

EU Strategy for the Danube Region

This paper represents a conclusion and summary of the outcomes from the INTERACT Forum “Territorial Cooperation adding value to the Danube area - linkages to Structural Funds” held on 16-17 March in Bratislava, Slovakia.

NOT official, NOT representing all, NOT exhaustive and NOT complete

1. General observations

The adoption of the EC Communication on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (10 June 2009) introduced, for the first time, the concept of a comprehensive macro-regional strategy covering several community policies'. In June 2009, the European Council has formally asked the European Commission to prepare as well an EU Strategy for the Danube Region, to be approved in the first semester of 2011.

European Territorial Cooperation programmes, including IPA cross-border cooperation programmes and ENPI CBC programmes, located in the Danube region, welcome the decision to develop the EUSDR. Territorial Cooperation programmes add an important dimension to the development of the Danube region: In the core area of the Danube region and at the heart of the EUSDR there are 42 cross-border, transnational and interregional programmes with more than 4,3 billion Euros available for cooperation projects in the period 2007-2013. Many other types of programmes and initiatives exist in the Region as well.

At the forum organised by INTERACT Point Vienna in Bratislava on 16-17 March 2010, programme managers of the Territorial Cooperation programmes and representative of the Objective 1 and 2 programmes agreed on several key considerations to be taken into account in the elaboration of the EUSDR.

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region should:

- be developed for the benefit of the whole Danube region and help create a common regional identity
- be developed in a cross-sectoral approach, integrating economic, environmental and social development
- focus on common priorities and optimal use of territorial potentials as a key for success
- be made for the benefit of citizens and improve their quality of life, their economic and social opportunities and their environment.
- make EU sectoral policies and programmes more effective and visible by creating opportunities for synergies and ensuring better coordination
- add clear value to existing efforts - programmes - initiatives and not become another strategy without concrete actions with joint responsibility
- be based on an effective governance system for the entire macro-region
- be based on a number of projects of high quality and with a clear implementation perspective
- become a cooperation framework for all stakeholders and actors in the Danube region

2. Opportunities and recommendations for EUSDR from the point of Territorial Cooperation Programmes

Territorial Cooperation programmes actively involve stakeholders from many levels: national regional, local, civil society, public administration, private companies, etc. Territorial cooperation programmes also address issues in a multi-national context. However, cooperation is complex and has limited financial capacity. Establishing links to sectoral policies and other funding sources is therefore key and EUSDR could become a good framework for this.

Cooperation programmes and projects already contribute to the development of the Danube region. Their priorities and objectives mostly fit with the suggested priorities of the strategy. What is needed is a way to identify, generate and select the most relevant projects and to capitalise on their results. It is important to start with what is already there and to emphasises potentials and opportunities of the Danube region:

- Cultural diversity, natural resources and knowledge of people are the most important potentials of the Danube region. It is important to continue to build upon existing cultural, natural and human resources in an effort to find joint solutions for the macro-region
- Urban areas as well as small and medium cities are of key importance to the area and there are many networks of cities already contributing the quality of life in the Danube region. The urban dimension should be better reflected in the EUSDR
- Research and development is a key factor for success in the Danube area. University networks, scientific cooperation and macro-regional centres of excellence should be fostered
- Links with countries and regions bordering the Danube macro-region need to be established to avoid creating artificial development bottlenecks at the ‘border’ of the macro-region
- The inclusion of non- EU Members States (Candidate, Potential Candidate and neighbouring countries) is an important asset to the Danube region and EUSDR; this should be utilised properly in order to create more balanced development of the entire region’s territory and to avoid development gaps
- Development trends need to be better identified and understood, not only facts and figures; A clear methodology should be identified for setting of development priorities, based on an analysis of trends, territorial potentials and challenges
- Synergies have to be a key aspect of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. The most appropriate way to link different structural funds programmes as well as sectoral policies and other funding opportunities should be explored
- Creation of a common understanding, identity and a sense of ownership among institutions and citizens of the Danube region is crucial

Potentials of the Territorial Cooperation programmes in the context of the EUSDR are:

- Danube region has a large number of national borders and therefore cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation programmes are very important in order to jointly tackle the implementation of EUSDR. Territorial cooperation has vast and long-lasting experience in this respect and is willing to share the expertise
- Territorial Cooperation is already exploring and implementing synergies among the cooperation programmes as well as with sectoral, national and regional programmes and initiatives

- Priorities of Territorial Cooperation programmes are already in line with the suggested pillars of the EUSDR
- Territorial Cooperation in the Danube region also has long experience in the joint implementation of cooperation programmes and projects between EU and non-EU countries and the joint management of EU and external funds
- Existing networks of cooperation created through cooperation projects are useful asset for the Danube region
- Cooperation between 1) different cooperation programmes and 2) between cooperation programmes and mainstream (Objective 1, 2) or thematic programmes under shared or direct management (Framework Programme, TEN-T, TEN-N, CIP etc) should be strengthened in the process of elaboration and implementation of the EUSDR in order to give the Strategy the impetus it deserves
- A working community of actors will be created, to be able to share and exchange good practices. This community will be coordinated by the INTERACT Programme with involvement of European Territorial Cooperation, IPA CBC and ENPI CBC programmes and coordinators of Objective 1 and 2