

DANUBE REGION strategy



news



FOCUS

A Year in Action

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INTERACT

Sharing Expertise



We can transform the region in terms of growth and jobs



PHOTO: EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Mr Walter Deffaa has been the Director-General for Regional Policy since the beginning of this year. The mission of this European Commission's Directorate General is to develop and pursue actions leading to the strengthening of the European Union's economic, social and territorial cohesion, with the objective to promote a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Mr Deffaa, can you tell us why it is useful to have macro-regional strategies?

Many important topics cannot be dealt with by countries in isolation: they require cooperation with neighbouring countries. This is the case for instance in the fields of transport, energy, the environment, the economy and security. However, this cooperation is not easy: countries have different languages, administration is often nationally oriented and sometimes interests are diverging. Part of this cooperation is done at the level of the EU-27, but we can better address some territorial issues at the level of the macro-region. Common challenges and opportunities can be identified together over a large but coherent zone, and solutions developed in cooperation with each other.

There is also the question of alignment, critical mass and impact. More and more, it is clear that our policies and funding should be better integrated, both for better value and to achieve the goals of Europe 2020. I think that this coordinated and integrated approach is much helped by macro-regional work.

What is your general evaluation of the macro-regional approach for the Danube Region?

The two existing Strategies -especially the Danube Strategy- are relatively new and their results have not been fully tested yet. A report on the added value for the Danube work is being prepared for early 2013.

However, I believe that the work in the Danube region is certainly addressing the main challenges - environment, risks, mobility, innovation, etc. I am also confident that we can transform the region in terms of growth and

jobs, by promoting better cooperation. This can already be seen in relation to research opportunities, innovative approaches, enterprise and new types of tourism. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region is also drawing on the experience of our first macro-region, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, where there has been significant progress in terms of projects and networks. My estimate is the Danube Region is progressing in the same way.

How has the Strategy evolved since its endorsement by the European Council in June 2011? What is the current state of play? Are there any concrete projects or results that you would like to highlight?

I would emphasise that it is clear that the Strategy has created a valuable cooperation platform, which did not exist in the past. This has enhanced the focus and coordination on key issues. Let me mention a few examples:

- In the area of navigability, the transport ministers now meet to work on the issue of water levels, after the situation that brought navigation to a complete standstill on the lower Danube in autumn last year.
- Police chiefs of the 14 Danube Region countries are setting up an anti-corruption platform.
- Projects are under preparation or implementation in the areas of energy and environment, such as the improvement of gas interconnections (e.g. between Slovakia and Hungary), a better use of biomass energy, and the restoration of waterway sediment balance.
- In the field of transport, a research project is working on how the Danube fleet can be more effectively modernised.
- A teaching programme for intercultural dialogue is being tested in schools to promote the different Danube cultures.
- The first Danube Financing Dialogue has been held in Vienna, gathering representatives of financial institutions and SMEs to improve credit flows and identify new business opportunities in the Danube Region.
- A second Danube Business Forum will be held in November this year, which brings together Danube enterprises, promoting links to universities and research institutes.

The Strategy has also led to better use of existing funds. For example, the European Framework Programme for Research recently launched a call specifically targeted at innovation in the inland navigation shipping sector, in which projects from the Danube Region were encouraged.

I also recently attended an important event organised by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission on the scientific support to the Strategy. This set the ground for a strengthened scientific cooperation in the Danube Region, in particular in the fields of environment protection, navigability, irrigation and agricultural development, and energy production.

Goals for the Danube Region are also now being formulated in a coherent and transnational way, thanks to the Strategy. Targets have been set in order to focus and prioritise efforts. For example by 2020: efficient multimodal terminals at Danube river ports and dry ports shall be developed to connect inland waterways with rail and road transport; a Danube touristic brand for the entire region shall be developed. Nutrient levels in the Danube shall be reduced so as to allow the ecosystem in the Black Sea to recover to 1960 conditions.

In parallel, much attention has been paid to developing an appropriate structure for the work. Coordinators for the Priority Areas have been appointed, assisted by Steering Groups gathering experts on each theme. A logo and a visual identity have been put in place, as well as communication tools such as the general website, or this newsletter.

It is worth mentioning that in November the Commission will organise, together with Bavarian and German authorities, the first Annual Forum of the Strategy (see *more information on the agenda p.8*). This will bring us an excellent opportunity to take stock of the work done and better plan the future. We are looking forward to hearing further proposals and ideas from all interested stakeholders!

What are the changes proposed by the Commission in the future package of the Cohesion Policy for 2014-2020? What will be the impact on the macro-regional strategies of the future regulations?

Cohesion Policy is at the heart of EU development, and will be the main investment mechanism for the delivery of Europe 2020 in the next decade. The Commission proposals for the next programming period are part of a major exercise to reach increased effectiveness and impact. In short, Cohesion Policy must show results. Secondly, we need to focus on a limited range of priorities to ensure maximum impact. For this, we have proposed a menu of priorities to be selected according to the principle of "thematic concentration". A third major aspect of the new proposals is the introduction of conditionalities to ensure that any investment is made where the conditions to do so are right. It is also worth noting that territorial cohesion, now fully integrated in the Treaty, needs to be more visibly part of Cohesion Policy. The Commission proposal raises the budget for European Territorial Cooperation by 30%, and this is being made part of the strategic approach. Finally, the Commission has taken steps to ensure future programmes are simpler to implement and funds easier to access.

As far as the macro-regional strategies are concerned, important steps have been taken to improve support for the macro-regional approach. The regulations propose that macro-regional strategies be embedded throughout the programming process (the Common Strategic Framework, the Partnership contracts, and all Operational Programmes, as appropriate) and when developing and implementing the policy in all respects. As was said in our Communication on the Baltic Sea Strategy, "it is essential that actors at all levels begin considering as soon as possible how and on which priorities to align funds for the coming financial period, taking account of the Action Plan and the targets set at Strategy and Priority Area level". The Commission has provided the opportunities, now they must be realised.



PHOTO: EUROPEAN COMMISSION - INFOREGIO

By Katrin Stockhammer, INTERACT Point Vienna

Key actors of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region met in January in Bucharest to explore common grounds and help shape the future of the Strategy.

The second meeting of National Contact Points (NPCs) and Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) of the EUSDR in Bucharest on 30-31 January “provided an excellent opportunity to share views on the progress of the Strategy and discuss the work ahead of us,” confirmed Regional Policy Commissioner Johannes Hahn in a recent letter to Prime Ministers in the Danube area.

“During the meeting everyone was encouraged to express opinions in an honest way,” said Anna Repullo-Grau of DG Regional Policy, who worked closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania and INTERACT to co-organise the meeting. “As we are still in an early phase of the Strategy it is very important to exchange information on what works well and what does not. The open workshop setting chosen by INTERACT and the small working groups created a friendly atmosphere and invited everyone to contribute to the discussions.”

The overall success of the Strategy depends to no small degree on the willingness and ability of PACs, NCPs and the Commission to cooperate. “We are all in the same boat,” confirms Priority Area 8 coordinator Hans-Peter Herdlitschka, who deals with the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development in the Danube Region. Referring to the Council Conclusions of April last year, he adds that “PACs have an important role in providing assistance to project lead partners, but we usually cannot act directly as project developers or implementers. Instead we rely on joint efforts – together with other PACs, NCPs and the Commission – to moderate and motivate and to encourage project promoters and funding sources to make a real difference for the Danube Region.”

The EUSDR network of NCPs and PACs also provides a framework for strategic discussions in addition to the debates of the High-Level Group. “The network seems to be a promising step forward that should be further developed,” said Roland Arbter, Austrian NCP of the EUSDR. “The joint learning process is much needed in this phase of the Strategy”, Arbter added.

Highlighting achievements of the Strategy to date, Commissioner Hahn points out in his letter to Prime Ministers that cooperation platforms have been created for each major theme of relevance to the Danube Region that did not exist in the past. Policy makers can use these platforms to identify common problems and opportunities, find shared solutions and implement joint actions and projects.

Of course much work remains to be done. As pointed out by many participants in Bucharest and communicated

to Prime Ministers by Commissioner Hahn, it is now of key importance to ensure that all relevant ministries participate in the Strategy in an active and coordinated way. In this vein, participating countries need to devote high-quality, well-supported human resources to the Strategy that enjoy full backing of their ministries or other organisations.

The success of the Strategy also relies on better alignment of the various funding sources; this includes the structural and cohesion funds, the pre-accession and neighbourhood policy instruments in non-EU countries, and all other available sources of EU and national funding, including loans and grants. For this, as emphasised by Commissioner Hahn, “coherent national positions for use in all different negotiating frameworks should be prepared”. This is central to the regulatory texts which the Commission proposed in October 2011.

As regards the structural funds, further key issues in relation to embedding macro-regional strategies in the future operational programmes are highlighted in a recent discussion paper of the INTERACT EUSDR Labgroup, including suggested amendments of the draft regulatory package and the need to provide concrete examples on how to embed the macro-regional concept in the 2014-20 Operational Programmes¹⁾. Additionally, INTERACT is currently examining the new mechanisms proposed in the draft regulatory package, such as integrated territorial investment, joint action plans and financial engineering instruments and their potential application to macro-regional strategies.

The next meeting of the network of NCPs, PACs and European Commission is scheduled for autumn of this year. “We are very much looking forward to the next meeting,” said Irina Ploeg Cruceru, another DG Regional Policy co-organiser of the Bucharest meeting. “You always have the feeling there is not enough time, and we are excited about the opportunity to continue the discussions.” In the future, the network could be fostered through many different types of settings. As suggested by Roland Arbter, “This can also include continuing ‘bilateral’ meetings of NCPs with the Commission.” Whatever the format, fostering the network will definitely help make the Strategy a success story.

¹⁾ “Discussion paper - Key recommendations on the legislative package proposal by the EC for Cohesion Policy 2014-2020” February 2012;
<http://groupsaces.com/DanubeRegionStrategyLabgroup/item/268993>



PHOTO: INTERACT

Danube Day 2012: Get active for the rivers!

By Benedikt Mandl, ICPDR*

PHOTO: ICPDR



On 29 June, the biggest river festival in the World will take place: Danube Day! It celebrates a unique struggle for healthier rivers that unites 14 countries and nearly 83 million people for the benefit of 30 major rivers and countless tributaries. As a result, 2012 is likely to see the biggest Danube Day in history.

From its spring to the Black Sea, the Danube is about 2800 kilometers long, making it the second-longest European river after the Volga. Its catchment area, the Danube River Basin, extends into the territories of 19 countries and comprises of more than 800,000 km², or about 10 percent of continental Europe. This part of Europe is highly diverse: The Danube passes through a variety of cultures, landscapes and ecosystems. It is this diversity that Danube Day endorses and celebrates every year on 29 June. The biggest river festival in the world is held all over the Danube River Basin in hundreds of individual events. This firework of riparian enthusiasm is coordinated by the **International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)**.

The ICPDR deals with a broader range of issues than its rather technical name would imply. Rivers are often perceived as lines of water running from higher to lower altitudes - a perception that is utterly wrong. In fact, rivers are three-dimensional, aquatic ecosystems characterised by dynamic changes. They split into branches, flow at different speeds, re-unite, build banks of sand and pebbles, give rise to floodplain forests and wetlands or destroy them with mighty floods. Historically, these ecosystems were under pressure due to human activities. Households, industries and agriculture contributed to a decrease in water quality for decades. Problems built up that could not be addressed by individual countries.

On 29 June 1994, the main Danube Basin countries signed the "Danube River Protection Convention". Rivers know no borders, and therefore, river management ought to reach beyond single countries as well. In this spirit, the convention defined the main areas that required action: the protection of water and associated ecological resources, the sustainable use of water in the Danube Basin, the reduction of inputs of nutrients and hazardous substances, and the management of floods and ice hazards. Today, the Convention has 15 contracting parties: 14 countries and the European Union. Together, they form the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, and they cooperate continuously to improve the quality of river systems.

This work, however, is not to take place on the level of governments and civil servants alone. The ICPDR is very active in public participation, which involves the consultation of stakeholders, and communication, which targets various interest groups, including the general public. In 2004, the ICPDR decided to celebrate the achievements of the international fight for healthier rivers by celebrating the first Danube Day. Since then, the event has grown from year to year. In 2011, the biggest Danube Day so far saw 230 events in more than 15 countries, thousands of participants and millions of people that were reached via mass media. Cooperation with the Coca-Cola network allows the ICPDR to produce information materials and giveaways.

Clean-up events, dance performances, the prestigious "Danube Art Master" children's competition and innumerable entertainment events are just a few examples of the educational value of Danube Day, which goes far beyond raising environmental awareness. In Budapest, Hungarians celebrated 'Danube Month', and some countries hosted a summer of Danube-related activities. Serbian events traditionally attract vast crowds and stretched from June to September: 100 events were planned by 300 organisations in 25 different locations!

In 2012, Danube Day will build on last year's success and hopefully become an even bigger event. 'Get active for the rivers!' - this is the slogan that will call nature enthusiasts to taste fish soup in the Danube Delta, enjoy a street festival in Belgrade, learn about the Danube Salmon in Vienna or dive into festivities throughout the Danube Basin on 29 June. To learn more about Danube Day in your area, visit www.danubeday.org.

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Zoom on a Priority Area:

“Security and organised crime”

An interview with Mr Christian Hofmann, German Federal Ministry of the Interior, and Mr Kalin Georgiev, Bulgarian Ministry of the Interior, Priority Area Coordinators.^{1) 2)}

The coordination of a PA of the EUSDR: a challenge or an opportunity?

Kalin Georgiev (KG): It is both a challenge and an opportunity. The bilateral cooperation and the traditionally excellent relations we have with our German partners help us a lot in this coordination task. You must also be aware of the effort, energy and commitment necessary to achieve these ambitious goals. Criminality is no longer a nationally-bound issue. Serious, organised crime and corruption are global issues, so joint efforts are needed. During the Bulgarian Presidency of the Salzburg Forum in 2011, participating countries agreed to make Danube Region Strategy activities a priority, thus ensuring high level support to PA 11 by all countries.

Christian Hofmann (CH): We need to look for those solutions which are appropriate for all 14 countries, taking account of the different cultures, languages and issues; and we need the solutions which are best for the people in the region. Further progress should be achieved by the local populations and not by people far away in Brussels.

What have been the main steps taken so far?

KG: Since the kick-off meeting of PA11 in June 2011, many steps were taken: setup of a Steering Group, definition of objectives for PA11, rules of procedure, criteria for project endorsement, a procedure for issuing letters of recommendation, etc. We received no less than 25 project ideas, and we look for feasible and ‘bankable’ ones. In January 2012 at the Police Chiefs’ Conference in Munich key topics for further strengthening of police cooperation were highlighted: drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings and the fight against corruption. We can also rely on the active and fruit bearing support of two NGOs: the Konrad Adenauer and the Hanns Seidel Foundations.

CH: Our work so far has been based on identification of four key targets: police cooperation, Danube cooperation and information centre, border management and document checking, and promoting rule of law and

fighting corruption. Besides what is mentioned by my Bulgarian colleague, we have established a coordination bureau in Sofia, and all our colleagues there are doing a brilliant job.

What is the most promising action identified to date?

KG: There are many promising ideas and activities. For instance, recently we called a Round Table on Setting up Coordination Centre(s) for Border Police Cooperation/ Networking of Existing Centres. In a very constructive dialogue we reached an agreement that will be presented to the next Steering Group meeting for approval. At the Symposium on EU Border Management and Security of Travel Documents in the Danube Region that took place in Sofia on 18-20 April, we gained new ideas and guidelines for cooperation on document security, border management and visa issues. Another project worth mentioning is the joint project of Bulgaria and Germany under the Rule of Law Program for South East Europe of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The project aims to enhance trans-border cooperation through elaborating and implementing comprehensive anti-corruption policies at national level of the Danube region countries and the Western Balkans, bringing them in line with the EU policy on the fight against corruption.

Is private funding involved in Priority Area “Security”?

CH: Not so far. In security matters it is a bit difficult to find private investors. But we should not forget that security is a sovereign function of governments. So private funding would be somewhat incongruent.

KG: Funding is a sensitive issue. There are no special funding facilities or instruments under the EUSDR. We were granted technical assistance for coordination, not for implementation of projects. We could not use the ISEC programme for financing, unfortunately, because the 2007-2013 calls had closed before we could prepare and submit projects. For the time being we very much rely on and are grateful for the Konrad Adenauer and the Hanns Seidel foundations for their financial support. And of course we have to rely on the allocation of our own funds for the implementation of projects. We expect to gain funding under the EU programmes for the next period.

More information on Priority Area 11 “Security and Organised Crime”: <http://groupspaces.com/Security/>

¹⁾ Please note that the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior is also involved in the coordination of PA11 - Security.

²⁾ To read the full version of this interview please visit www.danube-region.eu

GET INFORMED

Who is who in the EUSDR?



Did you know that the Danube Region Strategy website has a growing list of organisations and projects related to the Danube? Log on to www.danube-region.eu and click on the 'Who is Who' or 'Projects and Initiatives' tab to find out more.

Get Involved! Your Danube related organisation or project is not listed on the website? Log on to www.danube-region.eu to find out how to list your organisation:

www.danube-region.eu/pages/who-is-who-registration

or to list your project or initiative:

www.danube-region.eu/pages/get-listed-under-projects-and-initiatives

GET CURIOUS

"The Sport Quiz"

Assign the following famous athletes to their country of origin:

Austria	Czech Republic	Romania
Bulgaria	Hungary	Slovenia



A) Hristo Stoichkov	B) Kristina Egerszegi	C) Hermann Maier	D) Anze Kopitar	E) Gheorghe Muresan	F) Martina Navratilova
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Zoom on a Cooperation Programme in the Danube Region: Romania – Serbia

The Romania - Republic of Serbia IPA CBC programme is financed by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), and co-financed by Romania and Serbia. The programme's strategic goal is to achieve a more balanced and sustainable socio-economic development, and to improve the quality of life in the border area. All this becomes a reality through joint cross-border projects and common actions by Romanian and Serbian partners.

Romania-Serbia programme was among the first programmes to embrace the idea of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). Since environment is one of the key-objectives of the EUSDR as well as of the programme, the programme partners decided to allocate the funding available under priority axis 2 "Environment and emergency preparedness" to EUSDR-relevant projects.

Therefore in March 2011 a thematic call was launched with an IPA financial allocation of over EUR 7 million. The call was a great success: many project proposals were submitted, and five EUSDR-relevant projects were selected for a total value of EUR 6.9 million of IPA funds.

Contact and further information

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PHOTO: WWW.ROMANIA-SERBIA.NET

The Danube Region agenda

Major events

24-25 May:
Stakeholders' Conference on Inland Waterways
in the Danube Region, Bucharest



31 May:
Stakeholders' Conference on Energy, Budapest



13-14 June:
Stakeholders' Conference on People and Skills,
Vienna



29 June:
Danube Day, in all 14 countries of the Danube area



27 - 28 November:
First Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the
Danube Region, Regensburg



Territorial Cooperation events and news

22-23 May:
Central Europe Annual Event, Halle/Saale



5-6 June:
INTERACT Conference on sustainable growth in
ETC and its links with other funds, Florence



21 September:
European Cooperation Day, across Europe



8 - 11 October:
Open Days, Brussels
Keep an eye out for
Territorial Cooperation workshops!



For an overview of all
Danube Region Events, check out
www.danube-region.eu/pages/calendar

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www.interact-eu.net

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