**Next steps in the Road Mapfor civil society involvement in the framework of the EUSDR[[1]](#footnote-2)**

Promoting transparency and participation through multilevel governance and project development in the Danube Region

1. ***What has already happened***

On 25 June 2014, the 1st Participation Day of the EUSDR was held in Eisenstadt (Austria), back-to-back with the 3rd Annual Forum of the EUSDR in Vienna, financed and organised by the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), an umbrella organisation created in order to assemble those NGOs which are interested in contributing to the EUSDR. This meeting gathered a number of civil society representatives and actors from local authorities, academia and culture (over 150) from all over the Danube Region. It was supported and co-financed by Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” (PA10), Priority Area 9 “People and Skills” of the EUSDR, the Austrian National EUSDR Coordinator, and Foster Europe Foundation.

The participants of the 1st Participation Day of the EUSDR have adoptedunanimously the Eisenstadt Declaration on Participation in the Danube Strategy[[2]](#footnote-3), laying down the foundations for civil society participation in the EUSDR. In the declaration, they presented the Road Map to participation calling for the states participating in the EUSDR to foster participation on the national level and to hold National Hearings for civil society involvement. The results of these hearings should be reported at the Annual Fora of the EUSDR, with the Participation Day becoming a steady component of each Annual Forum. This approach was then elaborated by the DCSF and confirmed by the Advisory Committee of the Danube Local Actors Platform (D-LAP), a PA10 body involving civil society actors, social partners,representatives of academia and EUSDR actors from national, regional, local and international organisations active in the Region.A stronger involvement of the civil society was i.a. claimed by the European Commission in its report concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies.[[3]](#footnote-4)

1. ***What to do***

The overall approach for civil society involvement in the EUSDR is twofold:

1. Civil society and social partnerinvolvement in the governance of the EUSDR;
2. Strengthening civil society, European citizenship, social partners and civic engagement throughout the Danube Region.

Civil society involvement within the framework of the EUSDR implementation should first and foremost:

* Improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at EU, the macro-regional, and the national/regionallevel;
* Communicate the EUSDR to the citizens;
* Encourage democratic participation of citizens at EU level.
  1. ***Fields of action***

Macro-regional strategies are about the better use of existing institutions, legislation and funding for the development of the entire respectivemacro-region and about use and empowerment of the local and regional dimension (placed-based approach) and subsidiarity. One of the key challenges with regard to civil society involvement will therefore be the integration of existing structures within on-going EUSDR processes. This implies the following approaches, which PA10 and its D-LAP advisory committee propose to carry out in cooperation with the upcoming Danube Strategy Point (DSP):

* Involve**European bodies** dealing with the topic, e.g. DG REGIO, DG COM, DG NEAR, EC representations in the Danube Region, Europe Direct,the EESC, the CoR, etc. Furthermore, relevant institutions in third countries should be involved, such as the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)or the Central European Initiative (CEI);
* Involve the **National Contact Points for the Europe for Citizens programme** in the 9 EU-MS of the EUSDR and the other EUSDR countries (Serbia, Montenegro[[4]](#footnote-5)) participating in this programme;
* Involve the national, regional and local authorities and CSOs through annual **National EUSDR Hearings**in cooperation with the **National Coordinators of the EUSDR;**
* Involveeach of the **Priority Areas of the EUSDR**, where civil society is relevant;
* Ensure the **parliamentary dimension** of the EUSDR through involvement of the EP as well as national and regional parliaments;
* Create a strong link and exchange of experience with **other macro-regional strategies and research on macro-regional strategies**;
* Make the **Participation Day for local actors and CSOs** an integrated part of each Annual Forum of the EUSDR;
* Support **project development**, e.g. through networking activities and relevant programmes such as the Danube Transnational programme and other ESIF programmes;
* Support **capacity building** in the Danube Region, in cooperation with the PA10 Danube Capacity Platform (D-CAP).
  1. ***Potential civil society elements in an upcoming revised Action Plan of the EUSDR***

Civil society should play a role in each of the Priority Areas of the EUSDR. Within the current governance of the EUSDR, civil society involvement matters especially with regard to multi-level governance and project development.[[5]](#footnote-6)Currently, the D-LAP implements three actions of the Action Plan[[6]](#footnote-7):

* To improve the trust of citizens and stakeholders in political authorities
* To establish a Danube Civil Society Forum
* To ensure sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels

With the Danube Civil Society Forum already being set up and continuously growing in terms of membersand capability, apotential update of the existing Action Plan should regroup those actions which are already being implemented by PA10 through the D-LAP and its partners:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Danube Local Actors Platform (D-LAP) – Actions | Other relevant EUSDR PAs | Examples of relevant Institutions  **To be completed** | Relevant Funding Sources (Programmes and Funds)  **To be completed** | Potential Large projects  **To be completed** |
| Sustainable Danube Region | 1,2,3,**4,5,6**,7,9 | DCSF, ICPDR, WWF, DG ENV | Danube Transnational, CBC programmes in the Danube Region,HORIZON2020, LIFE, START, TAF-DRP, IPA, ENI | Climate Change Mitigation and Management, DCSF |
| Capable Danube Region | 3,**7,8,9** | DCSF, DSP, DG NEAR,DG EAC, DG Regio, DG COM, DG NEAR | Danube Transnational, CBC programmes in the Danube Region, Europe for Citizens, ESF, Erasmus+, BACID, START, TAF-DRP, TAIEX, IPA, ENI | BaileHerculane, Danube Master (FH Burgenland) |
| Transparent, open and participatory Danube Region | **1**,**2,4,5,6,8**,,**11** | DCSF,DSP,KdZ, DG DIGIT, EESC | BACID, Europe for Citizens, IPA, ENI, TAIEX | National Hearings, Participation Days |

This systematic grid could lay the foundations for the D-LAP as the future involvement of civil society and local actors and provide the main thematic directions for which civil society is relevant. It would also comply with the twofold approach of making the EUSDR an open and participatory process and strengthening the civil society as well as the local level in the Danube macro-region (see point 2). In addition to this, it would allow to establish links to each of the EUSDR Priority Areas.

* 1. ***Methodology***

The main body to steer this process is the D-LAP advisory committee which PA10 has set up in cooperation with the Danube Civil Society Forum and other networks and PAs.It involves mainlyfour types of participants:

* representatives from civil society organisations;
* representatives from the local and regional governments, as well as international organisations;
* representatives from academia dealing with the concept and the implementation of macro-regional strategies;
* representativesfrom social partner organisations.

Once this network is fully developed, the fields of action (see 2.1) can be implemented though a) project development b) networking and c) capacity building. The long-term aim of the D-LAP should be to bridge political divides in a region that was hit by recent conflicts as well as to bring the EUSDR closer to the citizens and enable interested persons to act as multipliers. The EUSDR is about existing instruments and therefore the macro-regionalapproach needs to be translated into concrete projects and activities with strong emphasis on the local and regional level. In this respect, there is also a need for a change in mentalities, building confidence amongst stakeholders and improvement of skills and capacities.Reciprocally, the capacity of civil society to provide expertise and thereby to influence region-wide decision making processes, policy-making and implementation needs to be sustained through an improved exchange of information on the macro-regional level. Fruitful participation in the Danube region is a mutual and joint learning process of state and non-state actors.

1. A joint paper by Priority Area 10 “Stepping Up Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), Feburary 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. For this and other documents, please see <http://www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/pages/civil-society> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. COM(2014) 248 final [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/europe-for-citizens/news/europe-for-citizens-programme-participating-countries_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Cf. Council conclusions on the governance of macro-regional strategies of 21 October 2014, 16207/14 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. SEC(2010) 1489 final [↑](#footnote-ref-7)