

Contribution from Peter Langer

Director of the Donaubüro Ulm

and Speaker of the Council of Danube Cities and Regions on the occasion of the Conference on EU strategy for the Danube region on 10th May 2010 in Ruse (Bulgaria)

I am pleased for having been invited to this conference and for the opportunity to speak here. I come from Ulm, the city in Baden-Württemberg / Germany at the upper part of the Danube, in which the very first of these conferences for the development of a European strategy for the Danube region took place. And we are really connected with that river outside here. It has already run through eight European countries up to here – a European miracle itself. I again have to admit, that the Danube is like a creek in Ulm, compared to the mighty river here. However, we do still have the highest church tower in the world, so!

I represent a network of cities and regions along the Danube which has – starting from Ulm – developed for many years. In 2009 we united to the “Council of the Danube Cities and Regions” in Budapest. Representatives from 33 Danube cities from Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Austria, Hungary, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria are members. The Council of the Danube Cities and Regions works closely with the Working Community of Danube Regions (the so called ARGE Donauländer).

This alliance confirms that in Ulm and in the cities and regions a lot of things began, which now can stimulate the development of macro-regional structures for the European Danube region.

The Council therefore welcomes the resolution of the European Parliament of 21st January 2010 on the European Strategy for the Danube Region, which underlines the necessity of incorporating regional and local actors in the process of developing the Danube Strategy, so that we can find solutions for common challenges and so that the concrete proposals will be realized efficiently.

Why do the Danube cities and the Danube regions play a special role in this process? That's because the mutual history, present and future is experienced most strongly and most directly by the people in the cities and regions.

"If European identity didn't develop in the Danube region, then where?" said our friend Erhard Busek once in Ulm.

Joint projects in culture, science, education, ecology and economy have been developed for many years and there have been numerous meetings, also of young people, the young Europeans. 15 Danube offices have been established from Ulm to the Danube Delta on the model of the Ulm Donaübüro. Two weeks ago, we founded another one in Golubac at the Iron Gate in Serbia.

The municipal and regional cooperation that has developed along the Danube is even more necessary for the future. This is why the Council of Danube Cities and Regions has worked out a position paper for the Danube strategy with action plans and projects in the frame of the consultation process and let the commission have it.

An important step should be the founding of a "European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)", that at first should be brought to its way

by the cities of Ulm, Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest. Let me tell you about the fields of action, which should be worked on by this EGTC. They also must be anchored in the EU Danube strategy in our opinion:

- **Sustainable improvement to the environment, water quality of the Danube from the Black Forest to the Black Sea and promoting renewable energy technologies:**

Water is **the** source of life. The Danube with its tributaries is one of the largest water reservoirs in the European Union. In the frame of EU 2020 the water quality along the whole length of the river is to be improved by 2020 in a massive project through the cooperation of municipal and regional water, sewage and waste disposal companies. This project is also in direct correlation to the realization of the European Union's Water Framework Directive. Ecological water and sewage projects are also becoming the important economic factor for the cities and regions along the Danube and form the future pillars of a developed nature and culture tourism along the Danube

- **Developing and increasing prosperity through improved transport infrastructure and mobility, know-how transfer in environmental planning, economic development and administrative management;**
- **The cultural and scientific co-operation to develop joint European identity in the Danube region:**

"Culture is the soul of Europe" is a basic issue of EU culture policy. The Danube region offers a suitable with its enormous diversity and different cultures and ways of life is an exemplary field for experimenting and experience. The Danube has been used as a theme to connect culture and people in different Danube cities for years. The International Danube Festival in Ulm has developed into the outstanding river festival in the Danube region. The International Danube Festival in Romanian Tulcea in the Danube Delta, festivals in Vienna, Budapest and Novi Sad are committed to cultural cooperation along the Danube.

Setting up a European network of creative forces, institutions and festivals from the Danube Region is a central project of the Council of Danube Cities and Regions within the framework of the EU Danube Strategy.

The European Danube Academy is the base institution and common platform for cooperation in culture, science and media. It is being expanded in close cooperation with other institutions into a central project within the framework of the EU Danube Strategy: Joint "think tank" of the Council of Danube Cities and Regions.

- **Strengthen civil society and civil rights:**

The Danube region is influenced by multi-ethnic co-habitation, unique in Europe, but it is also representative of the latent tensions and open conflicts between ethnic groups, of racism, expulsion and the genocide of just a few years ago.

Anti-discrimination and gender projects play a central role in the development of civil society structures in the Danube Region. Meeting projects for young people but also for the elderly along the Danube should be continued, expanded and interlinked. And strengthening a free

and independent media is central to developing civil society and democratic conditions in the Danube Region – for example through education and exchange programs for young journalists and by setting up a Danube media network.

- **Governance:**

The cities along the Danube are the motors for the development of a macro-regional Danube Strategy. The cooperation structure, which was founded by the Council of Danube Cities and Regions, should be consolidated to develop joint spheres of action and projects on the one hand and, on the other, to offer the European Commission a concrete partner institution with legal status. An innovative legal form that the EU has created for such co-operations is suited to this: the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

Therefore – I mentioned it -, as part of the municipal cooperation in the Danube Region, the cities of Ulm, Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest are planning a joint project and development agency in the legal form of a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation. The purpose of this agency is the development and implementation of joint projects in the fields of action of the Danube Strategy. Other Danube cities have declared their interest in joining the EGTC.

We suggest to make the network of Danube Cities and –regions and especially this project itself to a flagship project of the Danube strategy.

Convinced Europeans are the basis of a strong Europe. They are to be found in the Danube cities.

Thank you for your attention.