

## **Embedding process in Bulgaria**

The past year and a half was of key importance in terms of preparing for the new programming period and predefining the projects of interest to the countries along the River Danube. Bulgaria has closely monitored the extent to which the Strategy objectives were incorporated into the Partnership Agreement and the new programmes. As a result of this process, the Strategy objectives and the actions under the Action Plan are reflected in the priorities of the relevant mainstream programmes, as well as the territorial cooperation programmes and in particular Romania-Bulgaria and Bulgaria-Serbia CBC programmes.

Through the national coordination mechanism we have established the legal basis for monitoring the implementation of all those elements in the programmes that contribute to the achievement of the Danube Strategy objectives. We have launched coordination meetings on national level that involve both the Managing Authorities of programmes as well as the PACs and the steering group members. Those meetings serve as a platform for regular contact between the stakeholders, discussion of planned interventions as well as a follow up of implemented ones. On the other hand, we have ensured the participation of the National Coordinator in the Monitoring Committees of all programmes, which provides for a regular monitoring and active involvement even at the stage of preparation of the calls for proposals.

Following the adoption of a joint statement of the Ministers in charge of EU funds, European affairs and European integration in Ulm in 2015, we aim at raising awareness among the relevant stakeholders of the most important messages and further promoting their implementation. We already have some good examples of smart use of the various national and EU funding possibilities in line with the joint statement:

- **In terms of EUSDR related calls** our *OP Human Resource Development 2014-2020* is a good showcase. It envisages a specific operation dedicated to the Danube Strategy, called “*Danube Partnerships for Growth*”. With a view to increase their added value, the projects will be implemented by partners from Bulgaria and at least one Danube country;
- *OP Science and Education for Smart Growth* provides funding for strengthening the infrastructure for scientific research and innovation, establishing competence centres, etc. The idea is to create open hubs that could attract scientists from the region. The programme considers also intervention measures for student mobility with a view to build capacity and skills.

- **In terms of streamlining project selection** our *OP Regions* in growth has put a great emphasis on the Danube Strategy in the area of integrated urban development. We have introduced specific requirements in the Guidelines for applicants as well as in the selection grid closely linking the investment programmes of our beneficiaries to the achievement of the Danube Strategy objectives.
- Beside streamlining the resources under national OPs we also aim at combining **various financing instruments for the implementation of joint projects with an impact on the Danube Region, such as:**
  - improving navigation conditions on the River Danube in the shared Bulgarian-Romanian sector of the River Danube, rehabilitation and maintenance of the Danube waterway under the *Connecting Europe Facility*, or
  - in the field of energy, two gas interconnector projects are of common European interest to the trans-European energy infrastructure, where we use ERDF funds as well as grant assistance from the *European Energy Programme for Recovery*.

We also highlight the importance of ensuring complementarity and multiplying effect of the funds that we use in relation to the Danube Strategy. In order to ensure sustainability, we aim at encouraging projects that build on and complement good practices and successful partnerships from the previous programming period. In particular, complementarity and synergy will be sought in the implementation of the projects under the cross-border programmes Bulgaria-Serbia and Romania-Bulgaria.