presents and informs on the activities and results of the Strategy
- The **Annual Forum** is conceived as main event of the year is gathering all stakeholders and potentially interested actors to assess the implementation of the Strategy and discuss the way ahead. Ministerial meetings (general or thematically focused) are organized back-to-back with the Annual Fora in order to keep the political momentum of the Strategy.
- Acting as a one-stop-shop for the access to information on EU funding, the on-line platform EuroAccess Danube Region helps the EUSDR key implementers, but also directly the potential project promoters to find the right funding source for their projects.
- The role of the European Commission is perceived as important, although PACs often quote the insufficient and discontinuous participation of the relevant DGs and Commission services to activities of the relevant PAs as critical factor, which needs improvement.
- A gap between the Strategy and the funding programmes seems to continue. This too often divides managing authorities and officials in charge for the EUSDR, even if sometimes both being based in the very same ministry. This must be changed by ensuring effective internal coordination. The EUSDR should not be seen as red-tape but as an opportunity to make the implementation of ESI funds (and beyond) more coherent and efficient. Specific challenges of coordination of funding opportunities and EUSDR relate to IPA/ENI countries. Also, the integration of the macro-regional perspective in directly-managed EU funds requires improvement.
- The monitoring of the results of MRS is a challenging task. Not all results can be monitored in quantitative manner – this is particularly the case for example with the improvement in the mind-set for cooperation by the concerned administrations.

Moreover, the first report of the Commission identifies the following areas of improvement:

- translate political will into administrative support and ensure sufficient resources for day-to-day work on a long-term basis;
- ensure appropriate participation of national representatives to Steering Group meetings of priority areas and consider reducing the number and scope of current priority areas if sufficient resources are not allocated by participating Countries within well-defined time-frames;

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016SC0443>

- introduce a mechanism for regular rotation of Priority Area Coordinators, so to enhance the overall ownership of the EUSDR by national and regional administrations;
- strengthen commitment of sectorial ministries;
- acknowledge the importance of national coordination mechanisms and reinforce them;
- enhance the potential for aligning the existing funding instruments with the priorities (e.g. Danube financing dialogue, setting-up of an investment platform that would meet the needs of SMEs);
- Further, develop and strengthen a dialogue between managing authorities of different funding instruments and key strategy implementers in order to achieve the intended results.

The European Council reacted on this first report with the *Council Conclusions (8461/17, 25th April 2017)* and encourages the Commission, the Member States and participating non-member states to intensify their effort towards improving the territorial, social and economic cohesion in the Macro Regions. The European Council calls for more effectiveness in cooperation, funding and political ownership and for enhancing monitoring, communication and focusing the challenges of the regions.

In November 2017, the *Study on Macro Regional Strategies and their Links with Cohesion Policy² ("COWI study")* was published. It analyses the overall context of the Danube macro region as well as data and the report of the achievements of the EUSDR. It also evaluates its contribution to strengthening the territorial cohesion objective of the EU. Therefore, the study represents a valuable source of information for the stakeholders involved in the implementation of EUSDR.

EUSDR's achievements according to the "COWI study" are in brief:

- Although the Danube region is quite **heterogeneous**, in terms of macro-economic performance relations between most parts of the region are quite strong, and the macro-regional **integration on trade, investment and energy** is found to be high.
- There are large variations throughout the region when it comes to competitiveness, with a notable divide between urban areas/capital cities and rural/peripheral regions.
- Concerning the performance on political, governance, and institutional indicators, the region appears to be divided into four groups (best to lowest).
- The twelve priority areas set out in the EUSDR's Action Plan are confirmed to **address existing needs** of the Danube region, and are justified to be relevant to the macro-region.
- As the other three MRS (EUSBSR, EUSAIR, EUSAIR), the EUSDR has succeeded in **bringing together different actors** (e.g. private and public, across different government levels, from thirds countries).
- Moreover, a key achievement of the EUSDR is the increase in policy dialogue and cooperation on major issues, as well as more **cooperation with third countries**.
- Almost all of the PAs report **satisfactory progress**. The assessment of progress on the targets against indicators, however, show both **positive and negative developments**.
- The key support to the EUSDR's activities comes from the **Danube Transnational Programme**, but financing is also obtained from certain CBC programmes and EU Programmes (especially Erasmus). While it appears that nationally oriented ESIF programmes have been formally aligned, stakeholders report little transnational financing thus far.

In parallel the processes of drafting the regulations for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the Cohesion Policy 2020+ started in 2018 by publishing the ECs proposal for regulations (particularly *Draft Common Provisions Regulation (COM(2018) 375)³*, 29th May 2018). Eleven thematic objectives used in 2014–2020 have been simplified to **five clear policy objectives** in this regulation:

² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2017/macro-regional-strategies-and-their-links-with-cohesion-policy

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A375%3AFIN>

1. A smarter Europe - innovative and smart economic transformation.
2. A greener, low-carbon Europe.
3. A more connected Europe - mobility and regional ICT connectivity.
4. A more social Europe - implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights.
5. Europe closer to citizens – sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas through local initiatives.

MRS again are mentioned as important factor on the strategic side for identifying the main objectives of the funding programmes.

On 29th January 2019 *ECs second report on MRS* was published (*SWD(2019) 6⁴*). It gives an even clearer picture of the achievements and of the challenges for EUSDR in the following EU funds' period 2021–2027. The programming of the EU funds 2021–2027 is identified as opportunity to maximize the added value of a revised Action Plan of EUSDR. The EC recommends strengthening and coordinating the revision-efforts in order to enable a greater strategic focus for the MRS.

The EC identified the following areas for further improvement:

- Strengthen the ownership and commitment of line ministers by emphasizing the potential benefits which the EUSDR may bring and invite them to duly empower the officials representing their ministries at SG meetings;
- Ensure that the revision process of the EUSDR Action Plan, to be completed in 2019, reflects the implementing capacities of participating countries;
- Ensure a balanced distribution of Priority Area coordination roles;
- Continue to seek for synergies and complementarities with existing instruments and organisations already operating in the Region;
- Encourage a continuous participation of all relevant Commission DGs in SG meetings;
- Improve the dialogue between the EUSDR and ESI Funds/IPA authorities in order to identify and fund broader range of projects and actions in the mainstream programmes. This will be even more important in the planning of upcoming programming period (2021-2027) where cooperation is introduced as a horizontal objective for Cohesion Policy (Commission Proposal);
- Enhance exchange of experiences among programmes that are already funding, or plan to fund, macro-regional relevant projects, even across macro-regional strategies.
- Promote actions, in line with the EUSDR priorities, that bring added value to the EU enlargement process in Western Balkan countries.
- For the next generation of the transnational programme dedicated to the EUSDR, find a better balance between IPA and ERDF funds.

The European Council reacted on the second report with the *Council Conclusions (9895/19, 5th June 2019)* recognizes the role of MRS in fostering socio-economic and territorial cohesion and observes the need for rekindling the political momentum, increasing the commitment and ownership of stakeholders and partners on local and regional level, recognizes the progress done and calls for the optimal use of existing financial resources based on the principle of the three NOs. The Council took note of the Commission's recommendations. Finally, the Council welcomed the revision of the Action Plan, with the view to provide clear added value. The Council invites to make use of the advantages of the links between smart specialisation strategies and clusters. The Commission is asked to play a leading role in the strategic coordination of MRS.

After eight years of implementation of the EUSDR, a number of new challenges emerged or further anchored on the political agenda (e.g. digitalization, ecology, education, transport, climate change adaptation and decarbonisation, migration). Some of the former challenges were solved; some issues turned out not to be crucial any more or to remain tackled on the macro-regional level. Many projects and processes were implemented by promoters with the help of PACs. The two cited reports of the EC

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/sites/taxation/files/mid-term_evaluation_sw_d_c2020.pdf

to MRS and the COWI study give a clear recommendation for the revised Action Plan: The year 2019 is a window of opportunity for the revision process. A revised Action Plan will be the basis to better combine the findings of EUSDR with not only the (transnational) Interreg Programmes, but also the mainstream programmes of the new cohesion policy 2021–2027, centrally managed funding facilities, and others.

1.3. The scope of the revision

Taking into account the findings of the EC reports, the experience of the participating states, the Priority Areas and stakeholders of the EUSDR, the revision process addressed:

- Strategic objectives for increasing the quality of living in the Danube Region
- Objectives, targets, actions, activities and processes of Priority Areas
- the governance of EUSDR (internal and external) and the cooperation with other MRS and sea-basin strategies and
- The interplay of EUSDR with European funding facilities

The EUSDR revision process made particularly use of a multi-faceted bottom-up approach pursued in the framework of the two-stage consultation process (see chapter 2), involving stakeholders of different background and from different levels (EC, national, regional and local actors, the civil society, academia and cooperation platforms).

The revision process also considered available data and evidence stemming from ongoing or finished monitoring and evaluation processes (COWI, ESPON EMTM – European and Macro-regional Territorial Monitoring Tool, Attractive Danube Project, evidence gained by JRC – Joint Research Center, Territorial Analysis as carried out under the Danube Transnational Programme), whenever appropriate, in order to streamline and focus EUSDR activities. Furthermore, results of the EUSDR Operational Evaluation, which was finalized in June 2019, form the basis of this document (see chapter 3). In parallel to the revision process, decisions on future coordinative responsibilities⁵ were taken.

The process offered the possibility of reinforcing political ownership and commitment to the European Strategy for the Danube Region by sharpening a more strategic approach in the Strategy's implementation, by focusing on a limited number of priorities and activities, but with high added value for the Region.

2. Description of the Revision Process of the EUSDR Action Plan

As the EUSDR Action Plan is defined as a “rolling document” as stated above, revisions are foreseen. The process of revising the EUSDR Action Plan was initiated by the Bulgarian EUSDR Presidency in 2018, in the context of the debate on the future financial framework after 2020. Thus, the agenda of the Meeting of the EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators held on 1st February 2018 and the agenda of the Joint Meeting of the EUSDR National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators held on 25th May 2018 in Sofia (Bulgaria) comprised items regarding this process. Full consensus on the need for an Action Plan revision was reached at the National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators meeting held on 25th May 2018 in Sofia (Bulgaria), chaired by the Bulgarian EUSDR Presidency. The importance of the process was underlined also by Ms. Corina Crețu, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, during the Joint meeting of the EUSDR National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators organized in June 26th, 2018, in Brussels (Belgium). The EU Commissioner called for a political re-boost of EUSDR and also for a deep involvement and extensive contributions of both National Coordinators, Priority Areas Coordinators and Steering Group members.

⁵ See also chapter 7.1. internal governance – core EUSDR actors (more specifically d) Priority Area Coordinators).

The **first stage of the consultation process** endured until January 2019, involving PACs and the respective Steering Groups. This constituted a retrospective appraisal of actions, embracing also cross-cutting issues, possible cooperation fields and a general outlook. The Danube Strategy Point (DSP), which became operational in September 2018, collected the input received from all EUSDR PACs and drafted the *Summary of the PACs proposals to the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan – Outcomes of the consultation phase on the guidance note of the Bulgarian EUSDR Presidency*. Again, the need for revision of the Action Plan was stressed – even if most actions are still deemed to be relevant, more flexible and future-oriented agenda-setting is needed. Unexploited potentials for cooperation across Priority Areas were identified as well as the need for better integrating cross-cutting issues. This summarizing document was discussed during the PAC meeting on 22-23 January 2019 in Bucharest.

In parallel, in order to better adjust the process, the Romanian Presidency launched additional questionnaires, addressing both National Coordinators and Priority Areas Coordinators. The feedback received, which was discussed during the NC meeting organized by the Romanian EUSDR Presidency in Bucharest on 14th-15th February 2019, again highlighted the need for a revision of the Action Plan.

Concomitant with this, the aforementioned *ECs second report on MRS (SWD(2019)6)* was published on 29th January 2019, stressing even more the importance of the revision process: “Concerning the EUSBSR and the EUSDR, thematic and national coordinators should use the revision of their respective action plans as an opportunity to select the most relevant core priorities that have the highest EU added value, and that are worth mobilising EU and national funds”.

As a result of stage one of the consultations, the EUSDR National Coordinators agreed on an updated timeline for the Revision of the EUSDR Action Plan. The roadmap for the revision of the Action Plan was endorsed by NCs at the meeting in Bucharest on 14th-15th February 2019 and finally adapted at the meeting on 23rd-24th May 2019 in Bucharest.

NCs and PACs were invited to submit their contributions until 26th April 2019, in order to collect their proposals on matters regarding the strategic objectives for increasing the quality of living in the Danube Region, objectives targets and governance of the Strategy and interplay with the European funding facilities. All Priority Areas and 12 of 14 participating countries contributed to the first draft of the Consolidated Input, which was compiled and circulated on time (14th May) by DSP. After discussing the first draft at the Joint Meeting of EUSDR National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators in 23rd – 24th May 2019 in Bucharest and further written inputs until 7th June, the 2nd draft was distributed on 17th June to be endorsed in a written procedure until 1st July 2019.

This Consolidated Input Document was handed over to the EC in July 2019, constituting a primary basis for the drafting of the new EUSDR Action Plan. After feedback circles with the participating countries, the Action Plan (a Staff Working Document) will be issued and endorsed in autumn 2019.

For also allowing further EUSDR stakeholders (i.e. the civil society, citizens and multipliers) to contribute to the revision process, an online public consultation was carried out until 20th May 2019 and a Public Hearing on 27th June at the EUSDR Annual Forum 2019 in Bucharest offered an additional opportunity for the public to introduce proposals for the revision of the Action Plan (see Annex 2⁶). The proposals of these important group of stakeholders will be compiled to another report of DSP and sent to DG Regio to make use for the revising process of the Action Plan of EUSDR.

The representatives of the participating countries recommend a Meeting of Ministers responsible for EUSDR with the new Commissioners responsible for Regional and Urban Development and the one for Neighbourhood Policy as kick-off for the new Action Plan in October / November 2019.

⁶ As agreed in the framework of the Joint Meeting of EUSDR National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators in 23rd – 24th May 2019 in Bucharest, a report on the outcomes of the Public Hearings were handed over to DG Regio as separate Annex of the Consolidated Input Document.

3. Results and recommendations from the evaluation

Apart from the “COWI” study dating 2017⁷, which had a specific emphasis on MRS and their links with Cohesion Policy, no accompanying evaluation exercise specifically dedicated to the EUSDR has been carried out so far. Considering outcomes of the NC meeting of 25th May 2018, the joint NC-PAC meeting on 26th June 2018, and the timeline of the revision of the EUSDR Action plan as initiated in 2018, the EUSDR Evaluation Plan was adopted in the wake of the NC-PAC meeting on 6th/7th December 2018.

The EUSDR Evaluation Plan emphasizes the need for underpinning future-oriented reflections on the operational and thematic orientation of the Strategy with concrete findings stemming from a sound evaluation. This is also underlined in the aforementioned *ECs second report on MRS (SWD(2019))*, stating that “there is wide agreement that the ongoing revision of the Action Plan must be based on a sound evaluation of the results and that new actions and projects must be to the maximum extent possible measurable”.

Based on these postulates, as a first step, the EUSDR Operational Evaluation was launched in spring 2019. This Operational Evaluation mainly focuses on governance aspects, communication and stakeholder involvement of the EUSDR, thus on processes and workflows among the key EUSDR actors (see also chapter 7.1) as well as towards key target groups of the Priority Areas. In close cooperation with the specifically installed Steering Group DANUVAL – composed of selected representatives of the EUSDR core stakeholders – DSP assigned an evaluation consortium led by METIS Ltd. with conducting the Operational Evaluation, based upon desk research, an online survey and semi-structured telephone interviews. The evaluation also takes into consideration the growing knowledge on MRS in general and on EUSDR in particular, however, the summary on main findings below focuses on those outcomes of major relevance for the AP revision process.

This Operational Evaluation constitutes only a first contribution to evaluation and monitoring of the Strategy. For instance, the new EUSDR monitoring system, which will be launched by end 2019, is intended to provide a solid basis for tracing functionalities, evolvments and achievements both in operational and in policy terms.

Main findings of the EUSDR Operational Evaluation on the effectiveness, communication and stakeholder involvement of the EUSDR

Strategic dimension

The findings of the evaluation indicate that there have been some **achievements** of the EUSDR at strategic level, but the overall impact of the strategy is not very high. Questions on the **level of change triggered by the EUSDR in different policy fields**, on the impact of the EUSDR on **national or regional laws, regulations and organizational structures** as well as on **planning processes** reached a mean score between 2.6 and 3.2 on a scale from 1 (no change/impact) to 6 (high level of change/impact). Only the consideration of the EUSDR in **bilateral/international issues** was ranked higher (mean 3.7).

The major concrete achievement is the set-up of **cooperation structures** and new partnerships. In some PAs visible progress has been achieved, but in general internal actors largely agree that the momentum of EUSDR has decreased.

The results of the online-survey show that the **cooperation intensity** between key actors in the EUSDR is high at **PA level** and – to a smaller extent – at **national level**. At **Pillar level** and in the **EUSDR in general (cross-pillar)**, the cooperation is less intensive. The survey results also clearly show that

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2017/macro-regional-strategies-and-their-links-with-cohesion-policy

cooperation intensity in the Danube Region **raised over time** (e.g. intensity of information exchange, mutual understanding, binding rules/processes/structures, etc.).

The assessment of **cooperation with line DGs and other European institutions** showed substantial differences. A major aspect is that good cooperation is essentially **based on good inter-personal relationships**, thus cooperation culture has not fully reached the institutional level.

To tie **budgets and funding opportunities** to the strategy is seen as a major point, which could raise the political interest. Furthermore, the **revision of the Action Plan** has been explicitly raised as an opportunity to rekindle the political interest from the European level (e.g. through definition of cross-cutting topics across the PA).

According to the results of the online-survey, coordinated **funding of projects**, better **cooperation** and better **governance** are needed most in the Danube Region.

The added value of the EUSDR was rated highest in terms of “**Improving existing cooperation mechanisms and networks and/or creating new ones**”, followed by the factor “**Strengthening integration within the Danube Region and cooperation with non-EU countries in the areas of common interest and in addressing common challenges**”. The added-value was rated lowest in terms of factors relating to financing and complementarity of funding sources.

The most relevant factors constituting the benefit are 1) results in terms of projects, actions, networks and processes; 2) greater integration and coordination, mutual learning; and 3) improved cooperation with non-EU and neighbouring countries.

Governance dimension (operational level)

Stakeholder involvement and Steering Groups

Not only at strategic but also at operational level it is important that the right **stakeholders** are **involved**. The evaluation findings indicate that the current state of play is ranked as **satisfactory** but with room for improvement. The lack of persons having actual influence on policy-making was the major point of criticism. Also the involvement of additional stakeholders (e.g. cities, chambers and academia) was suggested in order to increase the added value and impact of the activities.

According to the perception of the online-survey participants, the **Steering Group** they belong to are **composed appropriately** and the involvement of the SG in the PA is relatively high. However, the answers show a wide variation, which indicates large differences between the Priority Areas. The stakeholder involvement also strongly varies between countries.

Key **success factors** for a strong involvement of the SG in the PA are high-level political commitment, ownership and leadership, regular and proactive participation at meetings as well as common projects and actions.

Main **obstacles** for a stronger involvement of the SG relate to the lack of capacities and expertise from part of the SG members. A step-by-step empowerment of SGs might be an incentive that MS invest more in strategy-building. Also a broader expert involvement should be considered. In order to encourage participation in SG it might be useful to combine several meetings and to encourage decision-making.

National outreach and funding sources

There have been some structural and institutional changes brought by the EUSDR, but overall, the **outreach and spill over to the national level** seems to be **little**. According to the perception of the interview partners, the outcomes of the SG meetings are not sufficiently transmitted to the national level. The few reported exemplary achievements related to institutional change are a service office and inter-ministerial consultation groups.

According to the online survey, the following funding sources are addressed most in the EUSDR: **ERDF (mainly via DTP, but also Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes), Cohesion Fund and national/regional funding sources** or development cooperation sources (e.g. BACID, CEI Calls for Proposals). Other funding sources like the **ESF, centrally managed EU funds** or **private funds** play a smaller role according to the respondents. Good EUSDR examples for enhanced intertwining of funds can be found, e.g. in Bulgaria.

Workflows and processes

In order to safeguard efficient and synergetic implementation procedures, well-functioning **workflows and processes** among key actors are vital prerequisites. The participants of the online-survey assessed the general workflows/processes **satisfying, sufficiently transparent** and **rather formal** than informal. The best assessment was reached at PA level, followed by the EUSDR level. Lower ratings are found at national level. The **efforts** that are **needed** to ensure the workflows/processes in relation to the outcome are assessed relatively high at all levels.

On the one hand, **examples** like the revision of the EUSDR action plan (ensuring the bottom-up approach), national inter-ministerial working groups (allowing the inclusion of line ministries and core stakeholders), Danube Participation Days (improving civil society involvement), or seminars, workshops and forums (used for capacity building, exchange of information and cooperation) were mentioned as **workflows/processes that work well**.

On the other hand, participation, transparency and decision-making processes on SG level, the interlinkage between MRS and EU Mainstream Programmes, external communication, national coordination or the selection of PACs were mentioned as examples of workflows/processes that **need to be improved**.

Projects and activities of strategic value

Projects and activities of strategic value are an important tool for making results visible. In this context, Interact has highlighted the concept of “**project chains**”, which are projects that are interlinked. This linkage may be a horizontal one (linking topics within a PA or a pillar), it may link projects across funding schemes or with national/regional projects or activities, thus allowing a wider outreach of the strategy. This implies that thematic coordinators of a PA actively build, implement and monitor such linkages. Good EUSDR examples are the DREAM project or Danube Parks.⁸

Another element for triggering changes through the EUSDR are processes put in place. A “**project to policy loop**” is a process where a link between macro-regional processes and a policy change is initiated. In this context, a macro regional process can trigger a policy discussion or even change. Good EUSDR practice examples are NEWADA and Fairway (PA 1a) or vocational training being brought forward in BiH, HU and HR.⁹

External communication and PR

In general, the participants of the online-survey are relatively **satisfied with the EUSDR communication flows**. This is the case mainly at PA level and at EUSDR level. At national level the satisfaction rate is lower. Overall, the **communication and PR tools meet the information needs** on the EUSDR, but only to a limited extent. The assessment on the extent of the communication and PR tools **highlighting the added value** of the EUSDR is less positive.

In terms of specific communication and PR tools, the **EUSDR Annual Forum**, the **Website** (www.danube-region.eu) and the **PA specific websites** achieved highest satisfaction rates. The participants of the online-survey also assessed the **reports** and **publications** relatively good. On the contrary, specific **national websites** related to the EUSDR and **Videos** were assessed rather poorly.

⁸ Further examples of project chains: FLOODRISK-DAREFFORT-DanubeFloodplain or Danube Sediment-SIMONA

⁹ Further example: JOINTISZA (PA4&PA5)

The **visibility** of the EUSDR varies for the different target groups. Not surprisingly, the strategy is most visible for the **key stakeholders of the EUSDR** (NCs, PACs, SG members) and least visible for the **public**. However, participants of the online survey also assessed (estimated) the visibility for **other stakeholders** (like multipliers, experts, authorities, politics, associations, interest representatives, civil society, media, academia) very low.

General findings, cross-cutting and transversal issues

Involvement, dedication, interest

- **Staff fluctuation** limits the strategic outreach, the options for concrete action and it is a major obstacle to anchor and stabilise institutional cooperation. A **stable institutional memory** is required in order to counteract the adverse effects. This could be an ancillary function of the DSP.
- In many cases, the persons sent to meetings lack the capacity and/or mandate to **take decisions**, which creates frustration and diminishing commitment.
- **Common projects and actions** are considered as a major success factor in terms of mobilising internal forces as well as in attracting political interest and thus reinforcing the momentum.
- In general, **working more towards “political results”** (e.g. ministerial meetings, mandates by ministers, etc.) would further raise the political interest. This could be highlighted more in the PAC's DTP working programmes 2020-2022.

Expectations

It seems that the EUSDR has a problem with **expectation management**. Several internal actors see that expectations raised are too high thus causing frustration.

- A major point is the trade-off between **far-reaching goals and a very limited number of policy levers**. One might consider to reduce the number of issues addressed, develop concrete actions in a limited number of areas and thus develop success stories to broaden or rekindle the interest of a wider group of stakeholders.
- A second mismatch in expectations relates to the **ownership** of the strategy. Actors at different levels complain about the lack of involvement:
 - MS see that a strong role in facilitation and coordination by the EC is required;
 - Actors at the European level see deficiencies in the ownership of respectively the commitment to the Strategy by the MS involved;
- The expectations related to the **role and tasks of the DSP** are quite diverse and demanding. It is a longlist that certainly requires prioritisation and should be re-evaluated against the available resources.

Budget and levers

- Many respondents referred to the **3 ‘Nos’ as the major limiting factor**. Appropriate allocation of resources should be secured.
- **Simplification** within EUSDR structures and processes should become a deliberate objective. Levers to reduce the administrative burden such as Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) should be considered.
- Strategic levers such as **cooperation across programmes** should help that ‘embedding the strategy’ goes beyond compliant formulations in national strategy documents towards actual coordination and alignment of priorities.

Finally...

It might help to dedicate more energy to find simple but convincing pictures for the desired future of the Danube Region. The evaluation has shown that the cohesive element in EUSDR are the interpersonal relationships slowly progressing towards institutional relationships. To exchange more openly on visions and ideas might be an element to tighten the networks.

4. Proposals for drafting a Narrative for the Danube Region

For bringing the EUSDR back to the political awareness, it is necessary to develop a common understanding of its role.

The Strategy is a tool to take into account the different economic, social and territorial situation of this part of Europe. Cooperation in this macro-region is essential not only for the countries of the region but also for the rest of Europe. The geopolitical position of the Danube region has always been a sensitive one. Cooperating across the external and internal borders of the EU, – it is one of the main topics of the EUSDR – remains crucial. Creating prosperity, fostering the economic growth are the keys to stable internal and external relations.

Therefore, the Danube Region should not be dichotomized; countries in the macro-region are inter-dependent. Prosperity also enables social inclusion, improving the income of the labour force and solutions for environmental problems. Enhancing stability of regional and local administrations is as important as improving the infrastructure.

The narrative therefore might be “Let’s create a prosperous Danube Region with high living standards, leaving no one and no region behind; with high respect to the cultural diversity of the Danube Region.” In short “Danube countries: one region – one future”.

Therefore, the EUSDR is a vital tool for further integration of this geographical macro-region.

However, the political impetus of the Strategy has been decreasing during the past years. Due to many reasons, the Danube Strategy has slightly moved out of focus in some participating states. The consequence is that also visibility of EUSDR is rather low. This decline however offers a chance to back this trend and to step forward. The notorious window of opportunity should be taken literally as a chance for a change, especially in connection with the revised Action Plan.

Even if the strategy itself is not a funding instrument, it has the power to draw a picture for the future of the Danube Region in its social, environmental, territorial and economic cohesion. Thus, a narrative of the strategy and success-stories must be communicated.

A new Communication strategy, as one of the central tools for increasing the visibility of the EUSDR, defines responsibilities, concrete tools and the target groups for each of the tools. The communication strategy includes a communication guide for the EUSDR governance bodies, virtual media presence and further tools.

One of the goals of the Communication strategy is to draw a future picture of the Danube region by developing a common narrative and by doing so to bring the EUSDR back on the public agenda.

On one hand, the creation of a common picture should be the first and crucial step to reach out to all political stakeholders – European, national, regional and local likewise. On the other hand, the narrative must also be able to reach the people of the Danube Region through positive pictures that a vast number of target groups can relate to in a positive way and can identify with.

The strategy narrative must take into account the highly diverse economic, social, cultural and territorial situation of this part of Europe with its way over 115 million inhabitants. A closer cooperation in this macro-region is essential not only for the countries of the region, but also for the rest of Europe. The geopolitical position of the Danube Region has always been sensitive and therefore

it is even more important to develop a mutual approach to the understanding of the Danube region. However, despite the differences, the region offers a vast number of similarities and common ground themes. It is exactly here where a common narrative can and should step in – to find mutuality out of diversity.

Therefore, it is highly important to elaborate the common understanding that the countries of the Danube macro-region depend on each other. Prosperity and good education also enable social inclusion, improve the income of the labour force and offer a ground for creating solutions for environmental, energy and other challenges. Enhancing the stability of regional and local administrations is as important as the continuous improving of infrastructure, fostering multimodal mobility as well as addressing diverse security issues.

In order to support this process, the DSP launched a tender to contract a company to support in the finalization of the communication strategy, creation of the narrative, delivery of Communication guidelines and a workshop dedicated to key messages and storytelling. The new narrative for the Danube Region is planned to be presented together with the Communication Strategy at the Ministerial Meeting in autumn (October / November) 2019.

5. Strategic Objectives for increasing the Quality of Living in the Danube Region

5.1. Spatial Trends in the Danube Region

EU Macro-Regional strategies as so-called “laboratories for a new Europe” offer an approach for finding more targeted solutions to challenges within functional areas, which cannot be solved by a single country, region or municipality. A range of analyses are currently examining factors and trends of relevance for the Danube Region’s future territorial development and its quality of living; such as the ESPON EMTM¹⁰, a Territorial Analysis as carried out by the Danube Transnational Programme¹¹, or evidence gained by the Attractive Danube Project or by JRC (Joint Research Center).¹²

Taking up and extending the definition as included in the DTP Territorial Analysis, the Danube Region shall not be merely understood as “container” being based on administrative logics only, but encompass also physical, functional and normative connotations. The region hence constitutes both a physical (territory) and a soft space (cooperating actors), where environmental, social and economic processes are flowing through / across borders, where social and economic relationships of societies are frequently crossing administrative barriers, thus highly defined by given border regimes.

Deduced and condensed of the currently available outcomes of the aforementioned analytical approaches, a range of megatrends and probable future evolvments of pronounced significance for the Danube Region can be identified:

¹⁰ ESPON European and Macro-regional Territorial Monitoring Tool (EMTM): So far, only some preliminary indicators have already been integrated in the web-based tool ([web link to preliminary EMTM](#)). Until early 2020, all envisaged maps will be accessible. At about the same time, comprehensive data descriptions will be available.

¹¹ The 1st draft of the territorial analysis as available in May 2019 displayed a snapshot on territorial and socio-economic trends only. The 2nd draft will be issued in September 2019, the final version in November 2019. Based on this territorial analysis, strategic decisions will be elaborated in a second phase, preparing specific objectives of DTP2 in general and a strategic call which is envisaged to be launched in early 2021 in particular (in cooperation with the EUSDR).

¹² However, it has to be acknowledged that profound analyses are also existing at Priority Area level, thus, comprising specialised or thematic knowledge and evidence. These studies cannot be considered in this context due to the Consolidated Input’s more general, overarching focus.

- *Continuing spatially unbalanced economic development:* The Danube Region is among the most heterogeneous regions in Europe, being marked by a persisting East-West graduation in terms of GDP per capita development 2010-2016: While there are economically prosperous regions in the West, easternmost and southernmost regions constitute economically only little productive areas¹³.

A closer look into the region reveals that concentration patterns further deepened also on the subnational level: capital cities and certain regional centres plus their surroundings remain drivers for economic growth (e.g. Bratislava), while peripheral and often only sparsely populated regions continue being economically weak. On the other hand, diverging developments evolved during the last years: While some NUTS3 regions turned into catching-up territories (RO), many NUTS3 regions have not yet managed to enter a prospering path (e.g. HR, UA)¹⁴. Thus, despite monocentric development patterns were partially dissolved, turning recent economic growth into sustainable growth will remain a major challenge, particularly as it is often stemming more from growth in labour-intensive than in technology-intensive sectors. Measures aiming at further spreading development impulses constitute one option in this regard. By contrast, finding alternatives to catching-up, launching stabilising measures and advancing crisis management might be beneficial as regards to shrinking regions.

- *Globalisation & relative regional positioning as general challenges:* The general economic performance is closely linked to the accelerated integration of countries, regions and cities into the global competition. Economic restructuring is progressing slowly in the Danube Region. Mono-functional economic zones turned out not to be crisis-proof, e.g. in case of clear dependency on assembly industries. In addition, changing border regime policies resulted in stricter border controls, strengthening re-bordering processes.

However, the level of integration in relation to trade, direct investments and business relations among large companies and SMEs is increasing. Hence, while interdependencies are steadily tightening, competitiveness between territorial entities is progressing. These factors further accentuate (intended or unintended) regional specialisation and regional disparities. Encouraging and funding of R&I will help to transform economies towards less dependency on mono-structures and highly competitive sectors of goods production. This requires close cooperation between research institutions (Universities...) and the economy. Transnational clusters may be helpful, but are currently sparsely implemented in the Danube Region.¹⁵

- *Persisting uneven labour-market developments:*¹⁶ Despite generally growing employment in the Danube Region, the area still shows a distinct northwest-southeast fragmentation relating to unemployment¹⁷, even if positive changes can be perceived in centrally located or northern regions (HU, SK, CZ, RO, BG). Although this can partially be traced back to recovery tendencies after the economic crises, further factors come into play, such as population ageing, pursuing emigration of workforce or the need for an economic transition to less labour-intensive growth.

As an emerging challenge, intensifying labour shortages in specific sectors become more manifest throughout the whole region (e.g. care). Furthermore, the innovation system still is weak and employment in hi-tech sectors is only little weak.¹⁸ These circumstances also challenge labour

¹³ see DTP Territorial Analysis, Draft Version May 2019, ranging from highest values 2016 (Eurostat) for Ingolstadt, DE (129 900) to lowest values for Chernivtsi Oblast, UA (823).

¹⁴ see DTP Territorial Analysis, Draft Version May 2019, ranging from the highest GDP growth between 2010 and 2016 (Eurostat) in Prahova, RO (+85%) to the lowest GDP growth in Zakarpattia Oblast, UA (-23%)

¹⁵ See also [Danube-INCO.NET project \(2016\): Mapping of relevant stakeholders describing activities, positions, and good practices including recommendations for synergies](#) and [JRC Technical Reports \(2015\): Annual Report of the JRC-IPTS activities within the Danube-INCO.NET project](#)

¹⁶ See also [World Bank and wiiw – Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies \(2019\): Western Balkan Labor Market Trends 2019](#)

¹⁷ see DTP Territorial Analysis, Draft Version May 2019, ranging from the lowest unemployment rate 2017 (Eurostat) in Prague, CZ (1.7%) to highest unemployment rates in Brčko, BiH (27.1%)

¹⁸ see DTP Territorial Analysis, Draft Version May 2019

market developments in disadvantaged, mostly peripheral regions, which additionally have to cope with low average salaries, uncompetitive economic structures and high long-term unemployment. This counteracts endeavours for retaining (potentially) highly educated workforce (brain drain / brain gain) and hampers the combat against steadily increasing poverty¹⁹. In comparison, labour markets in agglomerations are not always capable to appropriately absorb available workforce due to distinct mismatch between the needs of labour markets and educational offers.

However, declining social inequality and growing social inclusion do not necessarily go hand in hand with improvements in employment and economic growth, but are also greatly depending on purchasing powers, housing and household costs. Anyway, education and training are important factors for creating research-based labour markets and offer – not only young people – the opportunity of mounting the steps to higher income and satisfactory jobs.²⁰

- Diverging demographic trends accelerating dichotomized spatial development:** When examining components of demographic development on a macro-level, a persisting East-West graduation becomes manifest (immigration countries versus emigration countries).²¹ Western countries are marked by population increase mainly due to enduring immigration (DE, AT), eastern / southeastern countries show population decrease (e.g. RO, BG, RS, HR, BiH), mainly due to continuing emigration, especially of young (and well educated) people.

Zooming closer to the sub-national level reveals that an urban-rural also known as central-periphery dichotomization further intensified and causes challenges as regards the supply with public and private goods and services (e.g. public transportation, local amenities, social infrastructure). On the one hand, internal migration flows towards (capital) city regions and western (-most) border regions pursue throughout the whole region. Western countries and particularly central agglomerations are facing increasing pressure due to enduring (internal and international) migration influx, entailing growing ethnic and cultural diversity. This also implies that approaches for solving lacking housing facilities and for avoiding segregation have to be found, as well as for counteracting inadequate transport infrastructure (mainly sound public transport, optimally by fostering sustainable / environmentally friendly solutions) and for safeguarding of free and open space. On the other hand, peripheral areas are generally facing growing depopulation, particularly in southeastern areas and in mountainous areas in the Danube Region.²²

An additional factor is population ageing²³ – particularly in emigration zones, also due to migratory selectivity. Hence, throughout all types of regions, development needs in securing social care and health care will further accelerate, despite recently emerging economic effects are likely to expand further (keyword “silver economy”). Thus, increasingly uneven spatial development in the regions and agglomerations implies social, economic and political challenges – a more organised settlement development will remain a crucial factor, as well as the need for enhanced integration measures regarding immigrants and vulnerable groups, such as Roma people and other minorities.
- Continuing need for enhancing connectivity, accessibility and supply:** There is a significant intra-regional disparity when it comes to connectivity and accessibility between the western (DE, AT, SI) and southeastern countries (e.g. RO, BG): railroad, road, port and airport networks are underdeveloped, which leads to significant loss of prosperity. Despite transport infrastructure is steadily developing, bottlenecks still exist and north-south connections still can be deemed as weak.²⁴ While cross-border freight and passenger traffic flows are intensifying, the border crossing

¹⁹ see DTP Territorial Analysis, Draft Version May 2019

²⁰ see also [Eurostat Statistical Atlas – Eurostat regional yearbook 2018](#)

²¹ see ESPON EMTM interim report

²² see DTP Territorial Analysis, Draft Version May 2019, ranging from highest (positive) migration rates 2017 (Eurostat) of 26.00 (Ilfov County, RO) to lowest (negative) migration rates of -34.69 (Vukovar-Srijem County, HR)

²³ see DTP Territorial Analysis, Draft Version May 2019, the age index 2017 (Eurostat) is ranging from a relatively young age structure in Prešov Region, SK (0.73) to a relatively unfavourable age structure in Gabrovo Province, BG (2.45)

²⁴ For further details, see [EIB \(2017\): Transport Study for the Danube Macro-Region. Final Report.](#)

density along many border sections increases only slowly. Many TEN-T corridors in the Danube Region do not show the same qualitative level as in the western parts of Europe (especially the railways network, which is important for more environmentally friendly transport modes). Outside the TEN-T corridors, mobility of people, goods and information is sub-par in most of the Danube Area and lacks the contemporary sustainability-oriented approach of intelligent networking, innovation and multi-modal hubs and networks which have been an investment priority in other parts of Europe.²⁵

Despite favourable changes in energy production and use in the Danube Region²⁶, (fossil) fuels remain the main primary energy source in the Danube Region, holding the highest share in both primary energy production and gross inland consumption. The use of energy became more efficient in almost all sectors, except in the transport and services sectors. Thus, although the renewable energy share in the gross final energy consumption increased,²⁷ cross-border energy infrastructures still are dis-functioning or even missing. Hence, steps heading to a more diversified, integrated and low carbon energy market are still needed.²⁸ High-speed internet is available in capital cities (and in Western regions of the Danube Region), but hardly across the whole area.²⁹ A properly functioning optical fibre net is missing, again harming economic growth.

- **Enduring exposure to climate change and jeopardized biodiversity:** The Danube Region is marked by a vast natural, cultural (both material and immaterial), and ethnic heritage diversity. However, particularly in view of progressing climate change and global warming, land use and territorial development potentials will be challenged in the long run³⁰ (e.g. available water supply, natural hazards, energy demand, agricultural production, forestry, touristic potential). Particularly the lack of finance for infrastructure leads to severe impacts on the aquatic systems and the environment, including direct threats on biodiversity caused by discharge of untreated sewage, fertilizers, soil run-off and hydro-morphological change. Soil degradation and loss in the area, in lieu of appropriate arable land use management, infrastructure and result-yielding agriculture policies, but also due to uncontrolled peri-urban sprawling phenomena and soil sealing, represent other factors to be considered when assessing common Danube Region challenges.³¹

5.2. Acknowledgment of superior goals and objectives

As described under Chapter 1 and 3 of this document, the current *Action Plan (SEC(2010) 1489/3)* and its actions matched the needs of the macro region for enhancing the quality of living in the Danube Region. Still, some of the main challenges identified in the Action Plan are not yet solved or only partially solved. Mobility, energy, environment risks, socio-economy and security - each of these topics depicts manifold challenges of the Macro Region. Beyond that, a new set of challenges arose in the past years to be tackled in the upcoming years; like digitalization, climate change, migration, geo-

²⁵ See also [Attractive Danube \(2018\): Territorial Attractiveness Monitoring Platform: A Handbook for Policy Planners](#); DTP Territorial Analysis

²⁶ Decreasing primary energy production, decreasing gross inland consumption, drop of GHG emissions driven by the decrease of the energy intensity of the economy and change in the energy mix landscape (see [JRC \(2016\): Science for Policy Report. Sustainable energy in the Danube region as an integral part of the EU 2020 strategy](#)); see also: ESPON EMTM interim report, see also PA 9 (2017): [The assessment of alternative fuels infrastructure in the Danube Region and the development pathway to interoperability](#)

²⁷ Increase to 13.9% in 2013: 5.7% of renewable electricity, 7.1% of renewable heat/cold and 1.1% of biofuels –, cited in JRC (2016; see footnote above)

²⁸ See also PA 9 (2017): [Thematic Overview of the 6th Annual Forum of the EU-Strategy for the Danube Region](#) and Jirušek M. / Vlček T. (2017): [Challenges and opportunities of natural gas market integration in the Danube Region](#)

²⁹ See also [Eurostat Statistical Atlas – Eurostat regional yearbook 2018](#): Proportion of households with broadband access at home, by NUTS 2 regions, 2017

³⁰ For further details see [JRC \(2018\): Impact of a changing climate, land use, and water usage on water resources in the Danube river basin](#); see also: ESPON EMTM interim report

³¹ See [Attractive Danube \(2018\)](#); see footnote above)

political issues, or the need of better integration and cooperation of different administrative levels and the civil society.

One of the main goals of the revision of the Action Plan is to clarify future-oriented strategic objectives for the macro region and to increase the added value of the Strategy for the (Cohesion) Programmes of the forthcoming funding period 2021 to 2027. The benefit of the Strategy is to be multiplied by clearly anticipating the Strategy in concrete funding tools – be it European, national, regional, mainstream, cross-border or transnational cooperation programmes or other funding tools for speeding up the implementation of projects, processes or activities increasing the quality of living in the Danube Region.

The Draft Common Provisions Regulation (COM(2018) 375) lines out five policy objectives for 2021-2027:

1. A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation
2. A greener, low carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management
3. A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity.
4. A more social Europe by implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights
5. Europe closer to citizens by sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas through local initiatives.

The revised Action Plan of the EUSDR acknowledges these policy objectives as equally important for the Danube Region. Priority Areas, their targets, actions, projects and processes are envisaging these objectives, including Art.11 (1), ANNEX III (Horizontal enabling conditions) and ANNEX IV (Thematic enabling conditions applicable to ERDF, ESF+ and the Cohesion Fund).

As EUSDR is reaching out to pre-accession states as well, the objectives as proposed in *the draft for the regulation for the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) (COM(2018) 465 final) Art. 3*, have the same importance for EUSDR as the above mentioned:

- (a) To strengthen the rule of law, democracy, the respect of human rights, fundamental rights and international law, civil society and security as well as improve migration management including border management;
- (b) To reinforce the effectiveness of public administration and support structural reforms and good governance at all levels;
- (c) To shape the rules, standards, policies and practices of the beneficiaries listed in Annex I in alignment to those of the Union and to reinforce reconciliation and good neighbourly relations, as well as people to people contacts and communication;
- (d) To strengthen economic and social development including through increased connectivity and regional development, agriculture and rural development and social and employment policies, to reinforce environmental protection, increase resilience to climate change, accelerate the shift towards a low-carbon economy and develop the digital economy and society.
- (e) To support territorial and cross-border cooperation.

EUSDR also covers relevant neighbouring countries of the EU. Therefore the objectives in the draft regulation for establishing the *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) (COM(2018) 460 final) Art. 3 (2)* are equally important:

- (a) to support and foster dialogue and cooperation with third countries and regions in the Neighbourhood, ...
- (b) at global level, to consolidate and support democracy, rule of law and human rights, support civil society organisations, further stability and peace and address other global challenges including migration and mobility;
- (c) to respond rapidly to: situations of crisis, instability and conflict; resilience challenges and linking of humanitarian aid and development action; and foreign policy needs and priorities.

Besides these strategic and specific objectives of the Cohesion Policy Package, IPA III and NDICI the objectives and priorities of other European Funding Facilities like:

- Connecting Europe
- Digital Europe
- Horizon Europe
- Life
- Erasmus+
- et al.

will be acknowledged by the related tasks, actions, processes in the revised Action Plan. The EUSDR revised Action Plan will also consider other overall EU policies like the Territorial and Urban Agenda and other (macro-)regional initiatives (e.g. West Balkan, Eastern Partnership) and Annexes D of the countries' specific recommendations of the EU semester process on possible investment priorities for CohPol 2021 to 2027.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be considered as an overall tool for encountering climate change and enhancing sustainability of the Danube Region.

5.3. Strategic Objectives of EUSDR

According to the *Common Provision Regulation (Reg. (EU) No 1303/2013)*, a „'macro-regional strategy' means an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council, which may be supported by the ESI Funds among others, to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area relating to Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion;”

As the „Danube Region is a functional area defined by its river basin“ according to the *Action Plan (SEC(2010) 1489/3)*, the EUSDR per se is a transnational cooperation framework and a framework for cooperation between regions. It covers a region, which is highly heterogeneous by means of population density, economy, languages, history and culture. As far as possible, objectives and actions should thus concentrate on issues with transnational impact and impact on sub regions of the Danube Region.

For increasing the quality of live in the Danube Region, the Strategy (in alignment with cohesion policy) needs to focus its activities on (strategic) objectives describing the strategic and long term changes that it is expected to achieve during the next decade³²:

- 1. Counteracting Climate Change**
- 2. Stimulating Sustainable Development**
- 3. Establishing and enforcing Knowledge Society, stimulating the Economy and fight Poverty**
- 4. Improving Mobility and Connectivity**
- 5. Enhancing Democracy, sound Administration and strong Involvement of Civil Society and Youth³³**

³² As the Action Plan is a „rolling document“, also the Strategic Objectives may be subject of revision for a new Action Plan during the next ten years most likely related to a post 2027 MFF.

³³ PA 9 proposes an alternative wording for the five strategic objectives as follows:

1. Promoting the knowledge society and competitiveness, embrace the digital transformation (link to PO 1)
2. Counteracting climate change and promoting sustainable development (link to PO 2)
3. Promoting connectivity and sustainable mobility (link to PO 3)
4. Investing in skills, empowering youth and reducing inequalities (link to PO 4)
5. Enhancing democracy and participation, promoting common values (link to PO 5)

Ad 1) Counteracting Climate Change has become one of the main challenges of the Danube Region. Measures to slow down warming and for a better adaptation and increased resilience, securing water supply for people and agriculture, coping with increasing and more frequent natural hazards, preserving and restoring biodiversity etc. need transnational and interregional answers and cooperation across the borders in the whole macro region.³⁴

Ad 2) In line with the manifold challenges associated with climate change, all new development in the macro-region should **stimulate Sustainable Development**. This strategic objective is a horizontal issue par excellence. The ecological footprint of all activities shall be taken into account. For instance, enhancing mobility should consistently follow this principle – regarding all different modes, no matter if inland waterway transport, rail, road or air transport, in urban areas or in rural areas. Energy efficiency, CO₂ reduction, use of renewable energy etc. cover all different activities of human beings, including housing and energy efficiency of public buildings. Environment friendly technologies should be implemented. Sustainable rural agriculture³⁵ has to follow this strategic objective in order to improve sustainable rural development. To keep biodiversity, high water quality and the reduction of pollution are other issues of making the region and all its sub-regions more resilient and more sustainable. Industry and goods-production on the one hand and services like tourism on the other hand: both should validate their activities in order to follow the path of sustainable development.³⁶

Ad 3) Establishing and enforcing Knowledge Society is a broadband challenge for the region. It forms the basis for advancing (digitalized) economies and societies and is a key factor for competitiveness and prosperity. It covers a wide range of issues, embracing education (schools, universities, vocational training, smart specialisation, etc.), R&D, lifelong learning, clustering, innovation, incubator- and accelerator centres for start-ups and creative industry. Close collaboration across sectors, borders and priorities has to be enforced. **Stimulating the Economy** also means reduction of administrative burdens, a quick and efficient implementation of funding tools and an appropriate support for cross border/transnational networks. Strengthening employment markets, for instance by skilling unemployed persons or by implementing labour market re-integration measures, are equally important. Improving the living conditions in the Danube Region of course also includes **fighting Poverty**.³⁷

Ad 4) Improving Mobility and Connectivity is a crucial factor for enhancing the competitiveness and prosperity of the region. In the Danube Region infrastructure often is inefficient, desolate and fragmentary. Efficient cross-border connections for environmentally friendly transport are missing; the inland navigation has high potential when kept in high, sustainable standards. The implementation of TEN-T priority projects and the Rail Freight Corridors (EC-regulation 913/2010) are of high importance for the Danube Region, especially for the Western Balkans. The present degree of multimodality and interoperability is mainly at substandard levels. This also applies for ICT connectivity, which is, among others, a precondition for advancing digitalization. A coordinated approach for speeding up the

³⁴ **Climate change** (related to “Greener, carbon free Europe”) – PA 2 and PA 5 steering the implementation and integrating the contributions brought by PA 1a, PA 1b, PA 3, PA 4, PA 6, PA 7, PA 9 and PA 10;

³⁵ Proposal by RO including “sustainable agriculture & aquaculture”

³⁶ **Sustainable Development** (including *Sustainable Rural Development* related to “Smarter Europe”) – PA 5, PA 8 steering the implementation and integrating the contributions brought by PA 1a, PA 1b, PA 2, PA 3, PA 4, PA 6, PA 7, PA 9 and PA 10;

Innovation, innovative approach and innovative funding and investments (related to “Smarter Europe”) should be tackled by all PAs, guided by PA 8 and PA 10.

³⁷ **Education and professional training** (related to “Smarter Europe” and “a “more social Europe”) requires a closer cooperation between PA 9 and all the other PAs³⁷;

Migration (related to “Smarter Europe” and “more social Europe” and “Europe closer to citizens”) – PA 9 and PA 11 could monitor the activities in close cooperation with all other PAs, especially PA 10, PA 7, PA 8 and PA 3.

improvement of sustainable and low-carbon mobility in the macro-region is essential. This also has to include Public Transport in urban agglomerations.³⁸

Ad 5) Enhancing Democracy, a sound Administration and the Involvement of Civil Society and Youth are essential standards for effective cooperation in the Danube Region. Multi-level governance, strengthening regional and local authorities (as the ones closer to the people), participation on planning and decision making, social inclusion and non-discrimination of minorities as well as equal rights and income for men and women, involving the social partners and respect for civil society organisations build the pillars of stable democracies. This also includes a sound and efficient administration and cooperation on the fields of migration, security, prevention of and combat against crime and corruption. The diversity of culture and the rich cultural heritage of the Danube Region are unique and therefore worth cooperating across borders. Again, all issues of this strategic objective are subject of activities between priority areas.³⁹

The five Strategic Objectives are in line with the EUSDR Communication (COM(2010) 715) and the European Council Conclusions on EUSDR (3083rd GENERAL AFFAIRS Council meeting) endorsed on 11th April 2011. The principles also match the five policy objectives of the Draft Cohesion Policy Legislative Package 2021 - 2027 (COM (2018) 375 final) and the drafts for IPA III and NDICI objectives.

Furthermore, some issues are building the **horizontal frame** for the whole EUSDR, relevant for all five Strategic Objectives and to be implemented in the 12 Priority Areas:

Digitalisation e.g. is one of these horizontal frames. The ongoing digital transformation has an enormous impact on economy and society. It has a high growth and economic potential but also brings disruption to all sectors of economy, employment market, research, the academia and administration. Digital inclusion on the one side and cyber-crime on the other side are only two challenges to solve. Digitalisation also helps to better organize transport and logistics, goods production (e.g. industry 4.0, IoT), public administration and to enhance PPP projects. Innovation and creativity are the key inputs. Connectivity, high-speed internet, next generation mobile networks (5G) are the preconditions for enabling the digital transformation. Therefore, expansion of optical fibre infrastructure and high-speed mobile networks need to be secured.

Migration and demographic changes in all its varieties and impacts are challenging issues in the Danube Region as well as refugees from war-inflected regions are affecting the region. Migration creates vast challenges in the countries of origin and the hosting ones. The former suffer from brain drain and de-population in some, mainly remoted sub-regions, the latter of higher competition on the labour market, pressure on wages and the housing sector. These challenges need cooperation between hosting and countries of origin.

Each of these issues – because of their horizontal nature – will be mirrored by activities, projects or processes stimulated by Priority Areas of EUSDR. DSP will encourage cooperation of PAs and support the PACs for implementation.

³⁸ **Digitalization and digital transition** (related to “Smarter Europe” and “More connected Europe”) was indicated by a large number of NCs and PACs as a topic that should be more highlighted in the future in the EUSDR. All PAs could actively bring their contribution, under the lead of PA 7.

Transport infrastructure (related to “Smarter Europe” and “More connected Europe”) could be tackled jointly by PA 1a and PA 1b with PA 3, PA 4, PA 5, PA 6, PA 7;

³⁹ **Involving the Youth** and **strengthening of Civil society participation** (related to “more social Europe”, and “Europe closer to citizens”) – PA 9 and PA 10 could facilitate the efforts to stronger involve the younger generation civil society into EUSDR structures and processes, encouraging all PAs to develop activities that target both younger generation and civil society;

6. Priorities and Pillars, Specific Objectives and Targets

6.1. Priorities and Pillars of EUSDR

The EUSDR addresses a wide range of issues (see chapter 5); the current *EUSDR Action Plan (SEC(2010) 1489/3)* divides these issues among 4 pillars and 12 priority areas, which build the backbone of the Strategy's structure.

The implementation of the Strategy has proven, that, despite certain content wise and structural challenges, the present division into 4 Pillars and 12 Priority Areas is efficient and sufficient. Chapter 5 shows that the structure fits to the new challenges and objectives. It incorporates the following thematic vertical composition (see also *EUSDR Communication (COM(2010) 715)*):

- **Pillars** express the core fields of action of the Strategy.
- **Priority Areas** comprise the 12 thematic areas where the macro-regional strategy can contribute to improvements (either through tackling the main challenges or through seizing the main opportunities).

The division into **four Pillars** has proven as efficient and up-to-date. Moreover, the four Pillars are a familiar image and fit to the policy objectives of *Draft Common Provision Regulation (COM(2018) 375)* as described in Chapter 5.

In terms of communication and indicating the direction of actions, as well as a reference to the Cohesion Policy Legislative Package 2021 - 2027 (COM (2018) 375 final), the four Pillars are labelled as:

1. ***Connecting the Danube Region – smart and sustainable***
2. ***Protecting the Environment – clean and green***
3. ***Building Prosperity – smart, social and innovative***
4. ***Strengthening the Danube Region – effective, sound and safe***

For each Priority Area the Action Plan indicates the main targets and describes the actions, projects and processes. The Priority Areas per Pillar are:

Pillar 1: Connecting the Danube Region – smart and sustainable

- **Priority Area 1A** **Waterways Mobility**
- **Priority Area 1B** **Rail-Road-Air Mobility**
- **Priority Area 02** **Sustainable Energy**
- **Priority Area 03** **Culture & Tourism**

Pillar 2: Protecting the Environment – clean and green

- **Priority Area 04** **Water Quality**
- **Priority Area 05** **Environmental Risks**
- **Priority Area 06** **Biodiversity, Landscapes, Air & Soil Quality**

Pillar 3: Building Prosperity – smart, social and innovative

- **Priority Area 07** **Knowledge Society**
- **Priority Area 08** **Competitiveness**
- **Priority Area 09** **People & Skills**

Pillar 4: Strengthening the Danube Region – effective, sound and safe

- **Priority Area 10** **Institutional Capacity & Cooperation**
- **Priority Area 11** **Security**

6.2. Specific Objectives of EUSDR:

The following specific objectives were proposed in a bottom-up process by participating countries of EUSDR and the PAs, as lined out in chapter 2. The objectives, fit to the five policy objectives of the draft regulations, match the five strategic objectives of EUSDR and the four pillars of EUSDR communication.

These specific objectives as well consider the spatial trends, needs and challenges as lined out in sub-chapter 5.1. They cover the wide range of actions, strategic projects and processes suggested by the PAs (see Part B). Furthermore, some of these objectives are addressing the issues building the horizontal frame for the whole EUSDR, relevant for all five Strategic Objectives and to be implemented in the 12 Priority Areas:

Each of these issues – because of their horizontal nature – will be mirrored by activities, projects or processes stimulated by Priority Areas of EUSDR. DSP will encourage cooperation of PAs and support the PACs for implementation.

The following alignment shows the Specific Objectives of EUSDR compiled to the four pillars:

Pillar 1 Connecting the Danube Region

Policy Objective: Smarter Europe

- Improving renewable energy production
- Increasing energy efficiency
- Enforcing sustainable and smart tourism
- Promoting the regions culture and sustain cultural heritage
- Enhancing ICT connectivity

Policy Objective: More Connected Europe

- Improving transport networks
- Improving maintenance of inland waterways and navigation
- Stimulating sustainable mobility

Policy Objective: Greener, low Carbon Europe

- Enhancing energy efficiency in SME
- Reducing CO₂ by decarbonisation of transport and alternative fuels
- Increasing sustainable energy sources like biomass, solar energy, geothermal, hydro and wind power
- Retrofitting and energy management of existing multifamily housing and public buildings

Pillar 2 Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region

Policy Objective: Greener, low Carbon Europe

- Establish a Climate influence monitoring
- Reducing environmental risks
- Improving protection against natural hazards
- Improving waste management
- Improving waste water treatment

- Safeguarding drinking water supply
- Reducing water pollution and improve water quality
- Safeguarding Biodiversity
- Improving soil quality

Policy Objective: Smarter Europe

- Improving the use of spatial planning for safeguarding open space and sound land use in agglomerations

Policy Objective: More Social Europe

- Ensure active involvement of and dialogue with all stakeholders with the general public including awareness raising and education in water management
- Promote water related measures in urban planning

Pillar 3 Building Prosperity in the Danube Region

Policy Objective: Smarter Europe

- Increasing the accommodation of changes related to digitalization, development of digital competences
- Improving educational outcomes and competences for employability, entrepreneurship and innovation
- Reducing existing digital gaps in administration and the economy
- Increasing the competitiveness of enterprises
- Increasing cluster development
- Strengthening the support for R&D, productive innovation and smart specialisation

Policy Objective: More Social Europe

- Increasing and improving investments in education and skills
- Improving access to and the quality of education, training and lifelong learning
- Improving VET and work-based learning in all its forms, with special attention to apprenticeships
- Improving active support to employment /equal access to the labour market
- Improving fair working conditions
- Enhancing social protection and inclusion, esp. for minorities and vulnerable groups
- Enhancing an Inclusive digital society
- Increasing cooperation on R&I (research institutions, universities, funding facilities)
- Improving the securement of intellectual property

Policy Objective: Europe closer to the Citizens

- Promoting common values and a sense of European identity

Pillar 4 Strengthening the Danube Region

Policy Objective: Smarter Europe

- Improving the use of spatial planning for safeguarding open space and sound land use in agglomerations
- Increasing affordable housing

Policy Objective: More Social Europe

- Increasing non-discrimination of minorities and vulnerable groups (Roma ea.) in social and economic measures
- Improving the coordination of legal migration policy

Policy Objective: Europe closer to the Citizens

- Increasing the integration of civil society through involvement and participation
- Strengthening the involvement of younger generation into political processes
- Increasing the prevention and enhancing the combatting of crime, cybercrime and terrorism
- Strengthening the rule of law and fight against corruption
- Enhancing the coordination of legal and illegal migration policy
- Decreasing the trafficking in human beings, drugs and firearms
- Increasing general prevention of crime
- Improving the quality of public services and establish sound administration

6.3. Cross-cutting Issues

Cooperation between Priority Areas is especially important on any issues where more than one priority is involved. These so-called “Cross-cutting issues” are selected areas of (continuing or temporary) cooperation, aiming at strengthening reciprocal coordination among PAs. Cross-cutting issues gain ever bigger importance for the success of the EUSDR as a result of emerging new topics and policy fields and due to the fact that the policy should follow an integrated approach.

Issues like decarbonisation include topics like transport, mobility, energy, environment, economy, etc. The urgency of this issue is eminent in all participating countries equally.

These issues also need coordination among concerned PAs and across Pillars. The coordination of these issues has to be established according to the concrete themes – usually by the most concerned PA, Either by one of the PACs or by a special responsible expert from this PA⁴⁰ as it is already current practice among several PAs. (e.g. PA10 and PA11, PA1A and PA11, etc.). To ensure success of these special focus-topics, the work on these cross-cutting themes could be monitored by the respective EUSDR Presidency or EUSDR Trio with support of DSP.⁴¹

On the level of cross-cutting issues the following examples are set to be dealt with on at least two concerned PAs. The full list of cross-cutting issues defined by each PA is in Part B of this document.

⁴⁰ A close cooperation among PAs has become even more necessary, since some Actions as proposed by the PA’s might present opposing approaches (e.g. some Targets and specific Actions of PA 1B and PA 06). Therefore, PACs need to take the opportunity to seek for joint solutions in order to overcome conflicts as these contradictions call for integrative solutions as added value of the EUSDR. This can be done by assessing the impact on the environment in all PAs.

⁴¹ In this respect, the Strategy should carefully examine whether a coordinator, dedicated for a certain thematic issue cross-cutting PAs/Pillars is necessary. HU purposes to further examine the question of clarification of the coordination of these topics, of special financial support as well as to discuss the allocation of necessary measures to PACs to achieve successful implementation of cross-cutting issues.

1. *Transport infrastructure, Decarbonisation, Sustainable Mobility* (related to “More connected Europe”, “Greener, carbon free Europe”, and “Smarter Europe”) – could be tackled jointly by PA 1a, PA 1b and PA 2 with PA 3, PA 4, PA 6, PA 7, PA 8;
2. *Energy efficiency* (related to “Greener, carbon free Europe”) – PA 2 will ensure the main input, but contributions from PA 1a, PA 1b, PA 3, PA 7, PA 8, PA 9, PA 10 will ensure that the topic is treated in a more integrated manner;
3. *Bi- and multilateral cooperation in the field of tourism* could be obtained by joining the efforts of PA 3 as a leader with PA 1a and 1b to develop cross-border and coordinated services, with PA 9 to support the proper qualification of the personnel, with PA 7, PA 8 and PA 10 to create a joint labour market;
4. Foster the application of an integrative approach in the set-up of *navigation projects* in order to contribute to the achievement of “Good Ecological Status” and “Favourable Conservation Status” – developed by PA 4, PA 5 and PA 6 with the support of PA 1a;
5. Coordination of the implementation of the *Water Framework Directive, Floods Directive, Habitats Directive and EU Biodiversity Strategy* – PA 4, PA 5 and PA 6;
6. *Air & soil quality* should be tackled PA 6 with the support of PA 1a, PA 1b, PA 2, PA 4 and PA 5;
7. Consideration of biodiversity and nature protection topics in economic and spatial development-related PAs – is a cross-cutting topic that should be managed by PA 6 with support and input from PA 1a, PA 1b, PA 2, PA 3, PA 8, PA 4, and PA 11;
8. Improving cooperation between *decision-makers and researchers* is considered to be a relevant issue in relation to *building institutional capacities* (for better public service provision) as well as enhancing capacities of cities and municipalities to facilitate local and regional development – PA 10 and PA 7;
9. *Fighting Trafficking in Human Beings* – PA 10 and PA 11 should have the coordinating role, but input could be provided also by PA 1a, PA 1b, PA 3 and PA 9;
10. Cooperation for improving *administrative procedures for river transport* along the Danube River – PA 11, PA 1a.

For the structure of Priorities of the EUSDR, incl. Objectives, Targets, Actions, Projects and Activities and Processes, see Annex 1 at the end of this Document.

7. EUSDR Governance

Since more than a decade, macro-regional strategies (MRS) are an integral part of the European multi-level governance system, offering an integrated strategic framework for tackling challenges in functional macro-regions, aiming at strengthening social, economic and territorial cohesion. MRS are bottom-up oriented laboratories for seeking solutions for trans-border cooperation across funding schemes and sectors, involving both EU member states and Non-EU member states. Thus, MRS can be understood as incrementally evolving cooperation processes, being marked by changing multi-governance structures and soft arenas of involved actors. However, as MRS governance systems strongly arise from place-based settings and constellations of actors, arrangements for enhancing cooperation, collaboration and alignment of funds clearly vary between the different Strategies.

According to the *Council Conclusions on the Governance of Macro-Regional Strategies* as agreed upon at the General Affairs Council meeting on 21st October 2014⁴² and the *Communication concerning the Governance of Macro-Regional Strategies 2014*⁴³, “the delivery of results of macro-regional strategies relies on an effective governance model and efficient procedures for the implementation.” Furthermore, it was highlighted that internal governance involves three levels: “(i) political leadership and ownership, (ii) coordination and (iii) implementation and that these three levels are inter-related”.

⁴² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/cooperate/macro_region_strategy/pdf/concl_gov_macro_strat_en.pdf

⁴³ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/reports/2014/report-concerning-the-governance-of-macro-regional-strategies

Hence, while MRS as efficient trans-border governance systems indeed have a positive impact on the implementation of policies, it is acknowledged that governance frameworks involving different countries are complex and that the process is inevitably shaped gradually. Following the *ECs second report on MRS (SWD(2019) 6)*, macro-regional strategies are “political platforms which bring added value to the cooperation aspect of cohesion policy and provide an opportunity for multi-sectoral, multi-country and multi-level governance.”

However, the recent *EUSDR Action Plan (SEC(2010) 1489)* did not include specifications on the EUSDR internal and external governance model. Likewise, the *EUSDR Communication (COM(2010) 715)* does not contain detailed specifications, but states that by means of this “sustainable framework for cooperation”, the “Strategy seeks to make best use of what is available, by aligning efforts, specifically policies and funding. Actions are complementary. All stakeholders must take responsibility. In this respect, the *Declaration of the Bucharest Summit on Danube*⁴⁴ is an important commitment. The Commission can help by facilitating and supporting action, but the commitment and practical involvement of all authorities, at national, regional and other levels is needed. Working together with international and cross-border organisations across the Region will encourage synergies and avoid duplication. A reinforced territorial dimension will provide an integrated approach and encourage better coordination of sectoral policies. There must be an absolute focus on results.”

Thus, further to the aforementioned Council Conclusions and EC documents and based on outcomes of the multi-faceted consultations accompanying the revision process, the renewed Action Plan shall comprise and illustrate underlying principles of the operational functioning of the EUSDR. This also envelops looking beyond the EUSDR core respectively internal governance system, by picturing the external governance dimension with further stakeholders in the region, but also at EU-level and, finally, by outlining the cooperation with other MRS and sea-basin strategies.

Nonetheless, roles and responsibilities as described below depict solely the minimum level of activity to be accomplished by the stakeholders concerned. Experience has shown that the actual level of engagement is in many cases considerably higher. However, it is imperative to gain a streamlined picture on the perception of roles. The roles and responsibilities of the EUSDR actors of the Strategy are portrayed below, along the following sub-chapters: internal governance, external governance and cooperation with other macro-regional and sea-basin strategies.

7.1. Internal governance – core EUSDR actors⁴⁵

In a general sense, the EUSDR governance model shall facilitate a sound and effective implementation of the Strategy for reaching its thematic objectives. This mainly relies on core EUSDR actors involved in the internal governance system: Foreign Ministers and/or Ministers (or governmental institutions) concerned with EUSDR, National Coordinators (NCs), EUSDR Presidency, TRIO Presidency, Priority Area Coordinators (PACs), Steering Group (SG) members, Danube Strategy Point (DSP), European Commission (EC) / DG Regio and the High-Level Group (HLG). Financing of the core EUSDR governance structures via DTP has shown to be a good practice and shall be continued.

Coordination and interrelations between core EUSDR stakeholders. The established network of cooperation on the NC, PAC and SG level is proven and tested. Since 2011, all the 14 participating countries together with their regions have constantly been working on advancing the running of the Strategy and the network itself. Throughout the years, the Strategy has become a resilient and consistently functioning network in the Danube Region. Nonetheless, continuous effort shall be put on improving the coordination and cooperation among the different core actors, as well as on securing

⁴⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/cooperation/danube/pdf/bucharest_declaration_08112010_en.pdf

⁴⁵ Note: the interplay with bodies in charge of implementing programmes and financial instruments (e.g. Managing Authorities, Joint Secretariats, intermediaries, public authorities etc.) is included in chapter 8.

strong commitment on all levels involved – particularly on the political (ministerial) level, in order to avoid fluxes and to strengthen political ownership and foster leadership. Specifically, the continuous and strong cooperation between EU-Member States and Non-EU Member States has to be secured. In parallel, permeability shall be ensured, by avoiding monopolisation of activities resulting from involvement of only limited circles of stakeholders. Thus, further mobilization, more coherent and due involvement of actors shall be pursued within the governance of the strategy – at different territorial (EU⁴⁶, international, national, regional, local), institutional and sectoral level.

The NCs, PACs and SGs are meeting regularly and strive to make the strategy work. For ensuring continuous exchange, at least once a year, separate meetings for NCs (two per year) and PACs are to be further organised, plus at least one annual joint meeting of NCs and PACs. Annual Fora (back-to-back with ministerial meetings) are conceived as main EUSDR event of the year is gathering all stakeholders and potentially interested actors to assess the implementation of the Strategy and discuss the way ahead.

Principles of thematic coordination. The coordination of each Priority Area is the task of EU Member States (together with non-Member States or regions), in consultation with the EU Commission, and relevant EU agencies and regional bodies. Each Priority Area is managed by at least two PACs (further specifications of PACs see below). The existing governance structures for thematic coordination at PA level are consistently perceived as being consolidated, resilient and reasonable, building particularly upon competence / commitment criteria. Ensuring consistency thus appears of great importance for securing sustainability of actions set. The dissolution or rotation of established structures may lead to loss of institutional memory in the working networks and projects already established in this area. Thus, merging of PAs could rather weaken the network instead of strengthening it. Likewise, allowing transfer of thematic coordination functions constitutes a voluntary option only. In case a certain PAC is willing to step down, a new PAC can be introduced allowing the inclusion of a participating country not yet performing a coordinative role, but willing to take over stronger commitment and to provide expertise in a certain field.

For reaching better territorial distribution of coordinative tasks and for achieving a more balanced allocation of coordinative responsibilities across the Danube Region, the stronger involvement of the Non-EU countries shall be improved. The following approaches are conceivable:

- Being involved as regular PAC (based upon consultation with PACs and subsequent consensual agreement of NCs)
- Taking over responsibility for cross-cutting issues embedded in a PA (jointly with the relevant PAC): An option is to highlight certain topics and to associate these topics with existing PAs, for instance by defining a working group to be run by a representative of a Non-EU member state (taking over costs for travel and accommodation or the financing of meetings/conferences/events etc. by the budget of the PACs)

Despite defined coordinative roles, **implementation of actions is the responsibility of all, at country, regional, urban and local level.** Actions (which state the objectives to be reached) must be transformed into concrete projects/activities (which are detailed and require a project leader, a timeframe and financing), as lined out in the *EUSDR Communication (COM(2010) 715)*, and in chapter 6.

The core EUSDR actors belonging to the internal EUSDR governance system are described below, relating to respective emphasizes, tasks and responsibilities:

- a) Political leadership and ownership at national level.** The countries participating in the EUSDR represent the backbone of the Strategy, as progress associated with the EUSDR mostly becomes manifest in the Danube Region itself. EUSDR countries shall hence strive for

⁴⁶ The involvement and commitment of line DGs plays a crucial role in this regard, see also chapter 7.2

increased political commitment to facilitate the EUSDR implementation in order to back the trend of decline of political momentum. In order to raise and strengthen the EUSDR political profile, ministerial meeting dedicated to the EUSDR (Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Prime Ministers and/or Ministers concerned with EUSDR) or specific thematic EUSDR emphases (line ministers) shall take place regularly (at least every two years); and ministerial declaration shall be signed periodically. The Annual Conference of Danube Members of the European Parliament shall be further pursued. In parallel, participation in the High-Level Group on MRS shall be secured for supporting the EC in policy coordination.

An effective governance system requires a balance between three equally important levels: ministers, national coordinators, and thematic coordinators⁴⁷. In other words, political leadership and ownership not only implies a political dimension, as illustrated above, but also a **coordinative-operational dimension**. Participating countries are in charge of appointing NCs, PACs and SG Members. Hence, continuous efforts of participating countries are needed for empowering NCs and PACs and for supporting them to fulfil their tasks; as well as for ensuring appropriate representation of EUSDR countries in Steering Group Meetings. This also embraces the contextualisation of EUSDR developments and achievements into national / regional / local processes. Participating countries shall recognise the need to include the EUSDR on the agenda of the Council in its different formations and, whenever appropriate, to promote closer interrelations with relevant EU / national / regional / sectoral policies, programmes and financial instruments. Likewise, participating countries shall aim at securing that national / regional strategic planning, existing policies, programmes and financial instruments are in line with the EUSDR, by coordinating and integrating policies with the EUSDR and by inviting ministries and managing authorities to mobilise programmes / financial instruments for supporting the EUSDR. As the strategy is a long-term process, it is vital that capacity and resources are continually provided to implement the strategy and strengthen national coordination mechanisms and continuous exchange of information and cooperation.

b) National Coordinators (NCs)

The National Coordinators (NCs) are core strategic decision-makers within the governance structure of the EUSDR. They also have a strategic coordination function of the Strategy within their country. The NCs coordinate and keep an overview of the participation of their country in the implementation of the EUSDR including all 12 Priority Areas. Hence, they strive for monitoring the progress of the Strategy at national / regional / local level and for contributing to the Strategy's progress by identifying and introducing national interests and positions. NCs facilitate coordination, consultation and implementation in each country, identifying relevant contacts, and above all, by advancing practical aspects of the work. They also promote EUSDR and its visibility and pursue continuous dialogue with relevant national / regional / local stakeholders of key developments and on-going initiatives, aiming also at facilitating the proper involvement of relevant stakeholders. NCs encourage the mutual exchange with relevant programmes / financial instruments, aiming at better alignment of policies, resources and funding. This also comprises keeping close contact with the political level for securing reciprocal feedback and adjustment, for instance with relevant ministers.

The NCs shall convene for regular meetings and serve as an interface between the political level and the Priority Areas. NCs serve as the link between the political level and the Priority Areas and take own decisions or prepare decisions to be taken at political level. The NCs shall meet at least twice in the time span between two Annual Fora.

NCs are actively involved in the DTP Monitoring Committee's discussions / decisions. The involvement takes place in one of the following ways: as a full member of the DTP Monitoring Committee (MC), an observer, a member of a national delegation or through involvement of national committees or other formal/informal joint procedures prior to the MC meetings.

⁴⁷ ECs second report on MRS (SWD(2019) 6)

c) EUSDR Presidency

Pursuing a rotation principle, the EUSDR Presidency is taken over by a NC of a Danube country for a one-year period, in agreement with the other NCs. The incumbent Presidency proactively performs the coordination among NCs and PACs, supported by the DSP and the EC / DG Regio, and strives for facilitating decision-making and cooperation.

The Presidency will organise and chair at least two meetings of NCs per year plus at least one annual joint meeting of NCs and PACs, with the support of the EUSDR Trio Presidency, the European Commission (EC) and the Danube Strategy Point (DSP). 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 NC's meetings, where appropriate.

The incumbent Presidency is in charge of hosting the Annual Forum, ideally back-to-back with a ministerial meeting and a ministerial declaration in order to raise the EUSDR political profile, in cooperation with DG Regio and with the support of DSP.

TRIO Presidency

For securing coherency between presidency cycles and for intertwining emphasizes, regular coordination between the incumbent presidency, the past and the future presidency is proactively pursued. The TRIO Presidency has a clear supportive role for the incumbent Presidency. On the one hand, regular exchange on strategic and coordinative issues has to be secured, on the other hand, TRIO meetings are held back-to-back to NC-Meetings and NC-PAC-Meetings. DG Regio and DSP are invited to participate at the TRIO meetings.

d) Priority Area Coordinators (PACs)

Each Priority Area is managed by two or more Priority Area Coordinators (PACs), empowered by the participating countries, which are ensuring the operationalisation of the EUSDR. The PACs are key facilitators of the Strategy and serve as a strong liaison between their PA's groups of actors, by offering a platform for exchanging and coordinating initiatives, stakeholders, policy processes and information. They work on the PA implementation, in close contact with the European Commission and relevant EU agencies, together with relevant stakeholders at different territorial level (EU, international, national, regional, local) and of different background (inter-governmental, non-governmental, experts, academia, multipliers, civil society, financial instruments etc.) PACs thus have an interface and mediating function: they are in charge of coordination, implementation and communication in their specific Priority Area. Their work is transnational, inter-sectorial and inter-institutional.

In doing all their tasks, PACs work together with PA Steering Groups (see below), which are the expert drivers of a day-to-day implementation. Together with their SGs, the PACs ensure the implementation of the EUSDR (e.g. by agreeing on planning, with targets, indicators and timetables, and by ensuring wide contacts between project promoters, programmes and funding sources, and by providing technical assistance and advice). As a general principle, PACs aim at securing transparency towards SG members. PACs are in charge of setting up appropriate operational working structures, best suited to implement the actions, to agree a work programme between the stakeholders involved and to trace progress achieved. Hence, for some PAC sub-groups were installed, such as working groups, task forces, advisory bodies around sub-themes and tasks to support the work of the PACs and/or the SGs.

PACs are in charge of organizing SG meetings on a regular basis (optimally twice a year) and sub-group meetings (such as thematic working groups, if relevant). In cooperation with their SGs, PACs also contribute to the reporting and evaluation of the EUSDR (towards DSP / DG Regio). PACs shall identify progress related to the improvements that actions and projects deliver and to achievement of targets. Thus, they shall aim at tracing the multifaceted evolvments, achievements, outputs and impacts at PA level in thematic terms, e.g. following a joint appropriate monitoring system.

PACs aim at ensuring policy discussion and policy development, in cooperation with strategic and multiplying institutions, networks and platforms. They furthermore pursue proactive communication aiming at enhancing the visibility of results, particularly towards SG members and further relevant stakeholders (e.g. also by organizing expert, network or public events). For generating mutual learning effects and for triggering capacity development in thematic and procedural terms, PACs strive for expanding cross-PA and cross-MRS cooperation.

PACs ensure the coordination and exchange of information with relevant stakeholders (e.g. line DGs, ICPDR, Carpathian Convention – see chapter 7.2), in order to achieve relevant PA targets and actions and strengthen synergies and cross-sectoral cooperation.

Together with their SGs, the PACs contribute to revisions of the EUSDR Action Plan, as carried out by DG Regio, supported by the Presidency and DSP.

e) Steering Group (SG) Members

The Steering Groups (SG), with members from all involved countries, are established for all priority areas. Their role, capacities, resources and engagement are key to success of the Strategy. They constitute arenas for discussing thematic issues of interest for the Danube Region. SGs are the central executive and decision-making bodies at PA level regarding objectives, formats and emphasizes of cooperation and future developments. SG members are “the expert drivers of the day-to-day implementation”, which decide on the joint work within the PA together with the PACs, and which provide advice and assistance.

Together with the PACs, the SGs ensure the implementation of the EUSDR (e.g. by agreeing on planning, with targets, indicators and timetables, and by ensuring wide contacts between project promoters, programmes and funding sources, and by providing technical assistance and advice). Their work is trans-national, inter-sectorial and inter-institutional. SG members also support the PACs in reporting and evaluation of the EUSDR – they identify progress related to the improvements that the actions and projects deliver and achievement of targets. They also regularly provide information/reports on their work to their country’s NC and the line ministers responsible for the PAs issues.

SG meetings, usually taking place two times a year, are chaired by the PACs, are important structures for disseminating information, activating stakeholders at international / national / regional level and for bringing forward or supporting strategic initiatives. SG members shall ensure that outcomes of PA / SGs are spread and acknowledged by their hosting institution as well as the network concerned within in their countries. For enhancing coherency, full representation of all participating countries has to be secured (and supported by the participating states). According to the PAs requirements, further stakeholders like civil society representatives and / or non-governmental organisations may be invited to SGs (in an advisory or observing role). Likewise, other PACs may be involved to secure cross-PA coordination.

f) European Commission – DG Regio

The European Commission (EC), as the executive body of the EU, prepared the Strategy in 2010 in consultation with all partner countries. The Commission’s Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG Regio) plays a key role in strategically supporting the implementation of the EUSDR in cooperation with the participating countries and the PACs and is hence in regular exchange with the EUSDR Presidency, the TRIO Presidency and the DSP. DG Regio strives at securing appropriate capacities of all levels involved and thus has a mobilizing and integrative role. In general, the EC is assisted by a High Level Group, which shall also facilitate consultation between participating countries and DG REGIO.

DG Regio proactively pursues strategic coordination at policy level (EP, CoR, EESC, line DGs, NCs) and seeks to better interlink and align the Strategy with programmes during programming and implementation (i.e. EU, national, regional, centrally managed funding instruments). They actively aim to appropriately embed the EUSDR both at the strategic document level (e.g. Partnership Agreements, Operational Programmes etc.) and the operational level (adaption of selection criteria, calls dedicated to EUSDR, earmarking of budget, complementary financing

across programmes etc.), by ensuring continuous dialogue between EC actors (EUSDR officers, country desk officers and desk officers from line DGs) and programme bodies (Managing Authorities, Joint Secretariats, intermediate bodies) on possibilities of alignment and adjustments (see also chapter 8) – during programming as well as programme implementation. Furthermore, DG Regio promotes and facilitates the dialogue and involvement of stakeholders within the Danube Region, within the EU (line DGs, programmes, platforms, other stakeholders) and across macro-regional strategies – in thematic or procedural terms. This also comprises the exchange of information, good practices, lessons learned, and obstacles perceived for triggering learning-effects and for contributing to the streamlining of processes. As it is the case for all MRS, DG Regio is in charge of evaluating and reporting on the progress made in implementing the EUSDR and the results achieved.

In cooperation with the EUSDR core actors, DG Regio is responsible for updating the EUSDR Action Plan (as Staff Working Document), supported by the Presidency and DSP, and for seeking endorsement from the Council or the HLG on the proposed amendments.

g) High-Level Group (HLG)

The High Level Group (HLG) on macro-regional strategies is made up of official representatives from all EU Member States. It assists the Commission in the policy coordination of the Strategy. The Commission consults the HLG for modifications to the Strategy and the Action Plan, as well as for reports and monitoring. The HLG also addresses policy orientation and prioritisation and strives for facilitating the alignment of the Strategy with programmes / funding instruments.

h) Danube Strategy Point (DSP)

The DSP is a strategic working unit for the core EUSDR stakeholders and beyond, supporting the political and operational level of the EUSDR. The DSP thus has a cohesive function for the Strategy, easing the communication and coordination among the (TRIO) Presidency, the EC, NCs, PACs, further stakeholders and the wider public. Its primary role is to support the EUSDR implementation, communication, monitoring and evaluation and interlinking with DTP. Furthermore, DSP offers technical support to PAs and supports the development of capacities of all actors involved, taking into account the multiple challenges posed by different fields, especially non-EU countries. Through various activities in those areas, DSP also provides necessary information, feedback and proposals for streamlining the operational and political decision-making processes. The DSP seeks to promote the EUSDR within the Danube Region, but also on European Level. DSP encourages alignment with funding instruments and collaboration with strategic actors and other MRS.

Following the experience of the current (2018-2021) project implementation, the DSP is suggested become a permanently established structure in a longer-term perspective, to ensure consistency, institutional memory and permanent availability of a coordinative entity.

7.2. External governance⁴⁸

For securing coherent and sustainable strategic embedding, regular and intensive cooperation and coordination with actors beyond the EUSDR core governance system is crucial. Hence, building stronger ties with relevant, accompanied by efforts for securing a high visibility of the EUSDR, will remain a long-term endeavour. As lined out above, also towards a broader circle of actors, monopolisation has to be avoided and permeability should be enhanced.

On a general strategic level, EUSDR Presidency and DSP with the support of DG Regio seek for regular exchange with Members of the European Parliament (EP), with the Committee of Regions (CoR), with

⁴⁸ Note: the interplay with bodies in charge of implementing programmes and financial instruments (e.g. Managing Authorities, Joint Secretariats, intermediaries, public authorities etc.) is included in chapter 8.

the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and with INTERACT. DG Regio assures that the European Council is regularly updated on EUSDR evolvments and achievements.

Particularly at PA level, cooperation with **line DGs** is deemed as very beneficial, either for securing policy coordination and alignment of thematic fields of attention or for contextualizing EU policies with challenges for the Danube Region. The European Commission / DG Regio may play an important intermediating role in this regard, particularly by facilitating the exchange between relevant line DGs and PACs (DG NEAR, AGRI, CLIMA, EAC, ENV, EMPL, ECHO, MOVE, RTD etc.). Again, the cooperation with INTERACT is deemed as beneficial.

As the conglomerate of actors active in the Danube region is much diversified due to long tradition of multifaceted cooperation in the region, strong ties with **regional and international organisations** shall be enhanced.⁴⁹ For instance with the Danube Commission, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the Sava Commission, the Danube Tourist Commission, CEEweb, Danube-INCO.NET, the Danube Rector's Conference, Pro Danube International, the Working Community of the Danube Regions, the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM), the Carpathian Convention, NALAS, Global Water Partnership Central and Eastern Europe, Southeast European Law Enforcement Center, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Central European Initiative (CEI) – just to name some. Further international organisations might also be of great importance, such as United Nations Agencies (e.g. UN Environment, UNECE, UNDRR), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE), European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), European Training Foundation (ETF) or Europol.

Evidence generation and research. The scientific support of the EC's Joint Research Center (JRC) is a good example of substantial involvement of EC services within the EUSDR. Likewise, ESPON may deliver valuable input for the EUSDR by elaborating and regularly updating the European Territorial Monitoring Tool (EMTM), displaying territorial trends in the region and impacts achieved in the EUSDR context. Further data gathering undertakings like Attractive Danube may yield precious evidence, too. Academic actors focussing on the Danube Region, the EUSDR or MRS may introduce either thematic expertise or valuable reflections on the EUSDR functioning and structure, which can be useful for advancing joint efforts, e.g. Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, Spatial Foresight.

Sub-national level and civil society. As lined out above, the concept of multi-level governance is largely supported in all MRS. However, taking notice of the fact that challenges mostly become manifest in situ, thus below the national level, it is important that stakeholders at local and regional level are involved, whenever relevant. Likewise, operational partners aiming at solving challenges in the Danube region shall be addresses whenever possible. In parallel, greater participation of the civil society could strengthen the bottom-up dimension of the strategy. Good practices as applied by PACs are the involvement of civil society representatives and / or non-governmental organisations in SGs (in an advisory or observing role), stakeholder seminars or interactive events open to the wider public (e.g. National Participation Day or other events aimed at better involvement of civil society with EUSDR actors). Next to PACs, NCs play a crucial role in this regard: only by pursuing a proper and targeted dissemination of EUSDR evolvments within their countries, a broader participation in the EUSDR can be reached.

⁴⁹ E.g. Memoranda of Understanding or of Cooperation for strengthening institutional cooperation, e.g.: Memorandum of Cooperation between the Carpathian Convention with PA 1b, PA 2, PA 4, PA 5, PA 6; Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Global Partnership Central and Eastern Europe in 2019 by PA 4 and PA 5.

7.3. Cooperation with other MRS and sea-basin strategies

Macro-regional and sea-basin cooperation processes increase the attention to “functional areas” and thus strengthen the territorial approach of cohesion policy and other funding schemes. However, as many challenges are of cross-cutting nature, exchange of information, knowledge and experience and good practices shall be further pursued, for detecting overlaps, for exchanging good practices to address similar challenges which MRS face and for jointly communicating advantages of the MRS approach. This exchange can be thematically oriented (e.g. event on transport challenges and beyond), dedicated to procedural aspects (e.g. embedding into programmes such as mainstream programmes, communication with Managing Authorities, see also chapter 8) or of more general nature (transfer of operational working structures such as working groups, MRS synergies, supporting governance).

Beyond that, large-scale initiatives affecting several MRS can be closer coordinated or tackled in a cooperative manner. Cooperation across Macro-regional and sea basin cooperation processes shall become an integral part of activities of EUSDR stakeholders.

Inviting representatives of other MRS or sea-basin cooperation to Annual Fora, NC- and PAC-meetings shall be taken into consideration as well as regular exchange of experiences between thematic coordinators of different MRS.

The support of INTERACT is highly appreciated in this regard. DG Regio also plays a crucial role as intermediary.

8. Interplay of EUSDR with European funding facilities

As already lined out in the *EUSDR Communication (COM(2010) 715)*, the EUSDR “is implemented by mobilising and aligning existing funding to its objectives, where appropriate and in line with overall frameworks.”, building upon the “3 Nos principle” (no new EU legislation, no new EU institutions and no new EU funds). It is common agreement that this principle can also be seen from a positive angle and turned into “3 Yes”, when being understood as making common efforts for better co-ordination of resources, more coherent implementation of regulations and laws, and operating only minimal structures by making use of those that exist – that enabled constructive contributions from all parties.⁵⁰

Indeed, accessing and combining funding, especially from public and private sources (including also micro-funding) below the EU level, is important for reaching macro-regional objectives. Attention should also be given to combining grants and loans. Thus, a complementary use of funds shall be the highest premise for securing that synergies and complementarities are identified and used, and that overlapping or even doubling of undertakings is avoided. Supported by their SGs, PACs play an essential role in connecting the policy and the project level, among others by facilitating project generation or by participating in Monitoring Committee meetings. NCs and DG Regio – with the support of DSP – shall facilitate these endeavours by actively pursuing exchange of information on funding possibilities and on good practices.

2020+ under preparation: window of opportunity for a stronger alignment. Several regulatory and political provisions have been made to pave the way for the embedding of MRS into different funding programmes. As the renewed EUSDR Action Plan will be approved just in the preparatory phase of the funding period 2021-2027, this window of opportunity can be perfectly used for better integrating strategic actions of the EUSDR into programming processes relevant for the Danube Region. It was revealed several times, that there is persistent importance of continuing to use macro-regional strategies as a strategic framework for promoting more coherent and synergic implementation of EU policies, programmes and funds such as: cohesion policy, rural development policy, pre-accession,

⁵⁰ Macro-regional strategies in the EU - A Discussion Paper, presented by Commissioner Pawel Samecki at the ministerial conference „EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and Future Macro-Regional Strategies“ (17/18 September 2009 in Stockholm)

neighbourhood and other EU sectoral policies, as well as of national, regional programmes and funds, including private funds, and to implement joint projects with a significant macro-regional impact and tangible results. The renewed EUSDR Action Plan will hence become an important reference document for programming and implementation.

Operational Goals for strengthening the programmatic embedding of EUSDR objectives. For reaching a more aligned, targeted implementation across the Danube Region, cooperation is needed between all administrative levels concerned, at member state level (e.g. Monitoring Committee Members, coordinative bodies) and programme level (Managing Authorities, Joint Secretariats, further intermediaries and public authorities), in strong coordination with the EC (DG Regio, DG NEAR, line DGs) and the EUSDR's key implementers. Hence, particularly NCs and the EC, but also, PACs and SG members shall aim at facilitating the alignment of funding by contributing to programme arrangements. This relates both to programmes directly managed and to programmes indirectly managed by the EC, despite respecting the principle of subsidiarity and partnership. This comprises both the strategic document level and the operational / project implementation level.

Bodies in charge of implementing programmes or financial instruments bodies (Managing Authorities, Joint Secretariats, intermediaries etc.) are kindly invited, in all stages of programme cycle, to closely cooperate with NCs, PACs, DSP and line ministries for implementing the EUSDR for identifying and working together in areas of mutual interest. Thus, these implementing bodies may - by the way of contributing to the greater picture of macro-regional cooperation -, encompass strategic documents such as Partnership Agreements or Operational Programmes with macro-regional objectives ("synergy enabling rule"). Whenever possible and appropriate, in cooperation with the Monitoring Committee Members (or similar decision-making body), NCs and / or PACs / SG members shall hence be involved in programming. The intervention logic and monitoring systems of programmes / instruments shall allow tracing achievements, progress on actions / outputs / impacts related to the EUSDR, for being able to monitor and evaluate programmes' contributions to the EUSDR. Programmes shall strive for facilitating the realisation of EUSDR related undertakings, for instance by adapting selection criteria, by launching calls dedicated to EUSDR, by earmarking of budget or by complementary financing across programmes. Accordingly, potential and actual project implementers shall be provided with appropriate information on strategic interlinkages as well as on funding possibilities.

EC (DG Regio, DG NEAR et al.) shall strive for ensuring that strategic documents such as Partnership Agreements or Operational Programmes incorporate EUSDR objectives before being approved, again for facilitating consistency and synergies and the use of available resources most effectively. Participating countries thus encourage DG Regio as one of the key actors in the field of EU funding, to proactively coordinate with geographical units and relevant line DGs at the EC for securing the stronger interplay of the EUSDR with funding facilities. For reaching this, continuous dialogue on possibilities of further alignment and on possible adjustment shall be pursued, involving all EC and programme actors concerned. During programme implementation, EC shall ensure an accompanying monitoring of processes and achievements.

These considerations particularly refer to EU Cohesion Policy programmes (see below: ESIF, enlargement and neighbourhood policy). Again, in this context, INTERACT will play a valuable facilitating role as mediator between all stakeholders concerned. Comparable considerations and measures shall be taken when developing and implementing centrally managed funding facilities.

European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). In line with the thematic Policy Objectives as included in the proposed *Draft Common Provisions Regulation (COM(2018) 375)*⁵¹, participating countries and regions in the Danube Region shall duly take into account EUSDR priorities and actions in the programming and implementation of post-2020 programmes, also for ensuing on the strong nexus with the fundamental orientation of regulations of the current funding period 2014-2010.

⁵¹ European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, prospectively the Asylum and Migration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Border Management and Visa Instrument

Strong interrelation between cross-border, transnational and EU-wide INTERREG programmes shall be further pursued, particularly because of their trans-border logics. Due to the same geographical coverage, the Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) has an exceptional status for the EUSDR: besides funding a broad range of EUSDR projects and supporting project generation via its Seed Money Facility, parts of the EUSDR governance structures are financed by DTP. These practices are suggested to be continued.

Beyond that, greater awareness shall be put on further, partially financially stronger programmes being implemented in this framework, the so-called mainstream programmes.⁵² This postulate also corresponds with the proposed *Draft Common Provisions Regulation (COM(2018) 375)*, which furthermore underlines that cooperation shall become a horizontal objective for Cohesion Policy 2021-2027. In this context the European Council (8211/19 – Annex) added an Article 13a concerning “Transnational cooperation” into the draft of the ESF+-Regulation.⁵³ However, progress has already been achieved as several EUSDR activities were already implemented in the framework of the mainstream programs. For instance, the already initiated exchange between ESF Managing Authorities / Intermediate Bodies of the Danube Region in the format of a transnational cooperation structure, accompanied by DG EMPL, shall be pursued and further deepened. To name another example, in Bulgaria, the transport infrastructure OP finances with EUR 10 million the purchase of multifunctional dredging equipment. The Bulgarian Human Resources and Regions in Growth OPs also contributed to achieve EUSDR-related targets⁵⁴. Comparable measures shall be identified or further expanded.

Actors in the field of enlargement and neighbourhood policy. Also, in the context of the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) alignment with EUSDR objectives shall be ensured, in strong cooperation with DG NEAR. Again, cross-border and transnational INTERREG programmes play a role in this context, as well as programmes with regional or national emphasis. It is important that the Commission Services continuously ensure that MRS topics are covered in their yearly work programmes. To this purpose it is necessary to keep line DGs informed accordingly, best by joining the relevant PAs.

Centrally-managed programmes. A great variety of centrally-managed programmes is in place and is partially of great relevance for objectives of the EUSDR. Among others, examples are Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), Horizon2020, Erasmus, International Security Fund, the Migration and Asylum Fund, the Digital Europe Programme, Life, Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies (CEEPUS), European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST), Committee for European Construction Equipment (CECE), Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA), Joint Programming Initiatives (JPI), etc. PACs and SGs, in cooperation with the other EUSDR key actors, play a crucial role in exchanging and coordinating with the centrally-managed programmes of relevance for them. Although it is acknowledged that most centrally-managed programmes do not have a regional dimension, interlinkages between the EUSDR (and its projects) and the programmes shall be identified, both during programming and implementation, whenever possible.

Further financial instruments

As lined out above, better alignment of funds also concerns budget not stemming from EU funding pools, but also embraces Non-EU funding, loans, grants and private funds. EUSDR key stakeholders (NCs, PACs, SGs, DG Regio, DSP) shall aim at facilitating closer cooperation with funding instruments to lower the barrier for stakeholders in the Danube Region as well as to raise awareness for place-based development strategies in the line DGs. Examples are the European Investment Bank (EIB, e.g. infrastructure development programme), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the United Nations (e.g. Global Environmental Finance, UNDP-GEF), ENVSEC, International Development Cooperation in ODA (official development assistance) countries or the World Bank and

⁵² ERDF programmes with national / regional emphasis (apart from INTERREG), ESF, Cohesion Funds et al.

⁵³ This Article contains the following wording: Member States may support transnational cooperation under any of the specific objectives set out in points (i) to (x) of Article 4(1) of the ESF+-Regulation.

⁵⁴ ECs second report on MRS (SWD(2019) 6)

its regional or thematic programmes. In addition, regional funds (e.g. Visegrad Fund, Western Balkans Fund, Western Balkans Investment Framework etc.) should be taken into consideration by the Danube countries as possible financial resources. In the context of some PAs, many reform initiatives are funded via national budgets, for instance by development agencies, promotion agencies or foundations or grants (e.g. PA 9, PA 10, PA 11) – this shall further be strengthened. Furthermore, regional platforms, such Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) or Central European Initiative (CEI), may have a broker function, facilitating the accession of funds.

Synergetic approaches without regard to the programmatic embedding.

As stated above, complementarity across programmes shall be strived for, whenever possible. This may generate processes or project chains of vertical or horizontal nature, or project-to-policy-loops (as also identified in the framework of the EUSDR Operational Evaluation, see chapter 3). There is already a range of existing synergetic approaches in place, just to name some good practice examples:

- The EuroAccess tool supports in finding information on EU funding opportunities for project ideas in all four MRS.⁵⁵
- Danube Funding Coordination Network (DFCN), as integrated in PA 7, targets representatives of funding agencies and programme owners in the Danube Region, as well as representatives of multilateral European initiatives for coordinating national, bilateral and regional efforts in the Danube Region in order to foster multilateral collaboration in Research and Innovation (such as EUREKA, Eurostars, COST, Horizon2020, JPIs, ESA etc.)
- In several Danube countries, such as Romania and Hungary, intergovernmental Working Groups were established for coordinating EUSDR issues, involving a wider range of actors, among others stakeholders in charge of Operational Programmes.
- In Baden-Württemberg, two funds specifically dedicated to EUSDR have been established, projects have been supported with EUR 4.3 million leveraging around EUR 4.8 million more from third parties.⁵⁶
- Thematic Poles as realized as part of the DTP Capitalization Strategy support cross-fertilization among thematically connected DTP projects, involving also PACs.

Looking beyond the EUSDR, unexploited links between smart specialisation strategies and clusters in order to better connect the ecosystems as well as industrial and innovation policies within the macro-regional strategies could be further used. Furthermore, as lined out in chapter 7, exchange with key actors and project implementers involved in other MRS or in sea-basin strategies shall be further deepened for exploring and further developing complementarities of thematic or operational nature.

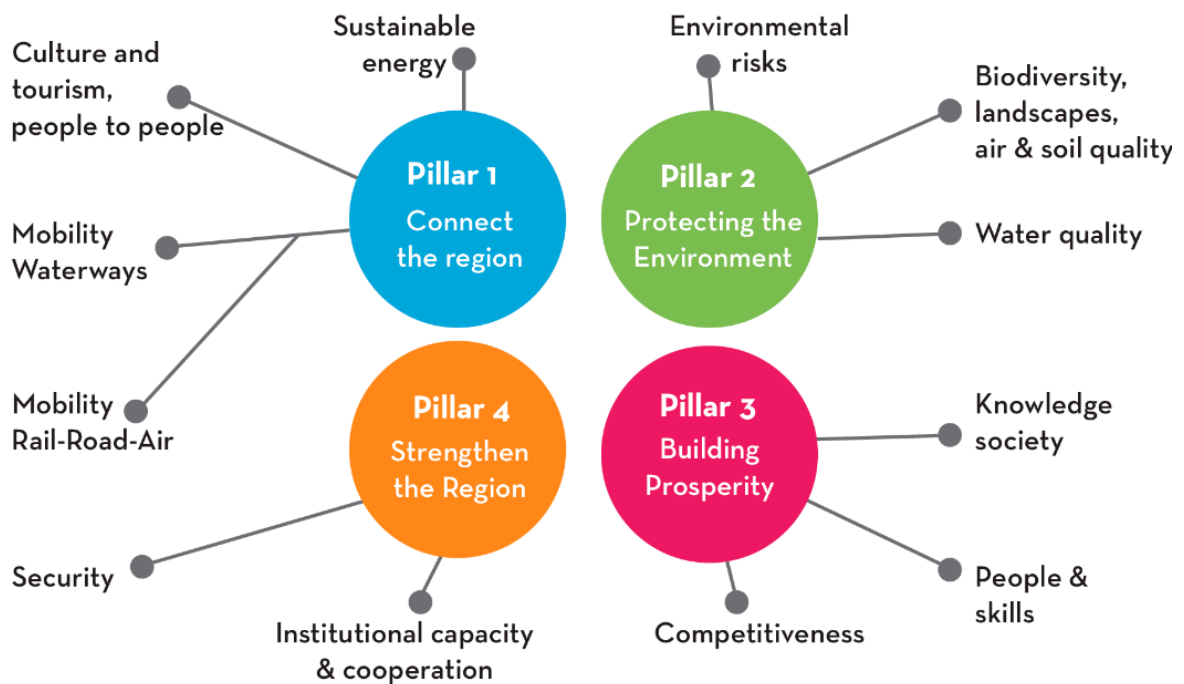
While Part A described the strategic and operational framework for the revised Action Plan, Part B now transfers “words into action” and demonstrates future foci at Priority Area level (targets, actions, strategic projects / activities).

⁵⁵ <https://www.danube-region.eu/funding/euroaccess-danube-region>

⁵⁶ ECs second report on MRS (SWD(2019) 6)

PART B:

Revised targets, actions and projects for the EUSDR proposed by PACs, after consulting the SGs.



PA 1A - WATERWAYS MOBILITY

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

TARGET 1: Waterway and port infrastructure & management: To optimally manage and improve navigability conditions as well as landside infrastructure in a harmonized and environmentally sustainable way

- Indicator: Number of days per year with Fairway Depth beyond 2.50 meters at critical stretches compared to the number of days with a water level beyond Low Navigable Water Level at the stretches.
- Baseline: 2012
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Actions 1.1 to 1.4

TARGET 2: Business development: Support transnational initiatives to promote inland waterway transport and business development in order to raise the modal share of inland waterway transport in the Danube Region

- Indicator: Number of organized B2B meetings
- Baseline: 2020
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Actions 2.1 to 2.3

TARGET 3: Fleet modernization: Develop the Danube fleet in order to become more fuel-efficient and to reduce emissions of greenhouse gas and pollutants

- Indicator: Not applicable - quantifiable indicators (e.g. reduction of emission levels by Danube vessels) can hardly be influenced directly by the PA1a actions due to many external influences and require a long observation time frame to detect significant effects.
- Baseline: NA
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Actions 3.1 and 3.2

TARGET 4: River Information Services: Implement harmonized River Information Services on the Danube and its navigable tributaries according to European legal provisions and ensure international data exchange

- Indicator: Coverage, correctness and timeliness of provided River Information Services (e.g. Fairway Information Services)
- Baseline: 2018
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Actions 4.1 to 4.3

TARGET 5: Education & Jobs: Solve the shortage of qualified personnel and harmonize education standards for professions in Danube navigation

- Indicator: Not applicable - quantifiable indicators (e.g. reduction of vacancies, number of new pupils) can hardly be influenced directly by the PA1a actions due to many external influences, low data availability and moreover require a long observation time frame to detect significant effects.
- Baseline: NA
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Actions 5.1 to 5.3

TARGET 6: Administrative processes: Establish time-efficient, service-oriented and transparent administrative procedures, especially border controls, in the framework of navigation on the Danube and its navigable tributaries

- Indicator: Number of harmonized and digitalized administrative control processes in Danube navigation
- Baseline: 2015
- Reference to relevant Action(s):

2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

Within PA1A a gap analysis document was drafted aiming to identify thematic areas and geographic locations for which additional project initiatives would be needed, in order to achieve the defined targets. This is primarily done by analysing the project activities that have been taken up in the years between 2010 and 2018, on the basis of the project database that has been maintained by PA1a since 2011. PA1a took this gap analysis as an opportunity to critically review and update the set of targets, thematic areas and priorities against the background of actual developments in the area of inland navigation, changed policy developments, feedback from stakeholders, etcetera. Based on experiences of the years since 2010 and the input of the PA1a Steering Group, following categorisation of targets and actions was proposed by the Technical Secretariat and approved by Steering Group Members.

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS

ACTION 1: Action 1.1 Good Navigation Status

- Description: Facilitate management of inland waterways in order to provide “Good Navigation Status” and adequate fairway conditions on the Danube and its navigable tributaries (in line with the TEN-T Regulation (1315/2013) and the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan)

ACTION 2: Action 1.2 Good Ecological Status and Favourable Conservation Status

- Description: Foster the application of an integrative approach in the set-up of navigation projects in order to contribute to the achievement of “Good Ecological Status” and “Favourable Conservation Status” (in line with the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) and Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) respectively)

ACTION 3: Action 1.3 Service-oriented constructional infrastructure

- Description: Contribute to service-oriented constructional infrastructure, aimed at the optimisation of lock operation, as well as the availability and quality of mooring places and bridge clearances where necessary

ACTION 4: Action 1.4 Multimodal accessibility

- Description: Contribute to better multimodal accessibility of inland ports and transshipment sites to other transport modes and their hinterland

ACTION 5: Action 2.1 Stakeholder meetings

- Description: Set up regular stakeholder meetings to identify waterway user needs on a continuous basis

ACTION 6: Action 2.2 Market analyses

- Description: Conduct market analyses to identify promising market segments for Danube navigation

ACTION 7: Action 2.3 International B2B meetings

- Description: Contribute to international business-to-business meetings aimed at raising modal share of inland waterway transport

ACTION 8: Action 3.1 Monitor innovations

- Description: Monitor ongoing innovations in greening and fleet modernization technologies

ACTION 9: Action 3.2 Roll out strategy

- Description: Contribute to the development of a roll out strategy to support the uptake and practical implementation of innovation and modernization measures in the Danube fleet

ACTION 10: Action 4.1 Fairway information services

- Description: Promote creation and use of service-oriented, timely and intuitive user information on site and online on current and future fairway conditions

ACTION 11: Action 4.2 Traffic management services

- Description: Pursue establishment of enhanced traffic management with the help of improved traffic information

FURTHER ACTIONS (IF OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE):

- Action 4.3 Support establishment of RIS-based solutions for logistics and transport management purposes
- Action 5.1 Support the Danube-wide application of EU Directive 2017/2397 on the recognition of professional qualifications
- Action 5.2 Identify measures to increase the availability of nautical personnel
- Action 5.3 Spread knowledge on Danube navigation to future decision makers and dispatchers of logistic supply chains
- Action 6.1 Harmonize and simplify border controls by means of guidance documents and an extended set of standardized control forms
- Action 6.2 Support the preparation of new digital tools to improve the efficiency of border controls

3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: FAIRway Danube

- Description: Regular maintenance and rehabilitation works are necessary to provide the required fairway parameters under the given hydrological circumstances. In 2014, PA1a elaborated a key document for Danube navigation: the “Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan for the Danube and its navigable tributaries”. The agreed level of service is to offer 2.50m fairway depth at low navigable water level, with the exception of Germany, where the target value refers to 2.00m fairway depth. This Master Plan was endorsed during a dedicated meeting of the Ministers of Transport in the Danube Region in December 2014. Directly afterwards, the FAIRway Danube project (co-financed through the Connecting Europe Facility) started. This project, in which 7 different Danube countries are participating, is implementing large parts of the Master Plan. Among others the project also produces bi-annual National Action Plans, which are monitoring reports to demonstrate progress made in the various countries.
- Reference to Action(s): Actions 1.1 to 1.4

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Fleet modernisation

- Description: GRENDEL (2018-2020) will support Danube fleet operators as well as public bodies in their efforts to set up a comprehensive strategy and concrete actions for launching a targeted long-term Danube fleet modernisation process. Building on the technological solutions developed in other projects and on good practices for wide-scale implementation, investment needs on national and regional level will be identified, including investment volumes and technical priorities. A model State Aid Scheme and innovative financial instruments will be introduced to develop public support measures for the Danube fleet modernisation.
- Reference to Action(s): Actions 3.1 and 3.2

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Developing jobs and skills

- Description: Since 17th of January 2018 the EU Directive 2017/2397 on the recognition of professional qualifications in inland navigation is in force. The Member States have the obligation to transpose the Directive into their national legislation until 17 January 2022. The implementation of the Directive faces some problems, but it is supported by Danube SKILLS project activities, CESNI (European Committee for drawing up Standards in Inland Navigation) and EDINNA (Education in Inland Navigation). A Policy Support Strategy for Nautical Education with a detailed roadmap for the approval of training programmes was drafted in the Danube SKILLS project. The further implementation of the EU Directive shall be pursued by follow-up projects.
- Reference to Action(s): Actions 5.1 to 5.3

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Towards digitalization of administrative processes in inland waterways

- Description: The project builds on a number of existing initiatives, including the working group on „Administrative Processes“ of the EUSDR. This led, in the first phase, eight priority measures and detailed implementation plans on simplification (a “Practical manual on border controls along the Danube and its navigable tributaries”) and on harmonisation (a first set of harmonised control forms). Furthermore, the flagship project builds on the DANTE project, aiming to improve the administrative procedures and processes for the Danube Inland Waterway transport (being implemented between 2017 and 2019), as well as the RIS COMEX project which explores further possibilities for digitalization and the effective use of River Information Services in administrative processes in Danube navigation.
- Reference to Action(s): Actions 4.3, 6.1 and 6.2

4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Foster the application of an integrative approach in the set-up of navigation projects in order to contribute to the achievement of “Good Ecological Status” and “Favourable Conservation Status”

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA4 and PA6

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Contribute to service-oriented constructional infrastructure, aimed at the optimisation of lock operation, as well as the availability and quality of mooring places and bridge clearances where necessary

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA3

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Contribute to better multimodal accessibility of inland ports and transshipment sites to other transport modes and their hinterland

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA1b

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Identify measures to increase the availability of nautical personnel

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA9

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Harmonize and simplify border controls by means of guidance documents and an extended set of simplified, harmonized and digitalized control forms

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA11

PA 1B - RAIL-ROAD-AIR MOBILITY

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

TARGET 1: Support efficient freight railway services and improved travel times for competitive railway passenger connections between major cities in the Danube Region (DR) by 2030.

- Indicator: travel time shorten for freight trains (in %), travel time shorten for passenger trains between capital cities (%), passenger kilometres, ton kilometres, volume of freight carried by railways
- Baseline: Start of EUSDR 2011 (in order to properly analyse possible progress since then)
- Reference to relevant Action(s): A1 and A2

TARGET 2: Support fully functional multi-modal TEN-T Core Network by 2030

- Indicator: % of completed TEN-T core network corridors (multimodal corridors), % of completed TEN-T core network (roads, railways), % of completed TEN-T comprehensive network (roads, railways), qualitative: number of relevant stakeholder workshops organised by PA
- Baseline: Start of EUSDR 2011 (in order to properly analyse possible progress since then)
- Reference to relevant Action(s): A1 and A2

TARGET 3: Support the development of efficient multimodal terminals at sea, river and dry ports in the Danube Region and ensure their connectivity and access through the integration of all modes of transport and efficient logistics services by 2030

- Indicator: LPI (logistics performance index) World ranking, new intermodal terminals (number), quantitative: volumes of handled cargo per intermodal terminal per year and mode
- Baseline: Start of EUSDR 2011
- Reference to relevant Action(s): A1 and A6

TARGET 4 Support improvement of the regional air connectivity and the implementation of the Single European Sky initiative.

- Indicator: operational regional airports (number), airplane movements (landing and take-off of an aircraft) number per year, number and quality of regional air links in the Danube Region (per MS or airport per year), passenger traffic (total passengers enplaned and deplaned, passengers in transit counted once) annual % change; per MS/airport per year, cargo traffic (cargo volume loaded and unloaded freight and mail in metric tonnes) annual % change; tonnes per airport)
- Baseline: Start of EUSDR 2011
- Reference to relevant Action(s): A3

TARGET 5: Facilitate the improvement of secondary and tertiary roads in the Danube Region.

- Indicator: lengths of secondary and tertiary roads (in km), quality of good roads (in %), kilometres of new roads per MS and year or/and kilometres of upgraded/modernised roads
- Baseline: Start of EUSDR 2011
- Reference to relevant Action(s): A5, A7 and A8

TARGET 6: Support safe and sustainable transport and mobility in the Danube Region.

- Indicator: number of fatalities per mode per year, a modal share (changes in % per year per country), kilometres of ITS systems in operation per MS and year, new metro / tram /dedicated bus lines constructed (km), new cycling routes implemented (km), travelled bike kilometres in urban regions per year
- Baseline: Start of EUSDR in 2011
- Reference to relevant Action(s): A1, A2, A4, A5, A7 and A8

2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

NOTE: while targets have been revised already in 2016, the PA1b SG didn't succeed to revise actions in order to reflect new targets. In spite great efforts more time is needed.

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS

The EU Member States are part of the Single European market that gives many advantages to performing trade within the EU28. The EU efforts to ease and harmonize activities in the transport sector are marked by e.g. White paper 2011: "Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area - Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system", the Communication by the European commission on development of a Single Railway Area (2010) with which European rail policy aims to facilitate the sustainable development of the European economy by providing high-quality, reliable, safe and efficient services, a Single European sky (2004) main objective is to reform ATM in Europe in order to cope with a sustained air traffic growth and air traffic operations under the safest, more cost- and flight-efficient and environmentally friendly conditions. Related to logistics the European Commission adopted "Freight Transport Logistics Action Plan" (2007). The aim of above-mentioned EU initiatives is to use common approach based on desired patterns leading to greater efficiency and optimal capacity use, as well as increased safety and security for all modes of transport.

On the other hand, non-EU Member States within the macro-region has no common guidelines, recommendations or policies. In order to reduce disparities between the various regions within the Danube macro-region, in particular to reach economic, social and territorial cohesion more balanced, more sustainable territorial development should be promoted.

How could EUSDR coordination activities contribute to synergy of all ongoing policies and works on projects and at the same time not to add to redundancy of already carried out or ongoing actions is an enormous challenge by itself. As one of the most important challenges for PA1b, which at the same time give a lot of satisfaction, remain coordinated activities between the European Commission, EU countries and non-EU countries, as well as all relevant international institutions and stakeholders acting in the Danube region.

ACTION 1: To bring to completion the TEN-T (rail and road) core network crossing the Danube Region, overcoming the difficulties and the bottlenecks including environmental, economic and political, particularly in the cross-border sections⁵⁷

- Description: Following work of EU coordinators on a regular basis and contributing to Core network meetings. Support TEN-T extension to neighbouring countries (non-EU member states) and contribute to cross-border challenges by organising HLG events. Identifying key stakeholders and organizing workshops and conferences, in order to exchange best practices within and outside the Danube Region. Identifying and ranking the most critical problems and continuously supporting all work on missing links and bottlenecks along the TEN-T network. Where and when possible preparing and adopting strategic guidelines to support efficient freight and passenger railway services on core network, and identifying and supporting the development and maintenance of comprehensive links to the TEN-T core network.

ACTION 2: To implement the Rail Freight Corridors forming part of the European rail network for competitive freight (Reg. 913/2010) with extension to candidate and neighbouring countries

- Description: Support the implementation decision of the EU Commission regarding the establishment of the Alpine-Western Balkan rail freight corridor, and monitor the new RFC. Identifying key stakeholders (multimodal terminals, port authorities, logistic operators), and drafting a study in order to identify beneficiary needs of intermodal transport in the Danube Region. Establishing a permanent and regular cooperation with PA1a in the form of annual conferences/meetings of the multimodal transport stakeholders. Identifying possible new projects (i.e. new possible terminals, upgrading of the existing

⁵⁷ Amendments by HU: "ACTION 1: To bring to completion the TEN-T (rail and road) core network crossing the Danube Region, overcoming the difficulties and the bottlenecks *taking into account* environmental, economic and political, *challenges* particularly in the cross-border sections"

terminals) and drafting of list of priority projects (study), as well as implementing new projects and sharing best practices within and outside of the Danube Region. Supporting the coordinated implementation of relevant Rail Freight Corridors in the Danube Region. The implementation of RFC should focus on ensuring interoperability, sufficient capacity for rail freight services of high quality and reliability and to improve and harmonise rail infrastructure standards relevant for freight traffic, especially axle-loads, train-lengths and loading gauges, along the entire corridors. In addition promotion of interoperability, supporting removal of cross-border administrative, as well as operational and technical barriers and supporting deployment of traffic management systems (ERTMS) are important activities of this action.

ACTION 3: To enhance cooperation between air traffic stakeholders in order to improve regional connectivity and prepare a plan to implement shorter plane routes

- Description: Identifying key air traffic stakeholders (small airports, local communities, business associations, airplane manufacturers, etc.), involving the main macro-regional actors and raising the macro-regional awareness by promoting enhanced regional connectivity. Drafting a study on small airports and preparing a basic policy document. Furthermore, jointly designing and implementing the Single European Sky Initiative, in accordance with the selection of routes identified and agreed upon by countries of the macro-region. Monitor and facilitate FABs consensus for the project objectives and activities. Facilitate the creation of missing FAB and the cooperation between the existing FABs in the Danube region. To implement SESAR, the technological part of the Single European Sky, in the Danube Region". Intelligent traffic systems in the air transport sector contribute to reduce airports' environmental footprint and to minimise nuisances like noise and air pollution. Supporting the European ATM Master Plan Level 3 Implementation Plan of the European ATM Master Plan that brings together and provides the framework for the commonly agreed actions to be taken by ECAC (the European Civil Aviation Conference) stakeholders, in the context of the implementation of SESAR.

ACTION 4: To ensure sustainable metropolitan transport systems and mobility

- Description: Identify and list best practices in the macro-region and the EU, while taking into account differences between member states. Each country permanently works on the project design to ensure sustainable transport systems and mobility in the urban and suburban areas. Monitor and promote achievements of flagship projects (when they commence). Identifying and exchanging best practices within and outside the Danube Region with focus on the metropolitan areas which are of crucial importance to the mobility in the Danube macro-region. This action should contribute to the competitiveness and attractiveness of metropolitan regions in the Danube area while at the same time will make a strong contribution to climate protection and to improve health in urban/ city-region areas. ICT will help to reduce information costs and make sustainable modes of transport easily accessible for all. It includes the further development of e-mobility by developing markets and infrastructure in densely populated areas in cooperation with enterprises. Public and private transport companies of metropolitan areas will be able to cooperate in public procurement for environmentally friendly vehicles and the development of standardised high-quality transport and mobility internet information platforms for citizens. The action should enable the capitalization of a wide range EU-projects already dealing with urban mobility and help to implement the EU Action Plan for Urban Mobility (2009).

ACTION 5: To improve the regional/ local cross-border infrastructure and the access to rural areas by facilitating secondary and tertiary transport infrastructure

- Description: Support development and maintenance of secondary road network in the Danube region and in particular links to the TEN-T core and comprehensive network. Identify key border-crossings that hamper smooth mobility of peoples and goods, including main border-crossings between the EU and non-EU countries. Support and encourage responsible ministries to start joint activities regarding the

action. Monitor and promote main border crossings. Regularly exchanging information on activities done regarding improvements on the cross-border sections.

ACTION 6: To develop further nodal planning for multimodality.

- Description: Use of same infrastructure (roads and railways) for freight and passengers transport leads in many nodes to congestion and loss of productivity. Design and implement projects, in accordance with pre-identified and agreed upon nodes in all EU Member states, and tentatively in 5 non-EU countries of the Danube Region.

ACTION 7: To develop further Intelligent Traffic Systems by using environmental-friendly technologies, especially in urban regions

- Description: Design, implement and monitor projects, in accordance with identified and agreed upon priority topics of ITS deployment in the macro-region. Supporting relevant research and innovations (closing the knowledge gap) and organizing annual conferences in the Danube Region with focus on key research. Support ITS deployment by 2030. Supporting sustainable mobility practices, programmes and projects such as cycling and walking.

ACTION 8: To raise awareness for road safety and encourage exchange of best practices

- Description: Road safety varies among the countries of the Danube region due to too often poor infrastructure, age of vehicle fleet and driver's behaviour⁵⁸. Support road safety projects and contribute to road safety "vision zero" by organising various events (e.g. conference, workshop or seminar). Road safety priority topics to be deployed or implemented in the macro-region are to be consulted with stakeholders.

3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: SI - AT: Construction of a second tube for the Karawanks motorway tunnel railway

- Description: This project regards the construction of a second tube for the Karawanks motorway tunnel on the cross-border section between Austria and Slovenia. The Karawanks motorway tunnel connects the A2 motorway in Slovenia and the A11 motorway in Austria and is part of the TEN-T comprehensive network, connecting the Baltic-Adriatic and the Mediterranean CNCs. It also connects hubs of the comprehensive and core transport networks (i.e., Villach-Klagenfurt, Ljubljana). The Karawanks motorway tunnel is currently single-tube and two-lane of approximately 8 km. It was opened on 1 June 1991. In the initial planning activities, the construction of a double-tube tunnel was envisaged, but only one tube was eventually built between 1987-1991. Until 1991, the Karawanks mountain was an obstacle between western and southern Europe. Moreover, prior to the opening of the tunnel, there was almost no cargo transportation on that route, due to poor road network conditions.
- Reference to Action(s): A1, A7 and A8

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: SI: 3rd DEVELOPMENT AXIS: State road linking regions and neighbouring countries

- Description: The main objective of the new road between the North Slovenian town Slovenj Gradec (border with AT at Holmec border-crossing) and the South Slovenian towns Metlika and Črnomelj (border with the Republic of Croatia at Vinica) is to ensure proper interconnection of centres of international, national and regional significance in the wider area of the third development axis. The corridor of the third development axis of the section considered takes place in the direction from north to south. The

⁵⁸ Amendment by HU: Road safety varies among the countries of the Danube region due to too often poor infrastructure, age of vehicle fleet and driver's behaviour *and animal-vehicle collisions*.

function of the new transport connection will be mainly to increase the competitiveness of the area along the development axis, increase access to and strengthening institutional and economic ties and increase the integration of space outside the existing TEN-T core corridors (Baltic-Adriatic and Mediterranean). In Slovenia, the new highway link will support a polycentric network of towns and other settlements, the harmonious development of areas with common spatial development characteristics,

- Reference to Action(s): A5 and A8

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: CZ: Brno Railway Node Modernisation

- Description: Modernisation of the Brno Railway Node will be one of the most complex investment projects in the Czech Republic. The node is a part of three European Corridors (Baltic-Adriatic, Orient/East-Med and Rhine-Danube). Parameters of the node have been unsatisfactory for decades and a fundamental reconstruction is required. The main station is planned to be relocated by 800 metres. The reconstruction will increase capacity and the node will be suitable for planned high-speed trains. Modernisation of the node will facilitate transport across Central Europe. Brno will become an important railway junction. Moreover, significant economic development of the area around the main station is expected.
- Reference to Action(s): A2, A4 and A6

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: CZ: D52 Motorway construction

- Description: The D52 Motorway will connect the Czech Republic with Austria. The route is a part of Baltic-Adriatic Corridor and is the main connection from the Czech Republic to Vienna. In the present situation, the road is congested, and it is considered a bottleneck on the Corridor. The section of the D52 Motorway from Brno to Pohořelice (17 km) was completed in 1996. The missing section from Pohořelice towards the state borders (37 km) is in planning process. After completion, the motorway will ensure reliable connection in north-south direction. The motorway is also instrumental in improving road safety and reducing negative externalities along the current road. The Czech D52 Motorway is going to be joined with Austrian A5 Motorway, which is almost complete.
- Reference to Action(s): A1, A7 and A8

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: D: Widening of the A8 motorway South of Munich to the German-Austrian border

- Description: The A8 motorway is a major German road axis which crosses the South-Eastern part of the Free State of Bavaria. It is part of the TEN-T Core Network, specifically the Rhine-Danube CNC and connects Germany with Austria, linking Munich to Salzburg. This project regards the widening of the transversal section to 6/8 lanes of the motorway A8 from the South of Munich to the German-Austrian border via Bad Reichenhall, for a total length of 116 km. This section is considered a bottleneck of the Rhine-Danube CNC, leading to congestions and undermining the mobility across a major road infrastructure of Bavaria. The project is meant to improve the characteristics of the A8 in terms of traffic safety, of the quality of transport and to alleviate some environmental issues. The widening project of the A8 would allow to achieve technical compliance with the current standards for motorways. The A8 motorway is one of the oldest in Germany. It was built between 1934 and 1939 and shows the typical features of a pre-war motorway.
- Reference to Action(s): **A1, A7 and A8**

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: AT: Third runway of the Vienna International Airport

- Description: This project regards the construction of the third runway of the Vienna International Airport (VIE). The VIE is a core node of the Baltic-Adriatic CNC. Currently, there are two intersecting runways available for take-offs and landings. However, in terms of potential for air traffic management, this configuration of the air side is considered a bottleneck. The capacity is not equal to 2, but only to 1,6 runways due to their operational dependencies. The peak hour capacity is an issue also for air traffic controllers that have to direct landing aircrafts to low level holding patterns, where the aircrafts circle, increasing noise disturbance and generating pollution. A similar issue exists also for departing traffic. On the ground, the lack of runway capacity often results in 10-15-minute delays for queued aircrafts. The third additional runway would increase the capacity from 74 to 95 slots per hours (i.e., +32%) and reduce delays, fuel consumption and noise by removing holding patterns in the air and on the ground.
- Reference to Action(s): **A3**

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: CZ – SK: Modernisation of the railway corridor State Border of the Czech Republic/Slovak Republik (Čadca – Krásno nad Kysucou)

- Description: The project regards the modernisation of the railway line from the state border between Czech Republic/Slovakia-Čadca-Krásno nad Kysucou. The railway section extends for about 17 km and is part of the Rhine-Danube CNC, namely of the section Ostrava/Přerov-Žilina-Košice-UA border. It is also part of the Pan-European Corridor VI and part of Rail Freight Corridors 5 and 9. The line is internally codified as 106D by ŽSR (i.e., the Rail Infrastructure manager of Slovakia). The bottleneck is mainly represented by speed limits (due to the strong slope) and to the lack of ETCS between Čadca and the border with Czech Republic. The project is part of the Operational Programme Transport (i.e., OPT), priority axis n. 1. The main goals of the project are increasing safety of travel and overall standards, reduction of negative environmental impact, increasing the railway route transport capacity, provide more effective transport management and time saving.
- Reference to Action(s): **A1, A2 and A7**

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: HU: Construction of the Csorna bypass section, Motor road M86-M85

- Description: This project regards the construction of the second stage of the Csorna bypass, which is part of the development project of road M85. The road M85 Győr-Csorna-Nagyecenk is the East-West axis of the Győr-Moson-Sopron County and crosses the road M86 Rédics-Szombathely-Rajka in the town of Csorna. It is expected that, once completed, the Csorna bypass could generate benefits in terms of: time savings, safety levels, environmental impact and vehicle operating costs. The project could improve the accessibility of the region enhancing the mobility of both passengers and freight.
- Reference to Actions(s): **A1, A4, A5 and A8**

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: BA: Road section Tarčin – Konjic of Corridor VC

- Description: This project refers to the improvement of the Pan-european Corridor Vc road section Tarčin-Konjic. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, trunk roads and regional roads extend for 8.501 km. Together these form the core road network of the country. The essential function of trunk roads is to connect the main economic and administrative centres of the country. In this network, there are also six European roads (i.e., E-roads), which extend for a total length of 995 km and that are classified in compliance with the European Agreement on the Main International Roads. The road Corridor Vc connects the central coast of the Adriatic Sea with Budapest, representing a major route for many key trans-European communications. The road Corridor Vc is split into 9 sections, for a total length of around 336 km.
- Reference to Action(s): **A1 and A8**

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: HR: Modernisation of the Railway line Dugo Selo – Hungarian border (Sections Dugo Selo – Križevci and Križevci – State border)

- Description: The project regards the modernisation of the cross-border railway sections Dugo Selo-Križevci and Križevci-state border with Hungary. The railway line connecting Dugo Selo with the Hungarian border is part of the Mediterranean CNC and, more in detail, it is part of the link connecting Zagreb with Budapest. The line is also part of the Rail Freight Corridor 6. The rail line modernisation is a part of a larger project for setting up a high-efficiency, double-track railway line for mixed transport along the entire Mediterranean CNC, which will connect the Iberian Peninsula through the Port of Rijeka, Zagreb and Budapest with the Hungarian-Ukrainian border and TEN-T European network. The rail line modernisation will increase in traffic volumes towards central European countries by connecting Rijeka and Zagreb to the Hungarian rail network.
- Reference to Action(s): **A2, A4 and A6**

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: RS: Reconstruction of the railway line Niš – Dimitrovgrad

- Description: The project regards the reconstruction and modernisation of the railway line Niš-Dimitrovgrad. The railway line connecting Niš with Dimitrovgrad and the Bulgarian border is the branch Xc of the SEETO Corridor X. This classification is a heritage of the Pan-European Corridors established during the 90s, when the branch Xc was defined as a connection between Niš, Sofia, Plovdiv, Dimitrovgrad (BG) and finally Istanbul. The line is part of the corridor connecting Central Europe to Bulgaria and Turkey

through Croatia and Serbia. It is an alternative to the TEN-T Rhine-Danube CNC. The rail section between Niš and Dimitrovgrad is an important bottleneck, being the only part of the entire corridor that is not electrified and having a weight limits of category D3.

- Reference to Action(s): **A2, A4 and A6**

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: BG: Modernisation of the railway line Volujak – Dragoman

- Description: This project regards the modernisation of the railway line Volujak-Dragoman and, as a result, the completion of the global project “Modernization of Sofia-Dragoman Railway Line”. The Sofia-Dragoman railway line is part of South-East Axis, the extension of the major TEN-T axes to the Neighbouring Countries. This is also the main direction between Europe and Asia and part of the Orient/East-Med CNC. On the Serbian side, the line extends to the Niš-Dimitrovgrad line. As part of the cross-border section of the TEN-T, the Volujak-Dragoman modernisation project is of great importance both at national and European level. It also incorporates the necessary measures for the achievement of an interoperable rail network by the optimisation of the capacity and efficiency of existing and new infrastructure, improvement of the safety and reliability of the network.
- Reference to Action(s): **A2, A4 and A6**

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: RO: Rehabilitation of the railway line Bucharest North – Giurgiu

- Description: The project regards the rehabilitation of the cross-border railway section Bucharest-Giurgiu, which connects the capital city of Romania with Bulgaria via Grădiştea. The Bucharest-Giurgiu rail line is part of the Pan-European Corridor IX, on the TEN-T comprehensive network. It is a very important link, being the unique connection with the Bulgarian cross-border river port of Ruse, on the Danube River. This project is in continuation with the railway line Ruse-Varna, identified in the FR of Bulgaria. In 2005, the Grădiştea Bridge collapsed due to the severe damages caused by a flood. Since then, the Bucharest-Giurgiu line closed to traffic. At the moment, trains are allowed to transit through the much longer route Videle-Giurgiu to pass the border between Romania and Bulgaria. The urgency of the rehabilitation of the section is necessary because the traffic diversion from the Bucharest-Giurgiu to the Videle-Giurgiu is overstressing the line, designed for lighter traffic.
- Reference to Action(s): **A2, A4 and A6**

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: MD: Construction of the M-14 road section from Balti to Criva

- Description: This project regards the rehabilitation of the road M-14, from Balti to Criva (i.e., 133 km). The road M-14 extends for 265 km from Criva to Chisinau and is considered of major importance by the Government of Moldova and a backbone of the national road network. The M-14 crosses the country from the North-Western border with Ukraine’s province of Chernivets’ka to South-Eastern border with Ukraine’s province of Odes’ka and passing through the capital city of Chisinau. In correspondence of Chisinau, the road M-14 intersects the Pan-European Corridor IX. The rehabilitation of the road M-14 would have a direct impact on the improvement of the road connection with Ukraine and contribute to the integration of Moldova into the transport system of the Eastern Europe.
- Reference to Action(s): **A1, A5 and A8**

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: UA: Feasibility study of the construction of the highway Odessa – Reni

- Description: This project regards the feasibility study of the construction of the highway Odessa-Reni part of the Eastern Partnership strategic network. The construction of the Odessa-Reni highway could connect the Europe, the near East and the Middle East with Ukraine. Furthermore, being located in the Danube Macro-Region and in proximity to important Danube ports (e.g., Reni, Izmail, Ust-Dunaysk), it could lead to an overall increment in transport flows in this direction. The existing road is in poor conditions. Freight vehicles impair the road pavement. The road has only 2 lanes and, in some parts, it crosses urban areas, resulting in congestions. The road does not comply with the international standards of TEN-T network.
- Reference to Action(s): **A1, A5 and A8**

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: ME: Improvement and modernization of the railway line Bar - border with Serbia

- Description: The railway from Bar to the Serbian border is part of the SEETO route 4. The project concerns the replacement of signalization and safety systems at the railway line Bar-Bijelo Polje. The project documentation is currently under preparation.
- Reference to Action(s): **A2, A4 and A6**

4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS of PA1b “To improve mobility and Multimodality – road, rail and air links”:

Pillar 1: Connecting the Danube Region – smart and sustainable

- Reference to **Priority Area 1a** (PA1a: inland navigation): the opportunities for cooperation between PA1b and PA1a are in the field of full modal integration, last mile and cross-border issues. Joint efforts of PA1a and PA1b to contribute to better multimodal accessibility of inland ports and transshipment sites to other transport modes and their hinterland.
- Reference to **Priority Area 2** (PA2: Sustainable Energy): Energy efficiency in transport; the opportunities for cooperation between PA1b and PA2 are in the field of deployment of new technologies and advanced concepts.
- Reference to **Priority Area 3** (PA3: Culture & Tourism): The development and functioning of tourism is linked to the quality of transport services and transport infrastructure, a focus on sustainable forms of transport should be made.

Pillar 2: Protecting the Environment – clean and green

- Reference to **Priority Area 4** (PA4: Water Quality): planning and construction of transport infrastructure takes into account protection of water sources (through EIA).
- Reference to **Priority Area 5** (PA5: Environmental Risks): planning and construction of transport infrastructure for economical and environment protection reasons seeks avoiding risks, including environmental.
- Reference to **Priority Area 6** (PA6: Biodiversity & Landscapes): the development of green(er) transport corridors, construction of resilient infrastructure is of great interest to both PAs. Hence any cooperation is welcomed.

Pillar 3: Building Prosperity – smart, social and innovative

- Reference to **Priority Area 8** (PA8: Competitiveness of Enterprises): potential for cooperation between two PAs is in the field of competitiveness and attractiveness of transport undertakings or/and air carriers.
- Reference to **Priority Area 9** (PA9: People & Skills): potentials for cooperation between two PAs are in the field of innovative training approaches for transport personnel. Transport SMEs and entrepreneurship is considered to be a generator of economic growth and regional cohesion.

Pillar 4: Strengthening the Danube Region – effective, sound and safe

- Reference to **Priority Area 10** (PA10: Institutional Capacity & Cooperation): Possible joint interests are within combating institutional capacity and public service related problems in the Danube region, ensuring sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels and enhancing absorption rate of EU funds and to ensure better coordination of funding, as well as supporting the development of local financial products for business (in particular transport services) development.
- Reference to **Priority Area 11 (PA11: Security)**: Cross-border issues related to transport of goods and people are strong common interests of both PAs.

PA 02 - SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

TARGET 1: To help to achieve the national targets based on the Europe 2030 climate and energy targets

- Indicator: progress in national targets (NREAP-s), number of related cross-border projects, number of new methods, solutions including cutting-edge low-carbon technologies, number of workshops, trainings, seminars on the use of RES in the heating and cooling and transport sectors and energy efficiency
- Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 1-4

TARGET 2: To remove existing bottlenecks in energy to fulfil the goals of the Energy Union within the Danube Region

- Indicator: number of joint activities, progress in elaborating / implementing joint activities, number of policy briefs, number of new methods, solutions including emerging technologies of subsurface energy storage
- Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 5-7

TARGET 3: To better interconnect regions by joint activities with relevant initiatives and institutions

- Indicator: established working contacts with other organizations in the field of energy outside of EUSDR, number of joint activities, progress in elaborating / implementing joint activities, number of related projects
- Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 8-11

2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

The EU Energy and Climate policy framework for 2030 establishes ambitious EU commitments to make further GHG reductions (40%) in line with the cost-effective pathway described in the 2050 roadmap, for the share of RES consumed (at least 27%) and saving at least 27% energy by 2030 at EU level compared to 2007 baseline projections.

The increasing use of renewable energy sources in EU contributes to more sustainable energy production, the lower dependency of EU on imported fossil fuels and moreover drives technological innovation and employment across Europe. In the light of the EU Renewable Energy Directive from 2009, EU member states created National Renewable Energy Action Plans which set out the road map of the trajectory. Non-EU members also defined national RES targets in their national energy strategies.

RES and energy efficiency work hand in hand, therefore energy efficiency has to be increased at all stages of the energy chain from generation to final consumption. EU measures therefore focus on sectors where the potential for savings is greatest such as buildings. Heating and cooling is the largest single source of energy demand in Europe. 84% of heating and cooling is still generated from fossil fuels while only 16% is generated from renewable energy. In order to fulfil the EU's climate and energy goals, this sector must sharply reduce its energy consumption and cut its use of fossil fuels.

In addition to the heating and cooling sector, the other key area is transportation, as this is the only sector among the major greenhouse gas emission sources, which still increases its emission.

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS

Following the Europe 2030 climate and energy framework and Energy Union Strategy, one can observe increasing attempt to spread the use of RES in the Danube Region area. The available biomass, solar, wind, hydro, geothermal resource base varies significantly across the countries, therefore there is a need to further map the energy landscape to fully understand issues we are facing and the potential of the regions.

The decarbonisation of the heating sector in the Danube Region needs regional cooperation and harmonized actions in order to reduce the energy consumption of the heating sector and cut its use of fossil fuels. In addition to heating, recent trends in climate change require the adaptation of cooling systems as well, for which renewables provide excellent opportunities. This is a new challenge.

The trends of greenhouse gas emission of the transport sector are unfavourable in the Danube Region, due to the transit role of the Region and the increasing dominance of the diesel-fuelled road transportation. Thus it is of utmost importance to promote the use of alternative fuels in the Region and contribute to the implementation of the 2014/94/EU Directive at regional level.

In order to better interconnect regions the key actions of PA2 focus on improved cooperation with the Energy Community, the Carpathian Convention and with the energy-related areas and thematic groups of the other macro-regional strategies (EUSBR, EUSALP, EUSAIR), as well as other international organizations working in the field of energy policy developments (e.g. IEA, IRENA, UNECE, etc.).

The Energy Community which has been established in 2005 with the aim to implement the relevant EU energy acquis, to develop an adequate regulatory framework and to liberalise their energy markets is the most important part of the PA2 in terms of cooperation with the non-EU member state countries.

Mountain areas are of special importance in the Danube Region. With the exception of Polish Carpathians, the Carpathians mountain range extending over 450,000 km² is located within the Danube Region. International cooperation on sustainable development and protection of the Carpathians is already ongoing within the framework of the Carpathian Convention (covering SK, CZ, HU, PL, RO, RS and UKR), which is an innovative instrument to ensure protection and foster sustainable development of this outstanding region and living environment. With such geographical, but also thematic overlap, further exploration of synergies and avoiding duplication is needed in the energy field.

ACTION 1: To further explore the sustainable use of biomass, solar energy, geothermal, hydropower and wind power to increase the energy autonomy and to promote and support multipurpose cross border RES utilization projects.

- Description: Large territories of the Danube Region are rich in renewable energy resources, especially biomass, geothermal and hydropower, however their current use is far below the potentials. Coordinated actions, cross-border projects and common activities will ensure the further deployment of renewables.

ACTION 2: To promote energy efficiency and use of renewable energy in buildings and heating systems including district heating and cooling and combined heat and power facilities

- Description: In the Danube Region households' heating and hot water supply account for more than 2/3 of the total final energy use. The overwhelming part of heating is produced by the combustion of fossil fuels with a damaging environmental impact associated with greenhouse gas emissions. The decarbonisation of the heating sector in the Danube Region needs regional cooperation and harmonized actions in order to reduce the energy consumption of the heating sector and cut its use of fossil fuels.

ACTION 3: Action 3 - To promote decarbonisation of the transport sector, regarding both public and freight transportation by developing the infrastructure for alternative fuels

- Description: PA2 will focus on knowledge sharing in the field of use of alternative fuels and exchange of best practices in green transportation, thus contributing to the implementation of the 2014/94/EU Directive at regional level.

ACTION 4: To improve energy efficient, cost efficient and innovative low-carbon technologies, including smart solutions while respecting the principle of technological neutrality

- Description: New technologies and innovative solutions supporting the integration of energy efficient and smart systems are required all over the Danube Region. PA2 will focus on engaging stakeholders and providing a networking platform for brainstorming and introducing new ideas generating novel projects beyond the state-of-art in the field of sustainable use of various energy sources, applying various ground-breaking technologies.

ACTION 5: To enforce regional cooperation with the aim of supporting the implementation of projects connecting energy markets with a focus on the projects of the Central and South Eastern Europe Gas Connectivity (CESEC) initiative

- Description: The signatory countries of the CESEC initiative are committed to jointly resolve challenges related to the security of gas supply and promote source diversification by implementing coordinated actions in the Region with the ultimate goal of boosting the energy market integration. In order to contribute to the above, PA2 shall serve as a platform for discussion for the Danube countries to oversee the full and timely implementation of the CESEC Action Plan, especially moving to soft measures.

ACTION 6: To exchange best practices and to develop activities to decrease energy poverty, to increase the protection of vulnerable consumers and to empower consumers to engage in the energy market

- Description: High energy prices, low household incomes, inefficient buildings and appliances, and specific household energy needs all contribute to energy poverty, which is a serious issue in many parts of the Danube Region. PA2 therefore aims to continue raising the awareness on the need for a more comprehensive treatment of the issue in scientific and policy practice and lay the ground for an Energy Poverty Reduction Action Plan.

ACTION 7: To explore new and innovative solutions of (subsurface) energy storage

- Description: The transition to a low-carbon energy system in Europe will likely require increased storage capabilities for different energy vectors or effluents. This transition calls for a strategic planning of the various emerging technological solutions. PA2 intends to conduct a region wide state-of-art survey on these developing technologies, especially focussing on those building on the gas storage infrastructure, and enforce regional cooperation to map the energy storage potentials in the Region.

ACTION 8: To ensure that actions are coherent with the general approach of the Energy Community and with Energy Union Governance, and explore synergies between the Energy Community and the Danube Strategy processes

- Description: As the EU and non-EU countries share many common challenges in the field of energy PA2 should ensure that its actions are coherent with the general approach of the Energy Community and to support sharing of information and encouraging cooperation either on the policy level or the project level between the EU and non-EU participating countries. The PA2 should also establish working exchange of information with the Energy Community secretariat.

ACTION 9: To reinforce the Carpathian Convention to share best practices and to develop joint projects

- Description: With a geographical and thematic overlap with the Carpathian Convention, further exploration of synergies is needed in the energy field to avoid duplications. PA2 will continue and expand the already established cooperation with the secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, to enhance the possibilities for inclusive transboundary cooperation of stakeholders from all the Carpathian countries in the energy field.

ACTION 10: To encourage exchange of information and best practices to improve cooperation, create synergies and to initiate joint projects with other macro-regional initiatives and relevant stakeholders at European and global levels

- Description: In order not to duplicate efforts and to better use available resources, in the following years PA2 will pay greater attention to create possible joint initiatives and coordinated actions with the energy-related areas and thematic groups of the other macro-regional strategies (EUSBR, EUSALP, EUSAIR), as well as other international organizations working in the field of energy policy developments (e.g. IEA, IRENA, UNECE, etc.).

ACTION 11: To encourage project generation related to the energy field

- Description: PA2 is aiming to introduce the actual financing opportunities to its stakeholders, supporting them in the application process and in case the project is selected and funded, PA2 aims to support them during the implementation phase as well. The goal is to encourage macro-regional project generation related to the spread of sustainable energy usage.

FURTHER ACTIONS (IF OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE):

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3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Darlinge - Danube Region Leading Geothermal Energy

- Description: The project was successfully applied for DTP 1st call, started on the 1st Jan 2017 and ends on the 30th of Sept 2019. 15 partners representing geological surveys, university, industry, regional energy and development agencies, ministries and municipalities, assisted by 7 Associated Strategic Partners from Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Romania work together to improve energy security and efficiency in the Danube Region by promoting the sustainable utilization of the existing, however still largely untapped deep geothermal resources in the heating sector.
- Reference to Action(s): Action 1 - To further explore the sustainable use of biomass, solar energy, geothermal, hydropower and wind power to increase the energy autonomy and to promote and support multipurpose cross border RES utilization projects.

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: DanubeFEST - Flexible Energy Storage Technologies in the Danube Region

- Description: The project proposal was submitted for DTP 3rd call and plans to test a cutting-edge technology, the battery combined charger (BCC) with RES in different geographical and consumption circumstances in 8 Danube countries to substantiate flexible storage capacities for smart grids. During these pilots, BCCs' optimal configuration, the effects of storages on system supply frequency control, the available operating requirements, costs and their management will be examined. Partners will also analyze the storage capacities of the electric vehicles, elaborate local feasibility studies and a DR strategy for their integration through BCCs to the power system. The project will exploit the results of eGUTS (DTP) project by matching the findings for optimal charger locations, which is analysed from e-mobility point of view by eGUTS and from grid feeding aspects by FEST.
- Reference to Action(s): Action 4 - To improve energy efficient, cost efficient and innovative low-carbon technologies, including smart solutions while respecting the principle of technological neutrality

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: DanuP-2-Gas

- Description: The project proposal was submitted for DTP 3rd call and its main objective is to support diversification of energy sources as well as to strengthen generation and storage strategies for renewables in the Danube Region by advancing sector coupling in regional energy planning. Main planned outputs of the project are: Danube Energy Platform and Transnational Renewable Energy Atlas; Transnational Infrastructure and Biomass assessment & Pre-feasibility Study.
- Reference to Action(s):
Action 7 - To explore new and innovative solutions of (subsurface) energy storage
Action 1 - To further explore the sustainable use of biomass, solar energy, geothermal, hydropower and wind power to increase the energy autonomy and to promote and support multipurpose cross border RES utilization projects.

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Deployment of fuel cells and hydrogen applications

- Description: "Hydrogen can fulfil a systemic function for integrating all energy consuming sectors and increasing the efficiency of the overall energy infrastructure. Hydrogen can help increase the penetration and integration of decarbonised and renewable energy within our energy mix, reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and helping Europe meet its environmental and climate goals. Hydrogen can be highly efficiently stored, transported and distributed at low cost, making it the ideal energy carrier of a decarbonised, sustainable society" (HyLAW project, EU policy paper)
- Reference to Action(s): Action 3 - To promote decarbonisation of the transport sector, regarding both public and freight transportation by developing the infrastructure for alternative fuels

4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Decarbonisation of the transport system, promotion of green mobility: supporting the improvement of sustainable and low-carbon mobility in the macro-region

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA1/B, PA3, PA5, PA6, PA8

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Climate change impacts

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA5, PA6

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Sustainable development

- Reference to Priority Area(s): all PAs

PA 03 - CULTURE & TOURISM

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

TARGET 1: Establish the Danube region as important European tourist destination and further develop and strengthen the Danube Brand for the entire Danube Region

- Indicator: -
 - Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s) Action 1, Action 2, Action 3.

TARGET 2: Support the implementation of a harmonised monitoring system dedicated to sustainable tourism and cultural/natural heritage, able to provide comparable statistical data in the Danube Region.

- Indicator: -
 - Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 4, Action 5.

TARGET 3: Establish the Danube as a transnational cultural and natural travel route.

- Indicator: -
 - Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 6, Action 7.

TARGET 4: Develop sustainable forms of tourism, including green tourist products and sustainable mobility solutions along the Danube region.

- Indicator:
 - Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 8.

TARGET 5: To create a 'Blue Book' on Danube cultural identity/Build on cultural diversity and heritage as the strength of the Danube region both for the well-being of the local inhabitants and as tourism resources.

- Indicator: -
- Baseline: -

Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 4, Action 9.**TARGET 6: To ensure the sustainable preservation and contemporary interpretation of cultural heritage and natural values.**

- Indicator:
 - Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 10, Action 11, Action 12.

TARGET 7: Promote the exchange of practices and networking in the field of a.) Arts incl. contemporary arts b.) Support the creation of linkages and synergies between the cultural and creative sectors and the tourism sector.

- Indicator: -
 - Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 13.

TARGET 8: Promote the development of quality products, infrastructure and innovative forms of tourism and culture by SMEs and public private partnerships.

- Indicator: -
 - Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 14, Action 15, Action 16.

TARGET 9: Promote skilled labour workforce, education and skills development in the areas of tourism and culture for sustainable jobs in the region.

- Indicator: -
 - Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 17.

FURTHER TARGETS (IF OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE):

2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

The assessment of the achieved results shows that almost all of the PA 3's actions with a few exceptions have been partially realised. To this end have contributed a number of implemented projects, which belong to the respective action.

It is clearly demonstrated that all projects part of DTP Sub-pole 5a - Cultural values in the Danube region contribute to almost all activities included in the EUSDR PA 3 Action Plan. In the Sub-pole the following projects financed under the 1st or 2nd DTP call for proposals are included: CultPlatForm21, ART NOUVEAU, DANURb, INSIGHTS, Iron Age Danube, NETWORKLD and REDISCOVER. The implementation of these projects continues until the summer of 2019. Reasonably, they are supporting the actions related to enhancing the diversity, preservation and promotion of culture in the Danube Region.

On the other hand, the DTP projects of Sub-pole 5b - Natural values contributed towards the actions for sustainable tourism and the infrastructure for tourism. Among the five projects in this area, two are concentrating on ecological corridors by enhancing framework for management of Transboundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserve "Mura-Drava-Danube" and by addressing connectivity issues along the Danube River corridor in between the national parks. The other three project tackle issues like sustainable tourism development in geo-parks; triggering economic development in Natura2000 sites; and protection and sustainable use of natural heritage represented by karst bio-regions. Also, some DTP projects under other thematic sub-poles like Transdanube. Pearls contributed towards PA 3 actions.

At the same time, a notable development of 2018 is the involvement of other actors besides the DTP in activities contributing to the implementation of the PA 3 actions not least by exploring further the potential of the DTP projects under realisation.

The Council of Europe's Routes4U project started its work to foster regional development through some specific tools. For example, the first Routes4U meeting for the Danube Region took place on 6 November 2018 in Bucharest, Romania and was supported by the PA 3 PAC. The meeting contributed to identifying the regional needs of the Danube Region with regard to the Cultural Routes Programme and featured three (CultPlatForm21, ART NOUVEAU, Iron Age Danube) of the DTP pole 5a projects as contributing to already established cultural routes or with potential of being developed into new ones.

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS

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ACTION 1: Develop a „Smart Destination Danube“

- Description: Develop a „Smart Destination Danube“, based on sustainable quality products, including a consistent communication and marketing strategy and a common narrative of the Danube.

ACTION 2: Capitalise existing EUSDR projects in the areas of culture, nature and tourism and identify and build-on the key elements of the Danube macro identity.

Description:

ACTION 3: 1. Enhance and promote the cooperation of networks within the Danube region comprising all aspects relevant for the further sustainable development of tourism, cultural and natural heritage; 2. Creation and implementation of an Ecotourism destination Certification System at level in the Danube Region

- Description: Creation of the Ecotourism Certification System as a mechanism for putting into practice the basic principles of ecotourism, designation of ecotourism destinations, in order to ensure nature conservation and sustainable development of local communities through tourism. This is an important step in the wider context given that since March 2003 the World Tourism Organization has recommended governments to support the initiatives that promote the certification in sustainable tourism.

ACTION 4: To collect good territorial evidence on cultural activities and establish a comprehensive data base giving an overview of cultural activities in the Danube Region.

- Description: -

ACTION 5: Develop an integrated transnational network of Observatories that will collect, process and analyse data, exchange and disseminate information on sustainable tourism development on continuous basis. The networks will be a resource centre for monitoring sustainable tourism impact, based on competent research.

ACTION 6: 1. To build on cultural diversity as strength of the Danube Region, develop new and support existing Cult. Routes, protection of cultural values; 2. To promote and encourage the development of the cultural and creative sectors; 3. To ensure the digitalization of cultural resources for the preservation of the cultural memory of the Danube region; 4**ACTION 7:** Valorise the hidden heritage in the Danube region, especially in rural, less visited areas and communicate their value.

- Description: -

ACTION 8: To promote sustainable tourism with three sub actions

- Description: 1:**Promote investments in green and blue forms of tourism** incl. all forms of ecotourism, cycling, hiking and activity tourism as well as innovative SMEs active in this area; 2&3:**Develop sustainable forms of mobility and information services, improving the connectivity and accessibility of and between touristic points of interest within the Danube region but also within destinations** in order to mitigate negative effects on the environment, such as pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, congestion, noise, etc. and raise the quality of life of inhabitants and visitors alike; 3:**Further develop the Danube, its tributaries and the Black Sea into a connected sustainable cruise ship destination**, amongst others for small and medium sized boats, bringing visitors also to less visited and less developed rural areas and micro cities and for longer stays.

ACTION 9: 1. Investigate, revive and promote cultural traditions, folklore, handicrafts and other authentic activities of ethnic communities and inhabitants of the Danube region – showcasing and valorising the region’s richness and cultural diversity - for preservation, safeguarding, identity building, job creation and communication.

- 2. **Strengthening cooperation and contacts between people of different origins, encouraging creativity and stimulating cultural innovation and economic development, based on heritage, traditions and tourism.**

ACTION 10: Promote investments in the preservation, restoration and safeguarding of (in)tangible cultural heritage and natural values such as national parks or protected areas and provide access hereto. This should include the sustainable touristic valorisation of cultural sites and formats of interpretation and communication under involvement of the local communities.

ACTION 11: Develop relevant clusters and networks of museums, interpretation and visitor centres as well as on intangible heritage within the Danube region.

ACTION 12: Enhance cooperation of science and research with the cultural heritage, natural heritage and tourism sector.

ACTION 13: Promote and further develop the Danube LIMES and encourage the further development of proposals for UNESCO World heritage encompassing the whole of the Danube region and develop interpretation, communication and marketing strategies for its touristic valorisation.

ACTION 14: To promote investments into the upgrading of quality of existing or new quality products and infrastructure as well as innovative forms of tourism and culture by SMEs and public private partnerships, creating jobs in the region.

- Description: -

ACTION 15: Promote strategies, concepts, networking and investments in new technologies/digitalization in the area of tourism and culture/cultural and natural heritage.

- Description: -

ACTION 16: To promote the development of wellness and health tourism in the region

- Description: -

ACTION 17: Promote further skills and education development to attract and empower people for quality jobs in the area of tourism and culture, considering the needs of the industry. Facilitate mobility schemes for people active in or studying the areas of tourism or culture.

- Description: -

FURTHER ACTIONS (IF OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE): included in annex Targets & Actions submitted by PA 3

3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Integrated Danube-wide strategic projects aiming at the elaboration of new, nation-wide topics and common narratives of the Danube region

- Description: 1. The Danube as a partner country at the ITB Berlin – considered to be the world leading travel show; 2. The Danube as a partner country at the Frankfurt Book Fair – positioning and demonstrating the potential and diversity of (contemporary) literature in the Danube region, contributing to a common narrative of the whole region from different perspectives; 3. Development of an international Danube travelling exhibition – Exhibiting in Europe, USA, China and Russia – diverse artefacts demonstrating the diversity and cultural/natural treasures/also hidden heritage as well as contemporary arts to an interested public, contributing to the creation of a common narrative of the Danube.
- Reference to Action(s): To establish the Danube Region as important European tourist destination; Develop a „Smart Destination Danube“

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Development of a SWOT analysis for the Danube tourism

- Description: Development of a SWOT analysis for the Danube tourism, especially concentrated on the Middle and Lower Danube as this will give a rather broad picture of the existing not only tourism offers and structures, but also of the existing or lacking transport and other infrastructure (like social services, heritage, environmental protection etc.)
- Reference to Action(s): Promote investments into the upgrading of quality of existing or in new quality products and infrastructure as well as innovative forms of tourism and culture by SMEs and public private partnerships, creating jobs in the region.

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Sustainable development monitoring activity in the Danube Region

- Description: Development of an integrated project aimed at using information technology for the sustainable development monitoring activity in the Danube Region
- Reference to Action(s): To develop sustainable tourism

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Fund for small projects

- Description: Setting up a fund to support small, partial, very simple but real solutions, without complicated cooperation with a large number of partners in other EUSDR countries.
- Reference to Action(s): Promote exchange of practices and networking in the fields of arts, incl. contemporary arts and support the creation of linkages and synergies between the cultural and creative sectors and the tourism sector.

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Danube Platform for Intercultural Dialogue

- Description: The project aims to strengthen joint and integrated approaches to preserve and manage the diversity of natural and cultural heritage and resources in the Danube region as a basis for sustainable development and growth strategies.
- Reference to Action(s): 1. To ensure the digitalization of cultural resources for the preservation of the cultural memory of the Danube Area; 2. To build on cultural diversity as strength of the Danube Region;

3. To enhance cooperation and contacts between people of different origins, to encourage creativity, and provide a driving force for cultural innovation and economic development, based on heritage, traditions and tourism

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: NEON platform– digital project

- Description: "NEON - Platform"- digital project that aims to create a common framework for theatres of ethnic minorities in the Danubian Europe through which they can affirm themselves, they can present their achievements and artistic performances to a wider audience. The "NEON - Platform" project aims at creating a network/platform for contemporary theatrical arts in the countries of the Danube Region, members of the EUSDR, with the purpose of facilitating intercultural dialogue by enhancing regional cooperation. The EU countries that are targeted by the project are: Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Republic Czech, Croatia, Germania (as a federal state and through Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria), Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary. However, the initiative will go beyond EU borders and will also include non-Eu states that are part of the EUSDR, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.
- Reference to Action(s): Promoting cultural and artistic exchanges, valorisation of cultural diversity as a resource of the Danube Region; Strengthening cooperation and contacts between people of different origins, encouraging creativity and stimulating cultural innovation and economic development based on heritage, traditions and tourism

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: The Digital Atlas of Patrimony/Heritage

- Description: The Digital Atlas of Patrimony/Heritage accumulates in an online database all elements of built and archaeological heritage on the territory of an administrative-territorial authority, ranked in the List of Historical Monuments and/or the National Archaeological Repertory or non- classified but valued heritage assets registered in the urban plans. The information of this database would become accessible to the general public, The Digital Atlas of Patrimony is designed to promote these. Throughout the project the initiators intend to continue the process of marking the elements of patrimony. Target audience consisting of students, the public and private sector, historians, archaeologists, architects and engineers etc. The project is also part of the theme and direction of action that Romania promotes within the mandate of the EU SDR Presidency. Improving connectivity and mobility in the Danube Region by promoting transport, tourism, digitalization and people-to-people contact.
- Reference to Action(s): Valorisation of cultural diversity as a resource of the Danube Region; Strengthening cooperation and contacts between people of different origins, encouraging creativity and stimulating cultural innovation and economic development based on heritage, traditions and tourism.

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Fostering enhanced ecotourism planning along the Eurovelo cycle route network in the Danube region"

- Description: EcoVeloTour facilitates the development of sustainable tourism in the Danube region along EuroVelo routes via enhanced, conscious and ecologically sound framework of tourism destination management and extending cyclist tourism, unfolding neighbouring regions beyond the EuroVelo route. The regions will capitalize on cultural and natural heritage, through the integration of the ecosystem service framework into ecotourism planning, that enable the attentive maintenance of high ecosystem provisions that contribute to the well-being of the region including ecotourism stakeholders in the long run. The framework will be strongly support by sustainable mobility guidelines that is key element in comprehensive ecotourism planning, esp. in the case of cyclist ecotourism.
- Reference to Action(s): -

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Promotion and development of cultural and creative industries

- Description: Business support - loans and guarantees; Export support - participation in fairs, festivals and international projects + home shows for potential investors; Promotion of Creativity in Education - Artist as a Teacher; Support of the original artistic creation - creation as a research; Link to a wider political and industrial platform; Creativity for life.
- Reference to Action(s):

4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Road, rail and water transport; The development of tourism is linked to the quality of transport services and transport infrastructure, a focus on sustainable forms of transport should be made. This is most evident when it comes to cross-border tourism offers or cultural routes.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 1A, PA 1B

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Security; Security has been transformed into a central issue when it comes to travel planning. Taking this into account, in 2016 PA 3 and the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism organized a high-level conference on Sustainability on Tourism Development and Security.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 11

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Human resources, education and skills; PAs can cooperate with other PAs in order to improve the human resources and to exchange best practices in the field of trainings, life-long learning programs, ICT skills, etc.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 9

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Energy efficiency in tourism; the opportunities for cooperation between PA 2 and PA 3 are in the sphere of application of new technologies and advanced concepts: such as smart cities, green transport and circular economy.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 2

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: 1. SMEs and entrepreneurship, cultural and creative industries; 2. Entrepreneurship in culture and tourism is considered to be a generator of economic growth and regional cohesion. This is of joint interest for PA 3 and PA 8; 3. Digitalization of cultural resources; 4. Rehabilitation of the historical resources

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 8; PA 7 and PA 9

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Biodiversity and environmental protection; this is a cross-cutting link not only to tourism, but also to transport and water quality. Climate change is also a topic that affects all the member states and for that reason its implications have to be jointly managed.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 5, PA 6

PA 04 - WATER QUALITY

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

TARGET 1: Contribute to preventing and reducing water pollution from point and diffuse sources in the Danube Region, especially related to organic substances, nutrients, hazardous and emerging substances i.a. by enhancing waste water treatment and by promoting best management practices

- Indicators:
 - progress in chemical status of surface waters in the Danube River basin;
 - progress in ecological status of surface waters related to organic substances, nutrients and river basin specific substances in the Danube River basin;
 - reduction of organic, nutrient and hazardous substances emissions discharged into surface water bodies in the Danube River basin;
 - percentage of population connected to appropriate wastewater infrastructure in the Danube River basin;
 - percentage of agricultural areas receiving funds for agri-environmental and climate measures
- Baseline: Characterization as a basis for the 1st International Danube RBMP
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 1, 2, 3

TARGET 2: Contribute to protecting water resources and safeguarding drinking water supply

- Indicator: percentage of population supplied from safe drinking water resources
- Baseline: Characterization as a basis for the 1st International Danube RBMP
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 4

TARGET 3: Enhance conservation measures of Danube migratory fish species

- Indicator: number of measures related to conservation of Danube migratory fish species
- Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 5

TARGET 4: Enhance climate change adaptation measures related to water quality

- Indicator: number of climate change adaptation measures related to water quality
- Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 6

TARGET 5: Assist in elaborating / implementing sub-basin management plans, such as Sava, Tisza and Prut sub-basins as well as a Danube Delta management plan

- Indicators:
 - progress in elaborating / implementing sub-basin management plans;
 - number of related projects
- Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 7

2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

The updated Action Plan of the Priority Area 4 "Water Quality" has been discussed with the PA4 SG several times, agreed on and considered as good basis for the future work.

The number of actions have been reduced since the last Action Plan and the targets and projects revised. Indicators were identified for the targets.

Due to the fact that this guidance arrived late in the process, the structure of the revised Action Plan agreed by the SG is different from this format and as a consequence not all the text agreed could have been inserted into this paper due to character limits, please also refer to the annexed original document approved by the SG.

The EUSDR PA4 Action Plan contributes to the implementation of the following initiatives at Danube, EU and international level:

- EU water legislation, especially Water Framework Directive, Priority Substances Directive, Groundwater Directive, Drinking Water Directive and its revision, Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive
- EU Resource efficiency roadmap
- EU Biodiversity Strategy
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- EU Plastics Strategy
- EU Circular Economy Strategy
- Pan-European Sturgeon Action Plan in the framework of the Bern Convention
- Sturgeon 2020 Strategy
- Paris Agreement on Climate Change
- EU and Danube Climate Change Adaptation Strategies of the EU and ICPDR
- EU Strategic Approach to Pharmaceuticals
- EU Common Agricultural Policy

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS

General PA4 objective: realization of integrated river basin management measures in the Danube Region in line with the EU Water Framework Directive and with the International Danube River Basin Management Plan (DRBMP) in order to save human health and freshwater ecosystems. Contribute to the implementation of the DRBMP and its Joint Programme of Measures based on the "Joint PA4-PA5-ICPDR Paper on Cooperation and Synergy for the EUSDR Implementation" for the development of the Danube Region.

ACTION 1: HAZARDOUS & EMERGING SUBSTANCES: Promote monitoring, prevention and reduction of water pollution deriving from hazardous and emerging substances (EU priority substances and watch list candidates as well as Danube basin specific pollutants candidates and others e.g. micro plastics-plastics, pharmaceuticals, PFOS)

- Description:
 - Close knowledge gaps on monitoring of hazardous and emerging substances in surface waters, biota and sediment
 - Determine sources and pathways of hazardous and emerging substances emissions
 - Quantify water emissions and loads
 - Implement prevention and mitigation measures including a more comprehensive evaluation of measures efficiency
 - Contribute to capacity building in monitoring, modelling and management of hazardous substances pollution
 - Contribute to improved quality of sediments

ACTION 2: WASTE WATER: Continue boosting major investments in building, upgrading, maintaining and rehabilitating urban wastewater treatment facilities and promote alternative collection and treatment of wastewater in small rural settlements, including measures to build capacity at the regional and local level across the Danube basin

- Description:
 - Identify means to finance infrastructure projects especially in EU Member States joined after 2007 and non-EU countries
 - Focus on investments in maintenance and rehabilitation of the existing infrastructure
 - Enhance and disseminate knowledge on wastewater treatment technologies also considering emerging substances
 - Assist in strengthening capacity at national and local administration level as well as at utility level to improve financing, operation and technology of the wastewater infrastructure and services
 - promote alternative collection and treatment of wastewater in small rural settlements, including measures to build capacity at the regional and local level

ACTION 3: WATER & AGRICULTURE: Promote prevention and reduction of diffuse pollution, promote nutrient retention, smart irrigation and water reuse, foster and develop an active process of dialogue and cooperation between authorities responsible for agriculture and environment to ensure that measures are taken to address diffuse pollution and ensure smart water use

- Description:
 - Decouple pollution and water scarcity from agricultural development
 - Improve water demand management in agriculture by smart irrigation and water reuse in order to reduce water abstraction needs
 - Make agro-environmental measures more attractive
 - Provide appropriate information on modern technologies and tools to improve agricultural practices
 - Close knowledge gaps on measures efficiency
 - Raise awareness related to the link between agricultural practices, water and soil quality and biodiversity
 - Contribute to CAP national strategic plans

ACTION 4: DRINKING WATER: Promote measures aimed at reducing knowledge deficits related to protecting water resources and safeguarding drinking water supply

- Description:
 - Contribute to resource efficiency and encourage deliberate and effective water consumption and a water saving culture by the civil and industrial consumers
 - Raise public awareness towards the environment friendly, economic, efficient and safe water uses as well as strengthening the environmental consciousness of the public using social media, information materials and targeted guidance documents
 - Promote water protection and pollution reduction from the source to tap, according to the proposed revision of the Drinking Water Directive
 - Ensure safe drinking water supply via water quality early warning and safeguard zones

ACTION 5: MIGRATORY FISH: Promote measures to enable fish migration in the Danube River basin

- Description:
 - Raise broad public awareness and political commitment for the Danube sturgeons as flagship species for the Danube River Basin and for the ecosystems and biodiversity of the Danube River Basin as a whole
 - Foster sturgeon conservation activities including protection of habitats, restoration of fish migration routes and ex-situ conservation measures
 - Close knowledge gaps concerning monitoring of pressures and planning of measures for fish protection in migration

ACTION 6: CLIMATE CHANGE: Promote measures to adapt to climate change impacts in relation to water quality

- Description:
 - Implement water quality measures of the ICPDR Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change
 - Promote measures to control water abstraction and groundwater overexploitation
 - Promote the establishment and maintenance of green infrastructure and natural water retention measures (NWRMs)
 - Promote water related measures in urban planning
 - Raise awareness about the importance of soil moisture and soil water retention capacity in soil fertility under changing climate conditions

ACTION 7: TOOLS: Enhance cooperation, increase and exchange knowledge and secure financing to water quality measures in the Danube Region

- Description:
 - Ensure active involvement of and dialogue with all stakeholders
 - with national and regional, urban and rural decision makers, public authorities;
 - with sectors (agriculture, industry, mining, hydropower, navigation etc.);
 - with the general public including awareness raising and education
 - Strengthen territorial cooperation at different levels
 - at EU level and with non-EU countries taking into account the regional differences;
 - with other macro-regional strategies;
 - at EUSDR level with other PAs, especially with PA 1a on inland navigation, PA 5 on environmental risks, PA 6 on biodiversity and PA7 on education;
 - at Danube level with ICPDR based on the "Joint PA4-PA5-ICPDR Paper on Cooperation and Synergy for the EUSDR Implementation" by contributing to the implementation of DRBMP and its JPM;
 - at sub-basin level considering Danube tributaries (e.g. Sava, Prut, Tisza);
 - at river section level (upstream, middle, downstream, Danube Delta);
 - at Operational Programme level;

- at trans-boundary project level with targeted result collection, capitalization, enhancing synergies;
 - including surface and groundwater as well as Marine coastal zones (impacts on Black Sea)
 - with other international commissions and organization related to water protection, e.g. Global Water Partnership (Memorandum of Understanding) and Carpathian Convention (MoU)
- Continue to support ICPDR in further developing water information systems in the Danube region
 - Strengthen and facilitate exchange of good practice in integrated water management implementation in the Danube Basin among decision-makers at all levels and all sectors
 - Identify transboundary funds, which could finance and invest in measures outlined in the joint programme
 - Collect information on water related financing needs

3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY:

- **Harmonize knowledge on hazardous water pollution, including emission pathways, coordinate prioritization of transnational measures and management strategies, improve expertise and skills in controlling and managing water pollution**
e.g. DanubeHazard project
- **Carry out targeted monitoring campaigns in the Danube River and in its tributaries**
e.g. Joint Danube Survey; Joint Tisza Survey; Trimonitor project
- **Raising awareness, prevention and clean-up of plastic pollution**
e.g. Plastic Cup project
- **Contribute to the EU plastics strategy e.g. microplastic monitoring in the Danube Region and its link to saving the Marine environment; impact of microplastics on ecosystems, especially on migratory fish species;**
- **Macro-regional cooperation on hazardous substances e.g. cooperation with EUSBSR on pharmaceuticals,**
- **Contribute to the activities related to the EU Strategic approach to pharmaceuticals**
e.g. boDEREC-CE project
- **Measuring and assessing sediment quality in surface waters in a comparable way in the Danube Region**
e.g. SIMONA project
- Reference to Action(s): 1

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY:

- **Assess investment needs in waste water technologies in the EU Member States joined after 2007 and non-EU countries including needs for maintaining the new investments,**
- **Contribute to the implementation of the EIB strategic approach on waste water investments in the Danube Region to fill the gaps,**
- **Monitor waste water effluents from potential hotspots to detect emerging pollutants e.g. pharmaceuticals,**
- **Prepare e-learning material to waste water administration and utilities**
- Reference to Action(s):2

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY:

- **Promote sustainable agricultural practices including buffer strips and sustainable use of pesticides;**
- **Raise awareness about the importance of good water quality, soil moisture and soil functions;**
- **Support the implementation of the ICPDR guidance document on sustainable agriculture;**
- **Promote smart irrigation and water reuse in line with the EU proposal on the minimum requirements of water reuse in agricultural irrigation**
- **Provide information about prevention and mitigation measures related to overexploitation**
- Reference to Action(s): 3

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY:

- Promote managed aquifer recharge (e.g. DEEPWATER project),
- Focus on microbiological water quality: i.a. investigation of antimicrobial resistant micro-organisms, in both tap water and drinking water resources;
- Establish basin-wide real-time monitoring in order to ensure early warning of drinking water suppliers about pollution putting in risk safeguard zones;
- Raise awareness about resource efficiency, water saving culture, effective water consumption and uses
- Reference to Action(s): 4

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY:

- Create ecological corridors for migratory fish species and initiate protection measures along the Danube and its main tributaries (e.g. MEASURES project);
- Link ecological status of waters to hydro-morphological measures carried out in order to restore ecological corridors for migratory fish;
- Raise public and political awareness on Danube sturgeons as flagship species for the Danube River Basin
- Find solution to restore fish migration at the Iron Gates, contribute to the implementation of the full feasibility study
- Reference to Action(s): 5

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY:

- Assess water quality elements of national climate change strategies towards transnational solutions;
- Assess national water balance calculation methodologies towards a transnational methodology including ecological flow;
- Assess methodologies of prioritization of water uses and their usability under different climate change scenarios
- Promote natural water retention measures (NWRMs) in urban areas, agriculture, hydro-morphology and forestry to improve water quality, e.g. via wetland reconnection, re-meandering and restoring the ecological functionalities;
- Promote managed aquifer recharge (e.g. DEEPWATER project)
- Reference to Action(s): 6

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY:

- Organize stakeholder workshops to bring together the relevant stakeholder communities;
- Establish information exchange and common activities and platform with water experts of other macro-regional strategies;
- Assist in elaborating / implementing sub-basin management plans, such as Sava, Tisza and Prut sub-basins as well as a Danube Delta management plan (e.g. follow-up of JOINTISZA project, e.g. Sava RBMP update, e.g. ICZM at the Danube Delta)
- Organize capitalization of the results of different water quality related international projects;
- Raise general awareness and promote IWRM approach in the population of the Region
- Reference to Action(s): 7

4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Adaptation to climate change

- Reference to Priority Area(s): all PAs

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Inland navigation, hydro morphology; Good ecological status of waters and good navigation status

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 1/a

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Hydropower and hydro morphology related to e.g. migratory fish; Green energy

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA2

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Floods and droughts management, accidental pollution control etc.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA5

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Biodiversity, nature-based solutions, migratory fish, soil protection etc.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA6

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Education, knowledge sharing, awareness raising on water

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA7

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Institutional capacity to improve multilevel governance and project generation (TAF-DRP, START, DSPF)

- Reference to Priority Area: PA10

PA 05 - ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

TARGET 1: To address the challenges of water scarcity and droughts in line with the Danube River Basin Management Plan – Update 2015, the report on the impacts of droughts in the Danube Basin in 2015 (due in 2016) and the ongoing work in the field of climate adaptation.

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 5. Anticipate regional and local impacts of climate change

TARGET 2: Provide and enhance continuous support to the implementation of the Danube Flood Risk Management Plan – adopted in 2015 in line with the EU Floods Directive – to achieve significant reductions of flood risk events by 2021, also taking into account potential impacts of climate change and adaptation strategies.

- Indicator: updated Danube Flood Risk Management Plan
- Baseline: 1st Flood Risk Management Plan of the Danube River Basin-
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 1. Provide sufficient support for development and execution of risk management plans for different hazards; 5. Anticipate regional and local impacts of climate change

TARGET 3: To continuously update the existing database of accident hazard spots (AHS Inventory), contaminated sites and tailing management facilities.

- Indicator: AHS Inventory
- Baseline: -
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 4. Decrease human impacts that evolves natural risk factors resulting environmental damages

TARGET 4: To support the assessment of disaster risks in the Danube Region, encouraging actions to promote disaster resilience, preparedness and response activities in line with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 3. Strengthen disaster prevention and preparedness among governmental and non-governmental organizations

2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

Priority Area 5 has implemented 8 actions set up in the Roadmap, all of them broadly formulated to follow the objectives of the Floods Directive (FD) mainly. EUSDR PA5 action plan also significantly contribute to the implementation of the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (presented in 2013), the Seveso III Directive (adopted in 2012 amending and subsequently repealing Council Directive 96/82/EC), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (adopted at the Third UN World Conference in Sendai, Japan, on March 18, 2015) and support the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in the Danube Region. Due to the fact, that the FD implementation process runs until 2021 and then flood risk management plans shall be updated in every six years and in case of the SEVESO III the first Commission report is due on September 2020 (and every four years thereafter), also the EU climate change adaptation strategy its currently under evaluation none of the actions has been fully accomplished, although remarkable steps were taken. Stressing the strategic role of the International Commission for the Protection of Danube River (ICPDR) and their Flood Risk Management and River Basin Management Plans, the majority of actions have been prepared and are implemented in cooperation with ICPDR. EU JRC has been the main partner in early warning and climate change prediction issues. ICPDR published in last year 2018 the updated Strategy on Adaption to Climate Change for the Danube, PA5 express the strong cooperation on the CC adaption.

Moreover, cooperation has started with the Carpathian Convention (MoU was signed in 2017), under the frame of the MoU PA5 express the cooperation by implementation the Carpathian Convention

Climate Change article for the region. On the field of integrated drought management with the GWP CEE (MoU signed in 2019).

All actions formulated in the current Action Plan are important for the future period as well and should be further developed. Although they could be regrouped, updated/reformulated and complemented by new emerging issues identified during the implementation of the PA5 Action Plan (e.g. drought and water scarcity policy responses, natural water retention measures, joint field exercises for improved preparedness, plastic litter transported by floods etc.) to be in line with the related policies.

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS -

Floods and drought and low flow events, as well as water scarcity situations, are likely to become more intense, longer and more frequent for the next period. In recent years, most notably in 2002, 2006, 2013 and in the summer of 2014, parts of the Danube River Basin District were being affected by very strong or extreme flooding events. These events, with return periods of up to 100 years and above, caused significant human and economic damages in the affected countries and communities. In 2006, 4 casualties were reported in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and the costs and damages amounted to almost 600 million Euro in the whole basin. In 2010, there were 35 casualties, and damages of around 2 billion Euro occurred, a figure which was even surpassed in 2013 (2,3 billion Euro damages, mostly in Germany and Austria; additionally, 9 casualties were also reported from Austria and Romania). And, most recent, the Sava River Basin in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Serbia was hit very hard in May 2014, affecting 2,6 million people, killing 79, and causing almost 4 billion Euros damage in the three countries.

In 2015 significant parts of the Danube River Basin were affected by droughts which negatively impacted different water-dependent economic sectors, vegetation and the aquatic environment. This is the latest of a series of events which occurred in Europe during the last decade. The widespread droughts in 2003 have affected over 100 million people, a third of the EU territory¹. They were followed by events that have affected portions of Northern, Southern, and Western Europe in 2007, 2011, and 2012. These recent trends highlight the significance of the issue in some regions of Europe, specifically in the context of climate change.

ACTION 1: Provide sufficient support for development and execution of risk management plans for different hazards

- Description: 1.1 Collaborate with ICPDR in order to perform DFRMP (forecasting, information exchange on the operation of hydraulic structures, flood management plans, elements of FRMP, flood protection education/training network); 1.2 Promote sustainable floodplain management including green infrastructure; 1.3 Foster basin wide management planning on specific issues; 1.4 Support relevant actors in developing risk assessment related to droughts, forest fires and other climate change related disaster risks

ACTION 2: Enhance the capacities and extend the coverage of basin-wide or regional forecasting and warning systems and develop rapid response procedures

- Description: 2.1 Create stronger links and synergies between the European information systems, like European Flood Awareness System and the European Forest Fire Information System, and the national or regional early warning systems to support preparedness efforts at regional level; 2.2 Support the development of the DanubeHIS system; 2.3 Support regular Accidental Early Warning System (AEWS) maintenance, testing and usage; 2.4 Support drought forecasting and drought management in the Danube basin

ACTION 3: Strengthen disaster prevention and preparedness among governmental and non-governmental organizations

- Description: 3.1 Support joint preparedness activities of disaster response actors (professionals and volunteers at operational, tactical and strategic level); 3.2. Harmonized training and capacity building of civil protection units (based on UCPM) to improve coordination, interoperability, procedures and self-sufficiency; 3.3. Support disaster risk reduction at regional and local level, raising public awareness; 3.4. Innovation and technology to support disaster response (VR, drone, IT solutions, mapping)

ACTION 4: Decrease human impacts that evolves natural risk factors resulting environmental damages

- Description: 4.1 Support completion of the ICPDR Accidental Hazard Sites (AHS), Contaminated Sites (CS) and Mining Sites (MS) geodatabase; 4.2 Identify potential challenges and solutions regarding rapid response procedures in case of industrial accidents; 4.3 Overview man-made structures or reservoirs as disaster risk hot spots

ACTION 5: Anticipate regional and local impacts of climate change

- Description: 5.1 Facilitate the harmonization or coordination of the different level climate change adaptation (CCA) strategies and action plans to boost international collaboration ; 5.2 Exploring direct effects of climate change and implement mitigation measures in environmental risk management plans; 5.3 Support research in the field of climate change adaptation; 5.4 Support natural small water retention measures

3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: DAREFFORT

- Description: A forecasting system that is based on the cooperation between the Danube Basin countries is the main objective. The project will deliver an overview about the present status of the national forecasting capabilities. The partners jointly work out the policy recommendations to be submitted to ICPDR in the interest of the establishment of the Danube Hydrological Information System (DanubeHIS). The main focus is to enhance the access to the recorded hydrologic and ice data and to provide harmonized distribution for all the countries in the Danube catchment. For this purpose, for all partners interface software will be installed to provide standardized data services also as data source for EFAS. The partners will collect the inputs from stakeholders and other interested parties in national expert workshops and results of professional discussions the international level by the Danube Forecasting Forums (DAFF). Timeframe: 01-06-2018 - 31-05-2021
- Reference to Action(s): 1. Provide sufficient support for development and execution of risk management plans for different hazards; 2. Enhance the capacities and extend the coverage of basin-wide or regional forecasting and warning systems and develop rapid response procedures

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: DriDanube

- Description: The main objective of DriDanube project is to increase the capacity of the Danube region to manage drought related risks. Currently the drought management is reactive, dealing mainly with losses and damages, cooperation between key actors is missing and formal legislation mostly does not exist. Proactive approach on the other hand counts on drought prevention, mitigation, vulnerability reduction, planning and preparedness. One of the main products of the project will be Drought User Service, which will enable more accurate and efficient drought monitoring and timely early warning. DriDanube will harmonize the currently heterogeneous methodologies for risk and impact assessments. The current slow reactions during drought will be sped up with the improved decision-making process in all parts of the drought management cycle. (2017.01.01 - 2019.06.30.)
- Reference to Action(s): 2. Enhance the capacities and extend the coverage of basin-wide or regional forecasting and warning systems and develop rapid response procedures

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Danube Floodplain

- Description: The main objective of the project is improving transnational water management and flood risk prevention while maximizing benefits for biodiversity conservation. The expected change is improved knowledge, among the countries located within Danube River Basin, related to integrative water management through restoration of floodplains, combination of classical and green infrastructure, natural retention measures, involving all related stakeholders. The main activities of the project are: updating the floodplain areas inventory and their ranking using the Floodplain Evaluation Matrix-FEM; assessing, by using the pre-selected pilot areas, of the efficiency of floodplain projects in the Danube District and developing tools for increasing the knowledge and cooperation of experts, practitioners, decision makers and stakeholders on floodplain restoration. Timeframe: 01-06-2018 - 30-11-2020

- Reference to Action(s): 1. Provide sufficient support for development and execution of risk management plans for different hazards

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: DANICE

- Description: Danube River basin ICE conveyance investigation and icy flood management. The ice management in the Danube Basin is an important issue, but not all the countries have to face with equally severe consequences of the ice transport. The initiative aims to create Danube Basin Ice Management Plan. It would reveal the actual ice situation and the probable effects of the ice conveyance. The project shall deliver national and basin-wide operative resource management plan for icy flood or other certain situations together with mitigation measures. Harmonization of ice management planning methods and recommendations for common standards are part of the proposal, too.
- Reference to Action(s): 1. Provide sufficient support for development and execution of risk management plans for different hazards

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: DAREnet

- Description: DAREnet supports flood management practitioners across the EU Danube River region to deepen and broaden their Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) related collaboration. The project is financed by EU Horizon2020 programme. DAREnet builds a multi-disciplinary community of practitioners, operating in a network of civil protection organisations, and supported by a broad range of stakeholders to foster synergies, innovation and its uptake. DAREnet presents a regularly updated RDI Roadmap highlighting innovation opportunities to cope with the main challenges in the region. It provides concrete perspectives for further development, industrialisation and uptake of innovations of highest relevance for practitioners, and lays the basis for concrete innovation initiatives, practitioner-driven and “bottom-up”. DAREnet draws upon synergies with the modules and facilities of the EUCPM and the regional strategies for flood prevention and risk management of the ICPDR and EUSDR.(2017-2022)
- Reference to Action(s): 3. Strengthen disaster prevention and preparedness among governmental and non-governmental organizations

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: MUNICIPAL-AID

- Description: Danube region is exposed to flood events, often of impressive scale and frequency. Countries share the burden of these events, therefore Danube Transnational Programme identified floods as one of the most relevant natural hazards (1.1.1.8). MUNICIPAL-AID as a transnational, action-driven initiative aims to serve an enhanced preparedness and capacity for intervention with better coordination between different actors. While keeping the focus on the transnational needs, the initiative puts regional and local actors into motion. Local knowledge and the involvement of the affected communities are cross-cutting issues in all mentioned policies. Supporting preparedness in lower levels is a key in the strategies, MUNICIPAL-AID pilots actions related to the training and coordination of flood rescue assets.
- Reference to Action(s): 3. Strengthen disaster prevention and preparedness among governmental and non-governmental organizations

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Revital 1

- Description: The main goal is to set the foundation for the establishment of the revitalization process of the Soltvyno mine and surrounding area through deepened cross-border cooperation between Transcarpathia and adjacent areas. It has 3 specific objectives: 1. to examine and evaluate the current environmental state of the Soltvyno salt mine and its wider surroundings with the aid of the cutting-edge technology, 2. to prepare the establishment of a complex monitoring system fitting into the wider regional framework for tracking the surface and near subsurface water qualitative and quantitative changes and the soil movements. 3. to raise awareness and promote the results of the project on different levels. This is important not only for the Soltvyno administration and its population, but due to the nature of the problem, also the settlements along the border and along the River Tisza basin. The project will also draft Strategic Concept Note. (May 2019 - May 2021)
- Reference to Action(s): 3. Strengthen disaster prevention and preparedness among governmental and non-governmental organizations

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: LAREDAR

- Description: Along the Danube River and on its tributaries, there are several reservoirs, dams and lakes available for different purposes (water storage and retention). Reservoirs have great impact on flood risk management, in case of coordinated operation they contribute to flood peak reduction. The planned LAREDAR Project's results would be a permanent cooperation of national-level operational management systems for optimizing the management of dams and reservoirs for an optimal flood propagation. Regarding to the impacts of climate change (for example heavy rain, flash flood), it has a significant importance to use reservoirs for water retention in case of low water periods to mitigate the negative effects of drought as an integrated element of the project. LAREDAR Project is planned to be realized in the whole Danube River Basin which is in the geographical scope of the EUSDR. The project results contribute to the implementation of EUSDR PA 5 and the Danube Flood Risk Management Plan.
- Reference to Action(s): 4. Decrease human impacts that evolves natural risk factors resulting environmental damages

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: PROFOUND

- Description: Flood rescue activities are supported for more than a decade by the Hungarian, Serbian and Romanian river rescue NGOs and volunteer fire brigades in the Danube Region. The aim is to develop these assets to be available for international response eventually, to take the first step to meet the requirements of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism and its modules. The volunteer organizations will adapt their procedures to the international standards, which eventually allow interoperability between UCPM modules. The training of trainers ensures sustainability of trained team members, also effective knowledge transfer. The results and the readiness of the units will be tested in multiple full-scale field exercises, simulating parallel flooding in Tisza and Danube Rivers.
- Reference to Action(s): 3. Strengthen disaster prevention and preparedness among governmental and non-governmental organizations

STRATEGIC PROJECTS OR ACTIVITIES: (IF OF STRETEGIC IMPORTANCE):

- **FloodUZH:** The project target area is the catchment area of Uzh River, shared between Ukraine and Slovakia, which covers mountain and flat country as well. Main problems of the basin are flash floods and scarcity of water in summer and early fall. This issue threatens sustainable development of 44 settlements of the transboundary area. The project focuses on the solution of the mentioned problems by flood modelling, mapping, development of a DTM and GIS database to support decision making process in flood protection and water resources management. The project will contribute to the cooperation towards sustainable and integrated water management considering potential impacts of climate change in line with EU Flood Directive and WFD. The project realization will greatly enhance cooperation in the basin, good practice of which could be used as a model in other areas of the Danube basin. The project brings together WM organizations, population, municipalities of EU Member and non-Member States; Reference to Action: 1. Provide sufficient support for development and execution of risk management plans for different hazards
- **WAPCOS:** Focusing on accidental pollution risk management in the Sava and Tisza sub-catchment. The project is building upon the existing structure (ICPDR) tools and processes (APC groups, AEWS, PIAC) upgrading them with rapid response procedures, emergency management plans and web-based accidental pollution rapid response system toolbox. Main objective – to address the specific environmental risk - accidental pollution. Specific objectives – to improve water management component (pollution sources, vulnerability) – to improve accidental pollution event management (civil protection) – to improve the response – lessons learnt during the Tisza cyanide pollution accident and Danube aluminium sludge accidental pollution; Reference to Action: 4. Decrease human impacts that evolves natural risk factors resulting environmental damages
- **SAFETISZA:** The project target area is common Batar melioration system in the Upper Tisza, where the water systems of Hungary and Ukraine are closely linked. In this area occurs both overabundance and scarcity of water which threaten its sustainable development. The project focuses on the solution of these two key problems especially flood and inland water prevention by dike, channel and hydraulic structures reconstruction. The project will contribute to the cooperation towards sustainable and integrated water management considering potential impacts of climate change. The project realization will reduce flood risks in the sub-basin, greatly enhance cooperation, good practice of which could be used as a model in other areas of the Danube basin, help to solve problems that cannot be dealt at

national level alone. The project brings together stakeholders - water management organisations, municipalities and authorities of an EU Member and non-Member State, NGO's and population of target region; Reference to Action: 1. Provide sufficient support for development and execution of risk management plans for different hazards

- **DAMWARM:** The project initiative is based on the experiences of heavy flooding by Drava and Mura rivers in recent years (especially in 2012) and on expectations related to climate change and increased flooding intensity. Learning from that, substantially improved flood safety can be only achieved through transnational approach of affected countries, represented by key actors from the field – competent water management authorities and operators. The main objective is to deliver an advanced system of water&flood risk management for entire Drava (fourth largest Danube tributary) and Mura as main tributary through setting-up of a transnational Flood Forecasting Centre (FFC) and optimal policy for infrastructure operations. FFC will integrate relevant data from all partner countries in new flood forecasting system which will enable HPP operators to coordinate actions at flooding events, and early warning & response organizations, local communities and citizens to react sooner and more effective; Reference to Action: 2. Enhance the capacities and extend the coverage of basin-wide or regional forecasting and warning systems and develop rapid response procedures
- **ICPDR APC EG - TMF:** The APC EG started an activity on the tailings' management facilities, which pose a high hazard of accidental pollution in the DRB. The APC EG suggested to start a specific project to undertake a hazard assessment in those Danube countries where the issue is important to identify and prioritize the TMF hotspots. The APC EG agreed to provide support (e.g. data collection, discussions of the outcomes) to this activity. The Secretariat developed a project proposal in cooperation with the UBA to organise a regional training event in Romania (first phase) for invited facility operators and authority inspectors and to support elaborating national capacity building programs on TMF management in the Danube countries.

4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: The joint work is related and planned to be implemented in the field of inland waterway infrastructure development and waterway management.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 1/A

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Hydropower production and flood risk reduction, or climate change adaptation

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA2

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Reduction of the adverse effects of climate change in the tourism sector

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA3

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Water Framework Directive implementation (effects of hydro-morphological measures on flood risk management and the improved status of water bodies in line with WFD Article4.7), accidental pollution control, plastic litter management of river

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA4

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: The use of floodplains as green infrastructure, management of invasive plant species on floodplains

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA6

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Education and awareness enhancement and Improvement of DFCN (Danube Funding Coordination Network)

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA7 and PA9

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Institutional capacity to improve multilevel governance in environmental risk management and project generation (TAF-DRP, START, DSPF)

- Reference to Priority Area: PA10

PA 6 - BIODIVERSITY & LANDSCAPES

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

TARGET 1: Improve management of ecological networks and protected areas through transnational cooperation and capacity building; Activities related to the management of ecological networks and protected areas (PA) are part of the national obligations. The EUSDR could help ensure consistency and sustainability in monitoring, reporting, generating and further use of collected data, as well as facilitate harmonized management of boundary sites. To achieve significant progress, by the end of 2030 following milestones should be reached: established 5-country UNESCO Biosphere Reserve "Mura-Drava-Danube"; established transnational cooperation or harmonized management plans on the boundary rivers; strengthened knowledge transfer between national authorities responsible for PA management; strengthened cooperation (knowledge transfer) between scientific community and stakeholders. Other monitoring tools: no. of organized events no. of meetings of relevant authorities.

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 1: Establish transnational cooperation and harmonization of the strategic management documents between protected areas on river systems in the Danube basin; Action 2: Build capacities of national and local authorities, non-governmental organizations, expert and scientific community in the environment related matters.

TARGET 2: Strengthen the efforts to halt the deterioration in the status of species (e.g. Danube sturgeon species) and habitats occurring in the Danube region and covered by EU nature legislation; The EUSDR could help ensuring harmonized development and implementation of species action plans and management plans; long-term sustainability of conservation measures, monitoring and awareness raising activities. To achieve significant progress, by the end of 2030 certain milestones should be reached: 1) implemented Pan-European action plan for sturgeon conservation; 2) established cross-border monitoring and management of large carnivores; 3) identified obligatory dissemination and awareness raising activities for PA 6 projects; 4) dedicated section on a web platform for PA 6 resources resulted from dissemination and awareness raising activities. Other monitoring tools: no. of organized workshops (conferences); no. of meetings with relevant actors (stakeholders, authorities).

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 3: Develop and/or implement conservation action plans and/or management plans for endangered umbrella species of the Danube region.

TARGET 3: Reduce the introductions and spread of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in the Danube Region. Invasive alien species (IAS) are considered as one of the major drivers of biodiversity loss, with a potential negative impact on economy and human health. In line with Danube Region IAS Strategy that defines priorities, to achieve significant progress by the end of 2030 following milestones should be reached: 1) collected and analysed data about alien species in the Region (distribution, pathways, impact); 2) identified IAS of particular concern in the Region; 3) established early warning and rapid response system, 4) developed action plan(s) for the priority pathways at regional level; 5) developed transboundary eradication plans; 6) raised awareness and established cooperation between all interested parties; 7) developed codes of conduct in compliance with the national rules of the Danube countries. Other monitoring tools: no. of organized meetings and no. of meetings with relevant actors.

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 4: Promote research to develop and apply the most appropriate methods for prevention and control of IAS and for management of the priority pathways in line with the DIAS Strategy and IAS Regulation (EU) 1143/2014.

TARGET 4: Maintain and restore Green and Blue Infrastructure elements through integrated spatial development and conservation planning. A network of healthy ecosystems often provides cost-effective alternatives to traditional 'grey' infrastructure and offers many other benefits for both people and biodiversity. As a network of (semi-)natural areas, Green and Blue Infrastructure provides environmental, economic and social benefits through nature-based solutions. To achieve significant progress, by the end of 2030 following milestones should be reached: 1) developed common approach to define and determine ecological corridors for key target species on land; 2) established

network of linked protected areas and policy stakeholders; 3) implemented pilot actions towards closing gaps of ecological corridors; 4) established cooperation between the MRS approaches in establishing ecological connectivity and GBI. Other monitoring tools: no. of meetings with relevant actors.

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 5: Anchoring the concept of EU green infrastructure in the Danube region; Action 6: Promote ecological connectivity through cooperation between Macro-regional strategies (MRS).

TARGET 5: Improve and/or maintain the soil quality in the Danube Region. Urban sprawl, climate change, deforestation and emissions of pollution generated by human activities (i.e. waste disposal, agriculture, transportation, etc.), have major impact on quality of soils and soil-related ecosystem services. It is important therefore to improve and/or maintain the quality of soils in the Danube Region. To achieve significant progress regarding soil quality, by the end of 2030 following milestones should be reached: 1) identified locations with obsolete pesticide and similar chemical remains; 2) prepared remediation plans; 3) prepared risk management plans in the case of environmental accidents; 4) developed harmonised Soil maps of the Danube region; 5) report on production potential of agricultural areas and application of appropriate agro-ecological measures; 6) identified appropriate measures for climate change adaptation.

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 7: Enhance and/or maintain soil-related ecosystem services (ES); Action 8: Identify locations with obsolete pesticide and similar chemical remains and prepare a remediation plan and a risk management plan in the case of environmental accidents.

TARGET 6: Decrease air pollution in the Danube Region. Air quality in the EUSDR is still a serious problem - main problems refer to exceedances of PM10 and precursor gases (NO₂ and SO₂), but geographical distribution differs according to pollutant. PM10 and PM2.5 hotspots are in the SE EUSDR, with a second hot-spot in southern Poland that influences the northern EUSDR border. SO₂ is present in higher levels in east of the Region, while NO₂ occurs in urban areas throughout the Danube basin. To achieve significant progress, by the end of 2030 following milestones should be reached: 1) enhanced monitoring network on air pollutants in the Region; 2) report on air quality in the Region; 3) strengthened capacities of national and local authorities, NGOs, expert and scientific communities; 4) established transnational cooperation and 5) developed regional Air Protection Programme. Other monitoring tools: no. of additional monitoring stations; system upgrade; no. of workshops/ meetings.

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Action 9: Take measures to gradually reduce the pollution, along the limit values for certain pollutants.

2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

The Danube Region covers wide area, not only the river Danube and its tributaries, lowlands and delta, but also the major part of the Carpathian Mountains, the Balkans and part of the Alps. As such, it is rich in diverse ecosystems that provide important habitat for numerous species. Well-preserved ecosystems of the Danube region also provide invaluable ecosystem services, such as food, fibre and fresh water, climate regulation, soil protection, nutrient recycling, waste assimilation. These are extremely important for the socioeconomic development and human wellbeing, especially in the wake of future climate change.

On the other hand, pollution generated by human activities in this region (i.e. waste disposal, agriculture, transportation, etc.), has major impact on quality of water, soil and air. For instance, erosion and runoff from arable lands is the main source of the agricultural diffuse pollution in the Danube River basin.

Considering the value and potential fragility of the Danube Region, environmental and nature protection and restoration of its natural assets, including development of green infrastructure, should be a high priority and a key task for society.

Several principles can contribute to effective nature and environmental protection. Environmental measures should be planned parallel to development of each sector, (e.g. tourism, construction, energy, transportation, agriculture). Moreover, human migration, cultural differences, urban / rural development and regional security should also be taken into consideration. Before building new infrastructure, improvement of current infrastructure efficiency should be examined (energy, household consumption, transport). Landscape (spatial) planning should be used as basis for developing good quality strategies for rural/urban development.

Compliance with EU environmental legislation (in particular, the Water Framework Directive, the Waste Water Directive, the Habitats and Birds Directives, the Waste Framework Directive and the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, Marine Framework Directive, important for the Danube Delta and the coastal areas of the Black Sea), is key factor for preserving the ecosystems and improving the environment in the EU countries of the Danube. Moreover, the EU acquis should provide the environmental framework in the candidate and potential candidate countries, as well as in other third countries participating in the Strategy.

Furthermore, PA 6 targets are in line and are contributing to the global and European processes related to environmental and nature conservation – such as EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, Convention on biological diversity (CBD) and UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There will be a need in the near future to align PA 6 work to the new global post 2020 framework to be adopted at the Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP 15), to be held in Kunming (China) in October 2020.

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS

The Danube Region encompasses a wide range of diverse but interrelated and interdependent ecosystems, including Danube with its tributaries, lowlands and delta, the major part of the Carpathian Mountains, the Balkans and part of the Alps. The region contains a large share of Europe's remaining great wilderness areas but also rich cultural landscapes. These diverse habitats result in presence of a rich and unique flora and fauna. Moreover, the Danube and its tributaries are of great importance for overall state of the environment, such as water quality, land use, ecosystem health and function, as well as ecological connectivity, not only for the Region itself, but also for the wider area. The natural heritage of the Danube Region is therefore of European importance.

But this unique Region and its natural values are under growing pressure due to urban sprawl and development of agriculture, industry, transport and tourism, often resulting in: loss of biodiversity and variety of ecosystems (wetlands and floodplain areas); deforestation; air and soil pollution (i.e. non-compliant municipal landfills and numerous contaminated sites are common); depopulation and land abandonment in rural areas. Moreover, the public awareness for the need of nature and environmental protection in the eastern part of the region is low, as well as the knowledge and use of best available practices.

ACTION 1: Establish transnational cooperation and harmonization of the strategic management documents between protected areas on river systems in the Danube basin.

- Description: Due to different customs and/or legislation, management of Natura 2000 and other protected areas located on boundary rivers of the Danube basin could present a challenge. Transnational cooperation and harmonization of the strategic planning documents (e.g. Natura 2000 management plans, management plans of protected areas, Masterplan) will help ensure consistency and sustainability in implementation of conservation measures and, in the end, contribute to better nature protection of these areas.

ACTION 2: Build capacities of national and local authorities, non-governmental organizations, expert and scientific community in the environment related matters.

- Description: Successful nature protection depends on well informed authorities, strong non-governmental organizations and involved expert and scientific community. The EUSDR provides a perfect platform to ensure multiplication and the sustainability of capacity building activities, such as those aiming to strengthen the knowledge transfer between national authorities; scientific community and different stakeholders (e.g. DANUBEPARKs); and managers of protected areas, Natura 2000 and Emerald Network sites.

ACTION 3: Develop and/or implement conservation action plans and/or management plans for endangered umbrella species of the Danube region.

- Description: The umbrella species (or flagship species) have complex demands on their habitats. Therefore, preserving (the dynamics of) their key habitats contributes to the protection of many other

species. Additionally, these species are usually attractive and fascinating plants or, more often, animals, which is why they are also well-suited to demonstrating to the public the need to preserve their habitats and raise awareness about anthropogenic impact on ecosystems.

ACTION 4: Promote research to develop and apply the most appropriate methods for prevention and control of IAS and for management of the priority pathways in line with the DIAS Strategy and IAS Regulation (EU) 1143/2014.

- Description: In order to develop and apply the most appropriate methods for prevention and control of IAS and management of their priority pathways in the Danube Region, further research is needed. List of IAS of particular concern in the Region could help to ensure more targeted use of the EU resources. Early detection and warning system, transboundary action and/or eradication plans and collaboration of all relevant sectors could ensure both pooling the resources and sustainability of applied measures.

ACTION 5: Anchoring the concept of EU green infrastructure in the Danube region.

- Description: Green Infrastructure (GI) refers both to the concept and to structures in the landscape. It is a strategically planned network of (semi-)natural areas with other environmental features, designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services. Since ecological connectivity is vital to reduce the biodiversity loss and to preserve ecosystem services, individual GI elements have to be connected by natural or artificial connectivity features or by sustainable use/ecosystem service areas.

ACTION 6: Promote ecological connectivity through cooperation between Macro-regional strategies (MRS).

- Description: The ecological connectivity was recognized as an area/topic of interest of all MRS that should be more explored in terms of collaboration and strengthening. Therefore, PACs of the EUSDR PA 6 started the initiative of MRS collaboration aiming to establish more systematic sectoral exchange between PAs. Main focus is on exploring ways for enhancing synergies and avoidance of duplication in terms of actions and funding, while increasing the efficiency of limited national (governmental) capacities.

ACTION 7: Enhance and/or maintain soil-related ecosystem services (ES).

- Description: Multi-functionality of soils represents the basis for many ecosystem services (ES). Since negative impacts on soil quality can result in indirect impacts on ecosystems and human welfare, it is essential to enhance and/or maintain soil-related ES. Therefore, DRC should develop harmonized soil map(s), carry out research and propose solutions for mitigating threats and pressures (agriculture, climate change, urban sprawl etc.) and promote dissemination and knowledge exchange by different networks.

ACTION 8: Identify locations with obsolete pesticide and similar chemical remains and prepare a remediation plan and a risk management plan in the case of environmental accidents.

- Description: Sites with remains of obsolete pesticides and similar chemicals (OPC) could pose a serious threat to human health and the environment. Danube Region Countries should identify these sites, prepare risk management plans (incl. intervention activities) and remediation plans in order to minimize the risk that OPC pose and to restore ecosystems. MRS approach would help to ensure a cross-border collaboration, stakeholder involvement, knowledge exchange and targeted use of EU funding streams.

ACTION 9: Take measures to gradually reduce the pollution, along the limit values for certain pollutants.

- Description: Enhanced and optimised air quality monitoring network and reports on air quality (based on measured and modelled data) would help tailor appropriate air quality enhancement measures. Moreover, Air Protection Programme for the Danube region should be developed, aiming to develop and disseminate appropriate tools for air quality assessment and management, while taking into account institutional knowledge and capacity gaps, need for coordinated and harmonised actions and sectoral collaboration.

3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Develop (in a participatory manner) a Danube Masterplan for the Conservation and Restoration of Biodiversity Values for mainstreaming into inland navigation programmes and integration with the navigation Master Plan for the Danube (Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan for the Danube and its navigable tributaries)

- Description: Participatory development of the Masterplan Bavarian Danube was recognized as a great example of stakeholder cooperation. This activity aims to transfer both the approach and accumulated knowledge to other parts of the Danube Region in the form of Danube Masterplan for the Conservation and Restoration of Biodiversity Values. New Masterplan should focus on the identification of biodiversity hotspots, priority restoration sites and measures for mainstreaming the biodiversity values into inland navigation programmes and integration with the navigation Master Plan (cooperation with PA 1A); LEAD: National authorities from (min) two DRC, WWF co-lead; TIMELINE: end of 2030; MILESTONES: developed Danube Masterplan for the Conservation and Restoration of Biodiversity Values; identified measures for mainstreaming it into inland navigation programmes and integration with the navigation Master Plan; OTHER MONITORING TOOLS: no. of meetings of interested parties, concept note on the development
- Reference to Action(s): Action 1: Establish transnational cooperation and harmonization of the strategic management documents between protected areas on river systems in the Danube basin.

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Strengthen horizontal knowledge transfer and access to environmental data between national authorities responsible for nature conservation (especially those of neighbouring countries)

- Description: There is still a need to strengthen horizontal knowledge transfer between national authorities (especially those of neighbouring countries) in the environment-related matters - e.g. use of Strategic Environmental Assessments for decision making, integration of the blue-green infrastructure into planning documents, supporting sustainable use of protected areas in order to increase support and feeling of ownership of local people, etc. The EUSDR provides a perfect platform to ensure visibility, multiplication and the sustainability of capacity building activities aiming to strengthen the horizontal knowledge transfer between national authorities; LEAD: National authorities, WWF; TIMELINE: end of 2030; MILESTONES: events (workshop, conference); report on best practices (case studies); OTHER MONITORING TOOLS: no. of organized workshops/study tours
- Reference to Action(s): Action 2: Build capacities of national and local authorities, non-governmental organizations, expert and scientific community in the environment related matters.

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Implement the Danube-related measures from the Pan-European action plan for sturgeon conservation

- Description: Sturgeons play an important ecological role as indicators of healthy ecosystems. In Europe, the highest number of species can be found in the Danube Region, where 3 species live mostly in the Black Sea, migrating up the Danube to spawn. The Danube River Basin preserves some of the most important wild sturgeon populations and functional habitats in the world today. Implementation of the Danube-related measures from the Pan-European action plan for sturgeon conservation will contribute to their protection and protection of other freshwater species and their habitats; LEAD: DSTF; TIMELINE: end of 2030; MILESTONES: enforced sturgeon catch moratoriums/ restrictions across borders, governance and funding framework for ex-situ conservation measures; mapped habitats and measures for conservation and/or restoration of their habitats taken; harmonised monitoring programmes; OTHER MONITORING TOOLS: no. of organized workshops/stakeholder meetings
- Reference to Action(s): Action 3: Develop and/or implement conservation action plans and/or management plans for endangered umbrella species of the Danube region.

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Develop an early warning and rapid response system, action plan(s) for the priority pathways at regional level and transboundary eradication plans for invasive species

- Description: Development of early warning and rapid response system and action plan(s) for the priority pathways (at regional level) will contribute to more successful prevention of introductions and control of spread of IAS in the Danube region. Transboundary eradication plans could help ensure both pooling the resources and sustainability of applied measures. Apart from eradication measures, in order to be (more) successful, eradication plans should also include appropriate measures for restoration of the invaded ecosystems; LEAD: DIAS; TIMELINE: end of 2030; MILESTONES: developed 1) early warning and rapid response system; 2) action plan(s) for the priority pathways at regional level; 3) transboundary

eradication plans (incl. measures for restoration of invaded ecosystems); OTHER MONITORING TOOLS: no. of organized meetings with relevant actors

- Reference to Action(s): Action 4: Promote research to develop and apply the most appropriate methods for prevention and control of IAS and for management of the priority pathways in line with the DIAS Strategy and IAS Regulation (EU) 1143/2014.

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Development of a common approach to define and determine ecological corridors for key target species on land and improve the communication, knowledge and data sharing between Environmental, Transport and Spatial planning sectors on spatial integration of green and blue infrastructure

- Description: Developed harmonized approaches and tools for macroregional planning of corridors will help prepare the ground for transboundary implementation of green infrastructure and/or ecological corridors based on sound data and information. Moreover, it will contribute to the improvement of terrestrial connectivity and intersectoral cooperation; LEAD: DANUBEPARKs, Carpathian Convention, WWF; TIMELINE: end of 2030; MILESTONES: established transnational working group and communication platform; adapted toolbox for identification of corridors and WebGis tool for future use; technical handbook on ecological connectivity in the DRB; harmonized dataset and ecological connectivity map for the EUSDR; selected pilot regions; OTHER MONITORING TOOLS: no of meetings with relevant actors; other documents (agreements, conclusions, reports).
- Reference to Action(s): Action 5: Anchoring the concept of EU green infrastructure in the Danube region.

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Establish the cooperation between the MRS approaches in establishing ecological connectivity and GI

- Description: In order to establish functional macro-regional ecological corridors and green infrastructure network, it is vital to establish strong cooperation between the MRS approaches. MRS cooperation will help to enhance synergies and to avoid the duplication of both actions and funding, while increasing the efficiency of limited national (Governmental) capacities; LEAD: PAC; TIMELINE: end of 2030; MILESTONES: MRS meetings; OTHER MONITORING TOOLS: TBD
- Reference to Action(s): Action 6: Promote ecological connectivity through cooperation between Macro-regional strategies (MRS).

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Develop harmonized Soil Maps for the Danube region

- Description: Activity includes preparation of data harmonization and definition of scales and data formats in addition to numerous other activities (e.g. scientific workshops and collaboration on soil research). Soil maps will be implemented in the entire Danube region. Apart from representing the basis for scientific and expert research, soil maps and related soil information will be used on local and regional level for awareness raising activities (targeting both the general public and school children); LEAD: SONДАР; TIMELINE: end of 2030; MILESTONES: guidelines for developing harmonized soil map; developed soil maps for Danube Region Countries; OTHER MONITORING TOOLS: percentage of area covered by the map
- Reference to Action(s): Action 7: Enhance and/or maintain soil-related ecosystem services (ES).

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Strengthen the implementation of shelter belts as biotope network systems

- Description: Shelterbelts produce a variety of environment benefits and important component in sustainable land use management. They can protect crop fields by reducing wind erosion, improving crop water use and increasing crop yields and economic returns. They also can protect livestock from harsh winter conditions, reducing animal stress and improving animal health. They reduce air exchange rates by reduces heating and cooling costs. Danube Region Countries should develop guidelines on using shelterbelts and multifunctional hedges to create biotope network systems in the agricultural landscape on local and regional level; LEAD: SONДАР; TIMELINE: end of 2030; MILESTONES: list of key elements of shelter belts; report on the role of shelter belts in improving soil protection against erosion by wind and water, mitigating climate change and improving biodiversity and microclimate; developed guidelines; OTHER MONITORING TOOLS: no of workshops/conferences; meetings with relevant actors
- Reference to Action(s): Action 7: Enhance and/or maintain soil-related ecosystem services (ES).

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Develop Air Protection Programme for the Danube Region

- Description: Air Protection Programme for the Danube region should be developed in order to reduce air quality pollution (harmonised with national programmes). It should take into account institutional knowledge and capacity gaps, need for coordinated and harmonised actions, sectoral collaboration, as well as aim to develop and disseminate appropriate tools for air quality assessment and management, and propose actions to reduce air quality; LEAD: TFAQ; TIMELINE: end of 2030; MILESTONES: identified institutional capacity gaps; identified measures and instruments to gradually reduce the pollution; developed Air Protection Programme; OTHER MONITORING TOOLS: no of workshops / meetings with relevant actors; stashed expert group for Air Quality improvement programme; developed Programme.
- Reference to Action(s): Action 9: Take measures to gradually reduce the pollution, along the limit values for certain pollutants.

4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Green Infrastructure

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 1a “To improve mobility and intermodality of inland waterways”, PA 1b “To improve mobility and intermodality - rail, road and air”, PA 2 “To encourage more sustainable energy”, PA 4 “To restore and maintain the quality of waters”, PA 5 “To manage environmental risks”

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Soil Quality

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 2 “To encourage more sustainable energy”, PA 4 “To restore and maintain the quality of waters”, PA 5 “To manage environmental risks”, PA 7 “To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)”

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Air Quality

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 1a “To improve mobility and intermodality of inland waterways”, PA 1b “To improve mobility and intermodality - rail, road and air”, PA 2 “To encourage more sustainable energy”, PA 5 “To manage environmental risks”

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Sturgeon conservation

- Reference to Priority Area(s): All PAs (e.g. to set up a network of ex-situ facilities in order to maintain genetic diversity across facilities and to better coordinate the management of breed stock)

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Invasive Alien Species

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 1a “To improve mobility and intermodality of inland waterways”, PA 1b “To improve mobility and intermodality - rail, road and air”, PA 3 “To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts”, PA 4 “To restore and maintain the quality of waters”, PA 7 “To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)”, PA 11 “To work together to tackle security and organised crime”

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Environmental crimes

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 11 “To work together to tackle security and organised crime”, PA 3 “To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts”

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Consideration of biodiversity and nature protection topics in economic and spatial development-related PAs

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA 1a “To improve mobility and intermodality of inland waterways”, PA 1b “To improve mobility and intermodality - rail, road and air”, PA 2 “To encourage more sustainable energy”, PA 3 “To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts”, PA 8 “To support the competitiveness of enterprises”, PA 11 “To work together to tackle security and organised crime”

PA 07 - KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

TARGET 1: To increase the effectiveness of investment in R&I through establishment of a funding coordination network aiming to initiate a minimum of 2 dedicated EUSDR activities each year (e.g. joint calls; joint strategic project proposals (within a multilateral framework))

- Indicator: Research and development expenditure, number of strategic project proposals, number of joint calls
- Baseline: PAC7 team is currently (within DTP technical assistance) in the process of a public procurement of a study focused on describing the fulfilment of PA7 targets and actions and formulating recommendations for their enhancement in the future. As a baseline was set year 2010.
- Reference to relevant Action(s): A1, A2, partially A3, A4, partially A5, partially A8

TARGET 2: To increase the number of EPO and PCT patent applications filed from the Danube Region

- Indicator: number of EPO and patent applications
- Baseline: 2010
- Reference to relevant Action(s): A1 and A3

TARGET3: To enhance regional research and education co-operation by supporting academic mobility within the region

- Indicator: number of students and teachers mobilities via Erasmus and CEEPUS programmes, MSCA, other programmes
- Baseline: 2010
- Reference to relevant Action(s): A4

TARGET 4: To increase the annual output of co-publications in the region

- Indicator: number of publications and citations from WoS and SCOPUS databases
- Baseline: 2010
- Reference to relevant Action(s): A3 and A4

TARGET 5: To develop RIS3 in all Danube countries (or their regions)

- Indicator: RIS3 developed and successfully implemented
- Baseline: 2010
- Reference to relevant Action(s): A1 and A3

2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

A society's ability to create and exploit knowledge is a key factor for progress and growth. A society based on knowledge needs competitive research and education infrastructure, innovation supporting and facilitating institutions, and high performing information and communication technologies.

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS

GENERAL CHALLENGES:

- Low political ownership and commitment
- Low SG-members involvement and active engagement
- Lack of cooperation between MRS and other EU policies and programmes
- Harmonisation among PAs is needed
- Better communication, visibility and common understanding
- Turning the political will into concrete programs with projects, support measures, activities and funding instruments dedicated to fulfil the actions
- Monitoring the implementation of the EUSDR actions through an agreed upon set of key indicators

- Orienting EUSDR towards a more strategic vision, to be implemented through strategic projects for the Danube region
- Steering efforts and activities of the PAs towards improved coordination and communication among its members
- Ensuring appropriate funding mechanisms and financial resources for (strategic) projects

ACTION 1: To promote coordination of national, regional and EU funds to stimulate excellence in R&D&I, in research areas specific for Danube Region

- Description: Innovation policies, instruments and funding programmes should foster excellence and smart specialisation, i.e. focus on key challenges of the Danube Region and develop key research strengths in areas important for the long-term competitive development of the Region. This action will support establishment of a Danube platform focused on exchange of information and experience in the area of R&I financing.

ACTION 2: To promote participation of Danube countries in EU R&I Programmes in particular in Horizon Europe

- Description: Within this action we would monitor the participation of Danube countries in EU R&I Programmes, trainings supporting researchers in project development, organization of informative workshop(s) on Horizon Europe and its particular work programmes, networking events supporting project preparation and participation in joint partnership initiatives (such as BIOEAST).

ACTION 3: To strengthen cooperation among universities, research organisations and SMEs in the Danube Region

- Description: This action will upgrade existing cooperation between its key target group of quadruple helix actors including DRC, Danube academies of sciences, Danube schools, along with the business sector and regional municipalities. It will contribute to stronger cooperation in various fields, such as developing joint programmes of common interest, mobility schemes, common research projects, exchange of best practices.

ACTION 4: To increase awareness and visibility of science and innovation in the Danube Region

- Description: Science is the greatest collective endeavour. At a time when so many decisions are being made on the basis of science, it is becoming increasingly important to inform the public about the issues at stake. We need to focus on making science more attractive (notably to young people), increase society's appetite for innovation, and open up further research and innovation activities.
*Promotion of the Danube region as a smart region at different fora.
*Promotion of Open Access and Open Science.

ACTION 5: To support exchange of information and experience sharing for the purpose of preparation of future strategic R&I documents applicable in the new programming period

- Description: Smart Specialisation can make a valuable contribution to the better integration of the Danube region, to stimulate the constructive use of regional diversity by avoiding uniformity and duplication in regional investment goals as well as help develop critical mass to tackle major common challenges. Within this action we can contribute to the fulfilment of SDGs (e.g. by development of STI road maps based on RIS3 methodologies).

ACTION 6: To promote horizontal cooperation in S&T across all PAs and other MRSs

- Description: This action will be focused on participation in joint activities across PAs, support of cross-fertilisation activities among macro regions, promotion of best practices and capitalisation activities between projects. It will help to fill knowledge-gaps by linking actors with complementary thematic specialisation, experiences, and methodological approaches from across sectors.

3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Establishment of the Danube Funding Coordination Network

- Description: This activity is embedded in the EUSDR based on the work and achievements of the Working Group on the coordination of funding mechanisms in the Danube Region (“DRIFF Working Group”), outcomes and recommendations of the feasibility study on Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund and on activities of the FP7 funded Dan-ube-INCO.NET project. The mission of the Danube Funding Coordination Network (DFCN) is to support joint Science & Technology & Innovation (STI) activities in the Danube Region. Its objectives are:
 - * to coordinate and synchronise national, bilateral and regional efforts in the Danube Region in order to foster multilateral collaboration in Research and Innovation
 - * to stimulate cooperation possibilities with running and forthcoming initiatives
 - * exchange information, experiences, approaches and ideas on joint funding activities
- Reference to Action(s): mainly A2, partially A1, A3, A4

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Multilateral Scientific and Technological Call

- Description: The overall aim of this call is to support project cooperation among the following participating Danube region countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Republic of Serbia and Slovak Republic. Aims of the Call:
 - *to contribute to scientific advancement by funding researchers’ mobility in the frame of joint research projects;
 - *to contribute to research capacity development in the region;
 - * to support the advancement of cross-border research cooperation;
 - * to provide an opportunity for young/female researchers to cooperate in an international setting and to develop their scientific careers
- Reference to Action(s): A2, A3, A4

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: EUREKA Danube region call

- Description: EUREKA Danube Call was open (already for 3rd time) for in Austrian, Croatian, Czech Republic, Hungarian and Romanian researchers to submit proposals for joint R&D projects, focusing on developing innovative products and applications in all technological and application areas. Applicants are expected to develop ready to market solutions or projects which have strong market potential for all involved participants and support the innovation growth in the Danube region.
- Reference to Action(s): A1, A2, A3, A4

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: COST Connect - Sustainable Energy in the Danube Region

- Description: This activity organized with PAC team in cooperation with COST Association was held on 10 October 2018 in Belgrade. Representatives from 15 COST Actions who are working within the Danube region met with key stakeholders and policy makers to encourage greater collaboration and alignment of resources.
COST Connect events are a series of highly interactive workshops that provide open spaces for attendees to grow their ideas and build stronger research networks. This thematic approach encourages networking and dialogue between stakeholders, which reduces duplication of activities.
- Reference to Action(s): A2, A3, A4

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: DTP projects: Resinfra@DR, Excellence-In-Resti, EDU-LAB

- Description: PA7 closely cooperates with four thematic poles of the DTP capitalisation strategy. The main aim is to identify solutions to common challenges through sharing good practices and methodologies, widen the scope of planned outputs, elaborate policy recommendations, common policy guidelines and help each other to valorise and build upon the knowledge resulting from projects.
- Reference to Action(s): A2, A3, A4

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Danube INCO.net

- Description: DANUBE-INCO.NET project was a coordination and support action funded under the 7th Framework Programme to address the official EUSDR in the field of research and innovation (R&I). The project put in all effort to ensure that events, publications and policy recommendations related to R&I cooperation in the Danube Region could reach an audience as broad as possible interested and engaged in the future macro-regional development of the Danube Region.
- Reference to Action(s): A1, A2, A3, A4

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Danubius-RI, flagship

- Description: DANUBIUS-RI included in the 2016 ESFRI Roadmap is a pan-European distributed research infrastructure focused on the ecology of the Danube Delta and on enabling excellent interdisciplinary research and innovation on River-Sea systems.
- Reference to Action(s): A3, A4

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: DREAM, flagship

- Description: DREAM (Danube River Research and Management) project is represented by joint research facilities to enhance knowledge transfer and to develop innovative monitoring and modelling tools along the Danube River. DREAM project addresses the topics of hydrodynamics, morph dynamics, navigability and ecological processes in various sections of the Danube.
- Reference to Action(s): A3, A4

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Danube:Future, flagship

- Description: Danube: Future aims at developing interdisciplinary research and education in the Danube Region simultaneously as a basis for the solution of pressing environmental issues and a sustainable future of the region. Danube: Future is a multi-year program that consists of three modules: core, capacity building, and sustainability related research with a long-term socio-ecological component. Danube: Future is a unique combination of regional, national, and supra-national initiatives in interdisciplinary sustainability research with training and capacity building. It contributes to the sustainable development of the Danube Region with a particular focus on the contribution of humanities.
- Reference to Action(s): A4

STRATEGIC PROJECTS OR ACTIVITIES: (IF OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE):

- Support of Knowledge Hubs based on Danube River related policies
- Support of BIOEAST initiative - Central and Eastern European initiative for knowledge-based agriculture, aquaculture and forestry in the bio economy
- Preparation of joint policy statements with other PAs
- Preparation of PAs position papers and policy papers

4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Enhancing digital literacy in the Danube Region

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA9

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Developing Danube e-commerce

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA8

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Enhancement of the awareness of the public and young generation through information campaigns and eco-education on water sources rational use and their protection

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA4

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Development of repository of available knowledge base of quadruple helix actors (academy, universities, research institutes, public decision-makers, large companies and NGOs, CSOs) within the region to avoid duplication of research efforts and have a thorough overview on existing knowledge in the region - this can be done through mapping and networking of research capacities, e.g. available trainings on various topics within DR.

- Reference to Priority Area(s):

PA 08 - COMPETITIVENESS OF ENTERPRISES

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

TARGET 1: To support and improve the competitiveness of the Danube region by generating concrete Technology Offers, Technology Requests and Expression of Interest in the field of innovation and technology transfer

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): To foster cooperation and exchange of knowledge between SMEs, academia, the public sector and civil society in areas of competence in the Danube Region

TARGET 2: To improve policy dialog and public governance in innovation and technology transfer by promoting adequate policies and policy papers

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): To foster cooperation and exchange of knowledge between SMEs, academia, the public sector and civil society in areas of competence in the Danube Region

TARGET 3: To improve the digital skills of entrepreneurs

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Establishment of an Innovative Digital Ecosystem in the Danube Region in order to support SMEs when tackling the challenges of a digitalized world

TARGET 4: Establishment of Trans-Danube Digital Value Chains based on transnational Open Data Lakes

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Establishment of an Innovative Digital Ecosystem in the Danube Region in order to support SMEs when tackling the challenges of a digitalized world

TARGET 5: Improvement of Know-How transfer about Digital Innovations to local SME

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Establishment of an Innovative Digital Ecosystem in the Danube Region in order to support SMEs when tackling the challenges of a digitalized world

TARGET 6: Identification of level of development and ambitions of the domain artificial intelligence in the individual Danube countries/ regions, contribution to the smooth fit of the respective strengths and identification of potential flagship applications for the region

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Establishment of an Innovative Digital Ecosystem in the Danube Region in order to support SMEs when tackling the challenges of a digitalized world

TARGET 7: Mapping and evaluation process/benchmarking of the state of the art in terms of the level and quality of the collaboration of the clusters with the regional development stakeholders.

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Improvement of framework conditions, support programs and capacity building of stakeholders, to enhance the collaboration between cluster initiatives and regional innovation strategies, with an accent on the rural areas

TARGET 8: Fostering the development of methods of the regional strategies by more intense involvement of the cluster representatives in the process. The main aim is to improve the current system and to overcome the current gap between regional strategies and cluster strategies, especially in terms of S3 implementation.

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): Improvement of framework conditions, support programs and capacity building of stakeholders, to enhance the collaboration between cluster initiatives and regional innovation strategies, with an accent on the rural areas

TARGET 9: To improve the innovation capacity of female SMEs

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): To improve business support to strengthen the innovation and digital capacity of female-led-SMEs

TARGET 10: Foster cooperation and continuous discussion between national/regional policy level and SMEs regarding AI how to integrate national/regional AI platforms.

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): To enhance the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in the Danube Region SMEs

2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

The unequal level of economic development is one of the most visible challenges within the Danube Region. The economies of the region are strongly relying on SMEs, but due to various difficulties, they are not able to exploit their existing potential completely. However, their support in overcoming the economic disparities is indispensable.

SMEs are facing extremely heterogeneous challenges during their daily operation, but effects of the digital transformation processes should concern them all. Unfortunately, due to the different economic development, digitalization as topic seem relevant in one country, but do not yet exist in another. However, digitalization is rightly referred to as the third Industrial Revolution. Single Technologies like Cloud Computing, Mobile Computing, IoT, Block chain or Artificial Intelligence and their combined application, are changing the way we do business today. Digitalization affects all economic sectors and areas of life. Against this background, digitalization and its challenges should be thematised when talking about competitiveness.

The same is valid for the artificial intelligence, which is a complex domain on a hype, with enormous resources put behind. It is an organic consequence of earlier decades of ICT, data storage, processing capacity and data transmission developments. The applications of artificial intelligence will determine the operation from health-care to everyday life. In order to be competitive, SMEs have to take into consideration the opportunities offered by these thematic field.

As mentioned above, due to the economic differences of the countries it is very difficult to handle these topics on the same level. However, the exploitation of industry differences can be used as asset for transnational value chains, or to identify issues related to digitalization or artificial intelligence that will allow even lower-income countries access to digital innovation by building on less investment-intensive regional assets (e.g. digital tourism, AI based individual medicine, smart grids).

The transnational exchange along different value chains can excellently supported by various cluster initiatives. These are well-known approaches to support competitiveness and innovation of the private sector through trust building, networking, capacities building and improving innovation capacities among SME. Due to increased complexity of innovation, cluster initiatives are promising to match SME according to needs and competences.

However, although originally intended to contribute to regional development, over the last years most cluster initiatives became more and more disconnected from regional development. Post 2020 the regions should come to the fore as a booster for economic development therefore mutual cooperation between regional developers and cluster initiatives should be forced. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to set up transnational frameworks and instruments to stimulate transformative activities through cluster initiative in the context of EUSDR in order to spur investments and jobs along emerging value chains through need based cross-regional cooperation.

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS

The Danube Region, being composed of different countries and innovation milieus of different levels of maturity, it is crucial to strengthen transnational co-operation. This has to happen both at the policy and business level, thus achieving higher regional coherence and sustainable economic growth.

In order to hold up with other regions the development of the new products and innovative services is essential. For this, especially start-ups and SMEs require the access to scientific and applied research knowledge combined with innovation expertise. For the technology transfer the transnational collaboration between research organisations and companies is crucial. The capability to adapt to innovation needs, it is required to develop and implement tools and services based on specific roadmaps and strategies in innovation and technology transfer.

However, the greatest added value for the Danube Region will be achieved if priority is given to sectors where the Region has existing strengths.

ACTION 1 - To foster cooperation and exchange of knowledge between SMEs, academia, the public sector and civil society in areas of competence in the Danube Region

- Description: This action is attracting stakeholders from all Danube region countries to foster cooperation in areas where there is particular knowledge such as in innovation and technology transfer. This can be achieved through generating concrete activities, projects and policy dialog in the field of innovation and technology transfer. The identification of the main challenges will help to improve the framework conditions in innovation and technology transfer in the Danube region. Emphasis should be laid specifically on actions supporting the internationalisation of SMEs and facilitating interdisciplinary cooperation in order to create effective synergies for the full exploitation of applicable results in the specific thematic field on innovation and technology transfer. Policy Exploration Systems in innovation and technology transfer could steer this process to make it consistent with the development perspectives of the whole Danube region.

ACTION 2 - Establishment of an Innovative Digital Ecosystem in the Danube Region in order to support SMEs when tackling the challenges of a digitalized world

- Description: The Innovative Digital Ecosystem should bring together organisations and stakeholders whose main goal is to enable and foster technology development and innovation. In other words, the Innovative Digital Ecosystem shall enable collaborative innovation among different stakeholders, through combining complementary resources, systems and support, with a clear goal to generate domain-based data lakes, new business models, products, features, processes or services.

ACTION 3 - Improvement of framework conditions, support programs and capacity building of stakeholders, to enhance the collaboration between cluster initiatives and regional innovation strategies, with an accent on the rural areas

- Description: This action aims to understand the interplay between clusters and regional innovation strategies. Attention shall be given on key success factors of the interplay between both, what are the tasks and responsibilities between clusters and regional developers and how this kind of cooperation shall be facilitated in the post-2020 era.

ACTION 4 - To improve business support to strengthen the innovation and digital capacity of female-led-SMEs

- Description: The focus of this action is mainly to support development of innovation and digital capacity of female-led start-ups and dynamically growing SMEs. The aim is to combine complementary resources, systems and support, with a clear goal to generate new products, features, processes, services or value.

ACTION 5 - Enhance the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in the Danube Region SMEs

- Description: Artificial Intelligence will be playing an important role in the next 10-15 years in the development of the Danube Region. Therefore, it is inevitable that SMEs adapt to and keep abreast of this new area and enhance and permanently update their knowledge in the field of AI to remain competitive. Most of the EUSDR countries/regions have their own AI platforms, which need to be harmonized. Individually the players cannot achieve the necessary critical mass with respect to know-how, competencies. The synergies can only be identified through collaboration among the players. Additional challenge is that policy makers and stakeholders of the implementation operate in a non-harmonized way, and the gap has to be overcome. The difficulty is that how to match-make the top-

bottom policy intentions with the bottom-up operational objectives. There is always hype when starting a new initiative which is followed by a natural decline in commitment. The challenge is to keep the interest constantly on a high level and gain benefit for all from the co-working. This above statement is especially valid for the topic of Artificial Intelligence, which is a fancy field for the discussions. It is increased by the fact that it is a complex, fast developing field, which is hard to be followed and monitored.

3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Digital Innovation Hub Network

- Description: Setup of a Danube-specific Digital Innovation Hub Network with a shared catalogue of Digital Innovation Services with related success stories that will be permanently enriched with new services from other EU-Regions and Programs.
- Reference to Action(s): Establishment of an Innovative Digital Ecosystem in the Danube Region in order to support SMEs when tackling the challenges of a digitalized world

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Identification of Trans Danube Digital Value Chains

- Description: Identification, Modelling, Implementation and Management of Trans Danube Digital Value Chains based on shared Data Lakes and new Digital Technologies (e.g. Block Chain Technologies, AI) in sectors like Tourism, Smart City Services, Agriculture, Manufacturing, Energy or Personalized Medicine
- Reference to Action(s): Establishment of an Innovative Digital Ecosystem in the Danube Region in order to support SMEs when tackling the challenges of a digitalized world

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY:

- Description: Setup of a Danube-specific Digital Innovation Hub Network with a shared catalogue of Digital Innovation Services with related success stories, that will be permanently enriched with new services from other EU-Regions and Programs
- Reference to Action(s): Establishment of an Innovative Digital Ecosystem in the Danube Region in order to support SMEs when tackling the challenges of a digitalized world

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Fostering the interplay between cluster initiatives and regional developers

- Description: Assessment and evaluation of the data of the StressTest Database to better understand the interplay between cluster initiatives and regional developers. Additional scientific research will be conducted. Project findings will illustrate regional differences and identify good practices.
- Reference to Action(s): Improvement of framework conditions, support programs and capacity building of stakeholders, to enhance the collaboration between cluster initiatives and regional innovation strategies, with an accent on the rural areas

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Strengthening female entrepreneurial skills

- Description: Development of innovative and practical solutions for strengthening female entrepreneurial skills in the digital age through increasing digital knowledge, networking, exchange of experience between business and academia, mentoring, organization of tailored events and setting innovative tools.
- Reference to Action(s): To improve business support to strengthen the innovation and digital capacity of female-led-SMEs

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Establishment of an EUSDR Artificial Intelligence Platform

- Description: Establishment of an EUSDR Artificial Intelligence Platform which will be a thematic open platform, serving as a monitoring and learning tool for the wide group of stakeholders both from the policy side and from the operational implementation stakeholder level, concentrating on SME.
- Reference to Action(s): Enhance the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in the Danube Region SMEs
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4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

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PA 09 - PEOPLE & SKILLS

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

TARGET 1: Contribution to a higher employment rate in the Danube Region, especially through tackling youth and long-term unemployment

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 1, 2, 3, 4

TARGET 2: Contribution to improved educational outcomes and relevant skills and competences in the Danube Region, focusing on learning outcomes for employability, entrepreneurship, innovation, active citizenship and well-being

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 5, 6, 7, 8

TARGET 3: Contribution to increased quality and efficiency of education, training and labour market systems

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 1, 5

TARGET 4: Contribution to ensuring inclusive education and training and promoting inclusive labour markets, equal opportunities and non-discrimination as well as the promotion of civic competences and lifelong learning opportunities for all

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 3, 4, 7, 8

TARGET: Contribution to a closer cooperation between educational, training, labour market and research institutions, in particular on transnational, regional and bilateral levels

- Indicator:
- Baseline:
- Reference to relevant Action(s): 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

Making the Danube Region competitive, cohesive, resilient and more prosperous in the future means investing in people, in their education and training, their skills, their creativity, and their capacity to innovate. The world of work is evolving at a brisk pace. Changing and increasing skills demands, coupled with economic, demographic and technological developments are posing considerable challenges as well as providing opportunities for innovative responses from education and training as well as labour market and social systems.

Priority Area 9 "Investing in People and Skills" is focusing on policies and actions in the fields of education and training, labour market and marginalised communities. By investing in people and promoting human capital, the Danube Region can grow in a smart and inclusive way. In this respect, the European Pillar of Social Rights, supporting quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning, quality employment and social inclusion plays a key role, also regarding its relevance for future EU investments in 2021 - 2027. Therefore, the importance of functioning labour markets and social systems as well as high-quality education and training systems for the Danube Region cannot be overemphasized.

A closer look to the Danube Region shows that there are various challenges:

There is a demographic change to an ageing society: Increasing life expectation concurrent with decreasing fertility rates and in some countries the overall population has started to decline.

Unemployment is less pronounced in the Danube Region, but less people are in employment and shares of employment in traditional sectors, such as agriculture, are still high.

On the job market special attention needs to be paid to the mobility of workers. Work induced migration flows follow an east-west pattern, motivated by considerable income disparities in the Danube Region, thus resulting in brain drain in some parts.

Education and training systems in the Danube Region are in general of good quality, but there is also a number of short-comings. For instance, too many pupils acquire only a low level of competences. A further problem is linked to equal opportunities, as young people showing weak performance come disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Enhancing the anticipation of skills needs and increasing the labour market relevance of skills is a huge challenge in many parts of the region - also within the context of digitization. The modernisation of education systems and the provision of VET including work-based learning in a larger context of lifelong learning become more and more important. Another key aspect concerns civic and social skills to empower citizens to participate fully in diverse and changing societies as well as to take action towards achieving the sustainable development goals in the Danube Region.

Furthermore, one third of the EU population at risk of poverty lives in the Danube Region. Roma communities, of whom 80% live in the region, not only suffer from poverty and substandard living conditions, but are also exposed to social and economic exclusion.

Regarding equal opportunities between men and women, inequalities are more pronounced in upper parts of the region than in lower parts. The general employment rate for women and men is lower than in rest of the EU.

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS

The above-mentioned challenges call for actions in a wide range of fields like education and training, labour market, integration, research and innovation as well as the need of mutual reinforcement of the policies in these areas. To tackle the existing challenges, PA9 is focusing on the following two main topics:

I. Labour Market and Social Policies:

The labour market systems in the Danube Region will tackle unemployment and social exclusion by supporting job seekers, marginalized and deprived groups. This should include the development of key competencies and organisations skills and the promotion of innovative projects and partnerships. Furthermore, a strong cooperation of labour market institutions regarding policies, measures and information exchange is needed.

To avoid the digital divide (by age, gender, region, high and low skilled work) on labour markets in the Danube Region the lack of knowledge and skills in IT should be reduced as well as common standards in the field of labour law should be developed.

Groups at risk of poverty should be empowered to get access to the labour market. Opportunities must be offered to them to get out of the vicious circle of unemployment and poverty.

II. Education and Training

Danube Region education and training systems should aim to deliver high quality and inclusive education and training that offer opportunities for both economic and social cohesion, support competitiveness and growth and smart, inclusive and sustainable development, and foster democratic citizenship and European values - thus helping all individuals to develop their full potential in a lifelong learning perspective.

Key issues for future regional cooperation relate to fostering equal opportunities in education and to ensuring quality learning outcomes, i.a. by strengthening the labour market relevance of skills, by reinforcing basic and key competences, fostering digital skills, and reducing the number of early school leavers. Action is also needed in the fields of quality assurance and skills monitoring, the promotion of teaching at all levels, addressing the diversity of

learners, increasing participation in LLL, fostering transparency of skills, addressing gender gaps as well as skills and competences to promote the ownership of democratic values and sustainable development.

Transnational school projects enhance dialogue and cooperation of young people and contribute to the process of European integration. Regional cooperation platforms such as ERI SEE (Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe) or the Danube Region Youth Platform are important instruments for the implementation of EUSDR actions. Cooperation in VET supports countries with opportunities for mutual learning and exchange of good practice. Work-based learning in VET is an important concept for enhancing competitiveness and employability in the region. In this context, centres of vocational excellence could act as drivers of quality vocational skills in a context of national, regional/local, and sectorial challenges.

Overall, possible measures/activities will focus on (1) Cooperation among institutions (Partnerships for cooperation, including small-scale partnerships; partnerships for excellence; online platforms and tools for virtual cooperation; learning mobility) and (2) Support to policy development and cooperation (PAC conferences and high-level meetings; peer-learning, peer-counselling, expert groups and networks; studies and surveys; civil society dialogue).

ACTION 1: Intensify Cooperation in Labour Market Policies

- Description: By intensifying the cooperation between labour market stakeholders' reforms will be enhanced. The focus will be on active labour market policies, common peer learning/peer counselling in the Danube Region, skills mismatch, labour market information systems, vocational re-education and re-training, dual education as a measure of active labour market policies, transition from school to work

ACTION 2: Digitalization and Innovation in the World of Work

- Description: To avoid the digital divide (by age, gender, region, high and low skilled work) on labour markets in the Danube Region there will be a focus on the following activities: reduce the lack of knowledge and skills in IT, exchange and development of common social security standards for platform and crowd work, necessary adaptations of existing labour law in the Danube Region.

ACTION 3: Integration of Vulnerable Groups into the Labour Market

- Description: We define vulnerable groups as persons belonging or perceived to belong to groups that are in a disadvantaged position or that are marginalized. The future activities will focus on: tailor made measures and projects developed with the concerned groups, e.g. case management, subsidies to keep up employment or new models of entrepreneurship for unemployed, social entrepreneurship

ACTION 4: Fighting Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion for All

- Description: Concrete issues of this action are: empowering groups at risk of poverty to get access to the labour market, actions to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty will complement each other and apply on integrated approaches, therefore long time policies are needed, diversification of social services and measures developed together with people at risk of poverty.

ACTION 5: Quality and Efficiency of Education and Training Systems

- Description: enhancing the anticipation of skills needs and strengthen the labour market relevance of skills, strengthening vocational education and training (VET), in particular work-based learning in all its forms, developing quality assurance mechanism, increasing evidence-based policy and practice to monitor and design reforms, promoting of teaching at all levels (recruitment, selection and induction; attractiveness of profession, initial education and professional development)

ACTION 6: Relevant and High-Quality Knowledge, Skills and Competences

- Description: reducing low achievement in basic skills, covering language, literacy, mathematics, science and digital literacy, strengthening transversal and key competences, in particular entrepreneurship and language competences, addressing the development of digital competences, including media literacy, at all levels of learning, further exploring the potentials of innovative and active pedagogies as well as educational resources

ACTION 7: Lifelong Learning and Learning Mobility

- Description: supporting mobility of learners and teachers as well as partnerships among schools and educational institutions, continuing LLL strategies, addressing the transition phase within education and training and from ET to work, i.a. through high quality guidance, promoting adult learning (in view of governance, supply and take up, access, quality) and second hand opportunities, fostering transparency, validation and recognition of skills and/or qualifications and implementing EQF and NQFs

ACTION 8: Inclusive Education, Equity, Common Values and Sustainable Development

- Description: Reducing early school leaving; addressing the diversity of learners, enhancing access to quality and inclusive education for all, including disadvantaged groups; Addressing gender gaps in ET; promoting civic, intercultural and social competences, ownership of democratic values and fundamental rights at all levels of ET, while tackling discrimination, racism and stereotypes; enhancing critical thinking, along with cyber and media literacy; promoting sustainable development through ET

3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

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4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Digitalization

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA7 Knowledge Society, PA 8 Competitiveness of Enterprises, PA10 Institutional Capacity and Cooperation

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Sustainable Development

- Reference to Priority Area(s): PA7 Knowledge Society, PA10 Institutional Capacity and Cooperation, PA3 Culture & Tourism, PA5 Environmental Risks

PA 10 - INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY & COOPERATION

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

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2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION -

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS -

ACTION 1: To improve institutional capacities in order to provide high-quality public services

- Description: Enhancing needs-based and high-quality public services, reducing administrative burden, strengthening cooperation capacities for all stakeholders in the multi-level governance system, and improving institutional capacities to implement eGovernance are crucial to contribute to better policy coordination, mutual learning, and development of common standards in public service provision that aligns policies between partner countries, manages spatial spill-over effects and increases knowledge.

ACTION 2: To facilitate the administrative cooperation of communities living in border regions

- Description: Capacity development for high-level public services, healthy regional development and trust building across borders is crucial to support smooth economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Danube Region. Hence, activities such as diminishing or eliminating legal and administrative obstacles or developing joint cross-border public services and governance structures contribute to improve the competitiveness of border regions.

ACTION 3: To review bottlenecks relating to the low absorption rate of EU funds

- Description: Building capacities of project promoters for better coordination of funds is expected to increase the development and implementation of projects, to support project capitalisation and use the innovative potential of a broad group of stakeholders at all levels. Better coordination of funding addresses the ability of project promoters to improve the use of available funding that is suitable for the implementation of innovative project ideas.

ACTION 4: To support better coordination of funding

- Description: Better coordination at programme level contributes to reinforce the positive results of projects at macro-regional level. Capitalisation and coordination networks between programmes are supposed to contribute to policy coordination and the development of cooperation mechanisms at programme and/or project level. Thus, the action aims at review factors that impede joint planning and programming, particularly between EU members and non-EU members in the EUSDR implementation process.

ACTION 5: To test and support innovative funding solutions (for local actors and civil society)

- Description: Supporting the development and testing of innovative funding instruments that suits the needs of different stakeholder groups in the Danube Region is supposed to increase the capacities of project promoters, unleash the untapped innovative potential in the Danube Region, and introduce project promoters to transnational EU project management. Suitable funding should aim at supporting broad stakeholder involvement in regional development.

ACTION 6: To foster cooperation built on mutual trust between state and non-state actors to enhance well-being.

- Description: Mutual exchange of good practices of trust building initiatives, implementing dialogue platforms, trainings and mutual learning on participatory governance co-designing public policies at macro-regional level are expected to support the endeavours of building trust with a particular focus on improving the cooperation in regional development in the Danube Region at all levels. Participation Days and further dialogue formats further enhance capacities to engage in participatory processes.

ACTION 7: To strengthen the involvement of civil society and local actors in the Danube Region

- Description: Both, Civil society organisations and local actors as well as public administrations at all levels need capacities to contribute to a meaningful participatory governance. Thus, civil society and local actors need to strengthen their political capital to engage in a transparent and responsive decision-making process. A particular focus should be given on youth participation and civic engagement in order to ensure a long-term perspective on regional development and sustainable democracy.

ACTION 8: To enhance capacities of cities and municipalities to facilitate local and regional development

- Description: Cities, municipalities and regions are key stakeholders in contributing to regional development that addresses territorial challenges. Drafting territorial strategies or establishing cooperation and participatory policies are pre-requisites for high quality regional development. Thus, local actors shall be supported in increasing capacities for cooperation and service provision in the area of Roma inclusion, fighting trafficking in human beings, spatial planning and cooperation in functional regions.

3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Evidence-based decision making: Improving cooperation between decision-makers and researchers is considered to be a relevant issue in relation to building institutional capacities (for better public service provision) as well as enhancing capacities of cities and municipalities to facilitate local and regional development. This requires the development of methods of cooperation with academia as well as the ability of researchers to present and communicate their findings comprehensively.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): Priority Area 7 Knowledge Society

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Developing funding and investment instruments: In the past years, Priority Area 10 Institutional Capacity and Cooperation piloted initiatives under the Danube Investment Framework funded by the European Commission. This also marked a starting point for the cooperation between Priority Area 10 Institutional Capacity and Cooperation and Priority Area 8 Competitiveness to assess opportunities for funding in the Danube Region.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): Priority Area 8 Competitiveness

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Roma inclusion at local level: Roma inclusion was identified as concrete example under the action “To enhance capacities of cities and municipalities to facilitate local and regional development” as local and regional administrations need to build capacities for inclusive service provision. This challenge corresponds with Priority Area 9 People and Skills that aims at fighting poverty and social exclusion of vulnerable groups (with a special focus on Roma).

- Reference to Priority Area(s): Priority Area 9 People and Skills

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Youth participation: Including young people in participatory governance was considered an important topic in view of the action “To strengthen the involvement of civil society and local actors in the Danube Region” in order to ensure constructive civic engagement and sustainable regional development for the future.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): Priority Area 9 People and Skills

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Fighting Trafficking in Human Beings: Fighting Trafficking in Human Beings is considered a complex challenge in the Danube Region that needs a coordinated approach between law enforcement, public administrations and organisations that are active in victim protection. This is considered to be crucial in order to mutually reinforce and support the efforts of different stakeholders.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): Priority Area 11 Security

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Digitalization: Since digitalised governance/government processes are affecting different policy areas as well as enhancing digital skills of people in the Danube Region, coordination between different Policy Areas/Priority Areas is considered crucial for the implementation of sound digital processes.

- Reference to Priority Area(s): All Priority Areas

PA 11 - SECURITY

1. EUSDR TARGETS OF PRIORITY AREAS

TARGET 1: Security offensive - Enhancing police cooperation with the aim of improving security and tackling serious and organised crime in the EUSDR countries and strengthening the efforts against terrorism threats

- Indicator: number of joint police operations within the Danube region
- Baseline: Enhanced exchange of best practices and networking
- Reference to relevant Action(s): To enhance cooperation between police units on operational and ministerial level to combat cross-border crime in particular in the Danube Region; To intensify the prevention of and fight against terrorist; To intensify the police cooperation in information security and combating cybercrime; To exchange experience, networking and cooperation in the field of countering smuggling and trafficking in human beings, drugs, excise goods and firearms; To strengthen and intensify the law enforcement cooperation in the field of property crime

TARGET 2: Promoting strategic long-term cooperation between law enforcement actors along the Danube River by enhanced networking

- Indicator: Number of joint operations conducted as a continuation of the DARIF project
- Baseline: Once a year
- Reference to relevant Action(s): To establish a network of contact and coordination centres along the Danube River, To further strengthen the cooperation with key stakeholders – Europol, Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC) and others, To establish standardised operational procedures for joint activities in case of transboundary technical-technological water traffic accidents, To enhance cooperation between water police units in Danube region

TARGET 3: Improving the systems of border control, document inspection management and cooperation on consular related issues in the Danube region

- Indicator: number of document inspections within the Danube region
- Action: Exchange of best practices and networking
- Baseline: Reduction of waiting times and control duration
- Reference to relevant Action(s): To further develop well-functioning border-management systems, To foster the cooperation and exchange of best practices on document inspection management, To address the topic of better managing migration in the Danube Region

TARGET 4: Promoting the rule of law and fight against corruption

- Indicator: Political Stability and corruption index: Estimate
- Baseline: Enhanced exchange of best practices and networking
- Reference to relevant Action(s): To further enhance the joint efforts in combating corruption, To foster the administrative cooperation and improvement of qualifications of law enforcement.

2. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

The activities within PA 11 contribute to sustainable development in the Danube region in terms that security is inter-related to all other aspects of the strategy - it is the necessary prerequisite for safe transport and energy corridors, safety of tourism, including even food security. When the Strategy was being elaborated the topic of security was added at the very last stage of its preparation. Yet, it proved to be one important element contributing to the level of security in the region and enhancing networking and cooperation with other priority areas.

Without a certain level of safety and stable security environment in the region, the cooperation in all other fields will be significantly affected. The successful implementation of the EUSDR requires the efficient functioning of not only its priority areas but also certain horizontal elements like cooperation between the priority areas themselves. For PA 11 Security it could be said that it involves a wide range of key stakeholders, which come from different law-enforcement agencies, but also committed partners from Europol, SELEC, RCC, etc.

The growing efforts of PA 11 to develop the “horizontal cooperation” with PA 1a, PA 6 and PA 10 already led to tangible results (e.g. the elaboration of a Practical Manual with PA 1a or the participation in several overlapping workshops or forums with PA6 and PA10).

DANUBE REGION SPECIFICS

The Danube River represents an important waterway for passengers and goods that requires a safe and free from corruption environment. In that regard tangible efforts to prevent and fight corruption were undertaken within the last few years. In that regard tangible efforts to prevent and fight corruption and combatting serious and organised crime were undertaken in the last few years. However, some challenges remain that call for further enforcement of the rule of law, both within and across jurisdictions. Intelligence must be better shared, more effectively used, and target joint actions should be implemented. Structures and capacity for private and public sector decision-making must be improved, including good planning and international cooperation. The optimal use of resources and the horizontal cooperation with the other PAs is essential. PA 11 and PA 1a have already undertaken concerted action

ACTION 1: Setting up a structure of Danube River Forum

- Description: An important aspect within PA 11 portfolios is the long-term cooperation on establishing a network of contact and coordination centres along the Danube that is continuously growing. As a follow-up to a strategic PA 11 project “DARIF” (2013-2015) the EUSDR-Countries participated in six annually held joint actions to strengthen the cooperation. In this regard we will furthermore organize joint action days in this field of cooperation once a year.

ACTION 2: Joint work with Priority Area 1a “Mobility: Waterways”

- Description: The joint work with Priority Area 1a “Mobility: Waterways” a has a longstanding history since 2013. The main objective of this cooperation is the standardization, harmonization and digitization of ship inspections on the Danube. In order to achieve this goal, several actions have been developed through several workshops, which need to be coordinated between the EUSDR countries. PA 11 is responsible for implementing of four measures. PA11 will continue the cooperation with PA 1a in the future.

ACTION 3: Implementation of a Ministerial Conference every 3 years

- Description: The Interior Ministers within the framework of the PA 11 of EUSDR convened at two Danube Security Conference in 2013 and 2016. The next meeting is scheduled for the end of 2019 or early 2020 (because of the EU-Elections). It’s really important to have a steady exchange and support on a high political level regarding all relevant topics in the EUSDR. So PA11 will furthermore organize such meetings in the future. Also, a Police Chief Conference is planned to cover the operational level.
- ACTION 4: Set up cooperation between law enforcement agencies in order to ensure information security in Danube region and counteracting hybrid threats.
- Description: This can include identification of hybrid threats, study best practice to counteract this phenomenon, disinformation methodology.

3. (EXAMPLES OF) SELECTED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT FOR THE EUSDR

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Setting up a structure of Danube River Forum

- Description: Essential aspect within PA 11 portfolios is the long-term cooperation on establishing network of contact and coordination centres along the Danube that is continuously growing. As a follow-up to a strategic PA 11 project “Setting up a structure of Danube River Forum” (DARIF) (2013 – 2015) the participating countries under the leading and coordinating role of Hungary participated in six annually held joint actions which were carried out as multi-purpose operations. These joint actions are really important to strengthen the cooperation between the involved authorities and the exchange of experience. So we will furthermore organize joint action days in this field of cooperation once a year.

- Reference to Action(s): To establish a network of contact and coordination centers along the Danube River

STRATEGIC PROJECT OR ACTIVITY: Joint work with Priority Area 1a “Mobility: Waterways”

- Description: The joint work with Priority Area 1a “Mobility: Waterways” already has a long history since 2013. The main objective of this cooperation is the standardization, harmonization and digitization of ship inspections on the Danube. In order to achieve this goal, several actions have been developed through several workshops, which need to be coordinated between the EUSDR countries. PA 11 is responsible for implementing three measures
- Reference to Action(s): Reducing the waiting times and control duration

4. CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS BASED ON “PACS INPUT FOR THE QUESTIONS FOR PACS RELATED TO NEXT STEPS OF THE REVISION OF THE EUSDR ACTION PLAN” BY ROMANIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY FROM 28th JANUARY 2019.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Cooperation for improving procedures for river transport along the Danube Rivers

- Reference to Priority Area(s): A good cooperation of PA11 with other PAs creates synergies and gives added value to the work. The cooperation between PA1a and PA11 in the field of strengthening the security on waterways is very important, so PA1a-PA11 working groups support the attendances in significant workshops from interested members of Non-EU-Member-States.

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Trafficking in human beings

- Reference to Priority Area(s): 10 - the topic was addressed during the XIV meeting of the SG of PA 11. Opportunities for further cooperation were discussed during the joint session between the two PAs during the XV meeting of the SG

CROSS-CUTTING TOPIC: Cooperation for improving procedural for river transport along the Danube Rivers

- Reference to Priority Area(s):

ANNEX 1

The structure of priorities:

The organisation of the Action Plan seeks to identify priorities clearly and make it explicit also who is responsible for their implementation and follow-up. It also aims to assign the responsibilities to different administrative levels and actors within the Region, with support from the other partners, notably the EU Institutions. The structure incorporates the following features:

- **EUSDR Objectives**

Are the overall goals that should be attained within each PA. They indicate the desirable results of the stakeholders' efforts for implementing the Strategy. It is recommended that they are aligned with the policy objectives and principles listed in chapter 5.

- **Targets**

Targets are meant to make the objectives of the Strategy measurable. They were developed and endorsed by the Steering Group of each Priority Area. EUSDR Priority Areas assessed the respective targets which were endorsed in 2016 in view of proposing adaptation or revision. PA built on the structure of the existing targets and, at the same time, included new targets matching the EUSDR Objectives due to new challenges in the Danube Region. PAs provided realistic and feasible targets on which basis a monitoring system will be subsequently developed by DSP.

- **Actions**

An Action is an important issue requiring intervention by the countries and stakeholders involved to meet the targets of the Priority Area. It can be a new approach, an increased coordination in policy making, a support to a process already engaged, a networking initiative, etc. An action may not necessarily require financing. All actions should be understood without prejudice to the existing EU competences and requirements of the EU *acquis*.⁵⁹

Implementation of actions is the responsibility of all, on country, regional, urban and local level. Actions (which state the objective to be reached) must be transformed into concrete projects (which are detailed and require a project leader, a timeframe and financing), as lined out in *the EUSDR Communication (COM(2010) 715)*. Further mobilization, more coherent and due involvement of actors shall be pursued along the Priority Areas – at different territorial (EU, international, national, regional, local), institutional and sectoral level.

- **Projects**

A project is concrete, with a start and end date. In general, it usually requires financing, a project leader and project partners. The Action Plan presents projects by way of examples to stimulate further initiatives as the Strategy progresses, and as new ideas emerge. The aim is also to illustrate what is needed.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ EUSDR Action Plan, 2010, p4, COM(2010) 715.

⁶⁰ EUSDR Action Plan, 2010, p4, COM(2010) 715.

- **Activities**

Are concrete umbrella like initiatives. They have a start, usually require intensive cooperation and are platforms for exchanging experiences and good practices. Projects and Activities in the Action Plan are presented as examples to stimulate further initiatives.

- **Processes**

Macro-regional processes⁶¹ should lead to improved implementation of the existing policies or ideally, the development of new policy recommendations and planning methods. They are organised and inclusive long-term cooperation, with blending activities based on identified gaps and needs of the macro-region aiming for greater policy impact and change of existing approaches.

A macro-regional Process is a number of jointly established development processes that aim to create a broad impact and achieve objectives (Targets and Actions) of the Priority Area. This process responds to the Actions defined in the Action Plan, which are implemented through interlinked Activities (e.g. meetings, groups, networks, and platforms) and Projects. A macro-regional process has a larger impact on cohesion, is linked to various policies and pushes stakeholders for a joint action (single or complex, depending on the topic). Through a strong stakeholder involvement, it helps to interlink various single Projects and Activities, take up their results and develop new joint initiatives for a macro-regional benefit. Thus, it ensures continuation and transferability of Actions at macro-regional level.

The macro-regional process is built on three core elements:

- a. The Strategy – dedicated to ‘breaking silos’ through transnational and cross-sectoral cooperation;
- b. The platform – established by the group of committed stakeholders (representing relevant multi-level governance levels) for the purpose of interacting on the macro-regional issues;
- c. The work plan (or road map) – in a form of agreed way to cooperate and reach the set objectives, targets and indicators.

The macro-regional process applies principles of macro-regional relevance, trans-nationality, complementarity and impact or change.

⁶¹ Interact / EUSBSR: Macro-regional strategies: workflows, processes and approaches, 18/01/2018, <http://www.interact-eu.net/library#1722-macro-regional-strategies-workflows-processes-and-approaches>