

EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

First Austrian contribution to stock-taking

In its letter to national administrations dated 22 October 2009, the European Commission invited i.a. to submit discussion documents regarding priorities, policies and actions related to the strategy (“*non papers*”).

The present document constitutes a first compilation of preliminary contributions by Austrian governmental bodies (both federal and regional) as well as social partners and some groups of interest (“*Austrian stakeholders*”). It is neither complete nor does it pre-judge more consolidated Austrian positions. It is the aim of this contribution to enrich the Commission’s information base when starting to elaborate an EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). In doing so, it does not question the leading role of the Commission in formulating comprehensive proposals for the EU strategy.

Overall approach to an EUSDR

When discussing its positions, Austrian partners are broadly guided by the Commission’s concept note “*Macro-regional strategies in the European Union*” (September 2009), in particular as far as *Actions*, *Boundaries* and *Constraints* are concerned (as described in the concluding chapter of the Commission’s note¹).

However, regarding the difficulty of defining boundaries, in the context of the EUSDR the assumption that macro regional strategies are basically EU internal ones (as in the case of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy) has to be revised with a view to specifically addressing and directly involving (potential and actual) EU-candidate countries and third countries. With the Danube River serving as its focus, a strict limitation of the Strategy to member states alone would miss the point of any such initiative. It is therefore appropriate and highly welcomed that the Strategy is open to all the Participating States of the Danube Co-operation Process, in which all countries which are part of the Danube River Basin are represented.

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- ¹ **Actions:** A strategy will only be successful if there are tangible achievements. Although an inclusive approach is recommended, there should be positive value-added for every action included in the strategy. Moreover all actions should promote networking and tend to increase or streamline compliance with Community policies.
 - **Boundaries:** The regions should be defined so as to maximise the efficacy of the strategy. This may well mean flexible, even vague, definitions of the boundaries. However, the limits of the region should be less important than the advantages of participating in the strategy.
 - **Constraints:** The macro-regional strategy should not rely on additional dedicated EU funding or special regulatory treatment for its impact although competitive access to a dedicated funding instrument could yield spectacular European added value. Rather, the absence of new money or legislation at the EU level, and the agreement to avoid any duplication of institutions, will allow all the partners to focus on the significant issues: how can existing resources, legislation, structures be better used for the benefit of the region

Relationships and synergies between the EUSDR and other EU policies will still have to be clarified during the process. It thereby is understood that the EUSDR should not substitute or change policies which are led in other contexts (EU Stabilisation and Association Process/enlargement, Eastern partnership/European Neighbourhood Policy, etc.). It will however be important to link up instruments and mechanisms available in the framework of those policies with instruments and mechanisms at the disposal of member states at national level.

Possible contents of an EUSDR - from an Austrian perspective

This non-paper is based on a first collection of contributions which has been organised among Austrian stakeholders in November 2009. More than 20 institutions have responded quite extensively to the guiding questions which were given by the Commission's representative at the meeting on 21 October 2009 in Vienna. Several studies and thematic papers have been submitted (the complete material - in EN - could be made available to DG Regio's working level). A first study prepared by the *Länder* Vienna, Burgenland, Lower Austria and Upper Austria is attached.

Concluding on the contributions so far, the general Austrian interests in the following **policy challenges and opportunities** have been confirmed and should thus be taken into consideration for the elaboration of the EUSDR (*demonstratively summarised as catch-words*):

In general, beyond a better use and better protection of the Danube River as such, the EUSDR should aim at developing an integrated approach to the whole region's sustainable development. Thus, the EUSDR should contribute both to political, economic, social and cultural development and cohesion of the Danube region and to further integration of the South-East European countries into the European Union.

Although the thematic proposals have been linked to the 3 *pillars* as proposed by the Commission, the outcome of the Austrian debate so far recommends to present an EUSDR with a specific pillar on "*Welfare and Security*" – addressing issues of immediate relevance for the citizens. Moreover, "*Governance*" has been identified as a possible additional pillar or as a cross-cutting issue.

"Connectivity"

- Multiple transport infrastructure needs in the Danube Region (waterways, ports, terminals, road, rail, bridges, pipelines) --> "hardware" and "software" needs, high relevance in respect to environmental compatibility and financing issues (taking into account the specific impact of the crisis in this part of Europe)
- Importance of the river Danube as transnational "backbone" of the regions transport and logistic system (Corridor VII) - addressing also economic, social and ecological aspects --> waterway infrastructure needs, awareness raising concerning potentials, ICT tools for navigation, transferring ports into multimodal logistic centres, human capital development, fostering integrated planning/development instruments, ...
- International and national rail and road transport routes, EU Transport Corridors (TEN-T, IV, V, X, Paris-Munich-Vienna-Budapest-Bucharest, "east-west" and "north-south" linkages, ...) --> missing sections/bottlenecks, modernisation, improvement of rail connections (no specific need for high-speed trains), cooperation among railway companies, financing, ...
- Multi-modality of transport , regional und urban multi-modal transport nodes
- Functional linkages between international/national transport routes and regional/local transport and logistic networks

- Sustainable mobility management
- Transport safety
- Border crossing regimes with non-EU countries in respect to transport flows
- Energy transport networks (“Energy Community”; stronger regional integration through common transnational energy projects like the river Danube as energy source, crude oil pipelines, Nabucco Gas pipeline, interconnection with Druzhba-pipeline, 380 KV power lines, cross-border power lines; --> missing sections/bottlenecks, modernisation, regulation frameworks, security, financing models, ...
- Information and Communication Technology networks
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“Environment and Risk Prevention”

- Integrated River Planning, Danube River Basin Management Plan (EU Water Framework Directive, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), Flood Directive, ...) -> Prevention against floods and droughts, development of ecological quality of Danube river system/catchment area as a whole, water management issues, quality of landscape, natural and cultural heritage, protective and renaturation measures, sustainable land-use measures, investments, monitoring, networking, education and training, ...
- Protection and development of the environment, nature and biodiversity conservation (e.g. Habitats Directive and Birds Directive (NATURA 2000)) --> standards and policy instruments, legal frameworks, environmental controls, private-public-partnership models, protection of ecologically valuable areas (incl. nature parks, ecological networks, ...), eco-tourism, natural resources (water, ...), ...
- Environmental infrastructure and technologies, like sewage plants, waste management, sanitation, soil purification, water purification, potable water supply, energy-efficient housing, ... --> investment needs, modernisation, capacity building and training measures, ...
- Enhancing the role of education for promoting sustainable development
- Promotion of energy diversification and renewable energy policies (e.g. Renewable Energy Directive), like in the field of hydro power, wind power, biomass energy, bio-fuel, ... --> legal frameworks, market profitability, energy clusters, sustainability, crisis-resilience, energy efficiency, capacity building and education, ...
- Region-wide support for climate-friendly policies; cooperation in the field “Climate Change” (adaption and mitigation) -> exploring potentials for transnational strategies, exchange of know-how and experience, qualifications, tools/instruments, ...
- Risk prevention in respect to brownfields restoration of contaminated areas and pollution legacies, ...
- Cooperation in the field of civil protection and emergency management (chemical and nuclear accidents, floods, storms, droughts, ...)
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“Socio-Economic and cultural integration”

- Transnational framework conditions for sustainable economic growth, economic development and integration in general – taking into consideration heterogeneous levels, trends, needs and potentials in the Danube Region -> scope for coordinating economic policies, EU cohesion policy, transnational cluster policies, business networks, policies for SMEs, SME cooperations,

- Fostering, facilitating and stimulating trade and investment --> trade barriers towards non-EU countries, investment/business climate, attractiveness for foreign investments, financing, ...
- Cross-border and transnational labour market policy
- Transnational research and scientific cooperation -> cooperation of research centres and programmes, university and high-level school cooperation (e.g. Danube rectors conference), vocational training, exploration of joint interests within the EU-context, ...
- Addressing "Knowledge triangle" potentials (interaction between education, research and innovation) and/or the "triple helix"-type of actions (interactions between academia and the private and public sectors)
- Strengthening the social dimension of development policies, aiming for social cohesion – starting from heterogeneous levels and priorities in the various countries
- Development of human resources through investments in education, training, science and research, transnational/interregional cooperation, inter-cultural learning, ...; specific attention to human capital development in priority areas (entrepreneurship, tourism) ; incl. mutual recognition of qualifications for promoting labour and student mobility, specific governance issues, ...
- Making better use of (high!) potentials for tourism --> global tourist destination, cultural tourism (Danube Tourist Commission), cultural routes ("cultural route Danube"), river tourism, cycling tourism, regional/local potentials, cross-border initiatives, ...
- Protection, restoration and utilisation of cultural heritage in many Danube countries -> partly lacking awareness, financial means and administrative/legal framework
- Regional and urban quality of life in the Danube region beyond economic convergence --> well functioning public services (in the field of health, care, ...), innovative and sustainable regional and urban development policies, sustainable natural resource management, "green urban technologies", measures against social exclusion, ...
- Levels of Service of General interests in all regions as pre-requisite for development
- Transnational cooperation in the field of Consumer Protection
- Transnational responses to demographic challenges, migration and integration; ensuring equitable and inclusive societies (also with regards to minorities); --> exchange of information and experience, joint learning, ...
- Building on cultural diversity as a strengths of the Danube region --> increasing human contacts, promoting inter-cultural dialogue, inter-religious dialogues, language skills, joint (cultural) events, scholarship programmes, ...
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"Governance"

- Potentials to optimise governance mechanisms for international cooperation on all levels of government and for – finally – delivering the EUSDR recommendations -> screening "old" mechanism of transnational cooperation and governance and identifying possible (new) ways forward when aiming for an effective EUSDR implementation, eventually proposing new "tools", ...
- Addressing relevant administrative and governance reforms --> institutional capacities and stability, quality of legislation and administrative procedures, transparency, extensive "red-tape", corruption, e-government, "1-stop-shop"-approaches, ...

- Enhancing the role of the regional and municipal level; strengthening (also existing) networks of cities and regions, and as concerns the involvement of NGOs and the civil society (“stakeholders”)
- Working on synergies between “internal” EU-funding instruments (Structural Funds, JASPERS, ...) and “external” EU instruments (ENPI, IPA, ...); e.g. moving on towards a better coordinated funding for EU Territorial Cooperation programmes
- Ensuring joint learning concerning public policies effectiveness (strategic planning, performance-oriented policies, evaluation, financial engineering, financing schemes, governance, ...) ; incl. in the field of major infrastructure investments
- Taking into account the specific impact of the current financial and economic crisis in the Danube Region in the EUSDR!
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More **specific actions, concrete experiences, examples of current activities** by existing transnational cooperation structures (e.g. within the European Territorial cooperation programmes, ...) and first ideas for “**flagship projects**” have also been developed.

Some **criteria** have been proposed for the **selection of policy issues** for the EUSDR (*tentative list*):

- Transnational significance of issues, enhancing transnational (functional) links
- Coordination need on transnational level – assuming a benefit of integrating the issue into the EU strategy (“market failure and policy failure test”)
- “Urgency”/priority issues and/or level of risk
- Focussing on Danube Region-specificities
- Integrated and comprehensive approach of the Danube region, effects/impacts on regional development
- Expected mid-/long-term outcome and impact for the region in respect to the overall objectives
- Expected visible short-/mid-term impact by concrete projects/actions which create an added value to the development of the Danube region
- Political commitment and interest among involved countries in order to secure its implementation
- Principle of equal partnership
- Expected contribution to the alignment/coordination of policies/funding schemes/legal implementation
- Building on achievements and making use of existing forms of transnational cooperation
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In addition, the following **overall expectations** for “positive outcomes” of the EUSDR have been expressed by the Austrian stakeholders (*tentative list*):

- Lean/”smart” and selectively focussed approach!
- Concrete results! Clear visibility of the “added value” for the Danube Region
- Elaboration of common understandings on transnational and on EU level concerning priority issues; incl. awareness raising for pending policy responses and realistic policy options
- Clear and realistic policy recommendations supported by effective implementation frameworks; facilitation of the implementation of ongoing and new projects/actions

which lead to a positive development and cohesion of the Danube region; incl. realistic timeframes and budgeting

- Ownership of all countries and all levels of government; demonstration of equal partnership approach
- Enhancing synergies and cooperation with and between relevant international forms of cooperation, regional and local networks
- Fostering EU-enlargement process in SE Europe; boosting co-operation on relevant issues between Danube countries and neighbouring countries
- Strengthening the Danube Region`s European identity/-ies --> making aware of the joint strengths of the region and of complementarities within the region (“unique selling points” of the Danube Region), producing forward-looking “visions” for political communication (like e.g. “The Danube region as a central element of a peaceful and prosperous enlarged European Union and as an important bridge for the European Neighbourhood Policy”)
- Clear complementarity of the EUSDR to other EU strategies (post-2010 Lisbon strategy, post-2010 EU Biodiversity targets, EU funding policies 2013+, ...) and in relation to national/regional activities
- Enhancing economic cooperation and integration between Danube region countries (incl. trade, investment volumes, technology transfer, cross-border valued-added chains, ...)
- Recognition of the river Danube as important environmental-friendly traffic artery in the Danube Region and by the EU
- Visible results of improvement of water quality
- Improved environmental quality (trend) indicators
- Visible results of improvement the quality of life
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Conclusions

Austrian stakeholders have numerous ongoing work relationships with partners in the Danube region on all levels of government and in the private and the public sector which hardly could be summarised in a short paper. There is a wide-spread interest to share these valuable experiences with the Commission.

Aiming to explore these issues and possible further contributions of Austrian partners more in-depth together with the Commission, it is proposed to organise bilateral thematic working sessions with desk officers of DG Regio as soon as possible.

Vienna, 2 December 2009