



EUSDR 8th Annual Forum
Bucharest, 27-28 June 2019
BUILDING COHESION FOR A SHARED PROSPERITY IN THE DANUBE REGION



Report on the Public hearings on the Revision of the EUSDR Action Plan

Date: Thursday, 27th June 2019, 09:00 – 11:30

Venue: The Palace of Parliament - Balcescu Conference Hall, Bucharest, Romania

Participants: representatives of the European Commission, National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), representatives of the Civil Society, public authorities, private sector and academia, others

Moderator: Claudia SINGER, City of Vienna, PA 10 Coordinator

Panellists:

- Jean-Pierre HALKIN, Head of Unit, Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy
- Rudolf SCHICKER, Coordinator Danube Strategy Point (DSP)
- Matthias HOLZNER, Baden-Württemberg State Ministry, member in the Steering Group of PA 10

Aim of the event: to offer the opportunity for the Civil Society, any actors and promoters of activities, projects and processes to make their proposals for actions to be integrated into the Action Plan (AP)

Ms Claudia Singer presented the results of the Danube Participation Day, organized on June 26th in Bucharest and shared the experience of PA 10 in supporting the Civil Society's involvement into the implementation of EUSDR.

Mr Jean-Pierre Halkin shared the views of the European Commission on the importance of the revision of the AP stressing the political and operational dimension of the Strategy and highlighting the need for inclusiveness. In this regards, he spoke about broadening the participation through a better involvement of the citizens and civil society, giving them the opportunity to contribute to the wider objectives of the Strategy. At the same time, Mr Halkin underlined the need to deliver the new Action Plan on time in order to achieve a better embedding in the future Programmes.

Mr Rudolf Schicker introduced the process of the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan, its scope and timeframe, the main conclusions of the input received from the National Coordinators, Priority Area Coordinators as well as the results of the online consultation (see attachment no. 1 – Public Hearing Annual Forum). Mr Schicker concluded that the received contributions highlighted the need for continuity in the development of the activities, higher commitment of the national level, more involvement of the local and regional actors and collaboration and exchanges with the other macro regional strategies.

Mr Matthias Holzner shared the experience of Baden-Württemberg in involving the business and economic sector, NGOs and public services in the EUSDR decision making process. After national discussions with different kind of stakeholders, the representatives of Baden-Württemberg formulated proposals referring to the involvement of the young people into the implementation of the Strategy, better support for the Roma minorities, for professional training and for SMEs. Mr Holzner urged the participants to share their ideas and underlined that these kind of exchanges are important even though it would not be possible to include all proposals in the new Action Plan of the EUSDR.

During the Q&A session, the participants who took the floor expressed the following **proposals**:

- The new Action Plan of EUSDR should have a **clear connection to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**;
- In the future, EUSDR stakeholders should put a **special emphasis on the civil society participation**. In this regard, a series of activities facilitating sectoral integration could be developed: elaboration of a good practices collection/manual, organizing effective participation days, implementing new mechanisms to enhance youth participation in the Strategy, develop capacity building actions;
- Exchanges of best practices on **better involving the civil society** and the local authorities in the implementation of the Strategy could improve the information flows in the Region; on the other hand, regulations and standards on working with the civil society could be developed and the communication strategy could comprise provisions regarding the mandatory organisation of one meeting with the civil society representatives per year in each Danube country;
- **More flexibility** for the new actors in the Strategy is needed;
- **Genuine bottom-up approach** should be encouraged in all countries of the EUSDR;
- The **establishment of a Danube media** network could participate in the improving of the communication in the entire Region; journalists can actively participate in better communicating the Strategy and its results to the wider public;
- **Involvement of the national authorities** is required for better engaging the regional and local actors; in this regard the EUSDR focal points in the ministries could play a more active role;
- In order to contribute more to the reduction of the disparities between the regions of the EUSDR, the main **specific objective** of the Strategy should be **rephrased** into “sustainability towards economic convergence”;
- **Agriculture**, especially ecological agriculture has a large potential for the region; knowledge transfer and best practice examples are needed to address the common challenges in the Region;
- **Health** represents a topic that should be included and emphasised in the future AP;
- **Clusters as major topic** should be included in the AP; the new AP should include **clusters and smart specialisation, digitalisation, innovation and technological transfer, education, cooperation and funding**; in order to make it operational the revitalisation of the network of clusters DANUCLUS and the networks of experts is necessary along with the establishment of a Danube Database for Consortia implementing relevant projects;
- The Strategy should encourage the use of **synergic mechanisms** between different funding tools in order to support strategic projects implementation;
- **Smaller and more accessible funding** should be made available in order to implement small scale projects (e.g. by reviving successful initiatives like START);
- **Cross-cutting initiatives** should be further **encouraged** (e.g. PA 6 & PA 8 on building and supporting green enterprises; PA 1a & PA 1b & PA 6 on the Danube Masterplan on navigation and biodiversity);
- There is a need of **enhanced support for the implementation of the EUSDR relevant projects in the neighbourhood countries**.

The Sli.do application was used to enhance communication among participants and extract as many relevant proposals as possible during the limited time allocated for the event. The event overview shows

that there were 65 active users resulting an engagement score of 57 and an engagement score per user of 0.9.

85 people voted for the 2 polls created during the event in order stimulate the public participation and reveal the participants' views on the key features of the Danube Region and the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan. The results were presented to the participants as word clouds.

1. What is the ONE word that describes the EU Danube Region Strategy for you?



Fig. 1: Word cloud no. 1

36 participants voted for the first poll, out of which 12 identified the **cooperation** as the expression to describe the EUSDR. Other terms indicated by the participants were *diversity* (4 answers), *integration* (3 answers), *connectivity/connect/connection* (3 answers), *coordination*, *communication*, *cohesion*, *challenge*, *complexity*, *New Europe*, *collaboration*, *togetherness*, *solutions*, *joint effort*, *opportunities*, *future*, *innovative approach*. The exhaustive answers list is available in *List 1-answers to polls* (see page 8).

2. What do you think the biggest change with the revision of the Action Plan should be?



Fig. 2: Word cloud no.2

A total number of 49 people shared their views as regards the biggest change the new Action Plan should produce. They provided very diverse answers, with different degrees of complexity, but most of them referred to *better integration, sustainability, more visibility and better actions*. The exhaustive answers list is available in *List 1-answers to polls* (see pages 7).

During the event, the participants used sli.do tool to address questions to the panellists. **25** questions were received; they can be grouped as following:

- **Strategic approach of the EUSDR**
 - How the synergies/interaction between EUSDR and EUSAIR and the Black Sea Basin can be enhances/realized?
 - How the Danube Strategy can facilitate the reduction of the disparities especially in terms of economics between the western and the south eastern part of the Danube Region?
- **Communication/visibility of the Strategy**
 - Are there any concrete plans for strengthening the visibility of EUSDR?
 - What is the vision in the AP for ensuring more visibility of the achieved results from the strategy implementation? Any strategic actions to be prioritised?
 - How could the communication towards the general public and especially to civil society be improved?
 - How can the strategy further clarify that it offers only a political framework and not funding?

- How can we come closer to the People in the Region, not only in the Capitals? We need more „unfiltered “information and communication in the Region.
- Communication in the Region!

➤ **Funding**

- What does the Commission plan to do for more alignment of post-2020 funds?
- How will the revision impact the future programming period and the allocated funds?
- Will funding be more available for the revised Action Plan?
- Has the revision of the action plan considered the priorities of the next EU programming period?
- How will the revision impact the planning of the future funding period?
- What does EUSDR plan to do for more embedding and synergies across ESIF funding?

➤ **New topics to be addressed/topics to be further addressed**

- How can you/we empower youth participation for a sustainable and durable involvement? Will funding be available for these youth programs?
- How do you plan to integrate the youth more? Are there any platforms, tools or instruments to do that and get involved for youth groups?
- How are circularity and waste management included in the strategy?
- Involve agriculture and health

➤ **Others**

- How the countries geographically not located in the Danube Region will be involved in the projects: how are you going to manage the geopolitical risks in this regards?
- When will the AP be ready?
- What were the main challenges in the process of the revision of the EUSDR action plan?
- Can EUSDR respond quickly to emerging trends, like “Fridays for Future”?
- Can our Danube be cleanse?
- It is not only about money. It is about solidarity, cooperation and saving the EU.
- Is anybody reading this at all?

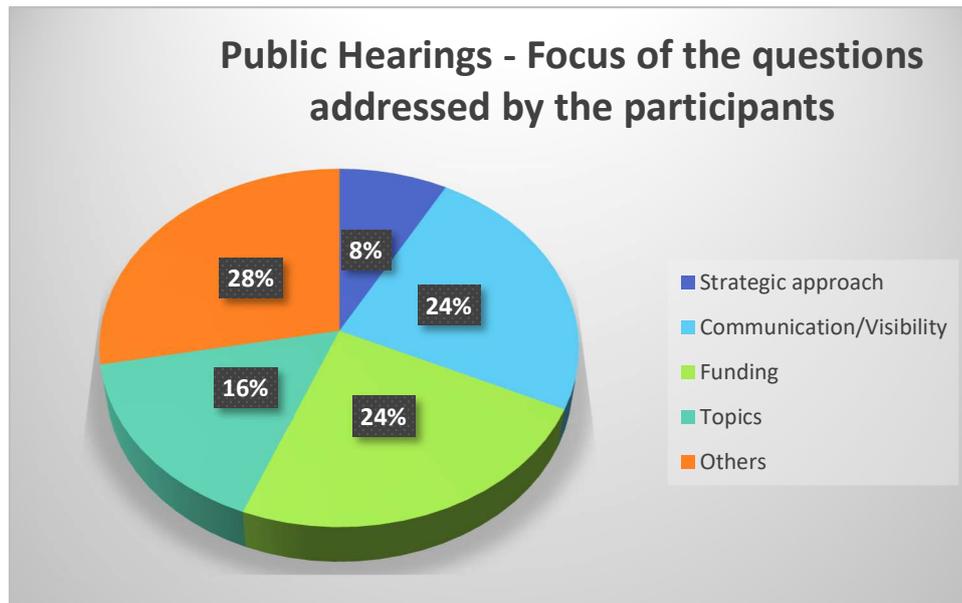


Chart no. 1 – Focus of the questions addressed by the participants

The Q&A session and the contributions on sli.do reveal a balanced distribution of the themes tackled by the participants, their proposals being focused on communication and funding, but also on governance and structure of the Strategy.

Synopsis of the results of the Public Hearing:

Civil society organisations clearly identified the need for further strengthening cooperation and for better governance as the most crucial challenges in the Danube Region. Efforts for securing funding, e.g. of infrastructure projects, will remain equally important.

In the field of **governance**, participation should be further fostered by applying a mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches. It was suggested to create platforms on a more regularly basis, such as national or regional participation days throughout the whole Danube Region. In this regard, use shall be made of already existing experience and formats, such as the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF). This could also contribute to enhanced continuity, also in terms of actors (civil society as well as administrative level). Likewise, the commitment on national level (NCs) shall be improved. In parallel, the local and regional level shall be tighter involved. More cross-sector collaboration and networking, more intensive cross-border cooperation and more exchange with other Macro-Regional Strategies are deemed as beneficial for all involved stakeholders.

For securing that EUSDR achievements and developments are reaching a wider audience, **communication** shall be improved at all levels, also in national languages. The creation of a Danube media network could facilitate spreading the word. In this regard, the creation of a common narrative is appraised as helpful.

Regarding possible **thematic fields of future cooperation**, the following proposals were brought up:

- youth participation & empowerment, education / LLL,
- scientific cooperation,
- climate change,

- sustainable transport & infrastructure,
- cluster policy,
- health,
- agriculture,
- stabilizing liberal democracy & human rights.

When it comes to **funding**, earmarking of funds for EUSDR projects was proposed as one possible solution for facilitating strategic EUSDR projects. It was suggested that undertakings and projects shall generally strive for contributing to economic convergence. Particularly for civil society organisations, an appropriate availability of micro-funding facilities shall be secured.

Generally, the participating civil society organisations are convinced that the EUSDR is an important tool for improving cooperation, for fostering integration (e.g. regional, economic, of minorities, of the young generation), for approaching ecological questions and for tackling further challenges of macro-regional dimension. Thus, Macro-Regional Strategies will remain laboratories for a new Europe.

List 1 - answers to polls

List of answers to Poll no. 1 - What is the ONE word that describes the EU Danube Region Strategy for you?

- Superb, Diversity, Coordination, Cooperation, Innovative approach, Future, Opportunities, Connection, Joint effort, Solutions, Connect, Integration, Togetherness, Connectivity, Communication, Cohesion, Challenge, The New Europe, Collaboration, Complexity

List of answers to Poll no. 2 - What do you think the biggest change with the revision of the Action Plan should be?

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Youth

- More visibility
 - Integration
 - Horizontal integration Visibility Cooperation
Visibility
 - Strategic actions
 - Waste management
 - Integration
 - Facilitating regional involvement through concrete actions
 - Bring the strategy to the people
 - More visibility
 - Communication
 - Definition of achievable targets! How many young people should be involved? How many tourists should visit region A, B, C? What you mean under sustainability? What are the detailed goals with climate change adaptation and mitigation? This may clarify relevance of actions!
 - More coherence btw thematic topics, objectives, desired actions, alongside with clear definition of concrete support mechanisms and resources allocated for implementation
 - Project implementation
 - Communication to the public
 - Commitment
 - Sustainability
 - Integration
 - Interdisciplinarity
 - More clear objectives and expectations
 - Correlation with the other initiatives in the Region.
 - No clear process
 - Communication
 - Involve youth
 - More coherency
 - Introducing youth
 - More involvement
 - Encourage youth #education on this area
 - Participation structure
 - To people youth
 - More visibility
 - Continue to implement before goals
- Integration
 - New responses to new challenges
 - Finding actualized solutions for current problems.
 - Project implementation
 - Knowledge transfer
 - Include Health
 - More visibility
 - Stronger cooperation
 - Increased focus
 - Simplification
 - Strengthen the bottom-up approach
 - Sustainability
 - More funding
 - Political ownership
 - Stronger, more inclusive governance
 - Impact
 - Commitment