

Online Meeting of the Steering Group of Priority Area 10
 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” of the EUSDR (PA10)

– Summary –

3 December 2020

Main Outcomes

	AT	BA	BG	CZ	DE	HR	HU	MD	ME	RO	RS	SI	SK	UA	EC	EESC	RCC	CEI	DSP	DCSF
SG online	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	+

Main outcomes of the meeting:

- The Steering group took note of the discussion contributions presented by the Slovak EUSDR Presidency, the European commission/ DG REGIO, The Danube Strategy Point and Priority Area 10 Coordination.
- **The topic for the Danube Participation Day 2021 was endorsed by the Steering Group** after a presentation and discussion. The endorsed topic reads as follows: **participation & digitisation**.
- Presentation and open discussion on developments within the EUSDR (Slovak EUSDR presidency priorities and planned activities, embedding process, communication strategy)
- Presentation of valuable resources, opportunities for cooperation and future activities.

Welcome

Jernej GRAHOR (PA 10/ Centre for European Perspective) and Claudia SINGER (PA 10/ City of Vienna) welcome all of the Steering group (SG) members and meeting participants, briefly explain the meeting house rules and make an overview of the meeting agenda.

European Commission/DG REGIO perspective on developments and progress within EUSDR

Johan MAGNUSSON, coordinator for the EUSBSR and EUSDR in DG REGIO and the European Commission (EC) addressed the following topics.

- EU green deal and digitalisation are the EC priorities high on the EU agenda
 → All stakeholders are encouraged to contribute to this effort
- The EC priorities are also addressed within the 3rd EC report on implementation of the MRS; The report was presented to the Council with conclusions adopted on December 2nd 2020.
- An essential goal for the entire EUSDR is the successful embedding process, which will give more opportunities for projects, activities, and all progress within the region with more funding opportunities (the process has been one of the leading priorities within the Croatian

presidency to the EUSDR and it is encouraging that the Slovak presidency will continue the effort).

- Inclusion of civil society and especially youth is a pressing topic (the topic is supported from the side of the EC; the Danube Participation day organised in October 2020 was an important platform to encourage this process, the EC wishes to include the civil society and youth in the MRS week event organised in Brussels announced for March 2021)

Presidency of the Slovak Republic to the EUSDR presentation

František KOLOČÁNY representing the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic presented the future plans and activities within the EUSDR on behalf of the Slovak presidency to the EUSDR.

The Slovak presidency that began their term in November 2020 determined their future work on most pressing challenges within the EUSDR:

1. **Revision of the action plan** (working on the revised Action plan finalised and published in 2020, and moving to the implementation plan of the agreed goals to provide new momentum to the EUSDR implementation)
2. **Embedding process** (finding methods on how to align the EUSDR priorities with various financial resources; a taskforce concerning the embedding process was established to lead the process and although much progress has been done, the implementation phase of the embedding will prove key with much work to be done at transnational and national level by multiple stakeholders)
3. **Political commitment and Governance** (gaining political commitment for the progress within EUSDR, encouraging HR support, smooth transitions of members and knowledge on all parts of the chain within EUSDR to address fluctuation of representatives)

Plans and priorities of the Slovak presidency can be divided into two clusters:

- **Institutional priorities** (upholding cooperation among the EUSDR stakeholders and partners outside of the strategy, and secondly, enforcing cooperation among PA coordinators to secure an effective and efficient address of cross-cutting issues)
- **Thematic priorities** (focusing on two topics namely climate change and biodiversity, and digitalisation with innovation)

Activities of the presidency will include classical format events and meetings, two thematic events (each focussing on one of the thematic priorities namely digitization/innovation, and climate change and an annual forum as a closing event of the presidency).

For more information consult **Annex 3** (Draft Activities of the Slovak EUSDR PRES), **Annex 4** (Programme of the Slovak EUSDR PRES 2021_presentation) and **Annex 5** (EUSDR Meetings under SK PCY).

DSP state of affairs and embedding process

Michaela FLOREA, Pillar Officer for Pillars 2 and 3 of the EUSDR and Nicole HAUDER, Evaluation and Monitoring Officer for the EUSDR, presented the second semester within the year 2020 of DSP activities.

- DSP continued with support to EUSDR stakeholders (with organisation of meetings in an online environment, needs assessment – to be published soon, workshops and MRS support)

The new monitoring concept for reporting on the progress and achievements of the EUSDR was presented by Nicole HAUDER.

- The concept will include 3 types of questions (questions from the EC used for the report of the implementation of MRS; questions from the DTP with additional information for the Project progress reports; further questions to the PACs)
- The aim of the concept is to guarantee a comprehensive monitoring system, that is both efficient, user friendly and provides a strategic decision-making support tool
- After multiple consultations with different stakeholders, the concept is currently undergoing a technical implementation stage, afterwards the process needs to be approved by NCs and is set to be implemented for the first time in the year 2022 (covering the reporting period 2021-22)

An impact evaluation is also scheduled for the year 2021 (more information to follow, the involvement of stakeholders and their feedback will be key).

Michaela FLOREA continued with a presentation concerning **the embedding process**; The process was initiated by the Croatian presidency to the EUSDR and throughout the year 2020, various events and consultations involved the activities of PACs (supported by SG members), who presented a shortlist of strategic topics submitted to DSP; NCs coordinated with authorities responsible for the ESI, IPA III and NDICI funds, screened the presented shortlist (and in consultation with MAs discussed on the feasibility of embedding on national level).

The DSP supported deliverables and documents that enforced the progress of the embedding process. One such deliverable is the **embedding tool**, that combines information on EUSDR actions and funding sources 2020+ and the presentation of strategic topics (shortlist). The leaflet on the embedding process also presents a valuable new document. Further course of action will build on the support to existing networks (ESF network) and newly established networks (MA network) to further support the exchange of work, build on ideas for efficient embedding process implementation.

For more information consult **Annex 9** (DSP Presentation).

Updates on the ESF Managing Authorities Network



The **Network of ESF Managing Authorities** actively set up from the year 2015 (with PA 9 and PA 10 working with a support function at the capacity of a secretariat) has continued its work on consultations, coordination of activities also considering the more coordinated embedding process.

Based on an informal meeting organised in March 2020, next steps were taken in a meeting held on 1.12.2020, this time in the form of a virtual event. The participants discussed the state of play; the work of working groups and consultations are further elaborated and although there are slight delays in the drafting of operational programs progress is being achieved. Further discussion topics included a revision of text modules on transnational cooperation for operational programmes, researching technical possibilities on how to set up transnational cooperation within operational programs (either within specific objectives or as a separate objective).

The shortlist of selected topics with potential for transnational cooperation was once more discussed upon and includes: women in the labour market, roma inclusion /inclusion of vulnerable groups, digitisation, aging population, life-long learning, social innovation, social entrepreneurship and also the possibility of vocational trainings (all of which are in line with PA9 and PA 10 priorities, many of which are also directly included in PA 10 activities and/or present the possibility of further cooperation). The meeting included discussions on priorities countries are committed to, how to make clusters of cooperation or groups with potential for cooperation within the Danube region, and other challenges. Political commitment to transnational cooperation and macroregional cooperation is also key. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic the importance of cooperation has always surfaced as a positive initiative, the EC as well as programming authorities and managing authorities support the link of operational programs, the EUSDR and MRS.

Next steps include a further discussion on selected topics for cooperation, integrating the text modules in operational programs, assessing potential paths for implementing transnational cooperation with support from the EUSDR (possibility of synchronised calls or joint calls). A question was presented by SG member Matthias HOLZNER in regard to synchronised calls and what kinds of support would such an initiative need to foresee (institutional support, financial support or a coordinative role)and if a discussions on how the process would be set up has been debated upon. A further question also covered the topics of React EU funds, namely if these have been discussed in ESF MA meetings.

Claudia: the React EU funds have been discussed but not in full detail (it is still also not suggested if there will be possibility for transnational cooperation in this field or if the implementation will be focussed on national priorities). More information on steps that need to be secured (including capacity building) and best practices from other regions (EUSBSR) were presented. Further discussions will take place in the following meetings discussing the possibilities of further cooperation.

Mr Ugo Poli presented a question in regard to embedding in the next generation EU national programs.

For more information consult **Annex 8** (Presentation 1).

Guidance paper for Youth Participation

Claudia SINGER presented the **Guidance Paper for Youth Participation**, starting from the process of the document's creation from the Danube Participation days in 2019 through multiple consultations, events (as the Extended PA-10 SG meeting on youth participation and other contributions from partnering organisations). The document draft was presented at the Danube participation day in October 2020.

The **guidance paper** includes three main subtopics describing:

- the benefits for young People to participate in the EUSDR and MRS, both in terms of what the EUSDR and MRS can offer to youth and vice versa how youth can help build the MRS and Danube region, both perspectives contributing to the **WHY** Youth participation matters.
- The topic **HOW** describes objectives and activities that are all part of the dimension's capacity building, communication and cooperation (to find out what do we need in terms of the mentioned dimensions for better engagement).
- The subsection referring to the **WHAT** of youth participation describes the participation of youth more precisely, through demands formulated by the Danube Youth network and good practice examples.

The document is in its final stages with only the collection of best practices that is still in progress. The further timeline of the document includes a finalisation at the end of December 2020/ January 2021, a written procedure and endorsement in the beginning of the year and submission to NCs in January/February 2021.

For more information consult **Annex 5** (Guidance paper on Youth Participation draft version) and **Annex 8** (Presentation 1).

EUSDR Implementation progress and steps forward

Jernej GRAHOR presented three EUSDR documents that were adopted/endorsed in the second period of the year 2020, namely the EUSDR implementation report 2019, the 3rd EC report on implementation of MRS and the Joint statement of Ministers responsible for the implementation of the EUSDR.

The EUSDR implementation report for the year 2019 present an overview of achievements within the strategy for the year 2019 with an outlook on the future challenges and areas within the strategy that should be strengthened. The key priorities included the embedding process, building of an adequate monitoring and evaluation system, strengthening communication, building EUSDR internal and cross-MRS capacity and revision of the EUSDR action plan. The document further describes the work of individual PAs, a brief overview of 2020 PA 10 activities was therefore presented. Further suggested challenges within the EUSDR include the embedding process, effective communication, strengthening of capacity building, strengthening of EUSDR policy impact, alignment of national documents with the strategy and advancement of Monitoring & evaluation within the strategy.

The 3rd EC report on implementation of MRS addresses the progress within all MRS strategies for the period of the 2nd part of year 2018 to the end of the 1st half of 2020. The document is complemented with a staff working document further developing the challenges, activities of each MRS. The EC presents the MRS as a ready and operational framework that gives big potential for cooperation, also delivering on EU priorities (European Green Deal, The European Digital strategy...). The report focuses on a presentation of results, that considering the challenges MRS are facing focuses on the opportunities. The outlined developments and challenges within the EUSDR are presented as follows: the embedding process, improvement of government and administrative capacity (with developments on all levels, political, coordination and implementation). Further challenges to be addressed are also communication and monitoring/evaluation established systems. The conclusion remarks include a way forward, based on the internal challenges of the EUSDR and global/transnational challenges that have the potential to (if seized as opportunities) continue the successful work of MRS.

For more information consult **Annex 1** (3rd EC report on implementation of MRS) and **Annex 2** (EC staff working document accompanying the 3rd report-2020_23-sept)

The Joint statement of the Ministers responsible for the implementation of the EUSDR is an important joint collaboration effort, political support to the activities of the EUSDR. The joint statement describes the challenging year of 2020 the EUSDR addressed efficiently, bringing the region closer together with joint action and responsive measures that contributed to fostering the wellbeing of citizens and strengthening the Danube Region resilience. The joint statement gives support to the upcoming challenges of the EUSDR including the embedding process, collaboration among EUSDR stakeholders, actions in line with priorities of the European level and other methods that have the potential of strengthening the role of MRS and the EUSDR as good practices of collaboration and cooperation.

For more information consult **Annex 6** (Joint statement of the Ministers responsible for the implementation of the EUSDR) and **Annex 10** (Presentation 2).

EUSDR Communication strategy

The communication strategy was prepared based on a need (and call from EUSDR stakeholders) to strengthen the potential of communication. Through a consultation with different stakeholders, a first draft was presented in December 2019 and was further elaborated by stakeholders until it's official endorsement in November 2020.

The overall aim of the strategy is to communicate the EUSDR vision and goals for the Danube Region (both internally and externally) and promote the work within EUSDR to increase support for the EUSDR macro regional cooperation. It is expected that the strategy has the potential to improve the culture of cooperation, facilitate the connection among institutions to share know how and best practices, improve dialogue and cooperation with international organisations, strengthen the coordination between policy makers and institutions at national level and intensify thematic cooperation with the five non-EU Danube countries.



Michaela FLOREA presented the main features of the strategy, including the vision and mission statement, slogan (also accompanied by visual identity use details), a presentation of the tree general objectives of the strategy, their respectful specific objectives and a description of identified target groups communication should address.

Special attention was given to both the key messages for promoting PA 10 (the key supported message for PA 10 is as follows “**stimulates the improvement of the quality of public services administration**”). The strategy describes the role in communication of all EUSDR stakeholders, further attention at this point was given only to the role of SG members who: are an important link of the strategy with other networks, NGOs, trade unions, and other stakeholders with potential to bring EUSDR closer to people. SG members may also contribute with ideas in their own field of expertise and are focal points (both for sharing the work of EUSDR in the national context and the achievements of the national level presented in the EUSDR networks).

The strategy combined with communication methods, established good practices and communication materials/deliverables presents a potential to strengthen communication, make it more efficient and engaging.

For more information consult **Annex 7** (EUSDR Communication strategy) and **Annex 9** (DSP Presentation).

Danube participation day 2021 (topic endorsement procedure)

Claudia SINGER presented the **topic proposal for the Danube Participation day 2021**, before an endorsement procedure could take place. The topic proposed addresses **participation & digitisation** (referring to challenges of participation and engagement within the civil society as direct effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, also challenges in terms of digitisation; the proposed topic would also be a complementing line of discussion regarding digitisation and participation according to the priorities of the Slovak presidency to the EUSDR, namely the topic of digitisation).

The SG members were enabled to share their ideas, thoughts, comments and suggest other topics that could replace the one proposed. The SG members agreed with the topic participation & digitisation and supported it in the endorsement procedure. The SG members will be further informed on the activities, possibilities of implementation and further discussions.

For more information consult **Annex 8** (Presentation 1).

Strategic projects & services

Claudia SINGER presented additional information in regard to:

- **Update on the EURO access database**, a platform funded by the EC and the City of Vienna is working on prolonging the operational work on the platform with a program extension. Next steps of the program would be to enhance visibility and accessibility, establish a project partner support and improve communication with potential project partners.
- **Presentation of strategic projects funded by the DSP**. The projects **MELIA Observatory** (focusing on media literacy) and **Talent magnet** (focusing on the support to counter brain drain through enabling cities and municipalities attract talent). Both projects contribute to the Action 7 (Strengthening the involvement of civil society and local actors in the Danube region) and target 7.1 (Supporting the empowerment of young people for participation in the development of the Danube Region through strategic guidance and the implementation of the micro-regional networks). The projects offer great potential for youth involvement, participation of civil society and participative governance, and will be followed closely by the PA 10 in the future.
- **Extended SG meetings**, that have been implemented as an additional platform for discussion in the year 2020 (offering new possibilities for more in-depth discussion on selected topics and involving a wider audience of stakeholders, members of other Pas, NC and others). Two extended SG meetings have been implemented in the year 2020 (topic of the Guidance paper on youth participation and cross border cooperation and services), currently two more are envisaged for the upcoming year 2021 on the topic of youth participation and the topic participation & digitisation. The implemented meetings will also be regularly continued with follow up activities to encourage and mobilise strategic project development.

For more information consult **Annex 8** (Presentation 1).

+++ Jernej Grahor (CEP) & Claudia Singer (City of Vienna) +++