

22th Meeting of the Steering Group of Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” of the EUSDR (PA10)

– Draft Minutes –

City of Vienna, Directorate for Urban Planning, Development & Construction
Vienna, 31 May 2022

Main Outcomes

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

Participants:

13 out of 14 EUSDR countries were represented at the 22nd Meeting of the Steering Group of Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” (see **Annex 2 Participants list**). Hence, the quorum was reached. The following countries were represented on-site: AT, DE (Bavaria), HR, RO, RS, SI and SK. The following countries were represented online: BG, CZ, DE (Baden-Württemberg), HU, MD, ME and UA.

Furthermore, the European Commission (DG Regio), the European Economic and Social Committee, the Central European Initiative, the Danube Strategy Point, and the Danube Civil Society Forum participated in the meeting.

Likewise, the Danube Region Programme and the Swiss Centre for Mountain Regions (EUSALP AG 5 Connectivity & Accessibility/LP of the Interreg project “Smart Villages”) attended the meeting.

Main Outcomes of the discussion:

- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the updates concerning the EUSDR Annual Forum from 19 to 20 October 2022.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the EUSDR Policy/Impact Evaluation, the Embedding processes in ERDF, CF, IPA, NDICI, and ESF+, and of the EU Cohesion Policy response to the war in Ukraine.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the new Danube Region Programme and the information on the first call for project proposals
- The PA 10 Steering Group agreed on discussing EUSDR PA 10 Flagships online and endorse the project selection via Written Procedure.

- The PA 10 Steering Group suggested to include civil society involvement, support for reconstruction in Ukraine and institutional capacity building for crisis management in the PAC 10 work plan.
- The PA 10 Steering Group agreed on a set of measures to be developed for better Steering Group cooperation and coordination in the next PAC Support project.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the cross-macro-regional cooperation on Smart Villages.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of youth activities in the Danube Region.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of activities from Steering Group members contributing to PA 10 actions.
- Croatia offered to host the next Steering Group Meeting in Zagreb if the pandemic situation allows for on-site meetings.

Upcoming events:

21 June 2022	Webinar "Youth Projects in the Danube Region (Online)
1-10 July 2022	12 th International Danube Festival (DE)
4-5 July 2022	Meeting of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region (AT)
11-15 July 2022	EUSDR Embedding Week (Online)
26-28 August 2022	Young Bled Strategic Forum (SI)
29-30 August 2022	Bled Strategic Forum (SI)
18 October 2022	Danube Participation Day (tbc)
19-20 October 2022	EUSDR Annual Forum (UA tbc)

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Welcome

Claudia SINGER (PAC 10/City of Vienna) and Jernej GRAHOR (PAC 10/Centre for European Perspective) welcomed all participants to the 22nd PA 10 Steering Group Meeting. Claudia Singer welcomes Bernhard JAROLIM, Chief Executive Officer for Urban Planning, Development and Construction of the City of Vienna.

Bernhard JAROLIM welcomed the participants. He stressed the importance of macro-regional cooperation in view of common challenges and policies such as the European Green Deal or youth involvement. Likewise, he strongly condemned the Russian attacks on Ukraine and expresses his solidarity with the partners in Ukraine on behalf of the City of Vienna.

Claudia SINGER presents the agenda for the 22nd Steering Group Meeting of PA 10 (see **Annex 1 Agenda**). The agenda was adopted by the Steering Group.

All participants introduced themselves in a brief *tour de table*.

Updates from Ukraine | EUSDR Annual Forum

Alla KINSHCHAK (Ministry for Communities and Territories Development and Construction, UA) reports that the Ukrainian government expects to work under the martial law until the end of the summer, but will be able to take on full functions of the EUSDR Presidency by early autumn 2022. Due to the ongoing military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency was not able to implement all the planned activities. Nevertheless, with the support of the TRIO and the DSP it is possible to hold meetings and events under the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency.

The EUSDR Annual Forum 2022 is planned to be organised in a hybrid format, similar to the Annual Forum organised by the Slovak EUSDR Presidency in 2021. Hence, the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency plans to host an on-site event for organisers and speakers, while the participants will join the event via live-stream. Slovakia and Slovenia (TRIO Presidency) kindly offered to support the preparations of the EUSDR Annual Forum. The EUSDR Annual Forum will take place from 19 to 20 October 2022.

The venue is currently under discussion. Regarding the main topics, the EUSDR Annual Forum will focus on energy security, sustainable economy, human capital and labour markets, youth activities, macro regional cooperation and embedding.

Alla KINSHAK stressed the importance to continue the cooperation between the Annual Forum and the Danube Participation Day.

Outcome:

- The members of the PA 10 Steering Group take note of the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency expects to take up its full function by early autumn 2022.
- The members of the PA 10 Steering Group take note that the EUSDR Annual Forum will take place from 19 to 20 October 2022 focussing on energy security, sustainable economy, human capital and labour markets, youth activities, macro regional cooperation and embedding.

EU Danube Strategy 2022: Update on the EUSDR Presidency & Results from the EUSDR Policy/Impact Evaluation

Katharina LENZ (Danube Strategy Point) reported that the EUSDR National Coordinators formally endorsed the installation of a temporary EUSDR Presidency held by the remaining members of the TRIO Presidency – Slovakia and Slovenia – supported by the Danube Strategy Point. The Temporary EUSDR Presidency takes over the EUSDR Presidency's duties and tasks until the Ukrainian National Coordination is able to take over. In addition, she presented an outlook of EUSDR Presidency events in 2022.

Katharina LENZ presented the results, conclusions and recommendations of the recently published EUSDR Policy/ Impact Evaluation conducted by Spatial Foresight. The evaluation was conducted

between July 2021 and May 2022 and provided conclusions regarding implementation, impact, communication, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the evaluation document includes a set of recommendations addressing collaboration on horizontal topics, cross-Priority Area cooperation, flexibility to adapt to cross-cutting developments, stakeholder empowerment or the development of a common EUSDR impact model. The final report is accessible on the EUSDR website. (See **Annex 3 PPT DSP, Working Document EUSDR Policy/Impact Evaluation**).

Tatjana KRALJ (Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds, Croatia) added that the results of the Policy/Impact Evaluation should be further considered in the PA10 Steering Group regarding for instance the next steps on implementing the recommendations.

Outcomes:

- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the installation of the Temporary EUSDR Presidency by the TRIO (Slovakia and Slovenia).
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the results and recommendations of the EUSDR Policy/Impact Evaluation.

Danube Strategy Embedding in EU programmes

Katharina LENZ presented an overview of the embedding process as well as the tools elaborated within the process. She highlighted the Guidance Paper for Embedding the EUSDR into EU Programmes. In doing so, she focused on the establishment of the networks of Managing Authorities for ERDF, Cohesion Fund, IPA and NDICI, followed by an outlook concerning the next steps in the process as well as the monitoring of the outcomes of the embedding process. After the endorsement of the Top 5 priorities for EUSDR Embedding in ERDF, Cohesion Fund, IPA and NDICI, the TRIO Presidency and the Danube Strategy Point will organise thematic meetings with Managing Authorities and Priority Area Coordinators. (See **Annex 3 PPT DSP, Working Document Guidance Paper for Embedding**)

Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK (European Commission, DG Regio) asks when the meetings are going to start as most programmes are currently under adoption. Katharina LENZ responds that the meetings are planned for the second week of July 2022.

András EDELÉNYI (EESC) enquired to what extent the embedding process was analysed in the Policy/Impact Evaluation and – since the embedding process has just started – if there will be a follow-up qualitative and quantitative analysis on the impact of embedding on funding for the strategy. Katharina LENZ explained that due to the early stage of the embedding process it is not covered in the present evaluation. However, in the post-evaluation process and once the programming process is finalised, it would be good to take a look at the Operational and Cooperation Programmes to see how the Danube Strategy has been integrated.

Tatjana KRALJ asks whether there are any ideas on how to further develop the next steps of the embedding process. Robert LICHTNER (Danube Strategy Point) replied that – so far – the Priority Area

Coordinators were included in shortlisting topics from the Action Plan. In the next phase Managing Authorities and centrally-managed programmes were involved, which consequently lead to the Top 5 priorities that have been endorsed by the National Coordinators. Now, the thematic coordinators and the Managing Authorities are supposed to discuss concrete actions to be funded during the EUSDR Embedding Week in July.

Claudia SINGER presented the updates and the progress from the Network of ESF+ Managing Authorities in the Danube Region. The network has agreed on the following 8 topics for joint cooperation in the ESF+: Women in the labour market, digitalisation, vocational training, social entrepreneurship, inclusion of Roma/vulnerable groups, ageing population, life-long learning, and social innovation. In the next step, the network will select 2-3 topic for an in-depth exchange and explore feasible modes of transnational cooperation in the ESF+. Thereby, the Competence Centre for Social Innovation SI Plus will play a major role in exploring (joint) activities and projects to strengthen social innovation in the Danube Region. The next meeting will take place in Vienna on 4 and 5 July 2022.

(See **Annex 4 PPT PAC 10-VIE**)

Outcomes:

- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the process of embedding the EUSDR in ERDF, Cohesion Funds, IPA and NDICI.
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the progress in the Network of ESF+ Managing Authorities in the Danube Region.

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Update from the European Commission

Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK presented the state of play of the EC's report on the implementation of Macro-Regional Strategies. The report is a staff working document from the European Commission based on the input of all four macro-regional strategies. She thanked all the stakeholders for the valuable inputs from Priority Area Coordinators and National Coordinators that have been submitted. The final draft is being created by the Unit Macro-regions, Transnational/Interregional/External Cooperation, Enlargement in DG Regio. The first draft of the report including the annex is supposed to be discussed on a wider basis within DG REGIO. Subsequently, the report will run through an inter-service consultation in September 2022. The final report is expected to be finalised by the end of the year. In the meantime, the European Council will be informed of the outcomes to prepare their conclusions on the report.

Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK further reports on the EU Cohesion Policy response to the war in Ukraine. The main elements of the response are the suspension of all working relations with the Russian Federation and Belarus, no EU funding in Russian and Belarussian territories, increasing the flexibility in current Cohesion Policy programmes to address needs in Ukraine and need of Ukrainian refugees in the EU. Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK refers to three concrete initiatives: Firstly, the 'CARE (Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe)' regulation entered into force on 9 April 2022 and introduced flexibilities to

mobilise resources available in the 2014-2020 programmes with a view to address migratory challenges as a result of the military aggression by Russia. These flexibilities include the extension to the current accounting year 2021-22 (ending on 30 June) of the possibility to apply the 100% co-financing rate to the ERDF, the ESF, and the Cohesion Fund that was introduced in 2020 with the CRII+ (Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative) package; member states will have a special 'cross-financing' option to use the ERDF and the ESF to co-finance expenditure eligible under the other funds. As regards ETC programmes, the CARE measures apply for the moment only to ERDF resources. In order to be applicable for the nine ENI CBC programmes, a specific legal act for the CARE measures is currently prepared.

Secondly, to further support Member States welcoming and accommodating refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine, the Commission has proposed a new simplified financing procedure under 2014-20 cohesion policy programmes. It would be a Simplified Cost Option (lump sum) – meant to be as simple and quick in claiming back as possible. The new Simplified Cost Option is supposed to cover immediate needs of refugees (e.g.: food, basic material assistance, accommodation, transportation costs). Again, this measure applies to ETC programmes funded by the ERDF, but not to ENI-CBC programmes, which are under a different regulation.

Thirdly, the European Commission suspended financing agreements in the programmes with Russia and Belarus in order to safeguard member states' interests: The participation of Russia and Belarus in ETC CBC and transnational programmes is suspended until further notice; no participation in Monitoring Committee (MC) meetings and work related to programme implementation. The MC can and shall have meetings without the presence of Russian or Belarussian representatives and can take any necessary decisions.

In addition, the European Commission aims at transferring the money pre-allocated to Russia and Belarus to current programmes with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova (if they are able to absorb the funds). Furthermore, the European Commission allows as much flexibility as possible for programmes with Ukraine and Moldova where programme implementation is disrupted by the Russian aggression or by the huge cross-border flow of refugees (implementation of projects, functioning of Joint MC, management verifications, audit, monitoring, etc.). The European Commission seeks to provide clarity and legal security to Managing Authorities and project partners on the EU side affected by the suspension of the Financing Agreements of partners from Russia and Belarus. Those aspects are covered by a legal act and interpretative notes that are currently under preparation and will be shared with the countries concerned.

Ivan LAJTMAN enquires, if there is any chance for project partners from Russian and Belarus to continue the cooperation. Despite understanding the rationale of the suspension of project partners, he considers the discontinuation of cooperation with partners from Russia and Belarus, who do not support the policies of their countries, a pity. Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK clarified that there is no exception from the suspension of project partners from Russia and Belarus. However, as soon as the situation gets "back to normal" civil society partners coming from those countries would be probably the first ones targeted for cooperation.

Outcomes:

- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the EC Report on the Implementation of MRS to be finalised by the end of 2022.
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the EU Cohesion Policy response to the war in Ukraine.

Funding cooperation in the Danube Region: What can we expect from the Danube Region Programme

Johannes GABRIEL (Danube Region Programme) presented the key elements of the Danube Region Programme 2021-2027. In the current funding period, the Danube Region Programme has an overall budget of 197 MIO EUR and a co-financing rate of 20%. Concerning the geographical coverage, the entire territory of the Ukraine will be eligible for funding once the Ukraine partners are in the position to take part. Johannes GABRIEL explained the priorities and specific objectives of the programme with a particular focus on relevant topics for Priority Area 10. Johannes GABRIEL announced that the first call for proposals will be launched in September 2022. He explained the different types of actions that can be funded and presented the indicative timeframe for the first call. Additionally, he announced that there will be a seed money facility. Interested project promoters are invited to follow any news and progress on the Danube Region Programme's website and to get in touch with the National Contact Points (if questions arise) or attend National Info Days that are organised in every country prior to the calls. Regarding the support for the EUSDR Governance, the programme will launch a call for proposal for PAC Support and the Danube Strategy Point in June 2022. The funding for PACs and the DSP will start in the beginning of 2023. (See **Annex 5 PPT Danube Region Programme 2021-2027 and Links and Downloads** under: www.interreg-danube.eu)

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Outcomes:

- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the key elements of the Danube Region Programme 2021-2027.
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the first call of Proposals that will be launched in September 2022.
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the launch of the PAC Support/DSP Call for Proposal in June 2022.

EUSDR PA10 Flagships

Claudia SINGER suggests to postpone the discussion on flagship projects to a one-hour online session due to time constraints.

The PA 10 Steering Group agrees to the proposal.

Outcome:

- The PA 10 Steering Group agrees to discuss and vote on PA 10 flagships in the course on a one-hour online meeting and Written Procedure.

Danube Participation Day

Stefan LÜTGENAU (DCSF/Foster Europe) announced, that the 9th Danube Participation Day will be dedicated to civil society involvement in the Danube Strategy. The aim of the Danube Participation Day is to take stock of the state of play of civil society involvement in the Danube Strategy and to look at ways to improve and design successful civil society participation for effective strategy implementation. Stefan LÜTGENAU appreciates that the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency expects to take on a more active role in the up-coming months and is looking forward to involving Ukrainian partners from civil society in shaping the programme as they have been a driving force in macro-regional cooperation since the beginning of the strategy. The Danube Participation Day will take place back-to-back with the EUSDR Annual Forum on 18 October 2022. The event will be organised in coordination with the EUSDR Presidency. Against this background the format (hybrid, on-site, online) is still under decision. Stefan LÜTGENAU encourages the Steering Group members to come forward with recommendations or inputs.

Claudia SINGER announced that the DCSF will prepare a questionnaire on civil society involvement in cooperation with PAC 10 that will be sent prior to the Danube Participation Day. The aim of the questionnaire is to receive insights into perspectives and experiences with civil society participation.

Outcomes:

- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note that the 9th Danube Participation Day takes place on 18 October 2022 and is dedicated to civil society involvement.
- The PA 10 Steering Group is encouraged to send inputs for speakers and involvement of civil society
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the questionnaire on civil society involvement that will be sent prior to the Danube Participation Day.

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Activities of the PAC 10 Coordination 2023+

Claudia SINGER presented the framework conditions for the next PAC Support funding. The up-coming call provides PAC Support funding for six years. For the up-coming application, PAC 10 selected three Specific Objectives: Coordination of the Steering Group (mandatory Specific Objective), embedding, and coordination of core stakeholders. For the application, PAC 10 has to outline the activities for the next six years with a more detailed work plan for the next two years. Hence, the Steering Group has the chance to propose topics or priorities of the PA 10 actions to be addressed in the next two years. (See **Annex 4 PPT PAC 10 VIE**)

Stefan LÜTGENAU suggested to focus on civil society participation and capacity building for resilient civil society involvement. This also refers to the promotion of National Participation Days. By boosting National Participation Days and the open exchange between state and non-state actors at national level, the strategy can better inform stakeholders and attract interested partners.

Matthias HOLZNER (States Ministry Baden-Württemberg, DE) remarks that the strategy and PA 10 should discuss the question 'What are possible contributions in the current war in Ukraine and in the reconstruction of Ukraine?' Since the Danube Strategy constitutes one of the few links between the EU and Ukraine, this question emerges more and more. Hence, we should discuss how the strategy can make useful contributions in the mid- and long-term future. Furthermore, this triggers the question, how could PA 10 flagship projects linked to support and reconstruction look like.

Teresa STUMMER (Land Lower Austria, AT) adds that the war in Ukraine and possible contributions from the Danube Region is also a major concern in the ARGE Donauländer, which is currently discussing what it needs to keep peace and to communicate. Against this background, it would be interesting to look into institutional capacity building in terms of institutional crisis management to be better prepared for future crises.

Outcomes:

- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the Specific Objectives selected for the next PAC Support project.
- The PA 10 Steering Group suggested civil society involvement, support for Ukraine, and institutional capacity building for crisis management to be included in the PAC 10 work plan.

Claudia SINGER presented Steering Group activities that have been organised in Priority Area 10. In addition to the biannual Steering Group Meetings and mailings, PAC 10 organised Extended Steering Group Meetings with (potential) project partners, academia, and civil society to elaborate needs and activities in a specific thematic field. Furthermore, PAC 10 organised Coffee Table Talks to informally discuss a topic for better understanding. In view of the next PAC Support, PAC 10 aims to develop a set of measures to improve cooperation and coordination in the PA 10 Steering Group. Hence, the Steering Group is encouraged to feed back on a set of proposed measures and suggest measures that are deemed useful to improve collaboration. (See **Annex 4 PPT PAC 10 VIE, Annex 6 SGM22_Vienna_Mentimeter Results**).

Tatjana KRALJ stressed the importance of continuity, as SG members are changing regularly.

Ivan LAJTMAN added that it is essential that new Steering Group members are made familiar with the role, rights and duties of this position.

Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK suggested that NCs should contact new Steering Group members to introduce them to the Danube Strategy. The importance of a regular exchange between the National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators and their Steering Group members should be discussed in the Governance.

Thus, the participants decided that it would be useful to have a meeting with new members before a SG Meeting for a briefing.

Outcomes:

- The PA 10 Steering Group voted to keep voluntary activities such as the Extended Steering Group Meeting and Coffee Table Talks.
- The PA 10 Steering Group agreed to introduce a monthly newsletter.
- The PA 10 Steering Group agreed that PAC 10 will develop a handbook for new Steering Group members and have introductory talks prior to their first Steering Group Meeting.
- The PA 10 Steering Group agrees on individual meetings between PACs and Steering Group members upon request or if deemed useful.

Youth involvement in the Danube Region

Claudia SINGER highlights the European Year of Youth Platform, which provides information on youth activities in EU member states but also non-member states. So far there are more than 368 published activities in the Danube Region from 10 Danube partner countries. If Steering Group members organise any youth events, they are encouraged to publish them on the platform. The platform can be accessed at https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en

Helene SCHABASSER (Danube Strategy Point) presented the Danube Youth Council (DYC). The DYC will act as an Advisory Board to the Danube Strategy Governance and is expected to consist of two members per country. Currently, there is a call for participation that will be open until 15 August 2022. Helene SCHABASSER took the opportunity to encourage the participants to mobilise young people to apply for the DYC. The DYC will be presented at the EUSDR Annual Forum and will gather for a DYC camp at the end of this year. More information on the call can be accessed at <https://danube-region.eu/danube-youth-council-call-for-applications-open-now/> (See **Annex 3 PPT DSP, Danube Youth Council**)

Jernej GRAHOR (EUSDR PAC 10/Centre for European Perspective-CEP) presented the Young Bled Strategic Forum, which is linked to the Bled Strategic Forum. For more than a decade, the Young Bled Strategic Forum has been bringing together young leaders aged between 18 and 35 years from all over the world to engage in lively discussions and develop innovative solutions to some of the most pressing global issues. It aims at getting more attention to young people, to focus on the challenges young people are facing and to give them an equal seat on the table with all stakeholders. Further, it has become a driver for change and a unique meeting place for a diverse array of young leaders, entrepreneurs, influencers, thinkers and social activists, offering them a platform to share their visions, exchange ideas and connect. Prior to the event preparatory meetings will be organised in which young people can create the program. This year the main topic will be "democracy for new a new age", including 4 specific pillars. Currently, there is an open call for participation for young people. (See **Annex 7 PPT CEP Young BSF**)

Outcomes:

- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the European Year of Youth (EYY) platform.

- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the Danube Youth Council.
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the need to mobilise more candidates to apply for the DYC Call for Participation.
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the Young Bled Strategic Forum.

Cross-macro-regional cooperation for Smart Villages

Peter NIEDERER (Swiss Center for Mountain Regions) presented the strategic EUSALP initiative Smart Villages funded by Interreg Alpine Space. The project funded several pilot initiatives that linked participatory governance and digital solutions to tackle various challenges and make rural communities more attractive. Furthermore, the project developed policy recommendations to promote the smart village approach. While the Smart Villages project will be finalised this year, the Alpine Strategy is working on a follow-up project that seeks to expand cooperation to the four macro-regional strategies. Currently, EUSALP AG Connectivity and Accessibility works together with EUSDR PA 10 Institutional Capacity and Cooperation, EUSBSR PA Innovation and the Policy Officer for the horizontal topic Innovation of the EUSAIR Facility Point. The first joint events preceding the follow-up project took place during the EU MRS Week in March 2022. During the workshop, the participants shared their perspectives on benefits of digitalisation in rural communities or benefits of cooperation across Europe. These inputs will also be considered going forward with the cross-macro-regional cooperation on smart villages. The cross-macro-regional cooperation should be further developed in the project SMART ERA that currently undergoes the application procedure in the Horizon Europe Programme. The project aims at developing automatized data collection on smart villages, implement pilot initiatives in all four macro-regions, develop recommendations to upgrade policy instruments, and set up a cross-macro-regional cooperation network. (See **Annex 7 PPT Horizon_ Smart Villages/SMART ERA**)

Outcomes:

- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the cross-macro-regional cooperation for Smart Villages

ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS IN THE PA10 ACTIONS

Matthias HOLZNER announced that the Danube Youth Festival will take place between 1 and 10 July 2022. The festival attracts around 350,000 visitors in Ulm and Neu-Ulm (DE). The festival displays numerous cultural events such as concerts or literature events. In addition, there are political conferences that might also be of interest for EUSDR stakeholder. Matthias HOLZNER highlighted a PA 8 event on the first day dealing with new value chains and the question how we can increase resilience. Another event, already starting on the 30 of June, is the Danube Youth Camp, taking place during the Danube Festival which attracts usually between 60 and 80 high school students from all over the Danube Region. The Youth Camp will address topics such as inclusion in democratic processes, education and digital space. On 8 July there will be an event of the Danube Networkers addressing citizens engagement. From 8 to 10 July a hackathon with civil society organisations and the IT community will address IT or process

solutions for Ukrainian refugees arriving in the Danube Region. (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VeOIE8hpTk>)

Stefan LÜTGENAU emphasised the role of National Participation Days as one of the pillars for participatory governance in the Danube Region. As the format of National Participation Days provides a platform to exchange on visions, projects and policies between state and non-state actors, the DCSF encourages all stakeholders in the Danube Strategy to give more attention to National Participation Days in the near future again. At this time, there are negotiations with Bulgaria and Slovenia taking place. Stefan LÜTGENAU pointed out that with regards to National Participation Days, the national stakeholders are the crucial drivers. However, the DCSF is at their disposal for support and has little money to assist the organisation of these events, if necessary.

Jernej GRAHOR informed that the Bled Strategic Forum will take place from 29 to 30 August 2022 in Bled. Over the years it has evolved into a leading international conference in Central and South-Eastern Europe, offering a platform to express and contrast opinions on modern society and its future. The purpose of the Forum is to gather participants from various fields with diverse knowledge, and encourage them to exchange views and seek innovative solutions to present and future challenges. In addition, the forum is also a unique opportunity for meetings and networking with regional and global stakeholders. Ana NOVAK (PA 10/Centre for European Perspective) added that due to elections, the confirmation of this year's topics is still pending, but the Steering Group members will be informed as soon as possible.

Jernej GRAHOR (EUSDR PAC 10) presented the 'Bridging the gap' platform for cross-regional cooperation. The platform is supposed to be a meeting place to exchange on specific topics. It will be a digital platform and will be used for preparatory meetings for the Young Bled Strategic Forum in summer 2022.

Nina KODELJA (CEI) informed about two activities related to the local dimension of the CEI: The first Congress meeting of the recently launched CEI Local Dimension is taking place in Sofia on 8 June 2022. The event with the title "CEI Local and Regional Authorities in the post crisis Europe – prospects for sustainable and resilient future" takes place within the framework of the Bulgarian CEI Presidency 2022. The event is organised by the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) and the CEI-Executive Secretariat and will gather mayors and local leaders, as well as their representative associations of CEI Member States, who will have the chance to exchange views and make the voices of Local Regional Authorities (LRAs) heard on key priorities, lessons learned, challenges faced especially in these difficult times and on possible future steps to move forward. The focus will be on the field of ecological transition and transition to green energy in the region. The second activity is the Call for Proposals for the CEI Know-how Exchange Programme (KEP), a development instrument aimed at supporting the transfer of expertise from organisations in the EU to peers in the non-EU countries within the CEI region. It is implemented by funding made available by the CEI Fund at the EBRD, entirely financed by the Italian Government. The call addresses public and private entities registered in a CEI Member State. Further, participation of at least two partners per proposal and at least one know-how provider and one know-how beneficiary institution. The deadline for the call is Monday 13 June 2022.

Claudia SINGER announced that as a result of the last Danube Participation Day 2021, a handbook on digitalisation and participation will be published until the end of the year.

Claudia SINGER announced, that PAC 10 will organise 3 webinars on funding for strategic topics. The webinars will address the following 3 topics: Youth Initiatives, Digitalisation (with focus on smart villages and smart cities) and cross-border (public) services. The first webinar on youth initiatives is planned for the end of June 2022.

Outcomes:

- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the 12th International Danube Festival in Ulm/Neu-Ulm from 1 to 10 July 2022.
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of call to revive National Participation Days.
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note that the Bled Strategic Forum takes place from 29 to 30 August 2022.
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the 'Bridging the Gap' platform
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the CEI Local Dimension Conference in Sofia on 8 June 2022 & the KEP Call.
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the upcoming handbook on digitalisation and participation containing the results from the Danube Participation Day 2021.
- The PA 10 Steering Group takes note of the up-coming funding webinars for strategic topics organised by PAC 10.

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AoB

Claudia SINGER asks, if there are any suggestions on where to host the next Steering Group Meeting, provided that the pandemic situation allows for an on-site meeting. Tatjana KRALJ suggested that Croatia could host the next meeting.

Claudia SINGER asked if there are any further topics to discuss. No further topics were raised.

Claudia SINGER thanks all participants for their contributions and closes the meeting.