



## PA10 Steering Group | Ljubljana, 9 May 2014

### Minutes of the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting

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#### 1. Participants

Magdalena Carabin Belarova (EESC), Elean Gagov (BG), Roman Haken (EESC), Matthias Holzner (D – BW), Gregor Krajc (SI), Petra Kratochvilova (CZ), Dorota Malečkova (SVK), Saša Mart (SRB), Joerg Mirtl (A), Valentin Panait (RO), Ana Pleše (CRO), Aniko Turi (H), Daniela Urschitz (A), Ionut Vasilca (RO), Kurt Puchinger (PAC 10), Irena Lukač (PAC 10).

The PA10 Steering Group has a new member institution – European Economic and Social Council (EESC). In the EUSDR Action Plan the role of EESC is referred to in relation to labor market and civil society issues, where the EESC intends to play an active role in PA10 / EUSDR, especially civil society issues. EESC is a consultative body of the European Union. Opinions related to the macro regional strategies including EUSDR (shared with SG members) are available in all European languages on their [web site](#).

#### 2. Governance

The SG continued the discussions about the governance of marco regional strategies (MRS) initiated at the December 2013 SG meeting in Vienna. Non-paper on governance drafted by the European Commission (EC) was distributed to Danube region countries and regions and has been extensively discussed throughout 2014 at the PAC, NCP and EUSDR High-level group. The consultations resulted in [Report](#) published by the EC concerning the governance of marco regional strategies on May 20. The report recommendations will be debated at the 3rd Annual Forum of the EUSDR on 26-27 June 2014 in Vienna.

Gregor Krajc (NCP Slovenija) reflected on the four elements of EUSDR structure: political leadership, ownership, coordination of the overall strategy and implementation - day to day managing of the strategy. He highlighted the following points:

- Due to different set-up in the countries concerned, NCPs are political appointees as well as public officials (mostly) from ministries of foreign affairs or regional development. No final conclusion has been reached on who the members of the high-level group should be, most likely representatives from ministries of foreign affairs together with the cohesion fund management authorities.
- Presidency of MRS: how to involve and engage the political leadership (ministers) more in the implementation of the MRS - it was recommended to the EC that voluntary presidency of the MRS would be most proper solution.



- Role of the EC: member states foresee a bigger role of the EC (DG Regio) in overall coordination. The right balance between involvement of the EC contributing the European perspective that would not impact the ownership of the member states should be found.
- Financing and role of PACs: in the future, coordination will be financed through Danube Programme.
- Involving and capitalizing on existing organizations and initiatives (e.g. CDCR, RCC, CEI) civil society will also improve EUSDR governance. These organizations also have longer tradition compared to EUSDR.
- Kurt Puchinger pointed out the importance of interface between the strategy and European Investment and Structural Funds (EUISF). EUSDR is about regional development, involving issues such as economic policies, infrastructure investments that EUISF are supporting. PACs do not have a line of communication with the management authorities of EUISF / cohesion policy.
- Focal point of the EUSDR will be set up - secretariat, executive unit and interface between NCPs, PACs and EC. There are many open issues, such as its tasks and financing.

Valentin Panait reflected on discussions that started at the 2nd Annual Forum in Bucharest and lessons learned, showing results in value and substance reflected at the upcoming Forum. He is hopeful that besides the meeting of the foreign ministers, also ministers for transport and research will meet at the sides of the Forum as their issues are at the core of the strategy.

-> For details on governance of MRS, refer to the [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](#)

### **3. PA10 Special Projects**

#### **Danube Financing Dialogue (DFD)**

Three Danube Financing Dialogues were organized so far - in Vienna, Belgrade and Bucharest. On average, around 200 participants took part at each of the event. The next one is planned to take place in Zagreb in 2015, the details will be discussed with the National Bank of Croatia in the coming weeks. Ana Pleše also confirmed positive expectations from Croatian side and that the DFD will most likely take place at end May 2015, date to be confirmed. Currently, a consultant is doing external evaluation of the DFD, draft of final report will be ready soon on basis of which improvements will be done for the next round of three financing dialogues.

-> 4th DFD in Zagreb, Croatia (May, 2015, date tbc).



## **Danube Technical Assistance Facility – Danube Region (TAF - DRP)**

First round of supported projects under TAF-DRP will be finished by end of June. The results and feedback from project promoters receiving TAF-DRP assistance are extremely positive - one project proposal (Dream) was already forwarded for financing under EUISF (7th framework). The second call for the TAF - DRP was concluded on April 1, 2014. 13 proposals for project ideas were submitted from all 11 priority areas, the results were published on May 13. All but one project were accepted, taking account the geographical balance and the budget. The consultancy services for the beneficiaries will commence as soon as possible (before summer).

With the support of the PA10 Steering Group, the PA10 submitted 3 proposals in call 2 - all 3 were selected. In the first call, PA10 submitted 2 project ideas that were also selected.

-> The results of call 2 are published [here](#).

## **Danube Region Project Fund - START**

START is a pilot pre-financing instrument with monetary support for finalizing the project setup or for starting the implementation of the project. For this purpose EUR 1.5 million is available (European Parliament budget). One supported project will be able to receive between EUR 20.000 and EUR 50.000, prefinancing up to 50 % will be possible. Geographical and thematical balance will be respected also in this pilot action. Details of START are being finalized, it will be launched in autumn and announced at the Forum.

Matthias Holzner informed the group that also Baden-Württemberg (BW) runs a similar small projects fund, EUR 400.000 of seed money per year that started in 2012. So far, BW has supported around 40 projects in different areas. BW submitted projects in the amount of EUR 9 billion for funding (life-long learning / Horizon 2020) where the fact that these projects are implementing EUSDR goals was not taken in the account. The second fund is BW Stiftung that runs mainly civil society and education initiatives/projects - EUR 500.000 per year (since 2012). Ideally, lead partners for both initiatives should be from BW. He proposed that success mechanisms between these initiatives should be exchanged.

Valentin Panait highlighted on a few successful EUSDR (PA8, PA11) projects as examples of good transnational cooperation, e.g. Danube river show, cluster cooperation. These are concrete results of the EUSDR and as such reported to the annual Forum.

-> Launch of START will be announced at the Annual Forum.

## **4. Review of working groups and other PA10 activities**

### **WG1 Institutional capacity**

The WG1 last met in December. Since then the majority of the work was related to the workshop that will be organized at the Annual forum together with two WG members,



academia and two ministers (from BW and SI) that are tasked with public administration. Another WG1 member will also have its workshop at the Forum (Creation of an eGovernance Platform for Digital Economy Development). In cooperation with PA9 and IOM (International Organization for Migration) a workshop for local level governments on migration management will take place at the sides of the Participation Day in Eisenstadt (24-25 June 2014).

So far, WG1 group has been quite productive with project ideas – one project idea was supported by TAF-DRP, another pilot project supported by BW will most likely seek START support, there is an interest among others to develop a project idea of common interest that could be eligible for START. Aniko Turi pointed out the need to follow up on the Hungarian initiatives submitted to the SG regarding e-government, PA reforms etc.

In late 2014 an event on eGovernment will be organized in cooperation with the Austrian Chancellery and Slovenian Ministry of the Interior. All other Danube countries are invited to showcase their e-government initiative. Once the event outline is agreed, the SG members will be asked to provide relevant contacts in their respective countries.

All the WG1 initiatives are in line with the work plan. We are considering the future direction and next steps for the WG1 in 2015.

We planned to hold a WG1 meeting during the Annual Forum. Due to PAC unavailability the meeting will be organized in early autumn, date will be communicated after the Annual Forum.

-> Workshop on Migration Management at Local level at the sides of the Participation day in Eisenstadt, June 24-25.

-> Workshop at the Annual Forum: „Building Institutional Capacities in the Danube Region in Practice – Presentation of Integrated Project Approaches and Exchange of Experiences“

-> Workshop at the Annual Forum: „Creation of an eGovernance Platform for Digital Economy Development“

## **WG2 Civil Society**

Meeting from September 2013 was postponed to March 2014. Restructuring of the group is taking place in order to realize the action Civil Society Platform. The WG will be enlarged and will from each country include a person from regional ministry, civil society and university. Danube Civil Society Platform has also become a member of Austrian Coordination Platform, and the EESC was also included. EESC will also be a guest at the Forum and will present their role in civil society. The platform will thus become capable of organizing events such as the upcoming Eisenstadt events organized by CDCR, PA9 and PA10. At the Eisenstadt event, a statement of the civil society will be accepted that will be communicated at the Annual Forum and to all the stakeholders. A very positive response from civil society, more than 150 registered participants already. A side event for civil society will also be organized at the next Annual Forum in Ulm (end October 2015 tbc). We will try to involve all levels of civil society which is quite a challenge. Civil Society Platform website to be ready for the Forum.



-> Participation Day in Eisenstadt on June 25 is a civil society focused side event to the Annual Forum.

-> Workshop at the Annual Forum: „The Danube Civil Society Organisations: Stakeholders of the Danube Strategy“

### **Roma Inclusion**

PA10 is in close contact with DG Justice, Roma NGOs and Austrian Chancellery. There is also one project being developed with the support of TAF-DRP related to Roma. Social inclusion, regional development and spacial development (social housing) and better spending are being tackled at a workshop at the Annual Forum. In autumn (October, date tbc) there will be another workshop organized with the Austrian Chancellery, NCPs, management authorities (ESF, ERDF) and in cooperation with PA9.

-> Workshop at the Annual Forum: „Stepping up Institutional Capacity for Roma Inclusion in the Danube Region“

### **Urban Platform**

Council of Danube Cities and Regions (CDCR) is a group of mayors of big cities along Danube river. The Urban Platform will include also CDCR at administrative level and widen it to entire Danube region including medium-sized cities. The Urban Platform secretariat is PA10, it is linked to the CDRC (Peter Langer), TINA Vienna, and Austrian Association of cities.

A website is being developed – to exchange ideas and information, upload project ideas, to find potential partners or just to share good practice (urban and regional policies). The aim is to give cities the voice in the EUSDR implementation. Each city will take up and lead an issue (e.g. Ljubljana transportation). More than 200 cities were invited to sign the letter of commitment - Budapest, Bucharest, Vienna, Ljubljana, Bratislava already confirmed, Sofia is also considering. The platform is not restricted to towns and cities, also open to regions (e.g. Vojvodina), and associations. EESC also expressed interes to participate at the platform.

-> Workshop at the Annual Forum: „The Urban Agenda in the Danube Region – Growing Together on the Urban Platform“

### **WG3 Regional Cooperation**

Meetings (results) have not a been a success. Therefore it was decided to develop a project proposal on regional development, with focus on the lower Danube (Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria) that was submitted for TAF-DRP support. It was a success as the ownership went to intersted colleagues This is a way to include WG members in cooperating in more concrete steps and this line will be followed in the future.

### **WG4 Financing**

A high-level dialogue on tax administration and compliance was in December 2013 in Ljubljana. The event was attended by 9 high-level representatives from Danube Region tax



administrations, 3 other SEE countries and the OECD, EC, IMF and academia. The result of this dialogue is a solid basis for a needs assessment of tax administrations in the region as it turns out that the most pressing issues are related to their institutional capacities (e.g. skills shortage, aging, low attraction of positions for young people).

The participants concluded these issues should be discussed and tackled top down, starting at finance ministers' level. It has not been decided yet how these conclusions will be picked up – within EUSDR or possibly also by IMF. In the second half of the year an event in the scope of this WG is planned, details will be communicated.

This working group only had one initial meeting, since then the work was practical and focused on building capacities in EU funds management, project selection and similar issues with a goal to better implement the EUSDR.

Kurt Puchinger explained that the review of bottlenecks related to low absorption of EU funds is the action we should tackle which cannot be separated from the EUSDR governance issues. Also, interface between the cohesion money and EUSDR is unknown. We would like to get a clear picture what are our existing networks within the PA10 Steering Group and what our instruments are or could be. SG members are matchmakers, the diverse group reflects also the diverse nature of issues covered under the PA10. Along with the SG members, PACs and NCPs are said to be the main implementers of the strategy but the key lies in project promoters that have or should have access to billions of euros in EISF (and other sources).

Therefore, a questionnaire has been developed to assess challenges and opportunities for improved governance within the PA10 and EUSDR. The objective is to have a basis to communicate to the EC in our progress report, offer a solution how to tackle the action plan and improve our governance. Most of the questions are about the funding sources and require ticking of a box, however there is also a place for comments – SG comments are encouraged and very welcome. The results will be anonymous and communicated in generic terms.

**Please fill in the questionnaire by June 18**

<http://www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/pages/pac10-sg6-questionnaire>

Ionut Vasilca offered an example how the EUSDR goals can be reflected in a country's cohesion policy. Within two priority axes of RO regional program related to transparent public administration, efficient judicial structure and service delivery a few percent of the amount dedicated to the said priority axes are planned to be earmarked for implementation of EUSDR.

## **5. 3rd Annual Forum EUSDR, 26-27 June 2014, Vienna**

The annual forum is the most important event of the year and its results should impact future implementation of EUSDR. This year, the focus is on governance and social inclusion



PA10 will contribute to the Forum's programme in the Danube Cosmos section dedicated to workshops, presentations and showcases of topics connected to the implementation of the EUSDR. The PA10 will be involved in the following 4 workshops:

- Stepping up Institutional Capacity for Roma Inclusion in the Danube Region
- The Danube Civil Society Organisations: Stakeholders of the Danube Strategy
- Creation of an eGovernance Platform for Digital Economy Development
- Building Institutional Capacities in the Danube Region in Practice – Presentation of Integrated Project Approaches and Exchange of Experiences
- The Urban Agenda in the Danube Region – Growing Together on the Urban Platform

Side events: informal conference of ministers of foreign affairs, transport and research ministers. In the morning of 25 June, the meeting of the Council of Danube Cities and Regions.

4th Annual Forum of the EUSDR will be in Stuttgart (October 2015, date tbc).

-> Active role of PA10 at the Annual Forum with 5 workshops.

-> SG members are invited to attend the 3rd Annual Forum of the EUSDR and side events. Details and registration are available at [www.donauforum.eu](http://www.donauforum.eu)

## 6. Conclusions

### General

- SG members will receive more frequent updates and tasks if necessary from PACs. All are invited to frequently check the PA10 web site [www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu](http://www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu)
- SG members are invited to attend the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Forum of the EUSDR from 26-27 June 2014 in the City hall to Vienna. More information and registration at the following link: <http://www.danubeforumvienna.eu/>

### Tasks for SG Members

- SG members are requested to fill in [the on-line questionnaire](#) by 18 June.
- SG members are invited to comment on the paper. Please send your comments in writing to the PACs.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION !**