

# 1<sup>st</sup> Danube Financing Dialogue – a successful premiere in Vienna

*„Investing in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is crucial. In general, investing in SMEs is an important driver for improving the economic situation and, more specifically, accelerating the cohesion process in the Danube Region’.* With these words, Kurt Puchinger, the coordinator of the Danube Strategy in the City of Vienna, opened the 1<sup>st</sup> Danube Financing Dialogue. Over 200 stakeholders attended the Dialogue on 22nd and 23rd of March in the premises of the Austrian Central Bank (OeNB). For the first time, representatives of financial institutions and SMEs sat around a table to discuss financing possibilities and identify new business opportunities in the Danube Region.

On several occasions the European Commission has stressed the importance of the role of SMEs for the Danube Region and for implementing the corresponding EU Strategy. This view was also shared by Colin Wolfe from the European Commission’s Directorate General for Regional Policy. In his words, ‘One of the most beautiful European rivers should also connect its riparian countries through a common strategy’. The Dialogue was opened with statements on opportunities and approaches for financing SME projects by high-ranking speakers, not only from the European Commission, but also from the European Investment Fund, the European Investment Bank and the European Central Bank. The first conference day was wrapped up by a panel discussion on the role and the challenges faced by companies in the Danube Region.

As its name implies, the essence of the event was a dialogue, namely a dialogue between SMEs in the Danube Region and their potential financiers. The second day of the conference was dedicated to provide the representatives from both groups with a platform for discussion. In the morning, participants were given the opportunity to get acquainted in a ‘matchmaking session’. They then had the possibility to actively participate in exchanging information in various small thematic groups. In the afternoon, the representatives of SMEs and financial institutions held individual face-to-face meetings for which appointments had been made prior to the event. These face-to-face meetings allowed the representatives to concretely discuss opportunities and ideas for specific individual cases.

The host of the Dialogue and Governor of the Austrian Central Bank, Ewald Nowotny, ensured all participants that despite the economic crisis Austrian banks would not pull back from the Eastern and South-Eastern European markets. He also expressed his deep appreciation of the high number of young entrepreneurs who had made it to the Dialogue. They are the future of the Danube Region, he said. This successful premiere moreover built a stepping stone. The coordinator is already planning to organise the next Financing Dialogue in cooperation with the Vienna-based consultancy Metis GmbH for autumn of this year. In his closing speech, Johann Sollgruber from the European Commission pointed to the possibility of hosting the next Dialogue in the Serbian capital of Belgrade.

All documents, PowerPoint presentations and pictures from the 1<sup>st</sup> Danube Financing Dialogue can be accessed under the following link:

<http://groupspaces.com/CapacityandCooperation/pages/1st-danube-financing-dialogue>

# Photos



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# Agenda

## 1<sup>st</sup> day

- 13:00 Registration and welcome coffee**
- 14:00 Welcome**  
Franz Nauschnigg, Oesterreichische Nationalbank (OeNB)  
Kurt Puchinger, EUSDR PA 10 Coordinator | City of Vienna
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- 14:15 Session 1 | Key note speeches on the role of SMEs and Financial Institutions within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region**
- Key note speakers**  
Colin Wolfe, European Commission:  
The significance of SMEs in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region  
Hubert Cottogni, European Investment Fund: Financing projects of SMEs in the Danube Region  
Peter Bandilla, European Investment Bank: Supporting private investment for public goods  
Diego Rodriguez Palenzuela, European Central Bank:  
Assessing the access to finance of SMEs in the Danube Region  
**Chair:** Peter Schneidewind, Metis GmbH
- 15:45 SME project market place | Coffee break**
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- 16:15 Session 2 | Panel discussion on the challenges and opportunities of financing SME investment projects in the Danube Region**
- Panelists**  
Andreja Jerina, Slovenian Government Office for Development and European Affairs  
Heinz Kogler, Enterprise Europe Network  
Johann Moser, Austria Wirtschaftsservice GmbH  
Katya Goranova, Business Support Center for SMEs  
Nikola Stefanovic, SEAF South Balkan Fund  
Werner Weihs-Raabl, Erste Group Bank AG  
**Chair:** Kurt Puchinger, EUSDR PA 10 Coordinator | City of Vienna
- 17:45 End of session 2**
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- 19:30 Dinner | 'Wiener Rathauskeller' | Vienna City Hall**
- Welcome**  
Elisabeth Vitouch, City of Vienna

## 2<sup>nd</sup> day

- 09:00 Registration and welcome coffee**
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- 09:30 Session 3 | Matchmaking**
- Opening remarks and chair**  
Peter Schneidewind, Metis GmbH
- 09:45 Matchmaking session 1**  
Representatives of SMEs and Financial Institutions  
Stakeholders of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region
- 11:00 SME project market place | Coffee break**
- 11:30 Matchmaking session 2**  
Representatives of SMEs and Financial Institutions  
Stakeholders of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region
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- 12:30 Session 4 | Closing remarks**
- Ewald Nowotny, Oesterreichische Nationalbank (OeNB)  
Johann Sollgruber, European Commission  
Kurt Puchinger, EUSDR PA 10 Coordinator | City of Vienna
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- 13:15 Face-to-Face meetings**
- 14:00 End of conference**