

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/donors-conference



Donors' Conference Framework





Acknowledgements

The Donors' Conference Framework provides a structure for an event format addressing better communication, coordination and cooperation between public and private funding programmes and project promoters as well as among different funding programmes and instruments. The framework is based on the results of the first National Participation Day in the Republic of Moldova in 2016 organised by the Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Moldova and the Danube Civil Society Forum, the EUSDR Priority Area 10 pilot initiative "Danube Financing Dialogues" funded by the European Commission and the City of Vienna and the first Danube Financing and Capacity Building Dialogue – a pilot event of the Donors' Conference Framework.



This paper is drafted by the coordination of EUSDR Priority Area 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation" – City of Vienna, reflecting on the concept and recommendations of the Danube Financing and Capacity Building Dialogue drafted by Metis GmbH. The concept is considered work-in-progress. Information on the framework as well as conferences organised under this framework will be published at www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/donors-conference

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Disclaimer

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Donors’ Conference Framework

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) aims at improving and making better use of existing institutions, legislation and funding for the development of the entire macro-region based on the topics addressed in the EUSDR Action Plan¹.

Projects are an important tool to test innovative solutions, strengthen concrete collaboration and initiate systemic change. However, project promoters and owners of project ideas in the Danube Region face various challenges, ranging from poor access to networks of competent and reliable partners to a lack of knowledge about available and suitable funding sources. There is still a widespread bottleneck between the intention to do something and the know-how to do it efficiently, to relate it to financial supportive sources and to make it visible. These challenges are supposed to be countered by measures such as strengthening cooperative ties between potential project promoters from different sectors, increasing knowledge of available public and private funding sources, better strategic coordination between project ideas and funding structures.

Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” of the EUSDR acknowledges these needs and aims to contribute through initiating and establishing better communication, coordination and cooperation, in particular, within the following actions² of the EUSDR Action Plan:

- To combat institutional capacity and public service related problems in the Danube Region;
- To improve the trust of citizens and stakeholders in political authorities;
- To ensure sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels;
- To review bottlenecks relating to the low absorption rate of EU funds and to ensure better coordination of funding;
- To examine the feasibility of Danube Investment framework.

Based on the experience with project promoters in the Danube Region as well as based on the results of past initiatives such as the Danube Financing Dialogue and National Participation Days, Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” developed the framework concept for a “Donors’ Conference”. The idea was developed in cooperation with the government of the Republic of Moldova and the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) and first implemented at the “Danube Financing and Capacity Building Dialogue” in Chisinau (MD) in October 2017.

With this paper, Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” seeks to provide guidance and recommendations for establishing a platform for exchange and coordination on public and private funding, increased knowledge of funding opportunities among project promoters and improved strategic planning for regional development. Public administrations, civil society organisations, regional or international organisations in the Danube Region that are interested to increase capacities for regional development and project implementation are encouraged to take up the Donors’ Conference Framework concept for further replication.

¹ EUSDR Action Plan, SEC(2010) 1489 final, 08/12/2010

² Cf. EUSDR Action Plan, SEC(2010) 1489 final, 08/12/2010, pp. 78-81

What is the Donors’ Conference Framework?

The Donors’ Conference Framework is a concept for an event format that aims at bringing together local and regional key stakeholders for regional development to further exchange between public and private funding sources, support a strategic use of funding and initiate better coordination between funding programmes in order to identify potential synergies. Additionally, the concept aims at gathering all relevant stakeholders in the area of regional development to support exchange on challenges, needs and requirements for project development and implementation in order to further mutual understanding and finding solutions together.

The Donors’ Conference is a platform for:

- furthering the exchange between public and private funding programmes and project promoters;
- supporting a more strategic use of funding (e.g. better alignment of funds; prioritising of project ideas);
- facilitating communication and coordination among public and private funding programmes and instruments.

The Donors’ Conference provides a platform for discussion, assessing needs and challenges of project promoters and presents an overview on different funding sources (public and private) in the Danube Region, enhancing the capacities of cooperation between participating stakeholders.

Focus areas & possible questions to be discussed (not exhaustive):

Strategic Planning for (macro-) regional development

- What are the main objectives of regional development in the region?
- How can we establish a strategic planning process that strengthens ownership of the development process of all stakeholders?
- How can we define priorities for regional development?
- Which existing initiatives/good practices are there, we could build upon or establish synergies?

Capacity building for (macro-) regional development

- What are the major challenges for project implementation (in our region)?
- What do we want to achieve with our support for project development?
- What do we want to achieve with our projects?
- Which capacities do we consider most important for successful project development and implementation?

Better use of funding sources and project development support for (macro-) regional development

- Who provides support for these objectives in the region? What kind of support is provided?
- What is the suitable funding source for our project(s)?

The thematic emphasis of the event format may vary according to the particular regional and local challenges.

Who benefits from the Donors’ Conference?

The Donors’ Conference aims for a holistic approach to communication, coordination and cooperation of stakeholders.

(Potential) project promoters from different sectors are expected to increase their knowledge about suitable funding sources and strategic objectives of regional development and/or other policy sectors pursued by the political and administrative level as well as to meet with potential project partners for future cooperation;

Public authorities responsible for supporting and monitoring progress in regional development have the opportunity to communicate to the implementers of their objectives and learn more about needs and challenges for progress and receive an overview of supporting structures (e.g. funding sources, networks etc.) for better coordination in order to realise their objectives.;

Public and private donor organisations have a platform to promote their supporting structures to potential beneficiaries, to get in contact with their target groups for feedback related to the suitability of instruments for project support and to learn about other funding structures to assess opportunities for coordination to maximise outputs and/or to create synergies.

The Donors’ Conference Framework is an inclusive format that aims to boost communication, coordination and cooperation among different target groups:

- Politicians and representatives from public administration responsible for regional development and related issues
- Public funding programmes (e.g.: EU programmes, programmes from national development cooperation agencies, UN organisations and other international organisations, national/regional funding programmes; national banks etc.)
- Private funding programmes (e.g.: Foundations, private banks, crowd funding initiatives etc.)
- Local actors: NGOs/Civil Society Organisations; regional and local public administrations and agencies; research and academia; SMEs; other project promoters
- Regional, European and international organisations that contribute to better coordination of donors (e.g.: European Commission/DG NEAR, Regional Cooperation Council/SEEDAD etc.)

Politicians and public administration responsible for regional development

The conference should include representatives from the political and administrative level responsible for regional development and EU policies as well as politicians competent in related fields of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (e.g.: environmental cooperation, competitiveness, social inclusion, knowledge society and smart specialisation, energy policy, transport policy).

Firstly, gathering political and administrative representatives provides the opportunity to discuss topics of regional development from the perspective of decision-making as well as from the perspective of policy implementation. Secondly, bringing together representatives from political and administrative level from different policy sectors contributes to better coordination across different policy areas in order to better use synergies and improve strategic planning by avoiding a “silo mentality”.

Public funding programmes

Public funding programmes constitute crucial funding sources in the Danube Region that are linked to regional, national, macro-regional, European and/or international development strategies. However, due to the variety of the funding landscape, potential beneficiaries might not be aware of these possibilities, not to mention opportunities to align different (public) funding sources. In the realm of the EUSDR, project promoters have a particularly strong focus on EU programmes such as the transnational Interreg programmes. However, as much as these programmes provide helpful support in the region, they are not the only sources. International organisations such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe or the Central European Initiative also provide crucial financial support to project promoters that is addressing topics relevant for the EUSDR. Likewise, regional and national funding instruments, national banks as well as other EU programmes (e.g. Horizon 2020, Europe for Citizens, Urban Innovative Actions, Erasmus+ etc.) offer further support for project implementation. Additionally, various agencies for development cooperation are active in non-EU member states and provide crucial support to step up regional development in the Western Balkans, in the Republic of Moldova and in the Ukraine.

Private funding programmes

As unknown some public funding programmes might be, the opportunities provided by the private funding sector are often even less familiar to potential beneficiaries. Private foundations, private financing institutions or crowd funding initiatives may provide suitable alternatives to public funding. The Donors’ Conference aims at including private donor organisations to provide a comprehensive overview on funding possibilities and to include a broader set of instruments in the implementation of (macro-) regional development. The Network of European Foundations and the European Foundation Centre – amongst others – could be helpful sources for identifying foundations that are active in specific policy areas and/or regions. At the same time, alternative funding structures such as the community-based instrument of crowd funding becomes more established in the Danube Region.

Regional, European and international organisations that contribute to better coordination of donors

Organisations that contribute to better coordination of donors might be good mediating bodies between different donor organisations as well as between donor organisations and beneficiaries. They also might provide a good overview of the funding landscape in a specific region and/or strategic planning of funding objectives. In the past, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) Advisory Group of the European Commission (DG Enlargement) aimed at supporting and improving the overall co-operation between the IFIs and the European Commission in the candidate and potential candidate countries, including co-operation under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). With the SEEDAD (South East Europe Donor Assistance Database), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) established a tool to provide detailed information on donor assistance to South-East Europe.



Please find a list of potential stakeholders for the Donors’ Conference in the Annex.

Recommendations for organising a Donors’ Conference

In October 2017, Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment of the Republic of Moldova and the Danube Civil Society Forum the Danube Financing and Capacity Building Dialogue in Chisinau (MD) as pilot initiative of the Donors’ Conference Framework. In the following, the paper outlines recommendations for organising a Donors’ Conference based on the experience from organising the pilot conference in Chisinau as well as based on the feedback from the participants.

Identify your major challenges

The Donors’ Conference Framework addresses different challenges of programming and project implementation for regional development that are interlinked. However, depending on the pre-existing capacities in the region, it might be useful to focus on the most challenging issues first.

The definition of different focus areas and related questions (see p. 2) can be a helpful starting point to assess briefly the major shortcomings or challenges for regional development and project development in the macro-regional context. Subsequent Donors’ Conferences might address the issue more comprehensively or reveal topics (e.g. policy areas, cooperation methods, particular funding sources) that should be addressed in more depth.

Go for an inclusive and participatory approach

The inclusive approach of the Donors’ Conference approach should be reflected in the agenda of the conference. Donor organisations tend to focus more and more on active participation and stakeholder engagement at all levels including local actors such as cities and municipalities, civil society organisations, researchers in project development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in order to increase project ownership. Therefore, the conference concept should consider this perspective.

The framework of the Donors’ Conference has the potential to serve as a platform to discuss macro-regional issues, including needs and challenges from different points of view, to share lessons learnt and good practices. Each participant can contribute to increase the overall knowledge through her or his expertise and experience. The Donors’ Conference should valorise the different perspectives of regional development by providing an opportunity to make different voices heard – either by means of a balanced mix of speakers and/or participatory workshop formats (e.g. world cafés) –, as small inputs from different perspectives may lead to viable solutions or innovative ideas. This also includes scheduling sufficient time slots for discussions and question & answer sessions.

Provide concrete guidance

Particularly in the realm of capacity building, participants expect to receive clear and concrete guidance for project development, project application or project implementation. Thus, it is recommended to look for good practices that illustrate strengths and/or weaknesses of activities in order to provide concrete and reflected guidance for peers or target groups, respectively.

Keep it nice and simple

The contributions from the speakers should be concise and outline the major observations, findings or points for discussion. Nevertheless, if participants are interested in more details of specific topics, funding programmes etc., the conference could provide more information through alternative features such as Question & Answer Sessions, thematic workshops, market places, info desks etc.

Include information on the opportunities of macro-regional strategies for the stakeholders

According to the European Commission³, the governance of macro-regional strategies shall contribute to “(...) tasks such as facilitating generation and implementation of initiatives and projects, setting of indicators and targets, reinforcing bridges to the relevant funding programmes, such as the European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020, LIFE, COSME, CEF, EU Investment Plan and participation in programme committees, where appropriate. Synergies with EU external instruments, and notably the Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA) and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), should be sought. Thematic experts and their Steering Groups are the key force to drive implementation forward in a thematically sound way.” Yet, stakeholders often are not aware of the opportunities that the macro-regional strategies could offer for them. At the same time, countries and regions committed themselves to implement the actions of the Actions Plans of the macro-regional strategies. The governance of the EUSDR – namely National Coordinators as well as Priority Area Coordinators and Steering Group members – could contribute to facilitate access to macro-regional networks in order to support project promoters to collaborate at macro-regional level.

³ Brussels, 20.5.2014, COM(2014) 284 final, Report From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies.

Pilot initiative: Chisinau (MD)

Danube Financing and Capacity Building Dialogue (DFCBD)

Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment of the Republic of Moldova and the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) the Danube Financing and Capacity Building Dialogue in Chisinau (MD) from 26-27 October 2017.



The conference served as a platform that gathered project promoters and public as well as private funding organisations in order to promote communication and mutual understanding between needs and opportunities for regional development. Furthermore, the event aimed at initiating the communication among funding organisations to contribute to a better coordination. 90 representatives from public authorities, development cooperation agencies, international donor organisations, EU programmes, civil society, research and interest groups exchanged on funding opportunities, good practices and shortcomings of regional development and macro-regional cooperation in the Republic of Moldova.



On the first day of the conference, the participants discussed the needs to establish a dialogue between donors and project promoters, funding opportunities for capacity building, better cooperation through improved governance and increasing the overall know-how on the funding landscape in the Republic of Moldova among project promoters.


The second day focused on thematic working groups discussing good practices and weaknesses in project implementation within the thematic clusters: Sustainability, Inclusiveness and Growth.

The basic findings for a future Donors’ Conference were to organise further regionalised workshops that could be summarised in a final conference in Chisinau; addressing more specific topics of project development that are linked to the EUSDR; and involve more stakeholders in the preparation of the conference.

This pilot initiative of the Donors’ Conference Framework was organised with the support of Metis GmbH and funded by the Danube Connects Program of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), the Danube Transnational Programme/European Union, the City of Vienna and Foster Europe.

Please find more information on the Danube Financing and Capacity Building Dialogue at:

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/donors-conference-republic-of-moldova

 Please find the agenda of the Danube Financing and Capacity Building Dialogue as an example in the Annex.

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Priority Area 10 Coordination (PAC 10)
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City of Vienna
Kirchberggasse 33-35/9
A-1070 Vienna

