Building the Future of the Danube Region: the Global Perspective

PA 10 SG Meeting

Background paper,

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Introduction

We can say that our work in PA 10 generally has been performed in line with the recommendations of the EC and the results of the 2nd Meeting of NCPs and PACs in Bucharest, January 2012 and is well documented in our 1st Annual Report. On the other hand it is true what has been said in Bucharest, that there is no "one - fits - all model" for implementing the Action Plan, as PAs are very diverse. After more than one year dealing with the content of PA 10, I better understand that generally following the line does not seem to be enough. Transforming each action in operational steps in form of projects and project ideas of the traditional type, as we have done in a first try already, for some of the Actions cannot lead to the desired results. The reason why is, that we followed over all the Bucharest line which said "it is easiest to start with the project level and to tackle – in parallel – the strategic level (policy debate)", forgetting that there are some Actions in PA 10, where "projects" need as a prerequisite an intense political debate and commitment at relatively high levels in state governance systems. If this estimation holds, the while working on PA10 action plan developed in 2012, we can use 2013, the window of opportunity with no open big financing programs to concentrate on political advisory projects on "ensuring policy discussions and policy development" for 2014 and beyond as indicated in the EC "Guidance to the Priority Area Coordinators". The following paper should help to start a discussion process in our SG for further clarification of this approach, which should guide the work of PAC 10, the SG and the WGs in the next year.

Lessons learned in Regensburg

"The aim of the Strategy is to develop into a durable cooperation framework, allowing policy makers to improve their cooperation and thus increase the effectiveness of policies, at EU, national and local level. It utilises the different existing policies and programmes and creates synergies between them to increase their leverage and impact."(Reflection Paper of the EC November 2012)

This message, launched in the preparation phase of the Regensburg Conference, re-opens the interpretation of the implementation phase of the Strategy from a pure project development mechanism to the implementation of a political processes, where necessary. This also seems to be indicated by the following question asked among others in the paper:

"Question: Is there a need to communicate the Strategy better to national policy makers? If yes, how can this be achieved?" (Reflection Paper of the EC November 2012)

Proposed Orientation in 2013

Initiating appropriate policy discussions and decisions needs to remember the overall mission statement of European Policies and to identify the stakeholders who have to become involved.

Basically the issue is to overcome national limitations. Overcoming national limitations means to look for common interests beyond. The challenge seems to be that the ownership of the Strategy, which is at the moment mainly in the hands of the administrative and government systems of the region, needs a calculated additional move to other political players in the region.

Who are the "other stakeholders", who show the potential of less nationalism and more Europeanism or Internationalism?

There are at least two powers available of which one has already proofed its ability to overcome national borders very efficiently, looking for profit mainly. The other one are the peoples, a composition of workforce and consumers including a broad variety of individual interests.

The art of organising a political debate in the interest of the peoples includes a systematic search for already organised multipliers who are related to this variety of interests of individuals, not looking for covering all of them. The search could start in the world of political parties for such, traditionally reacting positive on social, democratic and European issues. Another option is the Trade Unions, the religious organisations and NGOs with a humanistic or charitable transnational mission.

The hypothesis is that "projects" will appear suddenly, if subsidy programs are adopted and installed again in 2014 +. Not so, the necessary "internal" political debate on **top-down reforms** in the participating countries as well as a related transnational exchange of views and experiences. The advantage of a political debate also is that it contributes to the dissemination of the issue of the debate – Danube Strategy issues – and can be related to everyday experiences of the people.

So the proposed orientation for 2013 means to include systematically relevant political players in the Region, additionally to the already involved political executive units (governments at different levels)

The relation to the Action Plan especially PA 10

The following part of this paper tries to re-interpret some of the Actions of PA 10 as political issues and develops, based on some punctual experiences, ideas about the one or the other type of reforms which could help implementing the Strategy.

The EUSDR Action Plan (PA 10) includes a lot of elements which can better be interpreted as political projects, than as "technical" projects in the sense of regional development. There are already various reactions and interpretations of the countries on NCP level and others delivered, which could be indirectly or directly interpreted as political. Some examples:

- **Serbia** focuses (May 2012) in pillar IV only on: "establishing a safe transport system and affirming the principles of the rule of law along the entire Danube watercourse through the Republic of Serbia"
- **Slovenia** takes the EUSDR as an "excellent forum for challenging different policies, governance, initiatives and debate "improved architecture" of regional cooperation. In Slovenia we use it as a catalyst for such internal debate. **Should we expand the debate?"**

- **Croatia** brought many reforms on the way included in the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the adoption and implementation of the acquis for 2012: The **Act on Salaries in the Public Sector**, the Act on Amendments to the Act of the Right of **Access to Information**, the Operational Programme: "Administrative Capacity Development 2014 – 2020|| will begin in 2012. The Operational Programme will aim at improving the functions of the public administration by speeding up the process of its modernisation (at national, local and regional level), and at strengthening the capacity and efficiency of Croatian public institutions. The State School for Public Administration will implement the Programme for Managing Civil Servants, the Programme for the Advancement of Civil Servants, general EU programmes and human resources management and development programmes.

The recent experiences and projects of Croatia, partly co-financed by the EU, could be taken as promising bases for further expanded discussions, in the sense of Slovenia, in the Danube Region, showing the direction, in which way **state administrations** could design their capacity building – PA 10 projects. The political debate will contribute to move the governments and comparable executive bodies in the described direction.

The overall process of this reorientation of the work of the PA 10 SG and of the WGs will follow the relevant list of Actions.

- **To combat institutional capacity and public service related problems**

Improving the quality of public services and administrative procedures, of skills, competence and motivation of staff in the public sector, as well as the improving of the quality of legislation aim at an internal reform program of the political administrative system, aim at the implementation of “New Public Management” tools. To initiate such a **top-down reform** normally needs a government decision. The implementation needs transparent efficiency oriented targets and its relation to career-options and salaries as well as a service and qualifying program for the staff to cope with the changes. Complementary needed is a social security program for those persons who will not be part of the game in the future. Neither a measure nor a project positioned on a level which implies such a reform could be managed or evolved by a bottom up procedure has any chance of sustainability; on the contrary it leaves frustration and demotivation of the staff.

*An **analysis** is needed – presented by SG members – showing the weaknesses of administrative procedures and the obstacles against the implementation of New Public Management tools in the respective countries. Often these obstacles are not technical ones, but pure political, which again stresses the importance not to ignore those stakeholder positions any longer. Such analysis will be used as a basis for improvement of the Action Plan and the design of further actions and necessary political communication.*

- **To review bottlenecks relating to the low absorption rate of EU funds and to ensure better coordination of funding**

The identification of problems related to special procedures within certain administrations must be handled on the operational level very carefully and, if it should be a success at the end, very internally. From “outside” or from the Commissions side can be organised help by proposing a standard procedure and by proposing necessary manpower and qualifications to scope with a certain amount of funds, as something like a blueprint or better a benchmark or good practice, based on experience. The

identification of the bottlenecks itself again must be a top down initiated activity in the relevant government units.

- **To improve the trust of citizens and stakeholders in political authorities**
- **To ensure sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels**

Strengthening the positive relation between voters and elected politicians is not possible without an open political debate. An open political debate is possible, if both parties have enough information. Transparency and Open Government are the keywords.

Siim Kallas, former Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Administrative Affairs, Audit and Anti-Fraud, launched in 2005 the 'European Transparency Initiative' in order to achieve 'higher levels of openness and transparency'.

The 'European Transparency Initiative' starts from three assumptions:

"1. Transparency is needed to ensure a proper functioning of the decision making process. A closed system will always produce bad policies because it is deaf and disconnected. However, a fully open system will turn decision-making institutions into talking shops, which will be long on talk and short on decisions. In the end, one has to take a decision. Therefore, procedures which ensure transparency need to be crystal clear and agreed upon before the decision process starts. Policymakers have to apply transparency, but they also need 'space for reflection'. For example, in the preparatory stage of legislation decision-makers need to be able to discuss freely and evaluate information before submitting a proposal. Other stakeholders may provide data input, suggestions and position papers, but in the end those politically responsible have to table the proposal and defend it in Parliament. If no 'space for reflection' were to be left, Parliament would engage in the preparatory stage of legislation. Government would then become tantamount to a *gouvernement d'assemblée* which, as occurred in the Fourth French Republic, inevitably breaks down because it infringes upon the separation of powers. Therefore, one has to strike a balance on the highest possible level of transparency.

2. Transparency is needed to gain the trust of the public. Political institutions can-not perform without public confidence. Throughout history ambitious empires have tried to set up political institutions and conduct policies in spite of the public. In many cases people were promised to be provided with happiness, even against their will. 'Model states' were designed and 'policies of good intentions' developed. Intellectuals, in particular those far away, admired the so-called 'model states' and their leaders. But on closer inspection they were no more than a house of cards. Why? People didn't believe it anymore, in spite of the promising statistics and the daily 'good news' which were spread by state-controlled media. Legitimacy is only ensured when political institutions are exposed to transparency, when people know that what they see is what they get.

3. Transparency protects policymakers against themselves. The fight against fraud and the abuse of public money should be a permanent activity of each public administration. Policymakers are just like normal people. They may not be inclined to listen to the inner voice of evil, but it is always better to install a set of tangible guarantees. Sometimes political institutions are on the slippery slope before they are aware of it. Transparency is one of the instruments to keep public administrations on the right track and to prevent human weaknesses to prevail."

So far the transparency initiative.

But there are also projects available which can be used as a best practice examples in the Danube Region.

One is Help.gv, one of many e-government projects the Austrian government has started since the 1990's.

Help.gv.at is the interactive guide to all Austrian authorities and is an interface for 12 federal ministries, nine provinces, 80 district administrations and 2,359 municipalities. It provides information on all interactions in the most frequent life events (more than 200 of them) such as pregnancy, childbirth, marriage or housing. Furthermore, it permits the electronic processing of these procedures with special emphasis on such criteria as transparency, clarity of information and concentration on essential facts, all in a readily understandable and accessible format (with Triple-A compliance with WAI specifications). Help is also available in six other languages of the European Union facilitating EU-Citizens, for example, to find information regarding police registration, or the requirements for business start-ups in Austria. In 2003, HELP received the European Union's e-Europe Award for best e-Government portal in the category 'A better life for European citizens' and was nominated at the United Nations World Summit Award 2003 in the category e-Government.

PA10, in the context of it's role as a facilitator for capacity building and the integration of Civil Society in the Member States of the Danube Strategy, would like to support the introduction of Help.gv as a pilot-project in the member states of the Danube region; communication, integration, transparency, are core concepts of better government. However Help.gv. is a classical top-down project, which can only work with strong political and administrative endorsement and adequate resources, both financial and human. (www.help.gv.at)

- **To facilitate the administrative cooperation of communities living in border regions**

"Eliminating and overcoming administrative and legal obstacles for cooperation and adjusting regional competences to local needs would strengthen cooperation between institutions and local municipalities both at local, regional and international levels.

Citizens, entrepreneurs and municipalities of border areas need better information and services. The countries participating in the EUSDR could agree to revise internal legal standards and other administrative prescriptions that obstruct the development of economic and social cross-border ties." (EUSDR Action Plan)

The main question seems to be, what can regional authorities of different states directly contribute to the development of such a process, which aims at the general promotion of prosperity and quality of life?

We know, based on our CENTROPE experiences, that at least two things are possible:

- *actions with a positive, harmonising impact at the framework-conditions for projects of the civil society and the business world, as far as there is formal competence available, and*
- *offering services, which can support and motivate national stakeholders, the business sector and the civil society to cooperate in reaching public goals, trying to facilitate a series of win-win situations.*

Principally there is an unlimited potential for actions in the service field, and a very limited potential in the action field, because of different ***constitutional*** *situations in the countries.*

This seems to be a general limitation for cross-border cooperation projects, unfortunately in the core business of regional authorities, which has a crucial interface with the issue of "sustainability" of a cooperation project.

The solution of this dilemma can be thought twofold:

- -inclusion of central decision makers at the national level in the implementation of a regional project, or
- developing of a governance system at regional level for early as possible inclusion of non-governmental stakeholders in the process of regional cooperation.

Experience shows, that the second perspective is promising, because the process and only the process has the potential of sustainability, projects are ending and normally in parallel with the ending of subsidies and the interest of central national units to participate in regional projects is very limited. So, the orientation at the development of a governance structure to manage a regional cooperation process including public and non-public elements is one of the main lessons learned, but needs as a prerequisite a correct, but also relaxed and robust relation between public authorities and the market, or the civil society.

So we all know that political commitment to a project, especially when public money is involved, must not be calculated as a stability factor in cross border regional cooperation. It seems to be true, that national public spending for transnational activities needs a very high European political consciousness, needs a political perspective and a long term view concerning the famous "value added", which is not coming up in form of a successful performance at the next elections on community or regional level within some months.

From a professional point of view, based on a lot of experience and some theory like "finding the truth in facts", cross border regional cooperation has to be understood as an inclusive process, including from the beginning public and private stakeholders.

Subsidised ERDF projects, even excellent designed, should not be misunderstood as the process itself. Projects, if they allow following the inclusion principle, can highly support the development of such a process. Governance structures can be prepared within a project, but must be performed in the real world. Cooperation needs stakeholders who can take over responsibilities autonomous, without dependence on decisions of a higher level, which is not a direct part of the cooperation process.

As argued already earlier, regional cross border cooperation projects and the related subsidy programs should take this into account and should open the opportunity to design projects with a mixed stakeholder structure from the very beginning, if sustainability remains a highly important factor in project proposal evaluation.

- **To build Metropolitan Regions in the Danube Region**

"For many years now the Committee of the Regions has been building a reputation of being "the EU's Assembly of Regional and Local Representatives". There is no better subject of debate that simultaneously captures the 'regional' and 'local', the 'urban' and 'rural', and the 'domestic' and 'transnational' dimensions of European policy making, than "metropolitan governance". The latter has been prominent topic gradually rising on the political agenda of the European Commission and the European Parliament, not least through the persistent and focused work of the colleagues from DG REGIO and the Urban Intergroup within the EP. All these efforts have been supported in parallel by the activities of a number of important regional and urban associations and networks

such as Eurocities, URBACT, METREX, PURPLE and many others. The Committee of the Regions has also decided to contribute to the debate on metropolitan governance by pulling resources together with a long-standing international partner like the Forum of Federations (FoF). The going together with such a renowned global academic network on federalism in this project, provided us with an unprecedented mix of analytical and policy expertise on urban and metropolitan issues to be able to offer to our members and the rest of the EU institutions.

The atelier on the "Governance of Metropolitan Regions in Federal Systems" took place in June 2011, which was an important moment for the preparation of the European Commission proposal on the Structural Funds regulation for the next programming period (2014- 2020). The lively discussions that took place during the two days of the conference between academics, local and regional actors and representatives of the EU institutions confirmed the vision that the "urban dimension" in EU policy making needs further consolidation, not only in financial, but also in institutional terms. At the same time, the social and political processes unravelling in metropolitan areas across Europe need greater attention as a growing part of the population is concentrated there and a disproportionate share of the expectations and potential problems citizens have are associated with urban agglomerations and their surrounding regions. Related to this and focusing particularly on sustainability, quality of life and societal diversity and integration, the Committee of the Regions is set to organise its next external meeting – the 5th Summit of Europe's Regions and Cities on 22 and 23 March 2012 – in Copenhagen and under a Danish Presidency of the European Union. I am convinced that many of the original ideas and concepts developed during the 2011 ateliers on metropolitan and urban governance issues will be used in our political documents and debated during this summit."

Gerhard Stahl, Secretary-general (Committee of the Regions) Brussels

The Process

To support the development of such projects more information about the needs are necessary and more expert knowledge and, as far as PA 10 is concerned, a revision of the personal and content structure of the WGs. This research should be accepted as a **duty of the SG members,** and should provide us with solid information until the end of January 2013, because this will be the new input for the Working Groups.

From the point of view of PAC 10 it seems to be necessary to know:

- Are there reform programs, related to the issues of the EUSDR Action Plan in preparation or on-going and what are they looking like?
- Who are the driving forces, the stakeholders and beneficiaries, and which type of technical support could be needed?
- Are there obstacles and if yes, coming out of which corner?
- First results are awaited until when?
- Are members of the PA 10-SG directly or indirectly involved in such reform processes?

Based on such information the most promising stakeholder organisations can be selected and approached personally (see Appendix). In general this will be a duty of PAC 10, but **all SG members** are invited to strongly to support the PAC.

The reinterpreted Actions above should be used as a proposal of contents for projects including the different political levels and stakeholders in the Region.

Appendix

Political groups (selection)

Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) 270

Die Europäische Volkspartei (EVP, engl. European People's Party, EPP) ist eine politische Partei auf europäischer Ebene, die sich aus christlich-demokratischen und konservativ-bürgerlichen Mitgliedsparteien aus der gesamten Europäischen Union zusammensetzt.

Die EVP wurde von der CDU und CSU (Deutschland), der PSC und CVP (Belgien), des CDS (Frankreich), der Fine Gael (Irland), der DC und der SVP (Italien), der CSV (Luxemburg) und der KVP, CHU und ARP (heute im Christen Democratisch Appèl (CDA) vereinigt) aus den Niederlanden gegründet.

Mittlerweile sind 73 Parteien aus 39 Ländern Mitglieder der EVP, darunter die ÖVP, die französische UMP, die polnischen Regierungsparteien PO und PSL sowie der spanische Partido Popular.

Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament 190

The Party of European Socialists (PES) brings together the Socialist, Social Democratic and Labour Parties of the European Union (EU). There are **32 full member parties** from the 27 EU member States and Norway. In addition, there are **eleven associate and ten observer parties**.

PES aims include:

- the strengthening of the socialist and social democratic movement in the Union and throughout Europe;
- contributing to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union;
- defining common policies for the European Union and to influence the decisions of the European institutions;

Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe 84

Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance 59

Die Europäische Grüne Partei (englisch: European Green Party; EGP) ist eine europäische politische Partei, die 36 grüne Parteien aus 33 europäischen Staaten umfasst. Sie wurde am 21. Februar 2004 in Rom gegründet und folgt der Europäischen Föderation Grüner Parteien (EFGP). Die EGP ist einer der vier Regionalverbände der Global Greens. Zusammen mit der Europäischen Freien Allianz bildet sie im Europäischen Parlament die Fraktion Die Grünen/Europäische Freie Allianz im Europäischen Parlament.

The **European Trade Union Confederation** (**ETUC**)

was set up in 1973 to promote the interests of working people at European level and to represent them in the EU institutions.

At present, the ETUC has in membership 85 National Trade Union Confederations from 36 European countries, as well as 10 European industry federations, making a total of 60 million members, plus observer organisations in Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The ETUC is one of the European social partners and is recognised by the European Union, by the Council of Europe and by EFTA as the only representative cross-sectoral trade union organisation at European level.