

24th Meeting of the Steering Group of Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” of the EUSDR (PA10)

- Draft Minutes -

6-7 June 2023 | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Kneza Miloša 24-26, 11000 Belgrade

Main Outcomes

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

Participants:

9 out of 14 EUSDR countries were represented at the 24th 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: AT, HR, CZ, DE (Baden-Württemberg), ME, MD, RO, RS, SI.

Furthermore, the European Commission (DG REGIO), the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the Danube Strategy Point (DSP), the Danube Region Programme (DRP), and the Danube Youth Council (DYC) participated in the meeting.

In addition, the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), the Serbia Convention Bureau, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities - Association of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia and the Office for Information and Communication Technology and e-Government attended the meeting.

Main outcomes of the discussion:

- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the EUSDR Danube Participation Day on 23 October 2023
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the EUSDR Annual Forum from 24-25 October 2023
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the updates of the Slovenian Presidency
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the updates concerning the Bled Strategic Forum and the Young Bled Strategic Forum.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the presentations concerning Development of e-Government and digital transformation in Serbia
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the Danube Region Programme Seed Money Facility
- The PA 10 Steering Group agreed on a EUSDR PA 10 Flagships online vote and to endorse the project selection via written procedure.
- The PA 10 Steering Group agreed on organising Coffee Table talks for Steering Group members on the following topics:
 - Danube Youth Council,
 - Seed Money Facility,
 - Digitalisation and e-government,

- National Participation Days
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of next steps concerning cross border-emergency initiatives and agreed to extend the Task Force for upcoming meetings
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of DYC activities in the Danube Region

Upcoming events:

12-16 June 2023	EUSDR Embedding Week (Online)
25-28 August 2023	Young Bled Strategic Forum (SI)
28-29 August 2023	Bled Strategic Forum (SI)
09-12 October 2023	European Week of Cities and Regions (SI)
23 October 2023	Danube Participation Day (SI)
24-25 October 2023	EUSDR Annual Forum (SI)

Tuesday, 6 June 2023 | Day 1

Welcome

Claudia SINGER (PAC 10/City of Vienna) and Jernej GRAHOR (PAC 10/Centre for European Perspective) welcomed all participants to the 24th EUSDR PA 10 Steering Group Meeting. Claudia Singer welcomes Ambassador Miloš TODOROVIĆ, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia on behalf of First Deputy Prime Minister responsible for Foreign Policy and Security and Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Ivica DAČIĆ and Sanda ŠIMIĆ STAMBOLIĆ, Acting Assistant Minister of European Integration.

Miloš TODOROVIĆ welcomed all participants and highlighted that the membership to the European Union has foremost priority and emphasized the importance of the cooperation with the EUSDR PA10 Institutional Capacity and Cooperation.

Sanda ŠIMIĆ STAMBOLIĆ, (Ministry of European Integration, RS) welcomed all participants. She highlighted the contribution of the EU Danube Strategy and EU Adriatic Ionian Strategy for cooperation and coordination at eye-level despite the unequal access to funding between EU member states and candidate states. Equally, this macro-regional cooperation should be used to build capacities for EU funding programmes in candidate states to increase absorption rates of funds. Sanda ŠIMIĆ STAMBOLIĆ appealed to continue to organise National Participation Days to keep up communication with stakeholders.

Claudia SINGER presents the agenda for the 24th 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*.

Progressing Institutional Capacity and Cooperation in the Danube Region

ACTION 1: To improve institutional capacities in order to provide high-quality public services

Dara GRAVARA STOJANOVIĆ (Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, RS) presented the e-Government Development Programme of the Republic of Serbia 2023-2025 which sets out activities to implement accessible and user-centric e-Government services. The current programme is designed in cooperation with a working group of representatives from national public authorities, civil society organisations, the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, the EU delegation in Serbia, international and regional organisations as well as donor organisations. In doing so, Serbia aims at continuing the successful trend in its e-government development efforts in accordance with the European e-Government Framework and the UN Development Goals, while further incorporating principles of data protection. (See **Annex 3: PPT Gravara Stojanović**)

Tamara KORSIĆ (Office for Information Technologies and e-Government, RS) reported that the mission of the Office for Information Technologies and e-Government is to support and boost digital transformation in Serbia by ensuring digital public services and infrastructure as well as facilitating IT innovation. In this function, the office supports infrastructure for Information and Communication Technology such as data centres, digital registers or clouds. In addition, the office supports over 340 e-services. Tamara KORSIĆ highlighted that the office provides a data sharing platform for public authorities, universities, institutes and start-ups to foster innovation. By implementing these activities, the Office for Information Technologies and e-Government made a major contribution to Serbia's progress in e-government. With the initiative "Serbia Digitalizes", Serbia aims at sharing knowledge and lessons learned from the digital transition with other countries and regions. (See **Annex 4: PPT Tamara Korsić**)

Jana BELCHEVA ANDREEVSKA (Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe – NALAS) presented the network. Further, she presented the Working Group on Digitalization to strengthen the digital transition of local administrations in South-East Europe. Within this framework, NALAS conducted a survey on digitalisation to assess current developments and identify specific needs and challenges of local administrations. Likewise, NALAS aims at exploring opportunities for cooperation with other partners in the region such as the EU Danube Strategy. In doing so, the presentation of the activities and data of the Digitalization Working Group is a first step to identify potential links and benefits for cooperation with Priority Area 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation". (See **Annex 5: PPT Belcheva Andreevska**)

Claudia SINGER asks, if there is a coordinated approach of e-Services between the national and local level in Serbia. Tamara KORSIĆ explains that Serbia has a shared infrastructure that cities and municipalities can connect to. She mentions the example of the service „Baby, Welcome to the World“ that facilitates the registration of newborn babies as well as the application for health insurance and parental allowance. Marija LUKIĆ (Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities - Association of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia) adds that the involvement of local authorities is essential as they provide many services for citizens. However, while for instance, Belgrade is well connected to the e-service infrastructure, there are still cities and municipalities that are not integrated.

Aurelia CIORNEI (State Chancellery, MD) enquires how much attention Serbia pays to mobile apps. Tamara KORSIĆ responds that the programming of mobile application is not a priority. So far, the e-service provision is focussed on an easily accessible portal that facilitates access to different e-services. However, for some services, it could be a possibility to provide them also as a mobile app. Aurelia CIORNEI explains that the reason for enquiring about mobile apps is that the e-Government Agency of the Republic of Moldova is currently very active in developing a mobile application called MobiSign that provides a unique interface between the government, citizens and private entities. The app is a mobile identity and electronic signature system that works on mobile phones and does not require any other devices. In addition, Aurelia CIORNEI points to the EU4Digital Initiative that supports the digital

transformation in the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Within this initiatives, experts and practitioners engage in mutual learning on aspects of digitalisation such as interoperability or recognition of electronic signatures. Although this initiative is focussed on the Eastern Partnership, a similar approach could be launched in the Danube Strategy, since there is a lot of knowledge that the countries could benefit from. Claudia SINGER asks, if the initiative “Serbia Digitalizes” only provides knowledge exchange between countries or also to local and regional entities. Tamara KORSIĆ clarifies that the initiative primarily addresses other countries. Saša MART (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, RS) underlined that Serbia is open to exchange experience and knowledge on eGovernment with all interested countries and institutions. Raluca HERPEAN (Ministry of Public Works, RO) suggests that the coordination team of Priority Area 10 could prepare a questionnaire that will be sent to the Steering Group and answered in coordination with other national agencies to collect information on topics of interest and to create an integrated vision.

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the activities undertaken in the framework of the e-Government Development Programme of the Republic of Serbia 2023-2025.
- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the services implemented by the Office for Information Technologies and e-Government.
- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the activities of the NALAS Digitalization Working Group and considers further opportunities for cooperation with NALAS.
- The PA10 Steering Group supports to assess further steps on macro-regional cooperation for capacity building in the area of e-Government and e-services.

Action 2: To facilitate the administrative cooperation of communities living in border regions

Claudia SINGER provided updates on the follow-up of the first meeting of the Task Force on cross-border emergency healthcare (i.e. Extended Steering Group Meeting – cross-border ambulances) that took place online on 28 February 2023. The Task Force agreed at looking into potential support structures to launch new initiatives. This could be further discussed in connection with the up-coming Seed Money Facility funded by the Danube Region Programme. The Task Force agreed on looking into applying for a thematic session at the European Week for Regions and Cities. The Government of Lower Austria submitted a proposal for the European Week for Regions and Cities on behalf of the Task Force that has been selected. The next Task Force meeting should address legal frameworks for cross-border emergency healthcare and trust-building for better cooperation and acceptance of cross-border services. Furthermore, Germany and Austria sent requests regarding the invitation of experts to the Task Force meetings. (See **Annex 6: PPT PAC 10 VIE**) Claudia SINGER shared that the Government of Lower Austria also offered to organise a study visit to the cross-border health centre at the Austrian-Czech border that is part of the “Healthacross for Future” cooperation and asks the Steering Group members, if they would be interested in participating in a study visit.

Fiona FAAS (States Ministry Baden-Württemberg, DE) expressed general interest to take part in the study visit and asks, whether it was possible to involve experts to the Task Force Meetings. Claudia SINGER asks the Steering Group, if anyone objects the proposal to invite experts to the Task Force Meetings. No-one objected. Tatjana KRALJ (Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds, HR) expressed general interest in the possibility of a study visit, but points out that there is still a high need for more capacity building regarding the legal basis for cross-border emergency healthcare. Claudia SINGER responds that the Austrian-Czech cooperation can demonstrate more detailed insights into how to draft a legal framework. The model is currently also developed with Hungary and Slovakia. Furthermore, the b-solutions initiative provides legal and administrative expertise for

cross-border obstacles. The initiative is funded by the European Commission – DG REGIO and managed by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK (European Commission – DG REGIO) adds that the Cross-border Facility Point of the European Commission could provide additional support on how to resolve cross-border legal issues. If the Steering group members are interested, she can facilitate to establish the contact to the Cross-border Facility Point. Claudia SINGER suggested to send a mailing to the Steering Group requesting the wish for exchanging with the Cross-border Facility Point. No objections were raised.

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the follow-up activities since the first meeting of the Task Force for Cross-border emergency healthcare.
- The PA10 Steering Group agreed on inviting further experts to the Task Force Meetings, if deemed useful.
- The PA10 Steering Group agreed to assess the need to exchange with the Cross-border Facility Point.
- The PA10 Steering Group expressed its interest in a study visit at the healthcare centre of the “Healthcross for Future” initiative.

Action 3: To review bottlenecks relating to the low absorption rate of EU Funds and Invest EU

Claudia SINGER informed that PA10 organised a series of strategic webinars that covered different topics. This series can also be extended, if deemed useful. Furthermore, the Danube Civil Society Forum organised in cooperation with ALDA-European Association for Local Democracy a series of interactive training sessions on EU Project Development and EU Funds. One of the sessions taking place in January 2023 was dedicated to funding programmes for non-EU countries. (See **Annex 6: PPT PAC10 VIE**)

Aurelia CIORNEI suggested that it would be useful to develop a “training the trainers” programme for accession countries in order to enhance capacity building. Raluca HERPEAN recommended training videos that can be accessed by potential beneficiaries. Claudia SINGER welcomes the proposals. In particular, the possibility to publish training videos could be assessed and considered as complement to interactive trainings.

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of past activities for capacity building addressing project management and funding for potential project promoters
- The PA10 Steering Group put forward suggestions on how to support potential project promoters in the future.

Action 4: To support better coordination of funding

Claudia SINGER states that the Network of ESF+ Managing Authorities in the Danube Region - facilitated by Priority Area 9 “People and Skills” and Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” - will focus on thematic cooperation in the areas of vocational training and social innovation this year. The next meeting is expected to take place back-to-back with the 17th Annual Conference of Competitiveness Operational Programmes.

Katharina LENZ (Danube Strategy Point) added that Priority Area 8 “Competitiveness” deals with social innovation and should be considered for cooperation. Claudia SINGER comments that Priority Area 9 “People and Skills” approached Priority Area 8 on this subject earlier, but Priority Area 8 was reluctant to the idea of closer cooperation on social innovation. Nevertheless, the ESF Network should consider to reach out to Priority Area 8 moving forward.

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of updates concerning the Network of ESF+ Managing Authorities in the Danube Region.

Action 5: To test and support innovative funding solutions (for local actors and civil society)

Claudia SINGER states that the only known up-coming funding initiative for local actors and civil society organisations so far is the Seed Money Facility by the Danube Region Programme, which will be discussed in more detail later on. Further, Claudia SINGER invites the Steering Group members to share information on additional initiatives, if existing.

Aurelia CIORNEI reported that the government of the Republic of Moldova plans to provide a funding facility for civil society organisations from its own budget. The funding aims at ensuring sustainability and supports projects by civil society organisations. The facility is expected to be launched in 2024. Claudia SINGER announces that she will come back to this initiative and enquire a bit more about the details at a later stage.

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the currently developed initiative for funding civil society organisations in the Republic of Moldova.

Action 6: To foster cooperation built on mutual trust between state and non-state actors to enhance well-being for the inhabitants of the Danube Region

Jernej GRAHOR (Priority Area 10 Coordination/Centre for European Perspective) provided information on the Platform on Media Literacy. The platform is planned as a cross-macro-regional and cross-Priority Area initiative that will provide mapping and exchange of media literacy initiatives through research, discussions and interviews with stakeholders. (See **Annex 7: PPT CEP Media Literacy**)

Claudia SINGER recalls to continue with the implementation of National Participation Days. The majority of partner countries of the Danube Strategy have organised at least one National Participation Day. However, since the COVID 19 pandemic, this practice has been discontinued. This is also partly due to changes in staff, who might not be familiar with the concept. Hence, PA10 wants to reinforce the organisation of National Participation Days that proved to be a useful tool to build trust and exchange between representatives of the EU Danube Strategy and civil society and local actors. Claudia SINGER offers to organise a Coffee Table Talk to inform on how to organise a National Participation Day. Furthermore, PAC 10 considers to send a letter to all National Coordinators encouraging the organisation and support of National Participation Days. Claudia SINGER informs that Ukraine and Austria are already planning to organise a National Participation Day in 2024.

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the plans for the platform for Media Literacy.
- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the call to organise National Participation Days and possible further information provided on how to implement them.

Action 7: To strengthen the involvement of civil society and local actors in the Danube Region

Claudia SINGER informed about the Danube Participation Day 2023, which will take place at the University of Ljubljana on 23 October 2023, back-to-back with the EUSDR Annual Forum. In 2023 and 2024, the Danube Participation Day will address how cooperation in the EU Danube Strategy can contribute to Ukraine's recovery

and its path towards EU membership. In particular, the Danube Participation Day will focus on the contribution of civil society and local actors to Ukraine's recovery and the EU accession of Ukraine and Moldova. Furthermore, the conference will address how the EU Danube Strategy can support those stakeholders. The invitation will follow in summer 2023. (See **Annex 6: PPT PAC10 VIE**)

Jernej GRAHOR, informed that the Bled Strategic Forum will take place in Bled from 28 to 29 August 2023. The high-level ministerial meeting will take place on the first day and is followed by workshops and panel discussions on the second day. This year, the Bled Strategic Forum will be very strongly connected with the Macro-regional Strategies.

Jernej GRAHOR presents that the Young Bled Strategic Forum will take place from 25 to 28 August 2023. The discussions at the Young Bled Strategic Forum will be introduced into the Bled Strategic Forum. This year's Young Bled Strategic Forum's topic is „mitigating the butterfly effect“. (See **Annex 8: PPT CEP BSF**)

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the up-coming Danube Participation Day.
- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the up-coming Bled Strategic Forum and Young Bled Strategic Forum.

Action 8: To enhance capacities of cities and municipalities to facilitate local and regional development

Claudia SINGER stated that PA10 launched a cross-macro-regional cooperation with EUSALP Action Group "Connectivity & Accessibility", EUSBSR Policy Area "Innovation", and the EUSAIR Facility Point on Smart Communities. In the up-coming years, a cross-macro-regional network is expected to step up advocacy at European and national level as well as capacity building and mutual learning in the area of smart communities. The next concrete steps are a joint session on smart communities and attractiveness of regions for talent at the European Week for Regions and Cities 2023 as well as the start of the project „SMART ERA“ in 2024, funded by Horizon Europe. The „SMART ERA“ project includes project partners from the Danube Region from Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Slovenia. (See **Annex 6: PPT PA10**)

Claudia SINGER informed the participants that Priority Area 10 "Institutional Capacity" and Priority Area 11 "Security" take up their previous cooperation on fighting trafficking in human beings. A multi-agent group from law enforcement, civil society, and public administration is supposed to foster cooperation and coordination between the different stakeholder groups as well as between the countries of the Danube Region. The EUSDR Embedding Week on 15 June 2023 will address fighting trafficking in human beings and could point to potential funding instruments. (See **Annex 6: PPT PA10**)

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the cross-macro-regional cooperation on Smart Communities.
- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the plans for cross-Priority Area cooperation on fighting trafficking in human beings.

Updates from the European Commission

Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK presented the 4th report of the European Commission on the implementation of macro-regional strategies. The report also reflected on Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine as well as on the impact of the pandemic on countries and their communities. The report was also

taken further to the Macro-Regional Strategies Week in March that focussed on the most pressing topics stemming from EU priorities and global situation: Skills, Energy, and Funding. Furthermore, Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK stressed the wide range of projects and processes connecting local and regional actions with European political priorities and the important role of civil society and youth in the strategies' governance. Likewise, an intensified exchange between macro-regional strategies as well as with other regional cooperation networks could help to increase synergies. Regarding the accession countries, the enlargement process gains more importance in the macro-regional strategies as they are acknowledged as being well suited to help adopting EU laws and build administrative capacities in various EU policies. The EU Danube Strategy and Priority Area 10 are clearly contributing to those processes. This is also reflected in several references of good practices implemented by Priority Area 10. In this spirit, Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK encouraged to continue those efforts. Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK suggested to increase efforts in territorial cooperation and to consider stronger cooperation with other macro-regional strategies. The systematic inclusion of civil society and youth is an important process that needs to be reinforced. Thereby, she stressed the meaning of activities like the National Participation Days. Finally, Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK reported that the Council Conclusions on the report will reflect on the future steps the macro-regional strategies should focus on. This will refer on topics like optimal use of existing funding and the need for broad stakeholder engagement. In addition, the macro-regional strategies are invited to look for possibilities for even closer and more concrete cooperation with Ukraine.

Tatjana KRALJ (Ministry for Regional Development and EU Funds, HR) stated that Croatia was very disappointed to see that the first draft of Council Conclusions did not define the Enlargement process as a high priority of macro-regional strategies. This is particularly disappointing for the partner countries of the EU Danube Strategy and the EU Adriatic Ionian Strategy.

András EDELÉNYI added the draft opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on the 4th report of the European Commission on the implementation of macro-regional strategies. According to the Rules of Procedure, the final version was awaited to be approved, in the following week. He underlined the importance of the mission and transversal features of macro-regional strategies. András EDELÉNYI highlighted the role of the strategies regarding Ukraine, thereby pointing out the special roles of the EU Danube Strategy and the EU Baltic Sea Strategy. Finally, the EESC formulated general recommendations for macro-regional strategies including – amongst others – better involvement of civil society and territorial governance, increasing capacity building, better communication, better political coordination, or better alignment of actions and funding. (See **Annex 9: PPT Edelényi**)

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the conclusions of the 4th Report of the European Commission on the implementation of macro-regional strategies.
- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the European Commission's suggestions on possible ways forward based on the conclusions of the report
- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the draft opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee.
- The PA10 Steering Group emphasises the importance of the EU enlargement process for the EU Danube Strategy and vice versa.

Wednesday, 7 June 2023 | Day 2

UPDATES FROM THE EUSDR PRESIDENCY & EU DANUBE STRATEGY POINT

Jernej GRAHOR presented the thematic and institutional priorities of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Danube Strategy as well as up-coming events. The 12th EUSDR Annual Forum will take place in Brdo pri Kranju from 24 to 25 October 2023 with the motto “EUSDR Entering the Decade of the Future”. He reiterated that the Presidency team is open to meet any stakeholders, who have expertise and practical knowledge regarding the topics addressed by the Presidency and will gladly consider to include them in the programme of the Annual Forum or other thematic events. (See **Annex 10: Agenda Updates Presidency**)

Katharina LENZ (Danube Strategy Point) provided an overview of the supporting framework the Danube Strategy Point is offering. She reported on the embedding process and the embedding tools. Further she highlighted the upcoming EUSDR Embedding Week and that a monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of the embedding process will take place. Moreover, Katharina LENZ reported on updates concerning communication in the EUSDR as well as on the development of a capacity building framework. (See **Annex 11: PPT DSP**)

Sanda ŠIMIĆ STAMBOLIĆ stated that there are currently several different networks for Managing Authorities that work in an isolated way and – apart from the Interreg community – either only cover EU member countries or only accession countries. Hence, Sanda ŠIMIĆ STAMBOLIĆ SUGGESTS to look for ways to raise awareness in DG NEAR and no longer view the Western Balkans as isolated area, but rather work closer with the EU member states and their respective networks. So far, the EU Danube Strategy and the EU Adriatic Ionian Strategy are only strategies that consider member and non-member states as an integrated territory. Claudia SINGER informed that ESF+ Network plans to include the programmes of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) that address social affairs.

Sanda ŠIMIĆ STAMBOLIĆ also referred to youth involvement and mentioned the Youth Manifesto initiative and the programme Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY). The latter is an initiative that promotes experiences with Interreg Programmes through voluntary work. Furthermore, Sanda ŠIMIĆ STAMBOLIĆ emphasised the need to look for more creative ways to approach young people in Cohesion Policy. In her experience, funding is a rather boring topic for young people. Moreover, they tend to lose interest as they usually do not have the means to take part in classic EU funding programmes since they do not have the money to provide co-financing. Hence, funding instruments such as sub-grants could be an alternative. Ratin SAZEDUL (Danube Youth Council) adds that there is a need for raising awareness for funding youth projects and to promote youth programs in schools and universities.

Ratin SAZEDUL presented the Danube Youth Council (DYC). The Danube Youth Council provides a platform for institutional involvement of young people in all bodies of the EU Danube Strategy to represent viewpoints of young people for further consideration at the political level. The Danube Youth Council has been officially established as of October 2022 and is composed of 28 members, 2 members from each of the 14 Danube Region countries. He pointed out the importance and different ways of involvement of DYC members in Priority Areas. All DYC members bring in their experience in youth participation, policy making and institutional cooperation. Further, they could help to raise awareness of the EU Danube Strategy. Finally, Ratin SAZEDUL suggested all participants to get in touch with their national DYC members. (See **Annex 11: PPT DSP**)

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the updates of the up-coming events organised by the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency, including the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum in Brdo pri Kranju on 24 and 25 October 2023.

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the updates of the Danube Strategy Point.
- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the implementation of the Danube Youth Council.

The race for the host for the Specialised EXPO 2027: Exploring the Opportunities for EUSDR

Dušan BOROVIČANIN (Serbia Convention Bureau) presented that Serbia and its capital city Belgrade are bidding for the host of the Specialised EXPO in 2027. The race for the next host of the Specialised EXPO is entering its final stage, and the decision will be made in Paris on 21 June 2023. Under the topic "Play for humanity: Sport and music for all" Serbia aims to create the largest celebration of the global recovery in 2027 devoted to the prosperity of humankind. The EXPO 2027 also offers the potential of raising awareness of the EU Danube Strategy and raise its profile. (See **Annex 12: PPT Borovčanin**)

Claudia SINGER thanks for the presentation and suggests that this interesting opportunity for the EU Danube Strategy should be presented and discussed at the next Meeting of National Coordinators. If the National Coordinators and the partner country that will preside the EU Danube Strategy in 2027 support the opportunity to present the EU Danube Strategy, the stakeholders in the Priority Areas could develop content for the event.

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of Serbia's candidacy for the Specialised Expo 2027 and its potential to present the EU Danube Strategy.
- The PA 10 Steering Group recommends to present the opportunity for cooperation with the Specialised Expo 2027 to the board of EUSDR National Coordinators for further decision.

Danube Region Programme

Johannes GABRIEL (Danube Region Programme) provided an overview of the Seed Money Facility funded by the Danube Region Programme. The Seed Money Facility is a tool to kick-start the development of strategic projects and large-scale initiatives for the EU Danube Strategy. The project concepts resulting from the Seed Money Facility can be submitted to and financed by any other funding instrument. The Seed Money Facility Call is expected to be launched by end of 2023 or beginning of 2024 to ensure that funding resources are still available. The Priority Area Coordinators will be responsible to mobilise stakeholders to apply for the Seed Money Facility. The call will be organised in two steps, starting with the submission of the project idea in the electronic monitoring system JEMS. In the first step, applicants submit a description of the topic and how it contributes to the Action Plan of the EU Danube Strategy. The Priority Area Coordinators will assess the applications. The Monitoring Committee of the Danube Region Programme will then select the applications that will be invited to the second step based on the assessment of the Priority Area Coordinators. In the second step the applicants provide more detailed technical information that will be assessed by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat. Finally, the Monitoring Committee selects the projects that will be funded. Johannes GABRIEL stated that all projects need to produce three compulsory outputs: 1) an analysis of the needs and challenges addressed by the strategic project; 2) a prepared work plan for the strategic project and set-up of the partnership; 3) an analysis of possible funding instruments. The Seed Money Facility provides more funding for additional preparatory activities. The thematic scope of the call will be open to all twelve Priority Areas.

Claudia SINGER added that the coordination team of Priority Area 10 will organise a Coffee Table Talk on the Seed Money Facility once the Monitoring Committee has approved the concept in order to provide more detailed information on the Seed Money Facility and to discuss how to proceed in terms of stakeholder mobilisation for applications. The main question for the Steering Group is, whether we address few stakeholders in a more targeted way and focus our resources on in-depth consultations or we address a broader community of potential beneficiaries to offer more stakeholders the chance to apply for the Seed Money Facility. Fiona FAAS (State Ministry of Baden- Württemberg, DE) suggested to examine whether the Seed Money Facility could be used for youth initiatives such as the Danube Youth Network. Aurelia CIORNEI (Strategic Planning and Priorities Department, MD) expressed the idea of a project proposal to standardise the public services in the Region and to create the same conditions and levels in the Danube Region countries. Sanda ŠIMIĆ STAMBOLIĆ suggested to share the contact details of the Ministry for Public Administration and Local Self-Government and the Office for Information Technologies and e-Government. They certainly would be open to exchange on e-government issues and share experiences to work on such a proposal.

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the updates on the Seed Money Facility funded by the Danube Region Programme.
- The PA10 Steering Group agrees on having a Coffee Table Talk to discuss further details regarding the call for proposals of the Seed Money Facility.
- The PA10 suggested to consider initiatives regarding youth cooperation and e-government.

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Flagships: Selection of Flagship Initiatives 2023

Katharina LENZ introduced the concept of EUSDR Flagship Projects. Each Priority Area nominates up to three flagship initiatives that contribute to the implementation of the EU Danube Strategy and have a macro-regional scope. The Priority Areas can nominate planned, on-going and finalised initiatives. This process is repeated once a year, where Priority Areas can confirm previously nominated initiatives or suggest new ones. Further details can be access in the EUSDR Flagship Guidelines. (See **Annex 13: PPT EUSDR Flagships**) Claudia SINGER presented the EUSDR Flagship projects that Priority Area 10 has nominated in 2022. Last year, Priority Area 10 nominated the Danube Participation Days, the funding database EuroAccess Danube Region, and the network of ESF+ Managing Authorities in the Danube Region. Claudia SINGER asked, if the Steering Group members would like to nominate new initiatives.

Fiona FAAS proposed to nominate the Danube Youth Network. Claudia SINGER accepted the nomination of the Danube Youth Network and suggested that the Steering Group members can submit further proposals for nominations after the meeting. All proposals will be open for an online vote. The three projects with the highest scores will be proposed to be selected for EUSDR Flagship projects and confirmed in a Written Procedure. Priority Area 10 will then submit the projects to the Danube Strategy Point by 10 July 2023.

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the process to nominate the EUSDR Flagship projects.
- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the proposal to nominate the Danube Youth Network.

- The PA10 Steering Group agrees to decide on the EUSDR Flagship projects by means of Written Procedure.

Info Film on Priority Area 10 – Developing the script

Claudia SINGER opened a brainstorming session on a short info film illustrating Priority Area 10 of the EU Danube Strategy. The Steering Group members are encouraged to make suggestions on main message and potential target groups.

Ratin SAZEDUL suggested to focus on young people and the general public in order to access a broader audience and communicate the strategy beyond politicians and EUSDR stakeholders. The message of the film should be easy to understand raise awareness that PA 10 is also relevant for the local level. Aurelia CIORNEI suggested that the film should address also local authorities and civil servants. It could be used, for instance, in organisations like the training academy for civil servants in Moldova. Likewise, the film should be shared with local councils in all the partner countries and EUSDR stakeholders as well as members of other Steering Groups. Raluca HERPEAN asked about the planned length of the film. Claudia SINGER responded that the film is supposed to be very short. Raluca HERPEAN further stated that, if the film is addressing the general public, it will require an introductory explanation of the EU Danube Strategy. If the film focuses on EUSDR stakeholders, the film can have a greater focus on the thematic scope of Priority Area 10. Furthermore, Raluca HERPEAN suggested to shoot 20-second video clips of different people from the Danube Region that talk about the Danube Strategy and topics of Priority Area 10. The clips can then be put together like a jigsaw puzzle. Fiona FAAS suggested to showcase projects, initiatives or good practices of Priority Area 10.

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note of the planning process for a PA10 short film.
- The PA10 Steering Group presented suggestions regarding target groups and message for further consideration in the planning process.

Collecting topics for Coffee Table Talks & Extended Steering Group Meeting

Claudia SINGER stated that PAC 10 will continue the online formats of the Coffee Table Talk to informally discuss topics of Priority Area 10 and the EU Danube Strategy to provide more background information for informed decisions. Likewise, PAC 10 will organise Extended Steering Group Meetings on how to progress with the implementation of the Actions of Priority Area 10. The Extended Steering Group Meetings provide a platform for assessing the state of play and proposing activities together with experts. Claudia SINGER calls for the Steering Group members to make suggestions for topics any time. Aurelia CIORNEI asked if it was possible to organise a meeting on eGovernment and standardisation of public services.

Claudia SINGER reviewed the discussions at the Steering Group Meeting that brought up topics that should be discussed in more detail. During the meeting, the following topics were mentioned: Danube Youth Council, Seed Money Facility, Digitalisation and e-Government, National Participation Days.

Outcomes:

- The PA10 Steering Group agrees to organise Coffee Table Talks and Extended Steering Group Meetings on the following topics: Danube Youth Council, Seed Money Facility, Digitalisation and e-Government, National Participation Days.

- The PA10 Steering Group takes note that further topics can be taken on board upon request by PA10 Steering Group members.

AoB

Claudia SINGER asks if there is any other business. The Steering Group members did not bring any other topics up for discussion.

Closing Session

Claudia SINGER thanks the organisers, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, for hosting the meeting and for the great support. Claudia SINGER thanks Saša Mart for the support before and during the meeting as well as all his efforts as member of the PA 10 Steering Group and wishes him well on his new post at the United Nations in New York. Claudia SINGER closes the meeting.