



European Economic and Social Committee

ECO/277
Danube strategy

Brussels, 16 April 2010

WORKING DOCUMENT

of the
Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion
on
The European Union strategy for the Danube region

Rapporteur: **Mr Barabás**
Co-rapporteur: **Mr Manoliu**

To the members of the study group on **The Danube Strategy**
(Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion)

N.B.: This document will be discussed at the meeting on **21 April 2010 at 10 a.m.**

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On 26 February 2010, the European Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on

The European Union strategy for the Danube region

The Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 20 July 2010. The rapporteur was Mr Miklós and the co-rapporteur was Mr Manoliu.

At its ... plenary session, held on ... and ... September 2010 (meeting of ...), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by ... votes to ... with ... abstentions.

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1. Background – characteristics of the Danube region

1.1 The river Danube, which is 2850 km (1782.5 miles) long, is Europe's longest river. From its source in the German Black Forest to the Danube Delta on the Black Sea, it flows through Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine; four capital cities – Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest and Belgrade – are situated directly on the Danube. However, regional cooperation is defined in much broader geographical terms, for example with reference to the Danube hydrographic basin which also includes the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro. Eight of the above-mentioned 14 countries are EU Member States. The Danube macro-region covers an area of 800 000 square kilometres with over 100 million inhabitants.

1.2 Apart from its significant economic and transport role, the Danube is a major source of drinking water and energy; it is also of great importance in agriculture, fisheries and tourism.

1.3 The Danube strategy helps to strengthen cooperation between the European Union and neighbouring countries from Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans.

2. Existing international organisations and institutions responsible for the Danube

2.1 Several international organisations are already concerned with cooperation in the Danube region. The Danube Commission, based in Budapest, was established by the Convention on Navigation on the Danube (Belgrade Convention) signed in 1948. Its main purpose is to ensure Danube navigation for participating countries. The International Commission for the

Protection of the Danube River (ICDPR), which is based in Vienna, was set up in 1998 to implement the Danube River Protection Convention on protection and sustainable use of the Danube signed in 1994 in Sofia. Cooperation at local and regional level in the Danube area is supported by the Working Community of the Danube States (Arge Donauländer) established in 1990, which involves 23 regions from nine countries. Cooperation is also supported by the Danube Cooperation Process (DCP) signed in 2002 in Vienna.

- 2.2 In addition to this there are many and diverse organisations, programmes and initiatives at various levels to strengthen and tap into the potential of regional cooperation in the Danube area.

3. **Documents on the River Danube**

- 3.1 At its meeting of 18-19 June 2009 the European Council requested the European Commission to draw up a European strategy on the Danube by the end of 2010. Numerous existing background documents have been used to prepare the European Danube strategy.
- 3.2 The European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2010 on a European Strategy for the Danube Region spoke out in favour of preparing a strategy taking into account the economic and social needs and potential of the region, based on broad social dialogue.
- 3.3 In its opinion on "The EU Strategy on the Danube area" (7 October 2009) the Committee of the Regions welcomed the drawing-up of the Danube strategy aimed at ensuring greater prosperity, security and peace for inhabitants of the region.
- 3.4 Over the past few years the European Economic and Social Committee has discussed the complex issues affecting the Danube region in several opinions on various subjects (transport, economic cohesion, etc).

4. **The open consultation organised by the European Commission**

- 4.1 The European Commission announced an open consultation on the issue enabling it to take on board proposals and views from all concerned in preparing the strategy and ensure maximum transparency. In the period between 2 February and 12 April 2010 a Commission procedure enabled EU citizens, civil society organisations and others to make their views heard on the document at the pre-preparation stage and put forward proposals.
- 4.2 In parallel with the consultation, DG Regio – which is the Commission DG with responsibility for this subject – in cooperation with national governments organised several local events in e.g. Ulm, Budapest, Bratislava, Vienna, Belgrade and Bucharest at which various specialist issues were discussed.

5. **Danube strategy guidelines**

5.1 In developing a Danube strategy it is important to define a theoretical framework underpinning programmes to promote cooperation in the Danube area.

5.2 It is therefore important to take the following into account when developing the Danube strategy:

- the role played by the river in transport and infrastructure (with particular attention to Pan-European transport corridor VII, which affects the Danube);
- the Danube as a source of drinking water and energy, and as a natural environment which needs to be preserved;
- the role of innovation, research and education in the region;
- the needs of tourism in the Danube area and rural development potential;
- the role of the river in developing a shared Danubian awareness and identity, complementing European awareness and identity for the whole of the EU; cultural dialogue and solidarity have a key role to play here;

5.3 Given the diverse and often competing nature of the values and interests involved it is vital to develop an integrated Danube strategy based on common principles, taking into account not only economic rationale but also social needs and factors.

6. **Conclusions and proposals**

6.1 **At political level the planned Danube strategy:**

6.1.1 must be open, inclusive and sensitive to social considerations, taking into account proposals from civil society organisations and building on their experience;

6.1.2 given the complexity and interdependent nature of the relevant issues, can only be effective if it consistently follows an integrated approach rather than sectoral considerations;

6.1.3 must be a suitable tool for:

- a. genuinely contributing to the deepening of the European integration process, especially in the framework of the "Europe 2020" programme, and
- b. bringing the 6 non-EU Member States in the region closer to the European Union and supporting their efforts to achieve integration;

- 6.1.4 must reflect EU macro-regional level policy;
- 6.1.5 must help to coordinate the work of cooperation systems already existing at various levels and in different parts of the region, make this activity more effective and avoid duplication;
- 6.1.6 can only be implemented in the form of a process allowing for flexibility and periodic reviews;
- 6.1.7 must have realistic objectives. A short-term (3-5 year) action plan should be prepared for the achievement of these objectives; this action plan must make it clear that active involvement of all stakeholders is a key prerequisite for success;
- 6.1.8 must have clearly visible and tangible results for society and citizens;
- 6.1.9 must take into account the experience of implementing the EU Baltic strategy.
- 6.2 **Practical proposals at the level of civil society for the action plan accompanying the planned Danube strategy:**
 - 6.2.1 events (meetings, festivals, visits, etc) are needed to strengthen the feeling among people of the Danube region of belonging together, develop regional awareness and maintain cultural diversity, particularly where young people are concerned;
 - 6.2.2 a regional network of civil society organisations (Danube Civil Forum) should be developed to enable, among other things, joint action and projects; members of the network could meet once a year in the various countries of the region;
 - 6.2.3 regular contacts and cooperation between stakeholders in the region should be strengthened, together with social and civic dialogue; economic and social councils at national level could play an important role here;
 - 6.2.4 further reduction or elimination of barriers to free movement together with application of the principles of decent work and fair pay should help to bring people closer together;
 - 6.2.5 an international researcher group could be set up to carry out a scientific analysis and examination of strategic issues in the Danube region; the work of this group should be supported by a scholarship programme;
 - 6.2.6 the European Economic and Social Committee should set up a permanently operating observatory or study group on the Danube strategy;
 - 6.2.7 initiatives concerned with the teaching of languages used in the region should be supported;

- 6.2.8 elements of the Danube strategy and its action plan should be implemented by a monitoring committee comprising social stakeholders which could prepare an annual report on its conclusions;
- 6.2.9 implementation of the Danube strategy and its action plan could be financed from various sources, in particular funding from the EU (especially the Structural Funds) as well as countries in the region, the private sector and international financial institutions.
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