

## 25th Meeting of the Steering Group of Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” of the EUSDR (PA10)

- Draft Minutes –

13-14 December 2023 | Hotel B&B Park Ljubljana, Tabor 9, 1000 Ljubljana (Slovenia)

### Main Outcomes

#### Participants:

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

6 out of 14 EUSDR countries were represented at the 25th Meeting of the Steering Group of Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation”. The quorum therefore was not reached. The following countries were represented: AT (online participation), BG (online participation), HR (online participation), CZ (on site participation), DE (Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, through online participation), HU (online participation). Online participants cooperated in activities throughout different parts of the programme, a quorum count was therefore implemented regularly throughout the programme.

Furthermore, the European Commission (DG REGIO the Danube Strategy Point (DSP), the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) and the National Coordination team of Slovenia cooperated within the meeting.

#### Main outcomes of the discussion:

- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of developments and updates from the European Commission (DG REGIO).
  - DG REGIO representatives announce the implementation of an MRS implementation report covering activities within all macroregional strategies that will be implemented in the calendar year of 2024 and the consultations with EUSDR stakeholders implemented through a joint questionnaire, foreseen for the year 2024.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the conclusions of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency to the EUSDR and conclusions of the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum 2023.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the foreseen activities of the Austrian EUSDR Presidency to the EUSDR.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the activities organised within the Task Force Crossborder Emergency Healthcare.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the Danube Region Programme Seed Money Facility.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the activities and preparations of the Danube Strategy Point.
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the status of PA-10 onboarding and communication materials development (PA10 Beginners‘Guide and PA10 Info film).
- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of the EUSDR Danube Participation Day 2023 and 2024
- 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 DRP Project application in the area of PA-10.

- The PA 10 Steering Group took note of projects in the field of support of Ukraine and EU integration.

Upcoming events:

12-13 June 2024 EUSDR Embedding Week, Brussels

19 June 2024 11th Danube Participation Day (AT)

20-21 June 2024 13th EUSDR Annual Forum (AT)

30 August – 1 September 2024 Young Bled Strategic Forum (SI)

2-3 September 2024 Bled Strategic Forum (SI)

Wednesday, 13 December 2023 | Day 1

## Welcome

Jernej GRAHOR (PAC 10/Centre for European Perspective) and Claudia SINGER-SMITH (PAC 10/City of Vienna) welcomed all participants to the 25th EUSDR PA 10 Steering Group Meeting.

Jernej GRAHOR presents the agenda for the 25th 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.

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

Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK (European Commission/DG REGIO) presents updates and upcoming activities from the work and activities of the European Commission (DG REGEIO).

Karolina JASINSKA-MÜHLECK mentions the new Commission report that is due to be submitted by December 2024 and highlights the need for input from the implementers (PACs and SG members). The Commission is issuing the document since 2016, on the basis of every second year, as a report on the implementation of the four macro-regional strategies. The report is submitted to the Council, to the European Parliament and to the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee. As explained, the report aims to bring the strategies closer to the general public and assess their impact. All stakeholders will be consulted within the process through a survey (questionnaire) exercise, communicated with all National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators. The questionnaire will be distributed with EUSDR stakeholders within the beginning of 2024.

Ms JASINSKA-MÜHLECK mentions the upcoming Macro regional Strategies week event and encourages participants to save the date in their calendars. The event will take place in Brussels, live on the 12th and 13th of June 2024. She explains the agenda of the event, including practical workshops and a speed dating session for stakeholders to meet and exchange with other line DGs. The activities are designed around two days with an official opening on the first day with a high-level meeting from the four macro-regional strategies from the political level and the commissioner. The opening will be followed by a practical part and constructed of multiple interactive workshops. The event wishes to include a wide as possible audience, including youth, representatives of NCs, PACs and also Steering Groups. All stakeholders are therefore invited to participate.

Ms JASINSKA-MÜHLECK mentions the drafting of proposals for the future Cohesion Policy that will take place in the beginning of 2025 and the challenging geopolitical context with the war against Ukraine continuing. The discussion focuses on the enlargement agenda and the comparisons being made

between the cohesion policy and the way EU money is invested in the countries. She mentions the importance of consulting with stakeholders and citizens, as well as getting inputs from those involved in macro-regional strategies.

### **Slovenian Presidency to the EUSDR presentation on the 2023 EUSDR Annual Forum and the conclusion of the EUSDR Slovenian Presidency**

Aleš ROVŠNIK (Slovenian National Coordination team) provides an overview of the achievements and priorities of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency implemented between November 2022 and October 2023, including institutional development, engagement of countries and regions, strategic governance, youth involvement, embedding process, and thematic priorities. The Presidency slogan EUSDR entering the decade of the future symbolized two things. First, it symbolized the fact that EUSDR is already heavily in the second decade of its existence since its establishment, and secondly to explore on how the region will respond to all the challenges of the present and the future. Mr ROVŠNIK expressed gratitude for the cooperation with PA-10 and the organization of events related to civil society and the recovery of Ukraine and Moldova towards the EU.

The mentioned priorities, achievements and developments within the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency to the EUSDR include :

- 32 governance meetings and 40 thematic events, that were organized during the Presidency.
- empowerment and improvement of the engagement of all countries stakeholders in the EUSDR
- the annual forum that hosted 400 participants with high-level attendance. The joint statement of Ministers was adopted, that also endorsed the role of the EUSDR structures in the recovery of Ukraine and enlargement process.
- An update of the guidelines on empowering involvement in EUSDR and the revision of rules of procedures for national coordinators and priority area coordinators.
- A Highlighted importance of talent development and retention in the Danube Region, particularly for the Danube Youth Council
- discussions on the knowledge-driven society in the Danube Region and the emphasis on cooperation in science, technology, and innovation.
- the importance of involving young people in shaping the future of the Danube Region. The Danube Youth Council is highlighted as an important partner, that was included in events, activities and opportunities during the presidency.
- Developments on the challenges faced by the land connections in the Danube Region, including bottlenecks, lack of transport workers, and environmental concerns.

Annex 1: Presentation Slovenian Presidency to the EUSDR, Annex 2\_ Slovenian-Presidency-of-theEUSDR-2022\_23.

### **Austrian Presidency to the EUSDR presentation -Presentation of presidency priorities and planned activities**

Jutta MOLL-MARWAN (Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management National team of Macroregional strategies EU coordination in Austria) presents the activities of the Austrian EUSDR Presidency to the EUSDR. The work of the Austrian EUSDR Presidency focuses on the continuation within the trio and advancement of topics that are most relevant and pressing in the Danube region.

Their mission is to co-organize the EUSDR flagship event, the Annual Forum, which is not only an event of the presidency but an event of the whole EUSDR. The Annual Forum will take place on 20th and 21st of June in Vienna, preceded by the Danube Participation Day.

One of the priorities is the need to work further on implementing the governance mechanisms within the strategy, through improved collaboration, increased ownership, and generated added value through various formats and events. The activities implemented will include a variety of stakeholders to further showcase the work within the Strategy and wider. The governance structure activities will focus on support for core EUSDR stakeholders, allow time for more diverse and open discussions to unlock new potential and ideas. The programme will also focus on discussions for the future perspective of cooperation in the Danube region to create inputs for post-2027.

Jutta MOLL-MARWAN emphasizes the priorities of the Presidency program, including stability, security, fostering a European perspective, and focusing on innovation and green transition. The programme furthermore highlights the importance of involving youth, civil society, and regional/local stakeholders. Presidency priorities also strongly focus on institutional and governance objectives, including strengthening political commitment and enabling tangible funding opportunities.

The discussion includes a proposal by Ugo POLI (Central European Initiative) mentioning two recent events, the EUSDR Annual Forum in Brdo pri Kranju and the conference of the associations of local democracy agencies ALDA, which focused on the reconstruction and development of Ukraine. There is an expressed concern about the lack of visibility and coordination in the initiatives and actions related to Ukrainian reconstruction. Ugo POLI suggested the need for the macro-regional strategy for the Danube to support and coordinate the various actions and initiatives related to Ukrainian reconstruction.

Annex 3\_ Presentation Austrian EUSDR Presidency to the EUSDR

#### **Task Force Cross-border Emergency Healthcare**

Claudia SINGER-SMITH (PAC 10/City of Vienna) provided a recap of the progress made in the task force for cross-border emergency healthcare and discussed the questions and challenges related to legal implementation, administrative processes, and language barriers. She presented the plan for an online Q&A session to address open questions and gather expertise from different countries. The next step that is being explored would be a study visit to Gmünd in Lower Austria organised back to back with the next SG meeting.

The Danube region has successful projects and initiatives in place on the topic. Claudia SINGER-SMITH provided information about the involvement of different countries in cross-border health emergency initiatives, including Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Germany, and Croatia, further mentioning the cooperation between Hungary and neighbouring countries and the plans for cross-border cooperation with Austria and Slovenia.

Annex 4\_25 PA10 SGM\_CoV

#### **Interactive discussion on Seed Money Facility**

Jernej GRAHOR (PAC 10 SI /Centre for European Perspective) and Claudia SINGER-SMITH (PAC 10/City of Vienna) explain that the SMF funding program is an opportunity to gain funding for new projects and get engaged through the programming funding from the DRP.

The upcoming open call closes in March 2024. Promotional and dissemination activities have been implemented by both DRP and PA-10, as information sessions. There are more information material including videos of events on the DRP and PA-10 website. The stakeholders within the PA 10 SG can work together to mobilise potential applicants and support them within the application process. The discussion regarding possibilities and challenges in the process takes place during the meeting. The biggest challenges relate to the consortium building, dedication of resources by applicant organisations and very often the possibility to co fund (or cover the expenses).

The participants propose sending a questionnaire to gather information on planned or implementing initiatives related to the seed money facility. They highlight the importance of this information for all steering group members and observers. The SG members agreed to share information in a survey on planned activities to spread information on the SMF Call and mobilising potential project partners to shed light on potential support activities from the Priority Area Coordination.

Annex 4\_25 PA10 SGM\_CoV

Thursday, 14 December 2023 | Day 2

### Danube Strategy Point on updates within EUSDR.

Katharina LENZ (Danube Strategy Point) presents the work of the Danube Strategy Point, with a focus on past actions, upcoming activities and support to EUSDR stakeholders, especially connected to the work of the Steering Group members. Ms LENZ discusses various high-level topics including work done throughout the year 2023, plans for the calendar year 2024, focusing on support for stakeholders, embedding and funding, monitoring, evaluation, communication updates, capacity building activities, and updates regarding youth in the EUSDR.

- **Presented updates in EUSDR key documents and rules of procedures.** Ms LENZ outlined the updated Rules of Procedure for National Coordinators and PAC (whereas more specific ROPs within each PA have not changed) and the EUSDR Governance Architecture Paper update. The documents feature updates in regard to procedures and clarifications, as also further developments since the initial documentation drafting. One of the developments is the integration of the Danube Youth Council in the work of the EUSDR). The files will be updated throughout the development of the strategy, to address the needs and processes within the work of all stakeholders. The work of the task force for governance development in the EUSDR, that convened in November 2023, worked to further elaborate the governance development of the EUSDR.
- Within the Rules of Procedure for NCs and PACs, and the Governance paper, an update and clarification was described on voting rights and the rules of procedure within SG meetings. Katharina LENZ discussed the procedure for substituting new nominations of Steering Group members. When a member steps out, they inform the Priority Area Coordinators about the substitution and the new member. In this case the National Coordinators are to be informed by the PACs. The communication can be done directly by the line ministries. All stakeholders should share information, jointly update lists and keep the DSP informed. This procedure is documented in the EUSDR Governance Architecture Paper.
- Katharina LENZ discussed the embedding of funding and the strategic guidance for the post-2027 period. She mentioned the involvement of the Interact working group and the initial meeting held in December. The Austrian presidency and DG REGIO are also working on this topic. A strategic guidance paper on embedding will be available and the EUSDR embedding week will take place in October 2024. They are working in close contact with the networks of Managing authorities, programme authorities, network meetings. The ERDF-IPA-NDICI meeting is planned for July 2024, and could possibly be organised back-to-back with the one for ESF.
- Katharina LENZ discussed the monitoring of the embedding process and the overall Strategy. Katharina LENZ mentioned the mapping of cooperation actions by Interact (that enables an overview of information related to topics, projects within the MRS and other information that can be relevant to the work of EUSDR stakeholders, in planning, research, network building and partnerships). The reporting schedule was further discussed (next edition foreseen for



spring 2024 covering the year 2022 and 2023). In early summer stakeholders will be invited to participate within the EUSDR process implementation evaluation.

- Regarding communication, the speaker discusses the Danube Strategy Flagship and the communication tool used to describe the Strategy.
- Promotional videos were filmed, will be finished and sent to stakeholders in January. The DSP website (and interconnected PA websites) are being updated, and a search for a new service provider is under way until the end of 2024.
- Capacity building will be one of the priorities for the DSP with tailored trainings and opportunities for EUSDR stakeholders, following a Capacity Building Needs Assessment (CBNA) conducted from January 2024 on. The upcoming needs assessment on capacity building will invite stakeholders to participate in the creation of activities.
- The work of the Danube Youth Council is under way, also in term of long term funding. The DSP is collecting applicants for the Danube Youth Organisations Network as a network of organisations interested to participate within the strategy. The task force of the DYC is working on bringing the DYC and DYON together and managing expectations. This will be a task dealt with in 2024 under the Austrian presidency.

Comments, questions and recommendations:

- Questions regarding the continuation of DYC work, for which an answer is provide that only three DYC members will not continue their membership. New members have already been identified.
- SG members from Baden- Württemberg informed that stakeholders interested in the cooperation within DYON have expectations for the DYON network, which need to be managed and addressed to achieve a good result. Katharina LENZ provides information, that the research and discussion for possible integrations of DYON in EUSDR is under way, also as part of the upcoming NC-PAC meeting in Vienna. The organisations sharing interest have also declared their expectations when applying.

PA 10 coordinators inform the SG members regarding the upcoming monitoring and reporting, including the need for inputs from the Priority Areas and potential contributions from the steering group members. They will be contacted to assist in the preparation of documentation, the reporting of activities and tasks contributing to the PA-10 actions. The possibility of organizing coffee table talks to provide better awareness and encourage discussions is mentioned.

Annex 5\_ DSP\_EUSDR activities

#### **Presentation of PA-10 coordinated and connected projects.**

The presentation of flagship projects occurring within priority area 10 is discussed, as well as the invitation for participants to announce or present planned activities.

Danube Participation Day.

- Claudia SINGER-SMITH (PAC 10/City of Vienna) presents the updates of implemented activities within the Danube Participation Day 2023 and planned activities for the Danube Participation Day 2024. The theme of the two-year interconnected event activities are recovery towards EU accession. The discussions and activities focused on support for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. In particular, in the case of Ukraine also focusing on how the recovery process can be designed in a way that also contributes to the EU accession process. The discussions aimed to identify where the EUSDR can support stakeholders and be engaged. As also mentioned within the Joint Ministerial Statement supported within the Annual Forum, EUSDR extends solidarity and support for Ukraine in the past and the future.

- During the event implemented on 23.10.2023 in Ljubljana, the recovery process was discussed, particularly with the focus on environmental recovery, local democracy and participation and social recovery. Special attention was given to look at the needs of local actors and civil society. Cooperation of EUSDR stakeholders and the EU were discussed, and each workshop developed several messages or recommendations (that are available online). The EUSDR strategy has a strong role in the field of implementation of best practices, for providing this network to share knowledge and expertise or experience. The multi layer work of the strategy is beneficial, as well as in regard to the established networks of cooperation with stakeholders from Ukraine.
- Next Danube Participation Day foreseen to take place back-to-back with the Annual Forum, organised on the 19th of June in Vienna, Austria. It will build on the work of the 2023 edition and further discussions with stakeholders, to better address the needs of the stakeholders in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Furthermore, the aim is to build further mutual trust and opportunities of support, cooperation with equally valuable learning and exchange opportunities for EUSDR stakeholders that are not from Ukraine and Moldova.

#### Annex 4\_25 PA10 SGM\_CoV

Stefan LÜTGENAU (Danube Civil Society Forum) continues the discussion with further information on the DPD 2023, that was held as the first Danube participation day held live after the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, upcoming initiatives are mentioned with invitations to stakeholders for participation.

- The organization of the third Austrian national participation day is discussed, which will address water management in the daily catchment under the impact of climate change. The event will be held in Vienna at the chronological laboratory on the 8th and 9th of April. It is coordinated with PA10 and other priority areas, including organisations and universities. The aim is to address water scarcity and active water management in the framework of the strategy.
- The organization of a national participation day in Ukraine is discussed, which will take place on the 15th and 16th of May. Due to the ongoing war and air attacks by Russia, the event will be held in the countryside near the northern border. The aim is to engage non-state stakeholders in Ukraine civil society and build opinions between the two annual fora.
- Mr LÜTGENAU also invites all stakeholders and countries to further explore the opportunities for the organisation of National Participation Days.

Jernej GRAHOR (PAC 10/ Centre for European Perspective) presents the Bled Strategic Forum and Young Bled Strategic Forum

- The Young Bled Strategic Forum is discussed, which is a three-day intensive capacity building event for young participants. It aims to engage young participants with decision makers, allowing their voices to be heard and building on their ideas and solutions for the challenges of our time. The forum accommodated 41 participants from 25 countries and involved the Danube Youth Council with 4 members participating.
- The discussion focused on capacity building and gaining different skill sets, particularly in relation to the European year of skills. The topics discussed included methods for professional and academic development, long-term policy making for climate change and security, and the importance of culture and reading. The meeting also highlighted the engagement with decision makers, ministries, and universities to bring diverse perspectives and stakeholders to the topics.
- The dates for the Young Bled Strategic Forum next year are confirmed to be from 30th of August to the 1st of September 2024, with the Bled Strategic Forum happening on 2nd and 3rd of September 2024. The open call will be shared with all stakeholders, cooperation with DYC members will be made permanent in possible options and further explored.

#### Annex 6\_25 PA10 SGM\_CEP

## Presentation of PA-10 onboarding and communication materials.

Guided by Ms Andreea PRASACU (PAC 10/ City of Vienna), participants discuss the PA-10 guidebook, which aims to provide knowledge and tools for newcomers to actively participate in the implementation of PA-10 actions. They review the current draft of the guide and discuss its structure and content.

The purpose of the guide as decided in the 22nd SG meeting of the PA-10 is to develop such a document for newcomers, that enables them to understand and actively contribute to the PA-10 mission. The main objective of the guide is to give this individual the knowledge and the tools so that they can actively participate in the implementation of the PA-10 actions as well as allowing them and facilitating the understanding of our internal processes and promoting collaborative contributions. The main target groups and users of the guidebook will be new members of the Steering group, and other interested stakeholders.

The structure of the document is currently in many chapters, moving from the introduction of the Priority Area 10, building further with more information about the strategy, the complete EUSDR governance and other parts. The document uses visual materials and infographics to make it as clear as possible, and focuses on separate activities, actions, stakeholders.

The presentation continued with an interactive discussion with steering group members, that can be further implemented within the guidebook.

SG members were asked to define what helped them understand their role in PA-10. Fiona FAAS and Niombo LOMBA (State Ministry Baden-Württemberg) outline the importance of joining activities, learning by doing and the support of colleagues with broader experiences in the strategy. Stefan A. LÜTGENAU (Danube Civil Society Forum) proposed the visuals and communication to outline how the strategy does not refer only to the Danube River, but to a wider geographical area and a wider network of stakeholders, topics and actions. Corina HARTL (Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior, for Sport and Integration) suggested it would be beneficial, to make the booklet as practical as possible, with practical examples, to avoid an abstract presentation of the EUSDR. Some members also volunteer to be in direct contact in the preparation of the document and provide feedback in the preparation of the guide.

SG members highlighted the need for new members to have an onboarding module and training exercises tailored to their needs. They mentioned the importance of personal meetings to accompany the brochure and provide further explanations.

Annex 7\_ PA 10 Newcomer compass presentation, Annex 8\_ PA 10 Newcomer compass document

Claudia SINGER-SMITH (PAC 10/ City of Vienna) provides further information on the PA-10 info film, that was previously discussed within the PA-10 SG meeting held in Belgrade. The basis of the information film is structured on the received information and is in progress. The procurement procedure is under way and the story line will be further developed, within the year 2024. SG members will be informed about the process and consulted where possible.



## Presentation of initiatives and best practices within the EUSDR, and the DRP Project application in the area of PA-10

Mr Jernej GRAHOR (PAC 10/Centre for European Perspective) and Mrs Claudia SINGER-SMITH (PAC 10/City of Vienna) present the project implemented within the Danube Region Programme, that are being implemented as of January 2024. The SG members are informed on opportunities of cooperation with projects where PA-10 has an active role as Associated Partner or in projects directly connected to the work and actions of the priority area.

- HARMONMISSIONS PROJECT (Harmonisation of Missions in the Danube Region) is funded by the Danube Region Programme. The project is not directly connected to the priority area but includes collaboration on capacity building and sharing experiences. The lead partner is the CVTI SR - Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information (SK). The main topic of the project is exchange of best practices, experience and knowledge on the topic of two missions within Horizon, one is adoption to climate change and the second one concerning the goal of 100 climate neutral and smart cities by 2030.
- WIN PROJECT (Improving the position of Women in the labour markets of peripheral Industrial regions) funded by the DRP with lead partner Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts (SI). The project addresses upskilling or skilling of women and involving women in the labour market in regions ( primarily industrial regions). By working within the industrial regions, the project looks to reinvent the culture of industrial labour and look for more innovative ways of involving women into the labour market. The challenges of brain drain are therefore also a big component of the project.
- NONA Project (New Governance for New Spaces) funded by the DRP with lead partner Geodetic Institute of Slovenia (SI). Nona establishes a governance model that takes different aspects into account to link decision-making for territorial development with the objectives of the new Bauhaus and Green Deal policies. The NONA project seeks to initiate a change in spatial governance to better adapt spatial development of cities and regions to current and future challenges. It addresses conflicts about resources, demographic imbalances, spatial disparities, and applies criteria of sustainability and resilience as proposed by the New European Bauhaus Initiatives and the EU Green Deal.
- SMART ERA (SMART community-led transition for Europe's Rural Areas) is funded by Horizon Europe, and managed by the lead partner Fondazione Bruno Kessler (IT). PA-10 is an associated partner within the project. The SMART ERA project aims to address this by promoting smart solutions and multi-local living, leveraging digitalisation for remote work opportunities. The project's ambitions include creating a European-wide solution for automated data collection, adopting a Smart-Village approach for rural innovation, introducing a unified Digital Maturity/Smartness assessment method, and providing evidence-based recommendations to enhance policy instruments for smart rural development across the EU. Additionally, SMART ERA aims to foster cooperation on smart villages among the EUSALP, EUSAIR, Baltic Sea, and Danube Macro-Regional Strategies.

## Discussion on Capacities for Support in Ukraine and Initiatives in support for the Accession process to the EU

The discussion focused on the challenges and opportunities of cooperation between municipalities and stakeholders, particularly in the context of the Danube strategy. The importance of engaging stakeholders from Ukraine and the Western Balkans was highlighted, as well as the need for capacity building and knowledge transfer. Jernej GRAHOR (PAC 10/Centre for European Perspective) presents the project Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Ukraine, implemented by the Centre for European Perspective in the scope of Slovenian aid and Partnerships programme of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia. The programme is implemented in close cooperation with experts and with support of the U-LEAD programme.

The project “Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Ukraine” aims to provide targeted transfer of knowledge and experience on part of Slovenian municipalities and build the institutional capacities of Ukrainian municipalities (‘hromadas’), in the fields of reconstruction and local development – topics related to the challenges they will be facing at the wake of war as well as topics relevant to nationally led efforts on EU accession. A mentorship programme is executed by Slovenian municipalities, with the assistance of Slovenian experts, delivering on topics of local self-government, ties between local communities and the economy as well as with chambers of craft and commerce, civil protection, cooperation with vocational education institutions, just transition, international cooperation and strategic planning. The project will deliver reports with framework actions plans for reconstruction and modernisation of each ‘hromada’, tailored to their individual needs. The Slovenian contribution will positively influence the lives of Ukrainian communities and their wider regions by building local capacities, which are heavily relied on by the people in this time of crisis, and by delivering it in a sustainable and aligned manner.

Project objectives foreseen:

- a) To equip representatives of Ukrainian municipalities with targeted knowledge, experience and good practice in the fields relevant for post-conflict reconstruction as well as the process of EU integration, which will allow them to effectively engage in their daily tasks related to reconstruction, modernisation and reforms in the scope of EU accession process;
- b) To build institutional capacities of Ukrainian municipalities, enabling them to make a more efficient contribution to the processes of reconstruction and regional development as well as to the nationally led processes related to EU accession, incl. by making efficient use of strengthened international partnerships and long-term cooperation.

The project implementation also implements activities of funding education, project management and project proposal identification, that will be widely available to stakeholders in Ukraine in the integration process, with needed skills and knowledge to fully implement the potential.

The following key points have been discussed within cooperation with stakeholders from municipalities in Ukraine in connection to Interreg and the EUSDR:

- There is interest of UA municipalities for Interreg cooperation
- Some municipalities in UA know of the programme (most recognisable is Interreg PolandUkraine) but lack information about calls and knowledge on how to apply (due to budgetary constraints Drohobych mentioned co-financing would be an issue)
- There is a lack of knowledge about possibilities SMF offers & where to find partners
- Cooperation between U-LEAD with Europe, DRP & Association of UA Cities (AUC) on raising awareness about the programmes and financing could be helpful

Annex 9\_ Post conflict reconstruction

### Any other Business section and discussion on the next Steering Group Meeting

The discussion revolves around the planning of the next Steering Group meeting, including potential locations and timing. The participants consider the option of linking it to the end of the Annual forum to save travel time. Various locations are mentioned, such as Baden-Württemberg, Republic of Moldova, Austria (Lower Austria). The timing is also discussed, considering the participation at the macro-regional strategy in Brussels on June 13th and 14th and the Annual Forum making it difficult to plan the SG meeting back-to-back. SG members reach an agreement that the next SG Meeting will not be organised back-to-back with the Annual Forum 2024 as a direct effect of logistical preparation aspects and possibilities of participation. The precise timeline and location will be further discussed, with the next meeting announced and agreed upon to take place either in Stuttgart or Lower Austria. The decision will be subject to a bilateral discussion with Baden-Württemberg and Lower Austria.

Closing of the SG meeting.