



Growing together – together we grow

Stepping up Institutional Capacity and Cooperation
in the Danube Region





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The EU Strategy for the Danube Region

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

strives for prosperity by bringing together people in the world's most international river basin.

Encompassing fourteen countries and approximately 100 million people, the Danube region shares a rich and diverse cultural heritage as well as common economic, environmental and social potentials. At the same time, the region faces severe challenges such as the aftermath of the economic crisis, recurring floods, poor connectivity between cities and rural areas, massive migration flows, corruption and organised crime. In order to cope with these challenges, the countries of the Danube Region need to cooperate across borders to develop joint and mutually reinforcing solutions.

Thus, in June 2011 the European Council approved its second macro-regional strategy – the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). Its aim is to increase prosperity, improve the living conditions for the citizens, support capacity building within the administrations, push forward the protection of environment and resources and foster education. The fourteen countries involved in EUSDR are the EU member states, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and – outside of EU – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine.

By providing a shared framework, the EUSDR strengthens the cooperation between EU member states, candidate countries and countries of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), reinforces the coordination between different political and administrative levels as well as between policy sectors, promotes a better use of available resources, enhances cooperation with

the Civil Society and thereby strives for visible improvements for the people in the region. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region facilitates a coordinated macro-regional approach that aims at contributing to the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as well as to the objectives of the SEE 2020 Strategy.

In order to ensure comprehensive development and cater to the needs of territorial, economic and social cohesion, the strategy is based on four thematic pillars: connecting the region, protecting the environment, building prosperity, and strengthening the region. These pillars encompass twelve priority areas that facilitate the focussed implementation of development targets.

Connecting the region: mobility, energy, tourism and culture

Being well connected within the Danube Region and beyond is essential for increasing prosperity. Thus, it will be crucial to take greater advantage of the Danube's potential as a sustainable transport axis. This can be achieved by improving navigability or expanding and modernising infrastructure for cross-border road, rail and air traffic with a special focus on environmentally friendly mobility. The strategy further focusses on the expansion and modernisation of power grids and encourages the Danube countries to promote the use of renewable energy. But connec-



MAP © INTERACT

ting the region is not only limited to physical infrastructure. The EUSDR also seeks to promote cultural exchange as well as the sustainable use of the cultural and natural heritage by linking activities related to tourism in the Danube Region.

Protecting the environment and improving risk management

The Danube Region has a unique flora and fauna which is affected by human activities and climate change beyond borders and national interests. In order to protect and improve water quality, manage environmental risks, preserve landscapes, biodiversity as well as air and soil quality, an effective cooperation and coordination across borders is pivotal to the preservation of natural resources. The idea is to mutually reinforce activities for preservation and improvement rather than focussing on local, regional or national endeavours.

Increasing prosperity by strengthening competitiveness

As the Danube Region is characterised by great economic and social disparities – ranging from the richest to the poorest European countries – the EUSDR especially aims at improving know-

ledge management in the fields of research, education and information technologies. Therefore, the strategy supports the development of improved research infrastructure, enhances the networking between researchers, companies and policy makers, and promotes the matching of educational systems to the needs of the labour market. Another important field of action is the inclusion of vulnerable groups with special regard to Roma in order to foster social cohesion.

Strengthening the region: “Good Governance” is the key

Since 1989, the Danube Region has faced dramatic societal, political and institutional changes. In order to cope with issues such as security, organised crime or establishing efficient administrative practices to manage cities, municipalities and regions, the Danube countries have very different resources at their disposal, which are suitable to develop effective measures.

Good Governance is the key to the successful implementation of the entire EU Strategy for the Danube Region. In this regard, the strategy strives to step up institutional capacities for decision-making processes and cooperation between the public and private sector. Furthermore, institutional capacities and strong networks support the optimal use of resources.

Forewords

Christian Kern,
Federal Chancellor of
the Republic of Austria



PHOTO ©: FELICITAS MATERN

The Danube Region offers a wide range of opportunities and potentials for cooperation to promote prosperity and a high quality of life for its citizens. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region is a valuable tool to make use of these potentials, but also provides a platform for developing joint solutions for common challenges such as migration, social inclusion, or ecological hazards. Strong, effective public administrations and participatory decision-making processes are at the core of both exploiting potentials and successfully tackling challenges.

Sebastian Kurz,
Federal Minister for
Europe, Integration and
Foreign Affairs,
Republic of Austria



PHOTO ©: BKA / ANDY WENZEL

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region fosters cooperation among all fourteen countries in the region. Together we aim for better regional integration across national borders, sustainable development and strengthening prosperity through more business co-operation and improved business support. Enhancing institutional capacities and promoting good governance is fundamental to unblocking the potential of business creation and growth as well as to realising added value for the citizens of the Danube Region. It is also a unique opportunity to intensify the links and networking efforts with our neighbouring countries at all levels of the public and the private sectors.

Michael Häupl, Mayor of the City of Vienna



PHOTO ©: STADT WIEN / PID, IAN EHM

The Danube encompasses the world's most international river basin. While the river served as a border for a long time, it is now functioning as a connection between 14 countries and roughly 115 million people at the heart of Europe. Together, we are able to work towards a smart, sustainable and inclusive Danube Region.

The Strategy for the Danube Region adopted by the European Union aims to secure, maintain and achieve social equality, prosperity, individual prospects for the future and peace in the region. The expectations of the people living in various parts of the Danube Region diverge, depending on the challenges they are facing as well as on the potential available to them. These expectations range from a noticeable improvement in the standard of living and quality of life, better chances of finding a job, a stronger desire for security to a better way of coping with day-to-day life with support from public administration and authorities that truly cater the needs of their citizens, as well as the wish for clean water and well-regulated wastewater and waste management.

In other words, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region will only be successful once it leads to positive changes in people's everyday lives. This needs to be the focus of the projects and activities set. At the same time, this can only be achieved through cooperation and realisation of the full potential of the Danube Region. Thus, cities and regions as well as the Civil Society are pivotal for making European Integration successful and visibly improving the quality of life for people.

Andreja Jerina, National Coordinator of EUSDR; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Slovenia



PHOTO ©: CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN FINANCE

Slovenia has shared the common history of the wider region and is shaping our common future. Participating in three out of four EU macro-regional strategies (EUSDR, EUSAIR and EUSALP) comes as a natural way of dealing with common (macro) regional challenges and issues. To develop common solutions, capacity for cooperation needs to be developed in all participating countries at all levels and between all actors: government, industry, Civil Society, NGOs and the general public. Non-EU countries participate in the EU macro-regional strategies as equal partners. A capacity for understanding and cooperating within the "EU environment" is crucially needed, as is tailor-made institutional building. From the beginning of the EUSDR, Slovenia has been promoting EU macro-regional strategies as a valuable "EU enlargement tool" to facilitate collaboration between EU states and non-EU states on EU aquis-harmonised projects.

After the first five years of implementation, PA10 – jointly coordinated by the Center of Excellence in Finance in Slovenia and the City of Vienna – has established itself as an integral component of the Strategy. As pointed out during the first annual Forum of EUSAIR this year, other macro-regional strategies too should build on experience gathered within the PA10 and benefit from spillover effects.



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How to establish the basis for prosperity?

The basis for prosperity and all other goals of the EUSDR is “Good Governance”.

This concept not only comprises the development of appropriate structures and abilities in public administration, but also the involvement of the Civil Society in policy-making. The teams of Priority Area 10 in Vienna and Ljubljana assist countries in their reform process and thereby contribute to the success of the EUSDR.

Taking advantage of the huge economic, ecological and cultural heritage in the Danube Region requires cooperation among the fourteen countries. Sharing ideas, knowledge and good-practices as well as coordinated activities and funding among countries, cities and regions contribute to better policy-making. This also has to be embedded within a stable institutional structure that accounts for the rule of law, transparency, democracy, market economy and political stability. Efficient administrations are the backbone of economic and social development as they enhance effective reforms and investments. Thus, stepping up institutional capacities and cooperation is the foundation for making the Danube Region a smart, sustainable and inclusive macro-region.

However, the levels of institutional capacities still strongly vary within the area. In the past decades, the Danube Region faced significant political, economic and social transformation. Today, some countries are unable to unleash their potential due to unstable political, social and administrative structures. Aspects such as insufficient development of e-government, relations between the different levels of government, administrative weaknesses and lack of transparency prevent public administrations from fully supporting the Danube Region’s development.

Thus, the EUSDR seeks to optimise public management practices and cooperative structures that cater to the needs of the citizens along the

Danube. Priority Area 10 (PA10) works towards socio-economic and political-administrative reforms in order to meet the needs of a smart, sustainable and inclusive Danube Region with its citizens as their main focus. That is why PA10 promotes structured bottom-up processes and the involvement of Civil Society in order to contribute to project development that serves public needs.

At the same time, PA10 furthers projects and the exchange of experience seeking to dismantle administrative and regulatory barriers related to investment planning. “Good Governance” and administrative capacities are prerequisites for effective policy implementation and consequently affect the realisation of the EUSDR. Therefore, PA10 addresses horizontal issues and seeks to contribute to the progress in all Priority Areas.

In 2011, the Center of Excellence in Finance in Ljubljana (on behalf of Slovenia) and the City of Vienna joined forces in order to coordinate PA10 and thereby promote institutional capacity-building and cooperation. Having comprehensive experience in institutional capacity-building, financing, implementation of participatory processes and urban development, the PA10 teams support stakeholders throughout the Danube Region in their efforts to implement an open, innovative and modernised environment for good governance. In 2017, the Center for European Perspective in Slovenia took over the coordination tasks from the Center of Excellence in Finance.

Many Ways of Sharing Knowledge

Well-functioning public administrations, sound investment and an open dialogue with Civil Society are the foundation for a smart, inclusive and sustainable Danube Region.

Priority Area 10 (PA10) is closely cooperating with a variety of stakeholders such as civil society organisations, ministries, regional and city administrations, financial institutions and authorities in charge of EU funding, the European Commission, international organisations, regional initiatives, universities, project promoters and many others in order to enhance the exchange of knowledge and thus foster capacity-building and cooperation.

cohesion. Thus, PA10 supports capacity building in the area of project financing, planning and sharing of good practices, experiences and financial transparency. Apart from enabling the exchange of know-how and experiences with and among relevant stakeholders, PA10 fosters the match-making between project promoters and funding institutions, provides technical assistance for project development tailored to existing funding opportunities and facilitates the accessibility of information for funding instruments in the Danube Region.

Promoting excellence for good governance

To overcome the shortfalls in public administration, PA 10 promotes excellence through informal cooperation, sharing experience and triggering joint activities among representatives of the public sector. For this purpose, ministries responsible for public administration issues are brought together with stakeholders from regional and local administrations, academia as well as cooperation networks and initiatives dealing with public administration and good governance. The opportunity to share good practices and know-how within the macro-region proves to be an effective tool for fostering reform efforts.

Improving decision-making

Civil Society plays a crucial role in the exchange and cooperation with different levels of governance and in the processes of political transformation and EU accession. Therefore, PA 10 promotes the cooperation with the European Commission and regional networks that deal with civil society involvement in policy making, provides know-how in terms of participatory processes – amongst others within the framework of the Local Actors Platform – and supports the implementation of (national) hearings bringing together public authorities and civil society organisations for a fruitful exchange.

A framework for value-added investment

In several countries of the Danube Region, the absorption capacity for available EU funds is significantly low. This leads to a huge untapped potential for economic, social and territorial

Supporting urban policy-making

The Danube Region encompasses a large number of capital cities as well as metropolitan regions. As urban policies are at the core of



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European development policies, enhancing institutional capacity and cooperation includes the support for establishing sustainable, capable, smart and inclusive cities. Thus, PA10 encourages the exchange between urban regions on effective solutions and strategies for their specific needs and challenges as well as on better spending.

Initiating strategic projects

Committed projects and processes breathe life into the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and are crucial for achieving the strategy's targets. Thus, the strategy initiates "strategic projects" which demonstrate the progress made within the EUSDR's targets and make the strategy more tangible, contributes to a strategic focus of the activities and efforts undertaken in the Priority Area, and further supports joint cooperation in the Danube Region. Project promoters benefit through enhanced recognition of the project activities, comprehensive support from the Priority Area and access to its networks, embedding the project in a long-term strategic structure.

PA10 Targets

- Improve World Bank governance indicators related to government effectiveness, regulatory quality and control of corruption in comparison to 2011.
- Assure that 80 % of the participating countries involve their national, regional and local authorities and community support officers (CSOs) through annual national and/or provincial EUSDR consultations in cooperation with the National Coordinators of the EUSDR.
- Through the exchange of information and support on all levels of cooperation, the "Urban Platform Danube Region" (UPDR) helps to generate at least one Urban Danube Project for 25% of the UPDR stakeholder organisations, thus optimising investment.
- Increase the average absorption rate of EU funds in the Danube Region in comparison to the 2007 - 2013 period.

Coordination of Priority Area 10

The Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) ensure the implementation of the Action Plan defined for the Priority Area by agreeing on planning, with targets, indicators, and by making sure there is effective cooperation between project promoters, programmes and funding sources in the Danube Region. They also provide technical assistance and advice. The coordinators work in consultation with the Commission and relevant EU agencies as well as national and regional bodies.

The city of Vienna has been working together with other cities and regions for many years. This has resulted in a great deal of practical experience and creates a good basis for expanding collaboration through cooperation agreements with further cities and regions. Within Priority Area 10, Vienna's main tasks include the development of working structures, cooperation with relevant and interested stakeholders, participation in communication programmes and publication of results, as well as monitoring and reporting to the European Commission. The Viennese experts are also engaged in the further development of Civil Society involvement in governance, the intensification of inter-city collaboration, cooperation in cross-border regions, the optimisation of efforts and the utilisation of financial resources. Another area in which Vienna possesses a great deal of expertise is the exchange of know-how and cooperation in the field of urban technologies.

In implementing practical/technical solutions, PA10 receives support from EuroVienna, the EU consulting and management division of the City of Vienna.

PA10 Staff,
City of Vienna,
Republic of Austria

The Centre for European Perspective (CEP) is a Slovenian governmental organisation which started to operate in 2006 on the initiative of the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The mission of the centre is to enhance the European perspective through various activities in the field of democratisation, security and youth.

In this manner, it contributes to regional stability and prosperity by developing and strengthening friendly relations with beneficiary countries and improving visibility of Slovenian know-how within the region.

CEP is an official provider of international development assistance to South-East European countries, seeking to support and foster their economic, social and political development.

It performs its services upon the request of individual beneficiary countries and tailors these services to the countries' specific requirements. CEP is one of the organisers of the Bled Strategic Forum, the largest strategic conference in the region, and also active in the ENTRI capacity building programme as well as in the field of civilian crisis management.

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PHOTO © CEP

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The importance of having access to funding

Access to funding is an important factor for economic and social development. However, the low absorption of EU funds is a great challenge in the Danube Region. One reason for this is the lack of knowledge about available funding sources. The database “EuroAccess Danube Region” seeks to improve the current state.



The low absorption of EU funds is an outstanding issue in the Danube Region. EU members in the Danube Region are among the countries with the lowest absorption rates in the European Union. Also non-EU countries of the Danube Region with limited access to EU funds face challenges in absorbing available funding. Yet access to relevant funding is essential for the development of the region. Although a variety of stakeholders – ranging from start-ups, small and medium sized enterprises, NGOs, local authorities and research institutes – are eligible for EU funding, they fail to exploit the full potential for funding.

But why is the absorption of EU funds so low? One factor may be insufficient administrative capacity to tap EU funds. Another factor preventing countries from utilising EU funds may be inadequate knowledge of how to prepare and implement projects. Experience also showed that potential project promoters often simply do not know about available funding sources for their project ideas.

The “EuroAccess Danube Region” database addresses the lack of overview related to available funding. The database was launched in May

2016 and provides information on EU funding targeted at the Danube Region. “EuroAccess Danube Region” serves as an important step towards increasing the absorption rates in the region.

How EuroAccess works

EuroAccess encompasses the most relevant EU programmes for the Danube Region. The main objective is the development and maintenance of a user-friendly database. It includes full information on EU funding targeted at the Danube Region in the funding period 2014 to 2020. This tool will allow identification of the most suitable EU programme for each type of organisation and project in the area.

The relevant programmes cover seven highly different fields of action, which roughly correspond with the priorities of the European Union for the funding period 2014 - 2020 (“facts & figures”). The database contains funding information in the following thematic areas: environment and climate change, science and research, education, youth and culture, health and sports, em-



The EuroAccess database shall:

- enhance access to EU funds and raise the rate of EU-funded projects,
- point to EU funds relevant for the Danube Region,
- keep the list of calls for proposals up-to-date through screening of EU funds and
- ensure better coordination of funding.



How to use EuroAccess

The EuroAccess website provides a search template that enables users to identify funding schemes fitting to the type of organisation, the geographic scope of the project, the topics addressed as well as type of funding required.

Registered users of "EuroAccess Danube Region" database may:

- save information on selected calls for proposals as a PDF file
- add interesting calls to a personalised funding basket and
- sign up for a regular newsletter with the latest calls.

All information on the "EuroAccess Danube Region" database is available at:

www.danube-euroaccess.eu

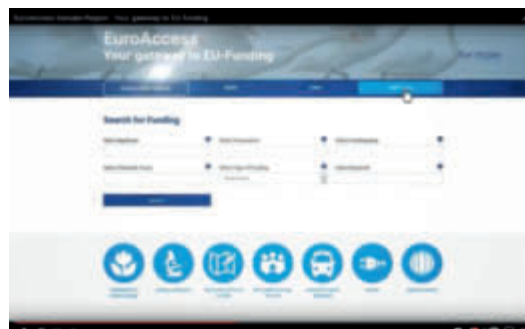
ployment and social policies, infrastructure and transport, as well as energy.

The right tool for project promoters

The search tool is built from the perspective of potential applicants. Any organisation developing a project can enter the criteria of its individual scheme, such as thematic focus, funding area, applicant's type of organisation, and type of funding. A detailed description of the programme helps project promoters to determine whether a funding programme fits to the project idea. Additionally, the database informs about submission requirements.

The information in the database is up to date. A regular newsletter keeps potential applicants informed about the opening of new calls on topics, as defined by the user.

EuroAccess
Danube Region



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Former Pilot Initiatives

Initiating cooperation across the Danube Region

The success of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) depends on the implementation of effective and innovative projects. The Seed Money Facility “START – Danube Region Project Fund” provided support for transnational cooperation and encouraged stakeholders all over the region to realise their potential for innovation.

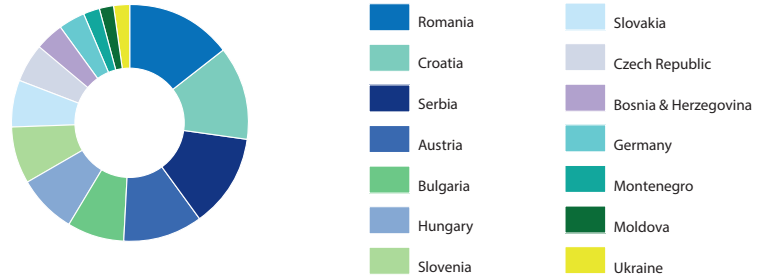


Priority Area 10's Seed Money Facility START provided support for the implementation of small-scale projects and for the preparation of transnational large-scale projects. The initiative aimed at encouraging project promoters in the Danube Region to initiate cooperation across borders and addressed public institutions, NGOs, universities, research institutions and small enterprises. Financially weak stakeholders gained the opportunity to engage in project implementation with partners from the Danube Region, to implement innovative project ideas and to increase experience in transnational project implementation.

Initiating development

The START initiative supported projects that addressed topics from the twelve EUSDR Priority Areas and were implemented by at least two partners from two countries of the Danube Region. The facility funded activities geared to drafting a sound concept for further application to funding schemes such as the programmes of the European Territorial Cooperation or other EU funds. This included networking for the set-up of strategic partnerships, developing a project concept, defining the budget for project implementation and identifying funding options.

START: Project partners per country



Furthermore, START provided financial support for the implementation of small-scale projects for activities such as joint workshops and research studies that gathered data and information on needs and potentials for future development.

The Seed Money Facility START provided more than 1.3 million euros for project funding. The initiative was co-financed by the European Commission and managed by the City of Vienna.

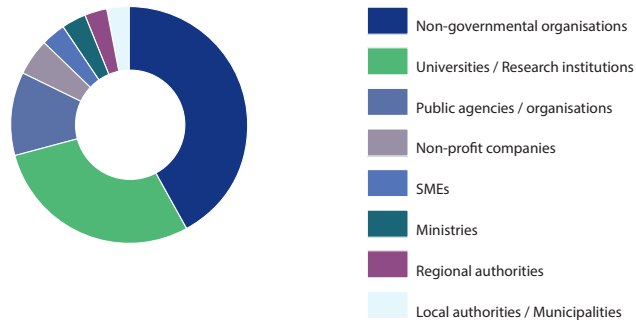
Realising great innovation potential

The response to the START initiative was more than impressive: project promoters from all fourteen countries of the Danube Region submitted over 800 applications! Forty eight of them were implemented with the support of START.

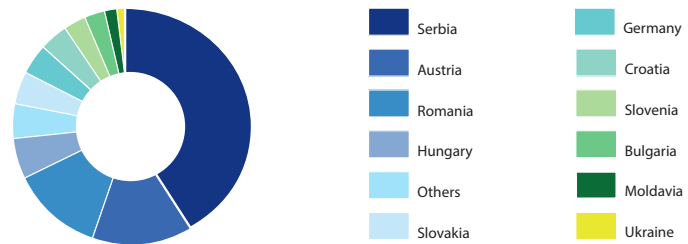
The topics ranged from the standardisation of road safety in South East Europe to promoting eco-tourism in the Danube Region, from implementing needs-based vocational training to support sustainable public procurement.

START elicited particularly great interest in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany and the Ukraine. The strong participation of Ukrainian project partners in particular reveals a high innovation potential in the regions outside the EU that could be realised in small-scale projects. The high share of NGOs particularly pointed to their great potential for regional development and shows the need for seed financing to activate innovation in the Danube Region.

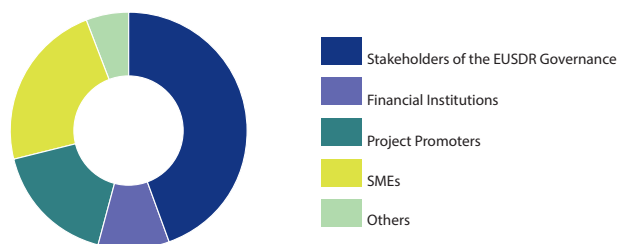
START: Project partners per type of organisation



DANUBE FINANCING DIALOGUE: Participants per country



DANUBE FINANCING DIALOGUE: Participants per type of organisation



Making the match: Finding support for innovative ideas

Small and medium-sized enterprises, start-ups, public organisations and local authorities in the Danube Region have innovative project ideas. However, stakeholders know little about available funding sources that suit their ideas. That is why the Coordination of Priority Area 10 initiated the “Danube Financing Dialogue” (DFD) – a unique match-making platform for project promoters and financing institutions.

In 2012, Priority Area 10 initiated the Danube Financing Dialogue (DFD) in order to address the lack of overview of funding sources in the Danube Region. The DFD offered a platform for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and financing institutions to exchange information on funding and investment opportunities. Up until May 2016, five match-making events took place in Belgrade, Bratislava, Bucharest, Vienna and Zagreb in cooperation with the National Banks in the region and co-financed by the European Commission.

The initiative aimed at stimulating the match-making of entrepreneurial financing needs and financing possibilities and fostering regional integration. The DFD therefore facilitated the dialogue between representatives of public and private financing institutions with SMEs and further project promoters to realise the potential of innovative project and business ideas in the Danube Region.

Getting together for better development

The initiative received positive feedback from the stakeholders in the region. The Danube Financing Dialogue reached more than 1,000 stakeholders from the 14 countries of the Danube Region and neighbouring countries. More than 70 business ideas were presented.

Furthermore, the DFD-events offered space for business-to-business meetings, small group discussions on the latest trends in financing busi-



PHOTO ©: CREATIVE COLLECTION

ness ideas and networking. Representatives from public authorities, public and private financing institutions, SMEs and other project promoters had the chance to exchange information and needs for project implementation.

Lessons learnt from DFD

The Danube Financing Dialogue not only offered a unique opportunity for exchange but also provided valuable insights for future initiatives. It successfully addressed the need to present available funding opportunities to promote project implementation. But it also showed that there is a need to enhance early-stage financing for start-ups and non-financial support for project promoters in order to develop good project designs. Furthermore, access to a network of reliable partners is crucial to establishing viable partnerships that implement innovative projects. Another important finding was that the needs of SMEs and project promoters in general are as heterogeneous as the Danube Region itself. Further support of SMEs should therefore focus on regional and/or sector-specific needs to provide targeted solutions.

Transforming a project idea into a feasible project design

The absorption rate of EU funds is remarkably low in the Danube Region. Increasing know-how of unexperienced organisations in regard to professional project development is a crucial step towards realising the region's development potential. The "Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects" (TAF-DRP) was an initiative co-financed by the European Commission to support organisations in order to form their ideas into eligible project concepts.

The majority of beneficiaries of EU funds are organisations with high technical and financial capacities. But there are numerous small and unexperienced organisations such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or local public authorities in the Danube Region with valuable project ideas that lack the capacities for comprehensive project development. Their lack of capacity is the reason why they do not apply for project funding and one of the reasons for the low absorption rate of EU funds in the Danube Region.

The "Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects" (TAF-DRP) was created to prepare small organisations for the EU-funding period 2014 - 2020 and to help them realise the full potential of their project ideas for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). The initiative aimed at translating project ideas to eligible project concepts by providing consultation services to less experienced organisations.

One of the targets of Priority Area 10 is to increase the average absorption rate of EU compared to the funding period 2007 - 2013. Priority Area 10 (PA 10) – represented through the City of Vienna – therefore managed the implementation of TAF-DRP involving all Priority Areas of the EUSDR. The TAF-DRP initiative had an available budget of 1,350,000.00 euros in order to support project consultation services for project promoters. The initiative was co-financed by the European Commission.

The TAF-DRP initiative supported the development of project ideas through offering consultant services up to a value of 25,000 euros and

for a duration of six months. The consultants provided technical assistance to organisations in order to set up a feasible project design ready for application to EU programmes, national or private donors and banks or to facilitate project implementation with the organisation's own financial sources.

Realising added value for the EUSDR

The TAF-DRP was implemented until 2016. The facility organised three calls and supported 49 projects with project partners from all countries of the Danube Region. All project ideas selected for support had to be of public interest and had to show a clear macro-regional dimension that was represented in a broad partnership covering several regions of the EUSDR.

The project ideas contributed to the objectives of the EUSDR Action Plan and had high relevance for at least one of the EUSDR Priority Areas. According to the supported organisations, the TAF-DRP offered great benefits in regard to structuring their project ideas, defining necessary resources for interregional projects, handling project partners from different regions, developing a realistic budget and drafting targeted applications for funding programmes.

The comprehensive consultation services provided important know-how to successfully advance the project ideas of organisations with little experience in macro-regional project design.

Future funding of strategic projects in the Danube Region

The “Danube Strategic Project Fund” (DSPF) is a funding facility aimed at supporting the implementation of strategic projects with a macro-regional impact. It offers specific added value at the interfaces between EU Cohesion Policy and EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy. The DSPF is co-financed by the European Commission and by the European Parliament.

Experience gained during implementation of the EUSDR over the last five years has shown that the different socio-economic development of the fourteen states along the Danube, requires further support that complements the European Structural and Investment Funds at the interface between Cohesion and Neighbourhood Policy. The Danube Strategic Project Fund (DSPF) therefore addresses current needs of the Danube Region and supports both the preparation and the implementation of strategic projects selected by the Priority Areas of the EUSDR.

The DSPF provides an overall budget of around one million euros for the financing of the projects. The facility is managed by the City of Vienna and co-financed by the European Commission and European Parliament. EuroVienna is responsible for the implementation of the DSPF.



What projects are funded?

The DSPF supports projects that fulfil at least some of the following criteria:

- have a strategic impact, especially in view of Enlargement and Neighbourhood policies;
- include cross-cutting and/or horizontal measures covering several Priority Areas of the Strategy;
- follow a multi-level governance approach;
- support the establishment of economic and social cooperation;
- foster integration and reconciliation of Danube countries, with a particular focus on the role of young people.

The initiative seeks to support projects with a budget of approximately 100,000 euros and that last for a period of twelve months. Projects funded by the DSPF can be implemented by national, regional and local authorities, universities, research institutes, social partners, associations as well as by SMEs (start-ups). The project partnership requires at least two partners from two different countries.



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How is the DSPF implemented?

EUSDR Priority Area 10, represented by the City of Vienna, is the managing authority (MA) of the DSPF. EuroVienna is the implementing body (IB) of the facility and responsible for its implementation. The DSPF Advisory Board consists of experts from the Danube Region and European institutions and decides on the implementing structures of the initiative.

Project selection is carried out by a jury of experts that assesses the submitted project applications. Projects are encouraged to particularly address one or more of the following aspects:

- strengthening economic development;
- implementing and improving vocational training;
- increasing absorption-rate of European Funds;
- advancing research and innovation;
- implementing innovative approaches in education;
- building sound administration on national and/or regional as well as local levels;
- fighting corruption;
- involving Civil Society in decision-making and/or emergency measures;
- avoiding bottlenecks in cross-border transport;
- reshaping national and/or European regulations;
- creating smart cities and regions;
- creating digital cities and regions.

How to apply for the DSPF?

Submission of project applications is organised as a “closed call procedure”. Potential and promising applicants are invited to submit a DSPF application by the Priority Area Coordinators of the EUSDR in coordination with their Steering Group members.

Potential applicants engage in a two-step procedure: In the first step, project applicants are

obliged to present a brief description of their projects, including a budget summary. After a formal eligibility check completed by the implementing body, the project applications are passed to the Advisory Board for preliminary selection. If a project is selected for the second step, the applicant is then invited to draft a detailed project concept. Project applications submitted in the second step are then assessed and selected by the DSPF Jury.

The process of submissions is expected to take place at the beginning of 2017. DSPF projects are planned to start in autumn 2017.



Danube Transnational Programme – Seed Money Facility

The Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) addresses the need for project development support in the Danube Region. With the “DTP Seed Money Facility”, the programme seeks to provide the resources necessary to prepare mature transnational project designs that are ready for submission to EU funding instruments. This small-scale project fund covers all twelve Priority Areas (though with a focus on certain topics within each Priority Area). Project partners from public authorities, non-profit organisations, enterprises and international organisations are eligible for funding.

More information on the web:
www.interreg-danube.eu

Experience institutional capacity and cooperation





Building institutional capacities and promoting cooperation is the backbone of social, economic and territorial development in the Danube Region. At the same time stakeholders throughout the Danube Region have identified challenges and needs that have to be addressed in order to improve living conditions for citizens. The initiatives of PA 10 supported those stakeholders to develop joint solutions that establish added-value for the region.



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Enhance connectivity in the Danube Region

A high standard of transport and energy infrastructure is a precondition for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Investing in innovative solutions for connectivity reduces costs, enhances efficiency, lowers energy consumption, increases the share of renewable energy sources and improves links between urban and remote areas. Cooperation fosters the exchange of know-how between public administration, business, research and Civil Society. Furthermore, working on joint solutions leads to the development of common standards such as for road safety or sustainable energy policies in the Danube Region.

This, in turn, improves the ability of institutions to deal with challenges and to develop viable activities and policies.

Increasing road safety

Poor infrastructure is the most serious threat to road safety in the Danube Region. The state of road infrastructure not only poses a risk for road users but accident-related costs amount to more than two percent of the regional gross domestic product (GDP).

Representatives from automobile associations in Slovenia and Serbia and from the European Road Assessment Programme in Slovakia joined forces in the project "Risk Assessment on Danube Area Roads" (RADAR) for the largest transnational assessment undertaken to highlight the key risk factors for road accidents in South East Europe.

The findings of the assessment facilitated the identification of practical and affordable actions towards the "common road safety area" proposed by the European Commission, which can be applied in the region to ensure uniformly safe travel. The implementation of the measures defined in the RADAR road improvement scheme

are estimated to lead to a 40% decrease in road deaths and to a long-term return on investment five to six times higher than the initial investment.

Optimising energy policies of cities and towns

Raising public expenditure on energy proves to be a challenge for a large number of municipalities in the Danube Region.

The project "Sustainable municipal energy policy" (SMEP) addressed this issue by supporting the implementation of sustainable and cost-efficient energy management schemes for municipal assets.

Initially, the project examined the current state of implementation of ISO 50001-certified energy management systems in municipalities in Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia. The examination showed that only a few municipalities in Austria and in the Czech Republic implemented the ISO standards.

The SMEP-project provided an assessment of the municipalities' energy management in order to offer a better understanding of how energy management, harmonisation of standards and energy policies are perceived by municipalities across the region.

As a result, representatives from energy agencies, municipalities and universities joined forces to cooperate further on the implementation of ISO 50001-certified energy management in municipalities and to contribute to the stabilisation of municipal energy costs in Eastern Europe.



Preserving natural resources

The sustainable utilisation of the rich and diverse natural resources of the Danube Region is fundamental for both tackling the challenges associated with climate change and securing a high quality of life for its inhabitants. As ecosystems extend across administrative borders, the effectiveness of efforts aimed at the preservation of natural resources also depends on good cooperation.

The foundation of target-oriented preservation initiatives is reliable data. Thus, cooperation across the Danube Region can build fundamental capacities for shared standards of data collection and joint monitoring of ecosystems, such as the Danube and its tributaries.

Joint approaches are also an important factor for effectiveness in terms of preserving and increasing biodiversity. Good examples are the preservation of sturgeon populations along the

Danube and, in regard to the sustainable valorisation of natural resources, eco-tourism.

Improving water management

The Sava River Basin (SRB) plays an important role in the Danube River Basin due to its natural heterogeneity and biodiversity. Although the collection of data on the environmental status is performed through the national monitoring programmes, most of the activities are limited to certain river sections, and particularly to chemical and biological parameters.

As yet, no common database and data exchange mechanism has been established. The main objective of the project "Towards the As-



assessment of Ecological Status of water bodies in the Sava River Basin" (STAWA) therefore was to establish a platform for the efficient exchange of monitoring data and information.

The outcome of the STAWA project (2005 - 2015) provides supplementary information for future water management plans – in particular with a focus on the development of flood protection and navigation – and facilitates a sustainable use of natural resources on a local, national and transnational level.

Preserving endangered species

Sturgeon populations in the Danube have been declining over the last century and are classified as critically endangered by now. Hence, there is an urgent need to preserve these populations. The aim of the project "Ex-situ survey to preserve sturgeon genetic diversity in the Middle and Lower Danube" (acronym: STURGENE) is to support the conservation of their genetic diversity and to restock and reintroduce this "Danube flagship species" into their natural habitats.

The main objectives of STURGENE were to establish the necessary knowledge base for sturgeon protection in the Danube region, to mobilise and contact stakeholders, and to develop a roadmap for protective actions. Target groups include local entrepreneurs and authorities, governmental and non-governmental decision makers, scientific and technical networks.

In the course of the project, ex-situ opportunities to preserve the sturgeon were analysed, field visits were conducted and a report was elaborated. This work initially led to a roadmap with recommendations. STURGENE eventually

resulted in an agreement of fishery authorities from Lower Danube countries to extend the sturgeon fishery ban for another five years as well as in a set of conservation measures to be pursued in the next years. The technical facility granted to the Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF) by the European Investment Bank (EIB) will be used to fund measures of the roadmap elaborated.

Promoting ecotourism

Eco-Tourism not only supports the careful use of natural resources, but also offers new opportunities for employment. Therefore, the overall objective of the "Danube Ecotourism" project is to foster sustainable eco-tourism in the lower Danube Region, to create new job opportunities for the young and unemployed, and to increase public awareness of the beauty and socio-cultural and environmental value of the riparian area.

The aim of this project was to enable direct discussion between Romanian, Bulgarian and Serbian experts, to define realistic integrated cross-border criteria for eco-tourism development and to elaborate a work plan on how cross-border eco-tourism products can effectively be offered to customers.

Hence, the project partners discussed criteria and schemes for sustainable tourism and decided on how they can become the basis for certification and marketing of future cross-border Danube eco-tourism destinations. As a result, a concept for sustainable tourism has been elaborated and serves as a basis for future cooperation.

Labour market and education

The EUSDR Action plan states: “A society’s ability to create and exploit knowledge is a key factor for progress and growth”. Therefore, needs-based education and the advancement of business sectors result in better job opportunities and employability, which significantly contributes to social stability in the Danube Region.

Transnational collaboration in the private sector leads to more competitiveness by means of know-how exchange, as for example in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector, or through developing vocational training that meets the requirements of the labour market. At the same time, increased cooperation between educational institutions and businesses facilitates the match-making between the skilled workforce and enterprises in the Danube Region and contributes to the prevention of brain drain.

Modernising port services

New technologies, new jobs and the full-scale re-engineering of technological processes of ports require a competent labour force in line with labour market demands.

The project “Training4Port” was aimed at increasing the quality of port services and improving the perception and accessibility of jobs in ports. To assess the needs of the port sector, experts prepared a detailed labour market analysis for ports in the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. As a result, the analysis indicated a strong need for competence-based training. At the same time, a joint platform for the efficient exchange of monitoring data of the Sava River Basin (SRB) was established. The improved accessibility of data supports the development of future water basin management plans and contributes to the modernisation of port services.



Fostering innovation across borders

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is key to innovation and smart development and could bring smart solutions to traditional business sectors. In the countries of the Danube Region, smart innovations will have a significant leverage effect on the creation of jobs and competitiveness. The project Danube ICT facilitated a sustainable, long-term, strategic transnational cooperation among ICT Clusters in Bulgaria, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia. Together, regional development organisations elaborated a common strategy for transnational cross-cluster and cross-industry collaboration for the benefit of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The project facilitated the exchange of experiences and good practices and thereby contributed to the identification of traditional industrial sectors that benefit the most from increased cluster cooperation. As a result, the agricultural and automotive industry have been identified as the most important sectors for future collaboration.

After establishing a transnational ICT Network, a joint Action Plan was elaborated. The Action



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Plan serves as a basis for further cooperation between the participating clusters and supports them in developing their full potential.

Needs-based vocational training

The project “Building Capacities” (B-CAP) was based on the experiences drawn from a model project in the Republic of Moldova. In order to renovate historical buildings in Baile Herculane in Romania, unemployed youth and middle-aged workers will receive vocational training in the construction and restoration sector. Subsequently, strategies for a further touristic use of these renovated historical buildings and centres will be developed.

The B-CAP project facilitated the development of a concept and financing structure for a vocational centre, where training on the restoration of historical buildings will be provided. The concept for the vocational centre was based on a survey of the needs of the target groups. Additionally, B-CAP sought to stimulate tourism in the Region. The project partners therefore elaborated a tourism strategy ensuring the future use of the renovated buildings in Baile Herculane.

Enhancing employability

The aim of the “Study on Implementing a Pan-European Social Platform to Support Lifelong Learning and Employability” (SoPI) was to assess approaches towards increasing job security and opportunities for university graduates in the Danube Region.

Accordingly, the study examined options for the match-making between graduate students and recruiters on the basis of market surveys, a cost-benefit analysis and a risk analysis with the purpose of identifying the situation at EU level in general and the situation in the Danube Region in particular.

As a result, the project proved helpful in demonstrating that the practical implementation of the platform concept and the closer cooperation between universities and businesses will raise the qualification and employability level of the university graduates, provides the business sector with more and better skilled employees, and improves the competitiveness of the Danube Region. The findings of the study have been applied to develop a concept for sustainable tourism in Romania and Bulgaria.



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Enhancing social inclusion

About one third of the EU population at risk of poverty lives in the Danube Region. Thus, the social and economic inclusion of marginalised groups is crucial for this area. Common challenges like the lack of education, limited access to labour markets, spatial segregation and sub-standard living conditions not only have implications for the groups directly affected, but for the entire European Union.

The exchange of good practices enhances municipalities' capacities to implement innovative approaches for social inclusion of vulnerable groups. In particular, ethnic minorities such as Roma benefit from initiatives aimed at increasing the level of education or creating new job op-

portunities. Additionally, cooperation between public and private stakeholders supports the adjustment to social and demographic changes in the region.

Improving primary education for Roma children

Eighty percent of the Roma population in Europe lives in the Danube Region. The social inclusion of Roma largely depends on their level

of education. Many Roma children don't attend primary education, mainly due to their limited access to schools and the high rate of channelling into special education. The project "Roma-Edu-Danube" addressed these issues and aimed at increasing the number of Roma children in primary schools, decreasing the number of drop-outs and, thereby, enhancing the general level of education of Roma.

In order to reach this aim, primary schools in Romania, Serbia and Slovenia provided teachers and school mediators with the skills and knowledge needed to work with Roma children. The schools implemented jointly developed training modules and exchanged their experiences and good practices.

Adjusting the housing market to social needs

Small and medium-sized cities of the Danube Region are challenged by social and demographic changes. The failure of the private housing market further aggravates social segregation. Cities are increasingly aware of the necessity to adapt housing to social and demographic needs. The project "Capacity building for small and medium cities – city centre revival" (CCR) facilitated the exchange on measures aiming at adapting the housing markets. Representatives of local public administration, Civil Society and research elaborated an Action Plan to support private homeowners in their investment decisions and the optimal use of their property. Additionally, these measures contribute to better living conditions for the citizens and the revitalisation of deprived urban areas.



Efficient public administration

Well-functioning public administrations serve as a basis for strong democratic structures and prosperity. Their ability to cooperate with civil society influences decision-making processes and policy implementation. Public institutions also provide services that contribute to the quality of life and provide important stimuli for the private sector.

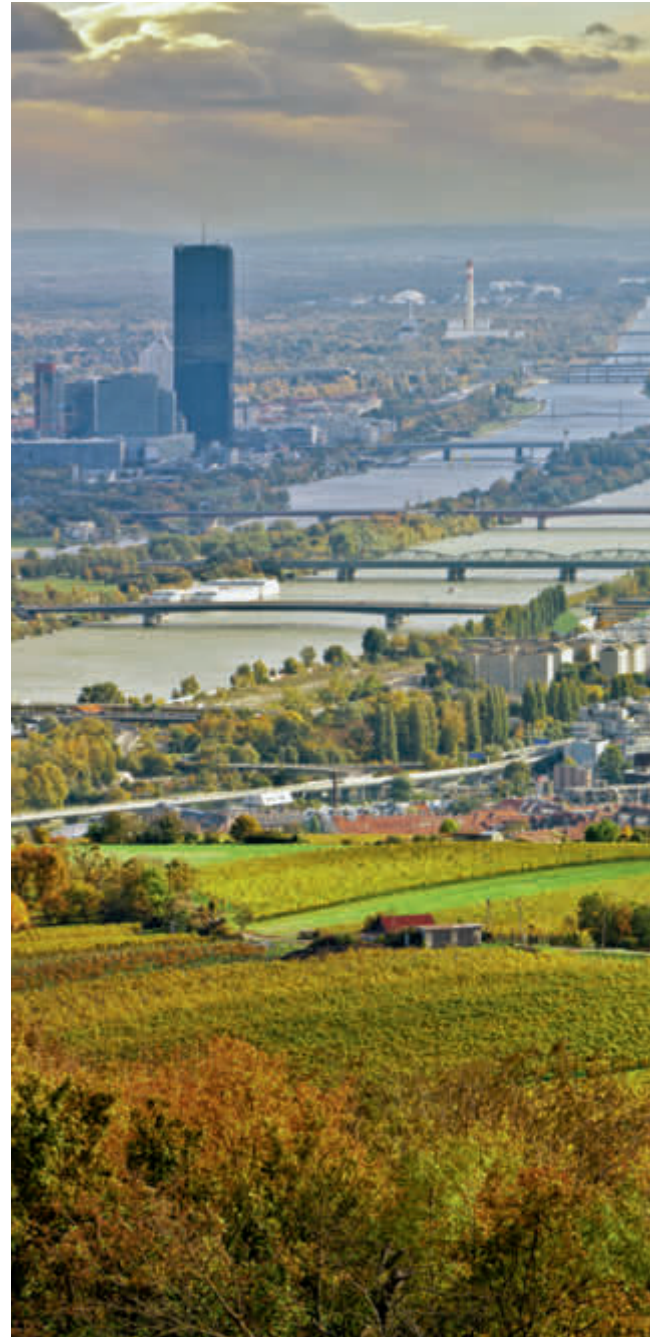
Enhancing the know-how of civil servants is crucial to strengthening public administration in the Danube Region. Improving the level of qualification has an impact on institutional procedures and services and contributes to greater efficiency. The development of vocational trainings for civil servants is an important step towards enhancing skills and building capacities in public administration. Also, developing strategic guidance for public administration supports the smooth and efficient implementation of institutional procedures such as in the area of public procurement.

Vocational training for civil servants in the Danube Region

Public administrations in the Danube Region face multiple challenges ranging from ensuring efficient financial management to confident handling of ethical conflicts of interests, from successful project development to the implementation of strategic and sustainable development. High-quality training for civil servants is an essential basis for the smooth handling of these challenges.

The project "Danube Network of Training Experts for Public Administration" (DANTE4PA) aimed at strengthening the administrative capacities of public institutions by developing a model for transnational vocational training.

Representatives from research institutions in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Romania and Slo-



venia joined forces to initiate a transnational network. The network consists of stakeholders from vocational education and training providers, local and regional public administration and representatives from the ministerial level.

Apart from the formation of a transnational network, the project partners developed a concept for the transnational roll-out of the vocational training model for further implementation.



However, public procurement often fails to support regional, ecological and social standards. Instead of ensuring the principle of best value for money, price remains the dominant selection criterion.

The current EU Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement provides new opportunities to promote sustainable development through the procurement process including a stronger focus on social inclusion.

The project "goodworks ATHURO" was implemented in order to support public administrations in the Danube Region in the application of standards of sustainable development for public procurement.

Country concepts revealed the status quo of and future perspectives for socially sustainable procurement at national, regional and local levels in Austria, Hungary and Romania. The findings provide guidance for further implementation of socially sound procurement procedures.

Additionally, the "goodworks ATHURO"-project applied a seal of quality for socially sustainable goods and selected products and services suitable for procurement. Thereby, the project managed to enhance cooperation between public administration and social enterprises in the region.

Supporting sustainable public procurement

Public authorities have considerable purchasing power. Public procurement therefore has a great potential to provide stimuli for the private sector. It is also an important instrument to enhance sustainable consumption.

Fighting organised crime

Being effective in fighting organised crime requires good transnational cooperation in terms of exchanging information as well as coordinating investigations and operations. Likewise, advanced institutional capacities are needed in order to successfully address security issues.

Collaboration across borders as well as between different stakeholders – involving law enforcement officers, judicial authorities, researchers and civil society organisations – enhances the quality of investigations and preventive measures and allows for a comprehensive approach that strongly impacts the manner in which security issues, such as the illicit trafficking of firearms, irregular migration or trafficking in human beings, are tackled.

Enhancing transnational law enforcement

Illicit trafficking of firearms is one of the key issues of organised crime in the Danube Region. After the armed conflicts in the Western Balkans in the 1990s, large quantities of military weapons remained in stock and have been supplying the European black market till the present day.

This problem was approached through the project ITF (“Illicit Trafficking of Firearms in the Danube Region”). ITF was aimed at enhancing law enforcement activities and security in the Danube Region by strengthened cooperation between law enforcement officers, judicial authorities and researchers.

The project facilitated the exchange of know-how, best practices and information between the countries’ criminal and judicial authorities in the Danube Region. Based on a needs assessment, police officers, prosecutors and researchers developed recommendations on how to improve measures against illegal firearms trafficking and optimise cooperation among all stakeholders. The data gathered in the course of the project have been compiled in a report that will also be used by EUROPOL and decision-makers at the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME).



Jointly combating trafficking in human beings

Southeast Europe in general, and the Danube Region in particular, are transit areas for irregular migrants on their way to Western Europe. These migrants are especially exposed to the danger of becoming victims of trafficking in human beings



PHOTO © LOGOFF / ISTOCK

(THB). Thus, the project “Countering Trafficking in Persons” (CTP) sought to improve police co-operation by means of enhancing information exchange, improving coordination of information sharing, coordinating joint investigations and conducting regional operations in the project implementation field. As a result, more efficient measures will be taken and safety and security within the region will be increased.

Prior to the planning of joint measures, information on the status of trafficking in human beings and irregular migration were collected at national level. Additionally, regional operations were assessed. The findings were considered for the development of future collaboration.

