

Joint Statement of the Danube Foreign Ministers

“Vienna Danube Declaration”

**Vienna
20 June 2024**

Over the last decades, the Danube Region has taken a big leap forward in deepening cooperation and has grown closer together. More than 115 million people from 14 countries call the area covered by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) their home, and since 2023, this region consists of EU member and EU candidate countries only. European integration along the Danube is progressing with the ultimate goal that the Danube will unite us all as an EU river.

At the same time, the wind is getting rougher for the Danube Region as it faces systemic and security threats, including the destabilising influence of third parties, hybrid threats and disinformation. A ring of fire is tightening around our Region, stretching from Ukraine, where Russia is waging a war of aggression, to the crisis in the Middle East and from the Sahel region to the Horn of Africa.

In the face of adversity, we will continue to stand united and strengthen our cooperation and commitment towards the Danube Region as a source of security, stability and prosperity.

Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, a manifest violation of its obligations under the UN Charter and international law, has undermined our rules-based international order, which is the bedrock of Europe and the Danube Region.

We condemn in the strongest terms Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, causing death, destruction and suffering. The violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity has to end. We reiterate our full solidarity with the people of Ukraine, who deserve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. We also remain committed to the security, stability and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova.

The Danube has become an important lifeline for Ukraine and other countries – as a means of transport and export of Ukrainian grain, food and other important products. In this regard, we condemn Russia’s repeated military strikes on Danube port infrastructure and storage facilities and infringements on the freedom of navigation on the Danube, the longest river in the EU. We encourage enhancing the EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes and support the improvement of connections to the Western Balkan region, bringing them closer to the EU.

With regard to our efforts to prevent instability, we must also make full use of EU enlargement policy as a geostrategic investment and in line with the merit-based nature of the accession process. History has shown that EU membership is a catalyst for overcoming regional conflicts, promoting reconciliation, strengthening regional cooperation and development and accelerating internal institutional and economic reforms. Especially in times of geopolitical transformation, it is crucial to ensure visible and tangible results.

We therefore encourage the further exploration of the EUSDR as a useful forum for cooperation with EU candidate countries including with a view to creating synergies with the reform processes required by the EU enlargement process. We also stress the need for a strategic approach to the Black Sea Region.

Furthermore, we highlight the role of youth to protect the future of our democratic and economic systems and to strengthen cohesion in our societies. We underline the importance of educational programmes for young people, including digital competencies, to enhance their abilities to identify and counter disinformation and misinformation. In this regard, we particularly appreciate the efforts of the Danube Youth Council (DYC) and look forward to its increasing active involvement in our Danube cooperation. We commend the institutionalisation of the Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON) as an innovative element for shaping the future of our Region.

We welcome the new initiatives of the Austrian EUSDR Presidency to promote further dialogue and cooperation in the Danube Region. Today's first meeting of Mayors of Danube capital cities as well as the Danube Region Speakers Conference held on 18-19 March 2024 in Vienna contribute to strengthening democratic resilience in the Danube Region. The Danube Region Business Summit, scheduled for 6 November 2024 in Vienna, will look at ways to foster the Region's prosperity by unleashing entrepreneurial and innovative potentials along the Danube and to contribute to Ukraine's reconstruction.

We want to develop a more secure and resilient Danube Region by improving border control systems and enhancing cooperation between police and other law enforcement agencies, by tackling illegal migration, corruption and serious and organised crime (including smuggling of migrants, trafficking of human beings, cyber-crime, drug trafficking and illicit trafficking of firearms) as well as strengthening joint efforts against terrorist threats. We wish to counteract illegal migration, explore opportunities of migration through legal pathways while respecting national competencies, and enhance cooperation to dismantle smuggling networks. In this respect, we support respective initiatives, including the upcoming meeting of the Ministers of Interior ("Salzburg Forum") on 25-26 June 2024.

Joint international operations on the Danube provide an excellent example of cooperation efforts of police and other law enforcement agencies making the most

international river in the world more secure. We support this endeavour and encourage further cooperative efforts like these. Harmonisation and digitalisation of control procedures along the Danube are another sound example of joint efforts to reduce administrative burdens, save time for passengers, crew and cargo, making the Danube an even more attractive corridor for transport, business and tourism.

We reaffirm our commitment to tackling existing and new challenges in the Danube Region, including by promoting cooperation in foreign policy and security matters.

In view of the next EU institutional cycle, we call on all key stakeholders, including the European Commission, to take into account the changing geopolitical environment of the Danube Region and to further develop, where appropriate, the EUSDR as to adapt to the new emerging needs and challenges and to strengthen the Region's prosperity, stability and security.

We highlight the importance of funding programmes such as Interreg in delivering EUSDR results. The collaborative efforts supported by these programmes provide a clear European perspective and value through cooperation across borders. They foster dialogue and coordination, facilitate the transfer of best practices and pave the way for enlargement.

We welcome the contributions at the 13th Annual Forum of the EUSDR held in Vienna on 20-21 June 2024 by all Danube stakeholders and partners who actively work on a joint vision and future perspectives for our Region.

Finally, we congratulate Bosnia and Herzegovina for taking over the EUSDR Presidency in 2025, to which we lend our full support.