

# EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) Implementation Report 2016-2018



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**With special thanks to EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators and their teams and to EUSDR National Coordinators active in the period of 2016-2019.**

**Imprint:**

This implementation report aims at illustrating EUSDR developments and achievements in the period 2016-2018 by focusing on activities on general EUSDR level and especially by taking into account activities on Priority Area level.

The main sources of this report are EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators' and National Coordinators' reports to the Danube Transnational Programme and the European Commission, respectively, submitted for the period of 2016-2018. Furthermore, Priority Area Coordinators and National Coordinators provided feedback and additional information on the draft report in November and December 2019.

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## 1. Introduction

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) was endorsed as the second of four EU macro-regional strategies (MRS) in 2011<sup>1</sup>. Hence, since almost one decade, MRS have been an integral part of the European multi-level governance system, offering an integrated strategic framework for tackling challenges in functional macro-regions, aiming at strengthening social, economic and territorial cohesion. MRS are bottom-up oriented laboratories for seeking solutions for transborder cooperation – across funding schemes and sectors, involving both EU member states and non-EU member states. Thus, MRS can be understood as incrementally evolving cooperation processes, providing a changing multi-governance structure and soft arenas for all stakeholders involved. However, as MRS governance systems arise from different territorial contexts and constellations of stakeholders, arrangements for enhancing cooperation, collaboration and alignment of funds clearly vary between the different strategies.

The EUSDR addresses a wide range of thematic fields and objectives, which serve as the backbone of the Strategy's structure. According to the *EUSDR Communication (COM(2010) 715)*<sup>2</sup> and the *EUSDR Action Plan (SEC(2010) 1489/3)*<sup>3</sup>, they are grouped in 4 Pillars and 12 Priority Areas (PA), see Table 1. While Pillars express the core fields of action of the Strategy, Priority Areas are the 12 thematic areas in which the macro-regional strategy shall contribute to improvements through tackling main challenges and through seizing opportunities.

Table 1: Overview on EUSDR Pillars and Priorities

	Pillar	Priority Areas (PA)		Coordinated by (country)
Pillar 1 (A)	Connecting the Danube Region – smart and sustainable	Priority Area 1A	Waterways Mobility	Austria and Romania
		Priority Area 1B	Rail-Road-Air Mobility	Slovenia and Serbia
		Priority Area 2	Sustainable Energy	Hungary and Czech Republic
		Priority Area 3	Culture & Tourism	Romania and Bulgaria
Pillar 2 (B)	Protecting the Environment – clean and green	Priority Area 4	Water Quality	Hungary and Slovakia
		Priority Area 5	Environmental Risks	Hungary and Romania
		Priority Area 6	Biodiversity, Landscapes, Air & Soil Quality	Germany and Croatia
Pillar 3 (C)	Building Prosperity – smart, social and innovative	Priority Area 7	Knowledge Society	Slovakia and Serbia
		Priority Area 8	Competitiveness	Germany and Croatia
		Priority Area 9	People & Skills	Austria and Moldova
Pillar 4 (D)	Strengthening the Danube Region – effective, sound and safe	Priority Area 10	Institutional Capacity & Cooperation	Austria and Slovenia
		Priority Area 11	Security	Germany and Bulgaria

<sup>1</sup> In 2009, the European Council endorsed the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) as the first EU macro-regional strategy. Three further EU macro-regional strategies (MRS) have been developed: the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in 2011, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) in 2014 and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) in 2016.

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/danube/com2010\\_715\\_danube\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/danube/com2010_715_danube_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/danube/action\\_plan\\_danube.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/danube/action_plan_danube.pdf)

### Aim of this report

This implementation report aims at illustrating EUSDR developments and achievements in the period 2016-2018 by focusing on activities on general EUSDR level and especially by taking into account activities on Priority Area level.

### Basics & sources

Since the very beginning of the EUSDR, actors belonging to the EUSDR core governance have reported on developments and activities in two different formats. One reporting line currently in place is directed towards the European Commission (EC) / DG REGIO and forms the basis for EC's bi-annual *report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies*<sup>4</sup>, among others also illustrating the development at EUSDR Priority Area (PA) level in an exemplary manner in the accompanying EC Staff Working Documents<sup>5</sup>. The other reporting line in place is oriented towards the Danube Transnational Programme (DTP), among others feeding into the *DTP Annual Implementation Reports*<sup>6</sup>, which examine the programme's performance and measures.

This EUSDR Implementation Report 2016-2018, as prepared by the Danube Strategy Point (DSP), complements the aforementioned reports, which are dedicated to the same geographical region, by specifically focusing on achievements on policy and project level, in a perspective beyond funding schemes. Thus, this report focuses on major developments in the framework of the 12 EUSDR PAs during the three-year period 2016-2018. It is of descriptive, compiling and comparative nature. It is based upon reports submitted by Priority Area Coordinators (PACs)<sup>7</sup> and National Coordinators (NCs)<sup>8</sup>, substantiated by research undertaken by DSP on PAC websites. The EUSDR Implementation Report constitutes an integral part of the new EUSDR monitoring system, which is currently under elaboration, again coordinated by DSP<sup>9</sup>. Future EUSDR Implementation Reports illustrating achievements are planned to be issued bi-annually – based upon the new monitoring system<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> EC's first report on the implementation of MRS:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1566375573483&uri=CELEX:52016DC0805> and

EC's second report on the implementation of MRS:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0021>

<sup>5</sup> Staff Working Documents issued in 2016: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016SC0443> and in 2019: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019SC0006>

<sup>6</sup> EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators and the Danube Strategy Point are funded by DTP. DTP Annual Implementation Reports are available here: <http://www.interreg-danube.eu/about-dtp/programme-presentation>

<sup>7</sup> Reports 2018 from PACs to DTP, Reports 2017 from PACs to DTP, Reports 2016 from PACs to DSP (2 parts), Reports from PACs to EC (2016-2018)

<sup>8</sup> Reports from NCs to EC (2016-2018)

<sup>9</sup> Since the former Danube Strategy Point (DSP) was established in 2015 for enhancing coordinative capacity, steps were undertaken for harmonising activities and reporting. However, DSP stopped in 2017 and was re-established and re-organised in autumn 2018. An EUSDR monitoring system is hence currently under elaboration by DSP "new".

<sup>10</sup> As presented to PACs on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2019 in Bucharest and to NCs on 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> February 2019 as well in Bucharest.

### Foci of the subsequent chapters

After examining achievements at general EUSDR level (chapter 2.1), this EUSDR Implementation Report specifically sheds light on developments at Priority Area level along three dimensions (chapter 2.3):

- (1) cooperation & policy embedding,
- (2) highlights
- (3) projects – implementation & monitoring

In chapter 3 the PAs are examined in a comparative manner regarding SG participation, cooperation with funding instruments and cross-cutting activities. Based on these developments presented, conclusions are drawn in chapter 4. Finally, progress achieved at Priority Area level is visualised in Annex 1 and project sheets portraying selected good practice projects are included in Annex 2.

## 2. EUSDR Developments and Achievements

In the period of 2016-2018 EUSDR key stakeholders brought the Strategy forward in several fields and on several levels, especially when it comes to strengthening ties within the core governance structure and advancing policy development and project implementation. Another achievement was the allocation of funding to the work of Priority Area Coordinators by the Danube Transnational Programme. The report at hand first gives an insight into the progress made, mainly taking into account findings of key studies on the EUSDR and MRS. Complementing these insights, the main achievements by Priority Area from 2016 to 2018 are highlighted.

### 2.1. EUSDR Overview 2016-2018

Since 2011 all 14 participating countries worked on advancing the implementation of the Strategy and on expanding the network of EUSDR stakeholders on strategic and operational level. On 16<sup>th</sup> December 2016 the **EC's first report on the implementation of MRS (SWD(2016) 443<sup>5</sup>)** was published and outlined the following achievements of the EUSDR until 2016:

- Overall, a rich set of initiatives are on the way under the umbrella of the EUSDR, which show that the Strategy is delivering results.
- Acting as a one-stop-shop for the access to information on EU funding, the online platform EuroAccess Danube Region<sup>11</sup> helps the EUSDR key implementers, but also directly the potential project promoters to find the right funding source for their projects.
- The role of the European Commission is perceived as important, although PACs often quote the insufficient and discontinuous participation of the relevant DGs and Commission services to activities of the relevant PAs as critical factor, which needs improvement.
- A gap between the Strategy and the funding programmes seems to have continued within the reporting period. This often divides managing authorities and officials in charge of the EUSDR, even if they are sometimes based in the very same ministry. This should be changed by ensuring effective internal coordination. The EUSDR should not be seen as red tape but as an opportunity to make the implementation of ESI funds (and beyond) more coherent and efficient. Specific challenges of coordination of funding opportunities and EUSDR relate to IPA/ENI countries. Also, the integration of the macro-regional perspective in directly-managed EU funds requires improvement.

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<sup>11</sup> EuroAccess has been expanded to cover all four macro-regional strategies: <https://www.euro-access.eu/>

Moreover, the report identified the following areas of improvement:

- translate political will into administrative support and ensure sufficient resources for day-to-day work on a long-term basis;
- ensure appropriate participation of national representatives to Steering Group meetings of Priority Areas and consider reducing the number and scope of current Priority Areas if sufficient resources are not allocated by participating countries within well-defined time-frames;
- introduce a mechanism for regular rotation of Priority Area Coordinators, so to enhance the overall ownership of the EUSDR by national and regional administrations;<sup>12</sup>
- strengthen commitment of sectorial ministries;
- acknowledge the importance of national coordination mechanisms and reinforce them;
- enhance the potential for aligning the existing funding instruments with the priorities (e.g. Danube financing dialogue, setting-up of an investment platform that would meet the needs of SMEs);
- Further develop and strengthen a dialogue between managing authorities of different funding instruments and key strategy implementers in order to achieve the intended results.

The European Council reacted on this first report with **Council Conclusions (8461/17)**<sup>13</sup> and encouraged the Commission, the participating EU member states and participating non-EU member states to intensify their effort towards improving the territorial, social and economic cohesion in the macro-regions. The European Council called for more effectiveness in cooperation, funding and political ownership and for enhancing monitoring and communication.

In 2018, the processes of drafting the regulations for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and Cohesion Policy 2020+ started, by publishing the **EC's proposal for regulations 2021-2027** (particularly *Draft Common Provisions Regulation (COM(2018) 375)*<sup>14</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2018). MRS again are mentioned as important factor on the strategic side for identifying the main objectives of the funding programmes.

Immediately after the reference period 2016-2018, on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019 the **EC's second report on the implementation of MRS (SWD(2019) 64)**<sup>15</sup> was published. This report gave an even clearer picture of EUSDR achievements and challenges. The programming of the EU funds 2021–2027 was identified as an important opportunity for maximising the added value of a revised EUSDR Action Plan. The EC recommended to strengthen and coordinate the efforts dedicated to this revision (for more information on the revision process see p. 9), in order to enable a greater strategic focus for the MRS. The EC identified the following areas for further improvement<sup>15</sup>:

- Strengthen the ownership and commitment of line ministers by emphasising the potential benefits which the EUSDR may bring and invite them to duly empower the officials representing their ministries at SG meetings;
- Ensure that the revision process of the EUSDR Action Plan, to be completed in 2019, reflects the implementing capacities of participating countries;

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<sup>12</sup> Note: this recommendation was however not supported by all EUSDR National Coordinators.

<sup>13</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/)

<sup>14</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A375%3AFIN>

<sup>15</sup> On 5<sup>th</sup> June 2019, the European Council reacted on the *EC's second report on the implementation of MRS* with Council Conclusions (9895/19) (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9895-2019-INIT/en/pdf>) and recognised the role of MRS in fostering socio-economic and territorial cohesion and observes the need for rekindling the political momentum, increasing the commitment and ownership of stakeholders and partners on local and regional level, recognises the progress done and calls for the optimal use of existing financial resources based on the principle of the 3 NOs ("no new EU legislation, no new EU institutions and no new EU funds"). The Council took note of the EC's recommendations. Finally, the Council welcomed the revision of the Action Plan, with the view to provide clear added value. The Council invites to make use of the advantages of the links between smart specialisation strategies and clusters. The EC is asked to play a leading role in the strategic coordination of MRS.



- Ensure a balanced distribution of Priority Area coordination roles;
- Continue to seek for synergies and complementarities with existing instruments and organisations already operating in the Danube Region;
- Encourage a continuous participation of all relevant Commission DGs in SG meetings;
- Improve the dialogue between the EUSDR and ESI Funds/IPA authorities in order to identify and fund a broader range of projects and actions in the mainstream programmes. This will be even more important in the planning of the upcoming programming period (2021-2027) in which cooperation is introduced as a horizontal objective for Cohesion Policy (Commission Proposal);
- Enhance exchange of experience among programmes which are already funding, or plan to fund, macro-regionally relevant projects, even across macro-regional strategies.
- Promote actions in line with EUSDR priorities which bring added value to the EU enlargement process in Western Balkan countries.
- For the next generation of the transnational programme dedicated to the EUSDR, find a better balance between IPA and ERDF funds.

#### Supplementing key studies on MRS during 2016-2018

During the period 2016-2018, a series of highly interesting publications on MRS was issued. Particularly the following studies published by Interact yield valuable input for the further evolvement of MRS: In February 2017, a report on the **Added Value of the Macro-Regional Strategies for Projects and Programmes** was published<sup>16</sup>, examining benefits and potentials at both levels and illustrating how win-win situations can be further exploited. A study on the **Embedding of Macro-Regional Strategies** was published in June 2017<sup>17</sup>, focusing on cooperation methods and tools for embedding MRS into EU funding programmes. Finally, in December 2017 the publication **Making the Most of Macro-Regions**<sup>18</sup> was issued, embracing expert views on multi-level-governance practices, evaluation and monitoring as well as on science and research.

In November 2017, the study on **Macro Regional Strategies and their Links with Cohesion Policy**<sup>19</sup> (“COWI study”) was published on behalf of EC / DG REGIO. It analyses the overall context of the Danube macro-region as well as data and achievements of the EUSDR. It also evaluates its contribution to strengthening the territorial cohesion objective of the EU. Therefore, the study represents a valuable source of information for the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the EUSDR.

#### Highlights at political level 2016-2018

To support cooperation in the Danube Region on political level, **Annual Conferences of Danube Parliamentarians (MPs)** take place periodically. The purpose of these conferences is to keep national and regional parliaments in countries along the Danube closely involved in the EUSDR and to foster transparent decision making. The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of these conferences took place on 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> September 2016 in Brčko, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the 5<sup>th</sup> edition on 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> October 2018 in Budapest, Hungary. The topics of the conferences were *Development of Port Infrastructure Capacities and the Role of Parliamentarians in Strengthening Economic Relations* and *Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in Agriculture and Water Management*, respectively.

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<sup>16</sup> Interact (2017): Added Value of the Macro-Regional Strategies for Projects and Programmes

(<http://www.interact-eu.net/library>)

<sup>17</sup> Interact (2017): Embedding of Macro-Regional Strategies (<http://www.interact-eu.net/library>)

<sup>18</sup> Interact (2017): Making the Most of Macro-Regions (<http://www.interact-eu.net/library>)

<sup>19</sup> EC (2017): Macro Regional Strategies and their Links with Cohesion Policy ([https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/))

As EUSDR countries generally strive to facilitate the implementation of the Strategy in order to counteract the decline of EUSDR political momentum, **ministerial meetings** and **ministerial declarations** are held and accomplished regularly – usually in the context of the **EUSDR Annual Fora**<sup>20</sup>, see Table 2. These fora are conceived as main EUSDR event of the year and are organised by the EUSDR member state presiding over the Strategy in the respective year. They are an important tool for enhancing cooperation and form a market place for ideas and important events, e.g. for political conferences.

*Table 2: EUSDR Annual Fora 2016-2018 & related Joint Statements of Ministers*

Edition	Date & Place	Focus	Associated Joint Statements
5 <sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum	03-04/11/2016 Bratislava, SK	implemented under the Slovak EUSDR Presidency, dedicated to innovation flows – water, knowledge and innovation in the Danube Region	Joint Statement of Ministers responsible for Research and Innovation <sup>21</sup>
6 <sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum	18-19/10/2017 Budapest, HU	implemented under the Hungarian EUSDR Presidency, focusing on energy, transport and environment	Joint Statement of the Ministers responsible for the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region <sup>22</sup>
7 <sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum	18-19/10/2018 Sofia, BG	implemented under the Bulgarian EUSDR Presidency, focusing on tourism as supportive factor for regional development, economic growth and territorial cohesion	Joint Statement of Ministers responsible for Tourism of the participating countries of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region <sup>23</sup>

## 2.2. EUSDR Core Governance - Activities and Key Priorities 2016-2018

Throughout the years, the Strategy has become a resilient and functioning network in the Danube Region. The established network of cooperation relies mainly on the core EUSDR stakeholders belonging to the internal governance system: Foreign Ministers and/or Ministers (or governmental institutions) concerned with EUSDR, National Coordinators (NCs), EUSDR Presidency, Trio Presidency, Priority Area Coordinators (PACs), Steering Group (SG) members, Danube Strategy Point (DSP), European Commission (EC) / DG REGIO and the High-Level Group (HLG), see Figure 1.

<sup>20</sup> <https://danube-region.eu/about/annual-fora/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://danube-region.eu/about/key-documents/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://danube-region.eu/about/key-documents/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://danube-region.eu/about/key-documents/>

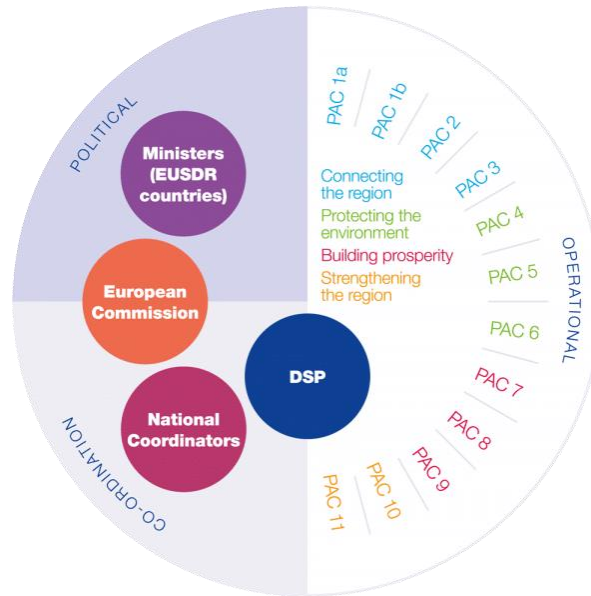


Figure 1: EUSDR core governance (Source: <https://danube-region.eu>)

The EUSDR Presidency is handed over to the next country at the occasion of the Annual Forum each year: Within the reporting period the Strategy was chaired by Slovakia in 2016, by Hungary in 2017 and by Bulgaria in 2018. The EUSDR was supported by the respective **Trio Presidency**, the **European Commission / DG REGIO** and line-DGs as well as the **Danube Strategy Point (DSP)**.

The **National Coordinators (NCs)** are core strategic decision-makers within the governance structure of the EUSDR. They are the links between the political level and Priority Areas and take decisions on behalf of the countries they represent and/or prepare decisions to be taken at political level. In this context cross-sectoral national platforms were established in several Danube countries - such as Romania, Austria and Hungary - to foster continuous dialogue among relevant national / regional / local stakeholders in key development areas and among ongoing initiatives. They aim at coordinating EUSDR issues, involving a wider range of actors, among others stakeholders in charge of Operational Programmes.

The **coordination of each Priority Area** is the task of the Danube Region member states, in consultation with the EU Commission as well as relevant EU agencies and regional bodies. Each PA is managed by at least two **PACs**, in cooperation with their **Steering Group** members<sup>24</sup>. EUSDR key stakeholders share the consensus that the existing structure for PA internal coordination and thematic coordination among PAs is reasonable and effective. In their function as acting bodies, PACs have been funded by DTP since 2017.

As regards the **Danube Strategy Point**<sup>25</sup>, it is a strategic working unit and supportive body for core EUSDR stakeholders and beyond, supporting the political and operational level of the EUSDR. The DSP thus has a cohesive function for the Strategy, easing the communication and coordination among the (Trio) Presidency, the EC, NCs, PACs, further stakeholders and the wider public. Its primary role is to support the EUSDR implementation, communication, monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, DSP offers technical support to PAs and supports capacity development of all core stakeholders involved,

<sup>24</sup> Steering Groups in a comparative perspective: see chapter 3.1.

<sup>25</sup> As regards the Danube Strategy Point, it was established in 2015, stopped its work in 2017 and was then re-established and re-organised in autumn 2018.

taking into account the multiple challenges posed in different fields and countries, especially non-EU countries.

From 2016 to 2018, NCs and PACs met regularly to address key aspects regarding the implementation of the Strategy:

Table 3: Meetings at EUSDR core governance level 2016-2018<sup>26</sup>

Type	Date & Place	Focus
PAC Meeting	14-15/01/2016 Brussels, BE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• revision of AP targets: preparation</li> <li>• technical assistance, financial management</li> <li>• alignment: embedding in EU programmes</li> </ul>
NC Meeting	07/03/2016 Bratislava, SK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EUSDR Governance (incl. DSP, DTP, monitoring)</li> <li>• revision of AP targets</li> <li>• ECs first report on the implementation of MRS: preparation (reporting)</li> <li>• EuroAccess</li> </ul>
PAC Meeting	08/03/2016 Bratislava, SK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• revision of AP targets: validation</li> <li>• communication</li> <li>• EuroAccess</li> <li>• PA reporting</li> </ul>
NC-PAC Meeting	23-24/05/2016 Bratislava, SK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DTP support for EUSDR governance</li> <li>• KEEP</li> <li>• Strategic projects</li> <li>• DSPF</li> </ul>
PAC Meeting	12-13/01/2017 Brussels, BE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECs first report on the implementation of MRS: preparation (reporting)</li> <li>• DSP support for PACs</li> <li>• Strategic projects – report and prospects</li> <li>• Monitoring &amp; evaluation</li> </ul>
NC Meeting	23/02/2017, Budapest, HU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discussion on future of DSP &amp; work plan</li> <li>• Strategic Project selection</li> <li>• alignment of funding</li> </ul>
NC Meeting	13/06/2017, Belgrade, RS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• future of DSP</li> <li>• Strategic projects</li> <li>• EUSDR Monitoring &amp; reporting</li> <li>• Embedding across MRS (Interact &amp; EC)</li> </ul>
PAC Meeting	01/02/2018 Sofia, BG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AP revision process: preparation</li> <li>• Interact activities for 4 MRS</li> </ul>
NC Meeting	22/02/2018 Sofia, BG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New supportive body/DSP procedure</li> <li>• Reporting in view of the second EC Report on the implementation of EU MRS</li> </ul>
NC-PAC Meeting	25/05/2018 Sofia, BG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AP revision process: consensus on the need of a revision reached; adoption of a roadmap</li> <li>• COWI study</li> <li>• DTP reporting</li> </ul>
NC-PAC Meeting	26/06/2018 Brussels, BE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AP revision process: launch of 1<sup>st</sup> stage of consultation process</li> <li>• Monitoring &amp; evaluation</li> </ul>
NC-PAC Meeting	06-07/12/2018 Vienna, AT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AP revision process: implementation 1<sup>st</sup> stage of the consultation process</li> <li>• EUSDR communication</li> <li>• Monitoring &amp; evaluation (evaluation plan: approval)</li> </ul>

<sup>26</sup> For further information on Steering Group meetings at Priority Area level: see chapter 3.1.

### Key priorities and achievements 2016-2018

During the whole period 2016-2018, the **embedding of the EUSDR in EU programmes** was of major importance, particularly regarding the alignment of funding with EUSDR objectives (see chapter 3.2). Based upon the **EUSDR Targets and Actions** as elaborated in 2012, a new/updated set of targets per PA was validated by NCs and PACs at a joint meeting held in Bratislava (SK) on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> May 2016. Since the **monitoring system** was still based upon the reporting system in place in 2012, the Danube Strategy Point (DSP) provided an update which was thoroughly discussed among PACs. The future set-up of the DSP was another issue on the agenda of EUSDR key stakeholders. Based on an evaluation of the former DSP, the decision was taken to retender DSP “new” for being financed via DTP, starting in autumn 2018, also see p. 7.

One clear emphasis of the period 2016-2018 was on the strategic relevance of EUSDR projects, e.g. by discussing the definition of strategic projects per se in 2017. Since this definition could not be resolved entirely, Danube Strategy Point is ready to provide support in clarifying this issue. The launch of a **Seed Money Facility**<sup>27</sup> via DTP enabled the development of projects of specific relevance for the Danube Region. Further on, the **Danube Strategic Project Fund** (DSPF) was created to support strategic transnational projects aligned with EUSDR and EUSAIR objectives, which were implemented in 2018<sup>28</sup>. For supporting the optimal use of existing funding opportunities, the **EuroAccess** tool was implemented as a pilot information tool on funding possibilities, customised for the Danube Region from 2016 to 2018, and then expanded to cover all MRS in June 2018 (“EuroAccess Macro-Regions”). Moreover, joint efforts were undertaken to highlight EUSDR achievements by securing that these EUSDR projects are appropriately displayed in the **KEEP database**<sup>29</sup>, which is maintained by Interact. This went hand in hand with the **growing engagement in cooperation across MRS**, particularly supported by DG REGIO and Interact (*see also below*).

The **preparation of the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan**, defined as a “rolling document”, and thus intended to be revised regularly, was of major concern in the period 2016-2018<sup>30</sup>. The importance of the process was underlined also by Ms. Corina Crețu, then EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, during the NC-PAC meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2018 in Brussels (Belgium). The EU Commissioner called for a political reboot of the EUSDR and also for a deep involvement and extensive contributions of both NCs, PACs and SG members. The first stage of the consultation process lasted until January 2019, involving PACs and the respective SGs. This phase comprised a retrospective appraisal of actions, embracing also cross-cutting issues, possible cooperation fields and a general outlook<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Documents for SMF implementation: <http://www.interreg-danube.eu/relevant-documents/>

<sup>28</sup> The **DSPF** builds upon the experience gained during the implementation of the pilot initiatives *START - Danube Region Project Fund* and the *Technical Assistance Facility* (TAF – DRP) and was initiated by PA 10 and implemented by EuroVienna. More information on the projects: <https://www.wienholding.at/tools/uploads/DSPF-Factbook---V18---Screen.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.keep.eu/>

<sup>30</sup> Already in 2016, under the Slovakian EUSDR Presidency, discussions on the need of a revision of the Action Plan arose. The NCs however, agreed to postpone the process in order to prepare a more thorough revision of the EUSDR Action Plan. This decision is, among others, related to the *EC's first report on the implementation of MRS (SWD(2016) 443; see chapter 2.1)*. The process of revising the EUSDR Action Plan was then initiated by the Bulgarian EUSDR Presidency in 2018, in the context of the debate on the future financial framework after 2020. Thus, the agenda of the PAC meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018 and the agenda of the NC-PAC meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018 in Sofia (Bulgaria) comprised items regarding this process. Full consensus on the need for an Action Plan revision was reached at the NC-PAC meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018 in Sofia, chaired by the Bulgarian EUSDR Presidency.

<sup>31</sup> This summarising document was discussed during the PAC meeting on 22-23 January 2019 in Bucharest. The consultation process on the EUSDR AP revision comprised a second stage in 2019 and was finally concluded by handing over the Consolidated Input Document of the Danube Countries for the Revision of the EUSDR Action Plan to EC / DG REGIO in July 2019

There is wide agreement that the ongoing revision of the Action Plan must be based on a sound evaluation of the results and that new actions and projects must be measurable to a maximum extent possible<sup>32</sup>. Based on these premises, the **EUSDR Evaluation Plan** as proposed and elaborated by DSP, was adopted at the NC-PAC meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2018 in Vienna (Austria), allowing the launch of the EUSDR Operational Evaluation as a first step in spring 2019. This evaluation is to focus on governance aspects, communication and stakeholder involvement of the EUSDR, in other words its focus is on processes and workflows among the key EUSDR stakeholders. Also connected with the launch of DSP “new”, improvement of communication on EUSDR achievements in general and on PA level was jointly initiated and tackled (e.g. update of contents on the EUSDR website and on social media, draft of the new EUSDR Communication Strategy).

Several efforts were undertaken to strengthen cooperation on **cross-cutting issues**, e.g.:

- Thematic Poles as part of the **DTP Capitalisation Strategy** support cross-fertilization among thematically connected DTP projects, also involving PACs.
- For fostering **evidence-based policy making**, regular exchange is pursued with **ESPON**, particularly in the context of the European Macro-regional and Territorial Monitoring Tool (EMTM)<sup>33</sup>, the **Attractive Danube project consortium**<sup>34</sup> and the EC’s **Joint Research Centre (JRC)**.
- Further modes of cooperation **across PAs** were either initiated or further deepened, see chapter 3.3. for more information.
- Exchange with **existing platforms and networks** is very important - just to give a few examples:
  - The **International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)** regularly cooperates with PA 1A, 4, 5 and 6, paying particular attention to the realisation of the ICPDR-EUSDR PA 4 & PA 5 Coordination Joint Paper on Cooperation and Synergy for the EUSDR Implementation<sup>35</sup>.
  - The **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** pursued continuous exchange with EUSDR stakeholders, e.g. for preparing a public hearing on *Economic Convergence and Competitiveness within Macro-Regions-Transnational Clusters* prepared in 2018 and adopted in June 2019<sup>36</sup>.
  - PA 6 pursues exchange with actors of the Alpine-Danube-Carpathian **ecological corridor ADC-NET**, international organisations (Carpathian Convention, Alpine Convention) and stakeholder networks (Danubeparks, ALPARC).
  - PA 9 and PA 10 organised network meetings with **ESF Managing Authorities** in May 2017 and September 2018.
- Progress was also achieved regarding **cross-MRS cooperation**, for further details see chapter 3.3.
- **Interact** plays a special role in supporting cross-MRS exchange, coordination and collaboration and in this function organised several events dedicated to cross-cutting / horizontal or thematic issues during 2016-2018:

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([https://danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/EUSDR\\_Consolidated-Input-Documents\\_AP-Revision\\_2019\\_DSP\\_v1.pdf](https://danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/EUSDR_Consolidated-Input-Documents_AP-Revision_2019_DSP_v1.pdf)).

The revised Action Plan is expected to be published by EC / DG REGIO until early 2020.

<sup>32</sup> See also EC’s second report on MRS (SWD(2019) 21 final)

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.emtm-tool.org/>

<sup>34</sup> [http://cotamp.gis.si/attractive\\_danube/](http://cotamp.gis.si/attractive_danube/)

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.icpdr.org/main/resources/joint-paper-cooperation-and-synergy-eusdr-implementation>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/>



Table 4: Cross-MRS events and activities, facilitated by Interact 2016-2018 (Baiba Liepa, Interact<sup>37</sup>)

Type	Date	Focus
Cross-cutting / horizontal issues, like communication, embedding and capacity building	13-14/02/2018	<a href="#">Meeting of Macro-Regional Representatives on Capacity Building Issues in the EU Macro-Regional Strategies</a>
	18/09/2018	<a href="#">Message in a Bottle: Communication across Macro-Regional Strategies</a>
	28/09/2018	Working Group Meetings: Building a Common Capacity Building Environment for
	12-13/12/2018	Enhanced Implementation of the EU Macro-Regional Strategies
Thematic cross-MRS coordinators / stakeholders meetings	14-15/03/2017	Cross-MRS meeting of thematic coordinators: <a href="#">Joint Meeting of Transport Coordinators of the EU macro-regional strategies</a>
	16-17/11/2017	Cross-MRS Meeting of Thematic Coordinators: <a href="#">Joint Meeting of Macro-Regional Coordinators on Climate and Disaster Risk Reduction</a>
	29-30/11/2017	Cross-MRS Meeting of Thematic Coordinators: <a href="#">2nd Joint Meeting of Transport Coordinators of the EU Macro-Regional Strategies</a>
	19/04/2018	Cross-MRS Meeting of Thematic Coordinators: <a href="#">First Macro-Regional Strategies' Workshop on Water</a>
	20-21/09/2018	Cross-MRS Meeting of Thematic Coordinators: Report from the Meeting of Coordinators Dealing with Social Policies in Macro-Regional Strategies (report available upon request)
Exchanges across Interreg transnational programmes dedicated to support EU macro-regional strategies (upon invitation only)	26/05/2016, 08/11/2017, 02/03/2018, 28/06/2018	Meeting of Interreg Transnational Programmes and DG REGIO Regarding Support to the EU Macro-Regional Strategies
	29/11/2018	Joint Meeting of Chairpersons of the National Coordinators Groups for the EU Macro-Regional Strategies and the Monitoring Committees of Interreg Transnational Programmes (summary report available upon request)
Video	04/01/2017	<a href="#">Transnational Programmes and EU Macro-Regional Strategies. What is the Difference?</a>
European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC)	09/10/2018	EWRC 2018: <a href="#">Macro-Regional Strategies as Innovative Cooperation Platforms for Cities and Regions</a>
Annual Fora of the EU macro-regional strategies workshop		<i>During the reporting period Interact has been organising and co-organising workshops in the framework of the Annual Fora of the EUSBSR, EUSDR and EUSAIR.</i>
Promoting / explaining coordination and cooperation		<i>Interact has been actively working with Interreg programmes promoting coordination across programmes to better address common challenges. The activity is also directly linked to work on MRS. More information available <a href="#">here</a>.</i>
	26-28/04/2017	<i>Interreg Annual Event 2017: Workshop 2: How can Interreg Programmes Contribute to and Benefit from the EU Macro-Regional Strategies?</i>
Promoting / explaining MRS		<i>Interact is actively contributing to various MRS events explaining and promoting the MRS concept.</i>
		<i>Interact publications can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</i>

<sup>37</sup> Further information and most recent activities of Interact can be followed here: <http://www.interact-eu.net/>

### Emphasises at High-Level Group meetings 2016-2018

In the period 2016-2018, several meetings of the **High-Level Group (HLG) of Macro-Regional Strategies**, consisting of official representatives of all EU member states, took place regularly. For instance, the HLG meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2016 in Brussels, was dedicated to reviewing the progress and to discussing future developments in the implementation of MRS, embracing also the new/updated targets which were adopted at the NC-PAC meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> May 2016. The HLG meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2017 in Brussels focused on the *EC's first report on the implementation of MRS*, embracing reflections of HLG members and from the perspective of the European Parliament. On 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018, another HLG meeting took place in Brussels, focussing on the elaboration of the *EC's second report on the implementation of MRS*, opinions of the Committee of Regions (CoR)<sup>38</sup> and the European Parliament on the implementation of MRS and EU Cohesion Policy after 2020.

## 2.3. Developments and Achievements in Priority Areas

Taking into account the above described developments on EUSDR core governance level, this section provides summary information on how Priority Areas have addressed their targets through activities and achievements in the period of 2016-2018. Progress made within the Priority Areas is displayed along the three impact relevant dimensions of (1) cooperation & policy embedding, (2) highlights and (3) projects – implementation & monitoring. Along these three levels, activities, initiatives or projects are presented as examples of good practice. By means of this summary PA developments and achievements can be communicated at a transnational and political level (among different PAs or to other MRS) in order to enhance EUSDR visibility and to generate added value.<sup>39</sup>

### 2.3.1. Pillar 1 “Connecting the Danube Region”

#### PA 1A: Waterways Mobility

##### Cooperation & policy embedding

In December 2018 the activities of PA 1A Waterways Mobility for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time were seized in **ministerial conclusions**<sup>40</sup> in which Danube Transport Ministers agreed to step up the implementation of the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan for the Danube and its navigable tributaries. Hence, the series of conclusions directly related to the PA's activities, which started in 2012 and were perpetuated in 2014 and 2016<sup>40</sup>, were successfully brought forward. PA 1A thus continuously feeds the policy process with technical input for further policy decisions in the field of Danube navigation. In this sense PA 1A priorities are well embedded in the political agenda.

PA 1A closely cooperates with the European Commission (especially with DG MOVE, DG REGIO) to secure policy coherency and strives for maintaining and deepening strong links with other stakeholders

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<sup>38</sup> <https://cor.europa.eu>

<sup>39</sup> The summaries presented are based on reports submitted by Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) and National Coordinators (NCs), substantiated by research undertaken by DSP on PAC websites.

<sup>40</sup> <https://navigation.danube-region.eu/documents/>



(e.g. representatives of business industry, river commissions, environmental stakeholders), and policy programmes and platforms such as NAIADES<sup>41</sup> and PLATINA<sup>42</sup>.

### Highlights

In the framework of coordinated waterway rehabilitation and maintenance activities, a specific focus was put on advancing the **Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan** until 2020 – which was endorsed by all Danube riparian states (except Hungary) in 2014. One main aim of this master plan is to significantly increase the knowledge on shallow sections of the Danube waterway for optimising the fairway routes and for drafting rehabilitation measures. Results are being monitored through the bi-annual National Action Plans, created in the framework of the *FAIRway Danube* project<sup>43</sup> together with PA 1A. Another main emphasis was put on the **reduction of administrative bottlenecks (“red tape”) in Danube navigation**<sup>44</sup>, supported by a joint working group of PA 1A and PA 11. PA 1A and PA 11 jointly developed a working group and work plan in order to identify steps for optimising administrative processes connected to Danube navigation, for instance by harmonising administrative forms, which shall finally result in lower waiting times and more effective control procedures in Danube navigation. Progress was also achieved regarding other thematic priorities, i.e. further developing River Information Services (RIS), contributing to the Good Navigation Status concept, supporting the update of Rhine-Danube corridor work plans or contributions to the working group on professional qualifications.

In December 2018 the **Transport Conference on Joint Efforts for the Mobility on the Danube** took place in Kiev, used as an opportunity to shape Ukraine’s priorities within PA 1A. In the framework of the **3<sup>rd</sup> Danube Business Talks** in October 2018, an international expert audience discussed how to make better use of the strengths of the Danube waterway.

### Projects – implementation & monitoring

In 2017 the PA 1A **project database** was relaunched – monitoring currently more than 130 projects, ranging from project ideas to already implemented projects. Six projects are considered as projects of strategic value and are partly monitored by PA 1A (*FAIRway Danube*, *Energy Barge*<sup>45</sup>, *Danube SKILLS*, *DAPhNE*, *DANTE*, and *DanubeSTREAM*). Furthermore, PA 1A issued Letters of Recommendation to six project initiatives in 2018, attesting their strategic relevance (*COIN*, *Plastic Free Danube*, *DAREM*, *Iron Gate 1*, *MEASURES* and *GRENDDEL*<sup>46</sup>). Generally, project initiatives within the thematic scope of PA 1A demonstrate a high success rate when it comes to accepted project applications.

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<sup>41</sup> NAIADES - EU action programme to develop waterway transport (<http://www.inlandnavigation.eu/what-we-do/eu-waterway-transport/>)

<sup>42</sup> PLATINA is a multi-disciplinary platform for relevant actors in the inland-waterway sector, supporting the implementation of NAIADES (<http://naiades.info/what-we-do/about-platina-ii/>).

<sup>43</sup> See Annex 2, p.1; further information: <https://navigation.danube-region.eu/projects>; [www.fairwaydanube.eu](http://www.fairwaydanube.eu)

<sup>44</sup> Further information: <https://navigation.danube-region.eu/>

<sup>45</sup> See Annex 2, p.5

<sup>46</sup> See Annex 2, p.2/14

## PA 1B: Rail-Road-Air Mobility

### Cooperation & policy embedding

In September 2017 **Joint Conclusions** were adopted at the *High Level Meeting on Transport Study for the Danube Macro-Region* in Belgrade, in the presence of 13 participating EUSDR countries. At several occasions a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** was signed, such as the MoU for the *Alpine-Western Balkan Rail Freight Corridor* in 2015, being confirmed by the *Commission Implementation Decision (EU) 2018/500* in March 2018<sup>47</sup>. Another Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) was signed with the Carpathian Convention in June 2016<sup>48</sup>. Moreover, a MoU was signed between the *Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Serbia* and the *Ministry of Infrastructure of the Republic of Slovenia* in October 2016, underlining the need to continue effective cooperation as concerns mobility and multimodality.

PA 1B closely cooperated with the EC and is involved in monitoring the work related to the “Core TEN-T Corridors” and to the “Eastern Partnership Transport Panel”. Furthermore, exchange of experience is pro-actively pursued with other MRS, namely the EUSAIR and the EUSALP.

### Highlights

The identified priorities were further pursued. In the fields of road transport, a specific focus was put on linking secondary and tertiary roads to the TEN-T network, road maintenance and road safety. Further emphasis was put on rail freight transport and air connectivity and functional airspace blocks. In horizontal terms, intermodal terminal and better logistic services, digitalisation in the transport sector and sustainable mobility in urban areas were also high on the agenda.

Several steps were undertaken to achieve concrete results: For instance, the study **Transport Analysis for the Danube Region (TAD)** was completed in 2017, focussing on projects with added value for the Danube Region and being also discussed in the framework of the aforementioned High Level meeting. In 2018, the publications **Transport Study for the Danube Macro-Region (Final Report)**, **Transport Infrastructure in the Danube Region – Road Links** and the **Study of Intermodal Transport Users’ Needs** were published<sup>49</sup>.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference on **Transport & Logistics of South East Europe and the Danube Region (TIL)** took place in Belgrade in April 2017 and March 2018. In November 2017 a **workshop on the resilience of infrastructures** was organised in cooperation with UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe<sup>50</sup>) in Ljubljana (SI) in order to establish a nexus to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as formulated by the UN. Furthermore, the 4<sup>th</sup> stakeholder conference “**Danube Region Transportation Days (DRTD)**” took place in December 2018 in Ljubljana.

### Projects – implementation & monitoring

PA 1B accompanies and monitors several ongoing projects and is partially involved as Associated Partner for assuring the strategic relevance of projects (e.g. Linking Danube, CityWalk, RADAR, TRANSGREEN, upgrade of the Karawanks Motorway Tunnel and the railway connection between Belgrade and Budapest – see Annex 2, p.3/4). Furthermore, PA 1B supported multiple consortia during

<sup>47</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec\\_impl/2018/500/oj](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2018/500/oj)

<sup>48</sup> [http://www.carpathianconvention.org/tl\\_files/carpathiancon/Downloads/](http://www.carpathianconvention.org/tl_files/carpathiancon/Downloads/)

<sup>49</sup> <https://transport.danube-region.eu/publications>

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/main/SDGs/Develop\\_Resilient\\_Infrastructure/C-Hasswel\\_UNECE-Transport-SDGs.pdf](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/main/SDGs/Develop_Resilient_Infrastructure/C-Hasswel_UNECE-Transport-SDGs.pdf)

the project development phase, e.g. by issuing Letters of Alignment. In 2017, PA 1B identified **23 key projects** which are either ongoing or in the pre-construction phase<sup>51</sup>.

## PA 2: Sustainable Energy

### Cooperation & policy embedding

PA 2 has been in close collaboration with the Energy Community and actively supported the establishment of the **Central and South Eastern Europe Gas Connectivity**<sup>52</sup> (CESEC) initiative. In November 2016 PA 2 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the **Carpathian Convention**<sup>53</sup> for enhancing future cooperation and exchange.

For exploiting synergies across MRS, thematic alignment with stakeholders of other MRS, such as the EUSBSR (and Interact), was fostered. PA 2 also strived to enhance exchange of experience with other EUSDR Priority Areas, such as PA 1B, PA 3, PA 4, PA 5, PA 6 and PA 9, and to steadily enhance cooperation with relevant stakeholders in the energy field.

### Highlights

During the period 2016-2018 specific emphasis was put on energy security, the gas market and gas infrastructure as well as on efforts in diversification of energy supply routes and sources (e.g. geothermics). For enriching discussions on energy issues and agenda setting, which is subject to significant change already in a medium-term perspective, stakeholder seminars were organised annually. Building upon the 3<sup>rd</sup> stakeholder conference which took place in 2016, PA 2 issued a **Position Paper on LNG** (liquefied natural gas). In 2018 PA 2 published a **Position Paper of Gas Market Integration** in the Danube Region considering relevant lessons learned and experience gained.

In the same year the **newly drafted PA 2 roadmap** was adopted by SG members, aiming at achieving national targets based on the *Europe 2030 Climate and Energy targets*, removing existing bottlenecks in energy and fulfilling the goals of the *Energy Union* within the Danube Region an better interconnecting regions by joint activities with relevant initiatives and institutions. In 2017 a **Study on Green Transportation**<sup>54</sup> was published, focussing on renewable energy sources in the transport field. In this context several events on renewable energy were organised.

Ensuing the aforementioned MoU signed with the Carpathian Convention, a joint workshop titled “Bioenergy in Mountain Areas” was organised in May 2017 in Sopron. The main focus of the year 2018 was put on **clean transportation** in the Danube Region, **smart cities** and **waste-to-energy production** with thematically related studies on clean connectivity and challenges, risks and opportunities of the natural gas sector in the Danube Region. Also, the 5<sup>th</sup> Stakeholder Seminar, which took place in Budapest (HU) in December 2018, was dedicated to green transportation in the Danube Region.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://transport.danube-region.eu/projects/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/infrastructure/high-level-groups/central-and-south-eastern-europe-energy-connectivity>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://energy.danube-region.eu/publications/>

Further concrete outputs were generated in the context of the CESEC initiative<sup>55</sup>, i.e. by commissioning gas market studies and policy briefs<sup>56</sup>.

Furthermore, PA 2 runs a stakeholder database, which is continuously developed. The stakeholder database contains numerous active contacts and is used for invitations to events, activities and newsletters.

### Projects – implementation & monitoring

PA 2 has been involved in the selection of PEI (Projects of Energy Community's Interest) projects. In the CESEC context, PA 2 actively contributed to the identification of relevant projects (e.g. LNG terminal, gas interconnectors), which primarily contributed to the security of energy supply. One regional cooperation project was accompanied during the project generation phase throughout the implementation as project partner, namely *DARLINGe*, dedicated to geothermal energy use in the region. In addition to that, PA 2 supported and followed closely the implementation of two projects within the DTP framework, namely *3Smart*<sup>57</sup> which aims at providing a technological and legislative setup for cross-spanning energy management of buildings, grids and major city infrastructures in the Danube Region; and *Energy Barge*<sup>58</sup> in the field of green energy exploitation from biomass along the Danube river. Moreover three projects supported by PA 2 were funded in the 1<sup>st</sup> Seed Money Facility Call.

## PA 3: Culture & Tourism



### Cooperation & policy embedding

PA 3 is in regular exchange with representatives from local and regional authorities, NGOs, academia and the civil society and actively contributes to thematically related events. Nonetheless, a wider involvement of stakeholders is still to be strengthened. The cooperation with other PAs is envisaged to be further deepened, too. Furthermore, the Strategy and its objectives have been increasingly integrated into national political frameworks in recent years such as national development programmes and strategies as well as into territorial cross-border cooperation programmes.

### Highlights

Significant efforts were undertaken for advancing all PA 3 targets. For instance, progress was achieved regarding the development and advancement of **cultural routes**<sup>59</sup>. In this context, a public debate on the macro-regional approach on culture was organised in November 2017 in Bucharest (RO), particularly for better involving civil society. Further attention was paid to the development of **clusters and networks of museums** and to the promotion of exchange and networking in the field of **contemporary arts** as well as to the creation of a “Blue Book” on **Danube Cultural Identity**. The **Danube Culture Platform** project was launched to initiate a multi-level cultural policy network, serving as a flagship initiative for building upon cultural diversity as a strength of the Danube Region.

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<sup>55</sup> Central and South-Eastern European Energy Connectivity (CESEC)

<sup>56</sup> See also: Thematic Overview of the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum of the EU-Strategy for the Danube and Jirušek M. / Vlček T. (2017): Challenges and Opportunities of Natural Gas Market Integration in the Danube Region (both available here: <https://energy.danube-region.eu/publications/>)

<sup>57</sup> See Annex 2, p.6

<sup>58</sup> See Annex 2, p.5

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes>

Many projects of the Danube Transnational Programme are associated with the field of **tourism**, dedicated to tourism infrastructure, sustainable or wellness tourism – and are, therefore, considered as relevant for PA 3. The fact that culture contributes to sustainable social and economic development and that cultural and linguistic diversity is a key asset of the EU and its protection and promotion is central to cultural policy at European level, was and should continue to be reflected in projects focusing on PA 3 targets.

Within the Priority Area, specific emphasis was put on advancing a harmonised monitoring system in order to generate solid data on tourism. With regards to outreaching activities, a **conference on tourism and energy** was held in May 2017 in Sofia (BG) with a second panel held in May 2018 in Sofia (BG).

#### Projects – implementation & monitoring

In their efforts to provide a solid basis for the *Seed Money Facility Call*<sup>60</sup> under DTP in 2017, PA 3 coordinated consultations to prioritise topics among PA stakeholders. Based upon an evaluative review, PA 3 issued a Declaration of Alignment to 18 out of 19 project proposals. Out of these 18 proposals three projects were selected for funding. Inter alia, nine transnational projects (DTP) are under implementation (e.g. *ART NOUVEAU*<sup>61</sup>, *IRON-AGE-DANUBE*, *DANUrB*, *TransDanubePearls*, *INSiGHTS*). The DTP-funded project *CultPlatForm\_21* (Danube Culture Platform) was considered as an EUSDR strategic project and above that, was labelled by the European Commission as a relevant project for the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018<sup>62</sup>. Another DTP-funded transnational project was *RARE - Changing Discourses, Changing Practices: The Roma as Human Resource* which was finalised in August 2019. Finally, giving an example at lower territorial level, PA 3 accompanies the project *Danube Ecotourism*, which is implemented under INTERREG VA Bulgaria-Romania. At the national level, Romania has also implemented a series of projects under PA 3 Target 5 *The Blue Book on Cultural Identity: “Diversity and cultural heritage from media perspective. Cultural heritage in the context of European Year of Cultural Heritage. Documenting visit and exchange of good practices for journalists and experts from the Danube Region”*.

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.interreg-danube.eu/calls/calls-for-proposals/seed-money-facility-call>

<sup>61</sup> See Annex 2, p.7

<sup>62</sup> Among 8 DTP projects in total labelled by the EC as relevant for the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018; more on *CultPlatForm\_21*: Annex 2, p.8 and [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/projects/europe/bringing-the-danube-regions-hidden-histories-and-culture-to-life](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/europe/bringing-the-danube-regions-hidden-histories-and-culture-to-life)

## 2.3.2. Pillar 2 “Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region”

### PA 4: Water Quality



#### Cooperation & policy embedding

PA 4 continued and extended the cooperation with other PAs (PA 1A, PA 5, PA 6, PA 7, PA 10) and with European and international organisations such as ICPDR, ISRBC, World Bank, IAWD, JRC, GWP and Carpathian Convention. PA 4 continued close cooperation with ICPDR – based on the "ICPDR - Joint paper on Cooperation and Synergy for the EUSDR" adopted in 2014. Beginning with 2018, PA 4 and ICPDR jointly developed policy support measures related to preserving water quality and conducted activities targeting relevant stakeholders in the Danube Region in the sectors of water and agriculture. In this respect, PA 4 tackled the issue of nutrient pollution of waters caused by agriculture by organising the workshop „Trust-building between Water and Agriculture Sectors in the Danube Region” and issuing the brochure “Effective reduction of diffuse water pollution by nutrients from agricultural land”. In 2018 PA 4 and ICPDR also organized a common workshop to discuss the water quality related challenges for the next 10 years. Furthermore, in September 2018 PA 4 organised the workshop “New experience in implementation of Article 4.7 of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) in the Danube Region” in order to share experience in this field.

Also, in order to facilitate coordination with the Carpathian Convention PA 4 signed the „*Memorandum of Cooperation between the Carpathian Convention and EUSDR PA 04 Water Quality*” in 2016<sup>63</sup>. Moreover, in 2018 PA 4 made first steps towards setting up cooperation among macro-regional strategies by organising a first macro-regional workshop on water issues together with Interact. At EUSDR level, PA 4 organised the event „*Pillar B Joint Stakeholder Seminar*” in 2017<sup>64</sup>. PA 4 also closely cooperates with the European Commission DG ENV.

During dedicated events, civil society was encouraged to actively participate in the implementation of EUSDR PA 4 by communicating and exchanging views on the needs and challenges of the Danube Region.

#### Highlights

PA 4 facilitated the incorporation of the requirements of the Water Framework Directive into national plans and into the Danube River Basin Management Plan (DRBMP). Important steps forward were taken, targeting the reduction of water nutrient levels stemming from agriculture, but also in the preparation of the integrated Tisza River Basin Management Plan and securing viable populations of Danube sturgeon species via issuing a Letter of Support to the Danube Sturgeon Task Force in 2017.

Thematic events such as „Effective Utilization of Water Resources in the Conditions of Climate Change (Drought and Water Scarcity)” and “Water – Non-alternative Source for Life” (both in Bratislava in 2016) aimed at finding possible solutions for current challenges identified in the Danube Region.

At the same time, PA 4 Coordinators focused their attention towards providing different kinds of stakeholders with comprehensive overviews on objectives, targets and activities of PA 4 and on available funding instruments during several seminars and conferences (e.g. the *side event on transboundary water cooperation within the Budapest Water Summit* (2016) in collaboration with PA

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/>

<sup>64</sup> The 4 EUSDR Pillars are commonly referred to as Pillars 1-4 or Pillars A-B (see Table 1).



5, the *Conference on Funding the Danube Strategy* in 2017 and an event on *Funding Opportunities for Pillar II of the EUSDR* in 2017). Their efforts to increase the visibility of the Priority Area consisted not only in permanently updating the website<sup>65</sup>, but also in publishing articles in dedicated magazines (Water Management Journal, Hungarian Journal of Hydrology) and elaborating and disseminating the brochure “*What is new in the update of Drinking Water Directive?*”.

In 2018 PA 4 organised an International Danube Day event on plastic pollution and a workshop on Water Framework Directive exemptions.

#### Projects – implementation & monitoring

PA 4 Coordinators channelled their efforts into setting up project consortia, exploring funding opportunities and developing new projects in order to be able to achieve the PA 4 targets and to implement the actions aiming at maintenance and restoration of water quality in the Danube River Basin.

The flagship projects of PA 4 – *DanubeSediment* and *JOINTISZA*<sup>66</sup> financed by the Danube Transnational Programme were important milestones in achieving the target concerning the management objectives set out in the Danube River Basin Management Plan. PA 4 assisted in the preparation of those projects too. Other important projects, also financed by the Danube Transnational Programme are: *Camaro-D*, *Dri-Danube*, *Danube Floodplain*, *SIMONA*, *MEASURES* and *DAREFFORT*<sup>67</sup>.

Relevant projects for PA 4 were financed by Interreg Central Europe (*DEEPWATER*; *PROLINE*; *FRAMWAT*), CBC programmes (HUSKROUA CBC – project *REVITAL I*) and DSPF (project *Danube Hazard*).

9 Letters of Recommendations (LoR) for projects on regional or basin-wide level were issued in the period 2016-2018 and a LoR leaflet for project owners to support their cooperation with EUSDR was prepared.

In 2018, PA 4 and PA 7 prepared a project proposal on increasing public awareness concerning water importance – *WATERFOREVER*, submitted in EEA and Norway Grants Mechanism.

By leading the capitalisation process under DTP “Water Management Pole”, PA 4 Coordinators were able to obtain a better overview of the activities within DTP, to enhance connections between the stakeholders implementing different projects, and to enable the exchange of knowledge and ideas for better use of project results.

Supporting project capitalisation PA 4 and PA 5 jointly organised an international conference session during the Hungarian Hydrological Society’s Annual Assembly in Mosonmagyaróvár (HU, 2017) and as a result published a special issue on best practices in flood protection and water management in the Hungarian Journal of Hydrology (10/2017).

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<sup>65</sup> <https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/>

<sup>66</sup> See Annex 2, p.10

<sup>67</sup> See Annex 2, p.11

## PA 5: Environmental Risks



### Cooperation & policy embedding

Apart from the continuous cooperation at EUSDR Pillar 2 level, an important part of PA 5 activities focused on intensifying the cooperation in the field of climate change and disaster risk reduction with a wide variety of relevant EU and worldwide institutions and organisations. As a result, in 2017 PA 5 signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* with the Carpathian Convention<sup>68</sup> with the aim of harmonising efforts at the upstream/mountainous regions of the Danube basin. Beginning with the second half of 2017, PA 5 started to collaborate with Global Water Partnership CEE on matters related to their *Integrated Drought Management Programme for the Better Management of Drought and Water Scarcity Issues in the Danube River Basin*. At the same time, PA 5 continued close cooperation with ICPDR – based on the "ICPDR - Joint paper on Cooperation and Synergy for the EUSDR" adopted in 2014 – in order to join forces for the implementation of the Danube Flood Risk Management Plan and for the revision of the ICPDR Climate Change Adaptation Study<sup>69</sup> and the preparation of the Danube Region Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. In addition, PA 5 collaborates with JRC on the improvements of the European Flood Awareness System.

PA 5 made remarkable steps towards establishing a basin-wide network of flood protection education, identified as one of the main challenges by EUSDR PA 5 experts in 2015 and emphasised by the Flood Risk Management Plan of the Danube River Basin District as well. As a first step, in 2016 a *Collaboration Framework Agreement* was signed between Hungarian and Bavarian universities and expanded with Slovakian and Serbian higher education (HEIs) and VET institutes. Furthermore, the submission of the *InterFloodCourse* project was supported.

The cooperation with the three other macro-regional strategies on risk management and climate change issues started at the end of 2017 with a workshop held in Budapest (HU) and continued in 2018 with a conference session of the EU Civil Protection Forum organised in Brussels.

### Highlights

As mentioned above, in 2018 PA 5 supported with its expertise the revision of the ICPDR Climate Change Adaptation Study and the preparation of the Danube Region Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. Also, following the Hungarian NCs the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was activated by DG ECHO (June 2016) in case the abandoned Solotvyno salt mine in Ukraine would cause risk for the water quality of the Tisza river and for the local communities.

### Projects – implementation & monitoring

Given the importance of the projects for attaining PA 5 targets and finding innovative solutions to specific challenges identified in the Danube Region, 17 Letters of Recommendations (LoR)<sup>70</sup> for projects on regional or basin-wide level were issued between 2016 and 2018 and a LoR leaflet for project owners to help their cooperation with EUSDR was prepared. Some of the most relevant projects implemented from 2016 to 2018 are financed by the Danube Transnational Programme

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<sup>68</sup> <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/>

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.icpdr.org/main/activities-projects/climate-change-adaptation>

<sup>70</sup> The full list of LoR is available at: <http://environmentalrisks.danube-region.eu/projects/pa5-letter-of-recommendation-lor/>



(JOINTISZA<sup>71</sup>, Danube Sediment<sup>72</sup> and DriDanube<sup>73</sup>, DAREFFORT<sup>74</sup>, Danube Floodplain), CBC Programmes (WateratRisk, Platform, Raab Flood4cast, Seddon II, East Avert), DSPF (InterFloodCourse) START (Morchflood, E-Flood Platform) in the fields of improved education, flood forecasting, floodplain and sediment management, drought and water scarcity addressing the whole region or sub-catchments of the Danube (e.g Raab, Lajta/Leitha, Tisza/Tisa, Prut, Siret). Furthermore, with support of PA 5 six project initiatives were submitted to the 1<sup>st</sup> DTP Seed Money Facility Call.

Supporting project capitalisation, PA 4 and PA 5 jointly organised an international conference session during the Hungarian Hydrological Society's Annual Assembly in Mosonmagyaróvár (HU, 2017) and as a result published a special issue on best practices in flood protection and water management in the Hungarian Journal of Hydrology (10/2017). A special issue of the Journal of Environmental Geography a peer-reviewed scientific journal on "Climate change adaptation in the Danube Region" was prepared and financed by PA 5 in 2018.

## PA 6: Biodiversity, Landscapes and the Quality of Air and Soils



### Cooperation & policy embedding

For fostering the consideration of biodiversity and nature protection topics in economic and spatial development, PA 6 proactively pursued the exchange with PA 1A, PA 1B, PA 2, PA3, PA 8 and PA 11. Moreover, a Memorandum of Cooperation<sup>75</sup> was signed between the **Carpathian Convention** and EUSDR PA 6 in November 2017. In general, progress was made in several policy fields: **The Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF)**, which is one of seven Task Forces of PA 6, proved to be a recognised player for sturgeon conservation in the Danube Region – particularly in policy terms. For instance, a working meeting titled "Sturgeon Conference" took place in November 2018, at the premises of DG REGIO as host and with participation of DG ENV, DG MARE, UNEP, EEB and sturgeon experts from the Danube Region. In the field of **ecological connectivity**, exchange was pursued with DG ENV and EUSALP stakeholders. For exploiting cross-MRS synergies, i.e. via future workshops, PA 6 initiated regular exchange with Interact and EUSALP stakeholders.

Moreover, PA 6 continues the approach of vertical (local, regional, national, EU) and horizontal (civil society, NGOs, scientific community, policy level) integration in various fields by its Task Forces, which are generally open to any stakeholder interested in the topic and willing to contribute to the implementation of the respective work programme. The stakeholder circle involved in the advancement of the **Masterplan Living Space Bavarian Danube** was further broadened and enriched by taking agricultural stakeholders on board.

### Highlights

All PA 6 activities are aligned to the PA 6 targets. As the **Masterplan Living Space Bavarian Danube** was finalised in 2017<sup>76</sup>, the implementation of identified measures started in 2018 and will be pursued in 2019. A study on **Ecological Connectivity in the Danube Region**<sup>77</sup> was published in 2018, embracing

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<sup>71</sup> See Annex 2, p.10

<sup>72</sup> See Annex 2, p.9

<sup>73</sup> See Annex 2, p.12

<sup>74</sup> See Annex 2, p.11

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/>

<sup>76</sup> [https://www.stmuv.bayern.de/ministerium/eu/makroregionale/doc/masterplan\\_eu-donauraumstrategie.pdf](https://www.stmuv.bayern.de/ministerium/eu/makroregionale/doc/masterplan_eu-donauraumstrategie.pdf)

<sup>77</sup> PA 6 (2018): Study on Ecological Connectivity in the Danube Region: <https://nature.danube-region.eu/files/>

feasible solutions for implementing green infrastructure in the Danube River Basin. Already in 2017 a thematically related expert seminar took place, among others involving DG ENV and EUSALP representatives (AG 7). In March 2018 around 100 experts, stakeholders and policy makers gathered at the international seminar **Danube Ecological Corridor** in Budapest (Hungary), particularly focusing on potentials for improving ecological connectivity and green infrastructure in the Danube River Basin.

Also in 2018, a study on **Ecosystem Services in the Danube Region**<sup>78</sup> was published, particularly dedicated to a better and more sustainable use of natural resources. Moreover, further steps were undertaken towards finalising the **Danube Region Invasive Alien Species Strategy (DIAS Strategy)**, for instance during a meeting of the Danube Region Invasive Alien Species Network in December 2018 in Sofia (BG).

#### Projects – implementation & monitoring

PA 6 is constantly cooperating with thematic core stakeholders and representatives of ongoing projects (e.g. *DANUBE parksCONNECTED*<sup>79</sup>, *LENA*, *SONDAR*, *ConnectGreen*, *SavaTIES*, *Dare2Connect*, *MEASURES*<sup>80</sup>) and is actively contributing to project development (e.g. *CONSPIRO*). The aforementioned study also shed light on potential project ideas for enhancing ecological connectivity in the Danube Region, which will partially result in project proposals to be submitted in DTP calls.

Furthermore, PA 6 is acting as Associated Strategic Partner in the DTP project *DaRe2Connect*, which is focusing on connecting habitats and Natura 2000 areas along the "Green Belt Europe". PA 6 also contributed to the DTP Thematic Seminar in Bucharest in December 2018 (in the framework of the 3<sup>rd</sup> DTP Call for Proposals) with a presentation on the topic of ecological corridors.

### 2.3.3. Pillar 3 “Building Prosperity in the Danube Region”

#### PA 7: Knowledge Society



##### Cooperation & policy embedding

Cooperation among education and research institutions in the Danube Region was further deepened and joint activities were launched on EU level. Continuous exchange was pursued with the Danube Rectors' Conference, JP Urban Europe, Erasmus+, SAIA, EUREKA, DTP and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions under Horizon 2020. Particularly with COST possible modes for enhanced future cooperation were jointly examined – thematic workshops will be carried out together. The newly envisaged cooperation within CEEPUS aims at contributing to better connections among universities (as well as research entities and private companies) via enhanced mobility.

In order to anchor PA 7 emphases in future funding schemes, a position paper for the upcoming EU-funding period was elaborated in November 2018, particularly focusing on Horizon Europe<sup>81</sup>. In December 2018 PA 7, PA 8 and PA 9 issued joint proposals for better embedding the EUSDR's Prosperity Pillar into suitable funding instruments in the upcoming funding period 2021-2027 and thus

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<sup>78</sup> PA 6 (2018): Study on Ecosystem Services in the Danube Region: <https://nature.danube-region.eu/files/>

<sup>79</sup> See Annex 2, p.13

<sup>80</sup> See Annex 2, p.14

<sup>81</sup> <https://knowledgesociety.danube-region.eu/>

made an effort to foster a comprehensive funding approach across thematically related Priority Areas<sup>82</sup>.

### Highlights

To increase the effectiveness of investment in Research and Innovation (R&I) by better coordinating funding mechanisms multilaterally in the Danube Region, the **Danube Funding Coordination Network** (DFCN) was established in May 2016<sup>83</sup>. Its core outcome is the coordination and synchronisation of national, bilateral and regional efforts in the Danube Region to foster multilateral collaboration in Research and Innovation. Furthermore, a COST Connect event on “Sustainable Energy in the Danube Region” was carried out in Belgrade (RS) in October 2018.

Significant progress was made in developing **regional innovation strategies for smart specialisation** (RIS3) in Serbia, Moldova, Ukraine and slightly later also Montenegro – strongly supported by the Joint Research Centre (JRC). For instance, a RIS3 event took place in Serbia, with the aim of exploring expectations of stakeholders from industry, academia and administration in view of future activities on RIS3 design. Furthermore, Danube Region stakeholders took part in the “Multi-Country Workshop on Smart Specialisation” in November 2018 in Brussels, organised by TAEX.

In the context of PA 7, the **Danubius Awards** are awarded annually for honouring outstanding research achievements in the Danube Region<sup>84</sup>. In the field of **social innovation** PA 7 facilitated progress concerning cross-project capitalisation (see also below). This also comprises social innovation in collaborative research for boosting participation of public and civil society in designing and managing EU policies.

### Projects – implementation & monitoring

PACs, WG and SG members remained active in seeking funding possibilities for PA 7 actions, and the improvement of the projects’ recognition, support and selection. PA 7 actively contributed to four thematic poles of the DTP Capitalisation Strategy, aiming at linking DTP projects for identifying synergies (e.g. *InnoSchool*, *InDeed*, *Danube Chance 2.0*). For instance, a meeting on “Educational Governance” took place in Bratislava in November 2018. Among others, several projects dedicated to social innovation were supported (e.g. *INT-VET* financed via Erasmus+, *Danube:Future* financed via CEI-KEP<sup>85</sup>). Further examples of important projects are for instance: *DREAM*, *HINO*, *DUAL EDUCATION*, *DO-IT*, *DANUBIUS*, *RESINFRA@DR* and *Excellence-in-ReST*<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> <https://knowledgesociety.danube-region.eu/>

<sup>83</sup> Building also upon outcomes of the DRRIF project (Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund, PA7 project, funded by the European Commission) and the Danube-INCO.NET project (FP7 project; <https://danube-inco.net/about/danubeinco.net>)

<sup>84</sup> The Danubius Young Scientist Award (<http://www.idm.at/projekte/preise/danubius-young-scientist-award>) is awarded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, in cooperation with the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM) and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRS).

<sup>85</sup> Central European Initiative Know-How Exchange Programme (CEI-KEP)

<sup>86</sup> See Annex 2, p.15/16

## PA 8: Competitiveness of Enterprises



### Cooperation & policy embedding

EUSDR PA 8 has contributed to a new dynamic in the cooperation between regional chambers of commerce in the Danube Region as well as between economic chambers and local public decision makers. Contacts between business representatives (chambers of commerce) with local public decision makers were intensified and led to easier implementation of projects. The *Memorandum of Cooperation* between the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ) and the Chamber of Commerce Serbia stands as an illustrative example. The established cooperation between the Croatian Chamber of Commerce (in their capacity of Presidency of the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce) and the Danube Chambers of Commerce Association might have positive effects for the business environment in the Danube Region. The cooperation was formalised through a *Memorandum of Understanding* signed in 2018.

In December 2018, PA 7, PA 8 and PA 9 jointly proposed a position paper on *Better Embedding of the EUSDR's Prosperity Pillar into Suitable Funding Instruments within the New MFF (2021-2027)*.

### Highlights

In order to improve business environment, strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs and enhance the participation of women entrepreneurs in economic activities PA 8 organised and/or supported relevant initiatives for the entire Danube Region: For example, the Danube Business Forum, focusing on "*Smart Cities in the Danube Region*" was organised in cooperation with the Economic Senate of Austria and the South European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) in 2016. Moreover, the *Danube Net Forum of Women Entrepreneurs* and the 4<sup>th</sup> *Cluster Workshop of the Working Group of PA 8* took place in Croatia. In 2017, PA 8 initiated the "*Danube Competitiveness in Practice Events*" with the aim to facilitate dialogue among stakeholders able to propose and promote relevant policy initiatives and projects. The first event, organised in cooperation with Enterprise Europe Network, reached approx. 200 stakeholders from different Danube Countries and took place in Hungary. The activities of the Coordinators aiming at higher political support were complemented by the work of the representatives in PA 8 Working Groups, especially the ones on digitalisation and on female entrepreneurship<sup>87</sup>.

### Projects – implementation & monitoring

Concerning the implementation and monitoring of projects, a wide range of activities was covered by PA 8 Coordinators - from facilitating a proper communication flow between different kinds of stakeholders to supporting the implementation of relevant projects and the efficient capitalisation of project results. Most of the transnational projects with focus in the area of socio-economic competitiveness were financed by the Danube Transnational Programme. For instance, the project *DanuBioValNet* contributed to boosting eco-innovation by developing a joint bio-based value-added network for the Danube Region. The project *Learning by doing* aimed at creating better tools to support long term transition of VET systems and the project *Made in Danube*<sup>88</sup> developed open innovation tools to match the needs of companies with the expertise of research organisations.

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<sup>87</sup> Also see project *Women in Business*: Annex 2, p.17

<sup>88</sup> See Annex 2, p.18

When it comes to representation in project development, PA 8 is a very attractive Priority Area. For instance, within the 1<sup>st</sup> Seed Money Facility Call of the Danube Transnational Programme, most applications (13 out of 65) were submitted within the thematic framework of PA 8.

## PA 9: People & Skills



### Cooperation & policy embedding

Throughout the reporting period PA 9 increased cooperation in the Danube Region in the fields of labour market and education and offered a useful framework in order to strengthen ongoing and enable future cooperation processes.

PA 9 in cooperation with PA 10 organised two *network meetings of the ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region* to discuss possibilities of future transnational cooperation - from transnational calls to project-tandems.

Also, PA 9 established and enlarged a network of different stakeholders stimulating efficient cooperation between relevant actors and to develop projects in the fields of people & skills (education and training, labour market, marginalised communities). For instance, PA 9 actively cooperated with ERI SEE, in particular in terms of activities within the “Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based Learning” in the framework of the Berlin Process<sup>89</sup>.

Within EUSDR Pillar 3, PA 9 acted as a catalyst, supporting synergies, facilitating knowledge sharing and emphasising the links with projects relevant for PA 7 and PA 8. The intra-pillar cooperation on issues concerning the funding resulted in the elaboration and promotion of the document *Better Embedding of the EUSDR's Prosperity Pillar into Suitable Funding Instruments within the New MFF (2021-2027)*. Also, close thematic cooperation with PA 10 and permanent exchange with the other MRS, especially EUSBSR, were considered as highly relevant.

### Highlights

In order to increase the evidence base for Danube Region policy-making, PA 9 initiated work on the monitoring-tool “Danube Region Monitor” comprising relevant indicators to reveal changes in the fields of education and training as well as labour market.

The Stakeholder Conferences organised each year by PA 9 created an extended framework for exchanges on topics of general interest such as new dynamics in socio-economic development, education policies, and the future of work and the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan. The annual thematic conference „Learning, Teaching, Exchanging – School Cooperations in the Danube Region”, taking place in Vienna, represented an important platform for collaboration between schools in the Danube Region.

Moreover, the thematic workshops held by PA 9 offered opportunities to further deepen the knowledge exchange and to initiate new projects on topics such as social partnerships and digitalisation in the Danube Region, early school leaving and NEET<sup>90</sup>, increasing the efficiency of the labour market and empowering people with disabilities.

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<sup>89</sup> <https://wba4wbl.com/western-balkans-alliance-for-work-based-learning/>

<sup>90</sup> NEET = not in education, employment or training

### Projects – implementation & monitoring

Through their activities, PA 9 Coordinators encouraged the development and the implementation of various types of projects funded from different sources (DTP, DSPF, Interreg V-A, Erasmus+ etc.). Highly relevant projects for PA 9 are *EDULAB* (proposing a new governance model and ensuring better interlinkages between education and employment), *I-VET* (Inclusive VET; establishing high quality career guidance and counselling programs for students with special educational needs), *danube@work*<sup>91</sup> (focusing on the digitalisation of work), *CODES- Competence Oriented Education for Elementary Schooling in Cross-Border Regions*. Good practice examples are the projects *Construction Academy in Moldova* (aiming at establishing a vocational centre to implement dual vocational training in those professions which are needed in the construction industry), *Cooperation between schools and the business sector in the field of tourism* (promoting better cooperation between partners from tourism and hotel management in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia) and *aces – Academy of Central European Schools*<sup>92</sup>.

PA 9 coordinators acted as co-leaders of Thematic Pole 10 "Migration" and Thematic Pole 9 "Educational Governance" within the DTP Capitalisation Strategy, thus contributing to enhancement of the cooperation between pole members and ensuring knowledge transfer within the pole and to a broader group of stakeholders and expert communities.

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<sup>91</sup> See Annex 2, p.19

<sup>92</sup> See Annex 2, p.20



## 2.3.4. Pillar 4 “Strengthening the Danube Region”

### PA 10: Institutional Capacity & Cooperation



#### Cooperation & policy embedding

In order to stimulate transnational civil society cooperation, the activities of PA 10 resulted in an **Agenda for Participation**<sup>93</sup> drafted by PA 10, the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), Interact and further stakeholders from the EUSBSR. Efforts to give further impetus to macro-regional cooperation in providing information about funding opportunities were made by PA 10 while closely cooperating with the EUSBSR Horizontal Action “Capacity” and the EUSAIR Facility Point and Facility Point Plus. In order to exploit further synergies across MRS a joint initiative of all four MRS was launched for facilitating a horizontal pillar of media and communication in September 2017, aiming at an increased visibility of the results of MRS activities.

PA 10 is in regular exchange with DG REGIO and receives financial support for stakeholder platforms and networks from the Directorate. Hence, PA 10 strives for maintaining and consolidating strong linkages with stakeholders on local, regional, national and EU-level.

#### Highlights

Within the framework of 2016-2018 and in line with PA 10 targets considerable efforts were undertaken to intensify the cooperation between civil society organisations and the integration of local and regional administration by offering a **Danube Local Actors Platform** (D-LAP). D-LAP stimulated several stakeholder platforms and networks, such as the **Danube Civil Society Forum** (DCSF) and the **Danube Participation Days** (DPD) as side events at the EUSDR Annual Fora<sup>94</sup>. As a flagship initiative to build upon a set of supporting structures for project promoters, the **Danube Investment Framework** was launched to initiate coordination between project promoters and financial institutions on financing small projects or project preparation. In addition to that, further steps were undertaken to achieve concrete results on financing through the supporting structures of the **Danube Investment Framework** (DIF)<sup>95</sup> comprising the pilot initiatives **Danube Strategic Project Fund** (DSPF), **START** (Small Project Fund; SPF), the **Seed Money Facility Tool-kit** (SMF), the **Technical Assistance Facility** for projects in the Danube Region (TAF-DRP) as well as the **Danube Financing Dialogue** (DFD). As a result of these initiatives the Danube Project Support Tool-kit (DPS) was drafted to improve alignment and embedding of EU funds and project-based guidance.

As there is a strong need in the Danube Region for better coordination of funding sources, increased knowledge of funding opportunities among project promoters and improved strategic planning for regional development, PA 10 established the **Donors’ Conference Framework**<sup>96</sup> with dedicated events on a yearly basis starting with the highly successful **Danube Financing and Capacity Building Dialogue**<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> <https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/agenda-for-participation/>

<sup>94</sup> The success of having a civil society related side-event at an Annual Forum was such that it was replicated by EUSBR and EUSALP.

<sup>95</sup> Danube Investment Framework: <https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/projects/>

<sup>96</sup> <https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/donors-conference/>

<sup>97</sup> <https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/2017/11/danube-financing-and-capacity-building-dialogue-how-do-we-make-financing-for-development-work/>

held in Chişinău (MD) in October 2017 and followed by the seminar "Expanding Civic Space" and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Danube Financial and Capacity Building Dialogue organised in Sofia (BG) in October 2018.

These measures are complemented by the online tool **EuroAccess Macro-Regions**<sup>98</sup> run by PA 10, in collaboration with EuroVienna and with financial support of DG REGIO. EuroAccess Macro-Regions was initially created in 2016 for the EUSDR and serves now as an information point on EU funding opportunities for all four EU Macro-Regions.

Another main emphasis of PA 10 was on the inclusion of youth policy processes and public governance, embraced within the platform of the **Bled Strategic Forum**<sup>99</sup> for promotion of the inclusion of youth as well as in the **Danube Governance Hub**<sup>100</sup>, which was established following the conference on "Public Governance as the Foundation of European Integration" held in Vienna (AT) in June 2016.

In the course of the same year further steps were taken to optimise the exchange of representatives from civil society and public administration. Both stakeholder groups had the opportunity to share views on potential cooperation in the Danube Region at the **Second Dialogue Forum for the EUSDR** on "New Opportunities for Innovative Cooperation in the Danube Region" in Tulln (AT) in September 2016<sup>101</sup>.

In order to facilitate integration of neighbouring countries, the border **Cadastre and Land Register Initiative** was launched by PA 10 in cooperation with KDZ – Centre for Public Administration Research, aiming at an increased awareness of digital border cadastres and at identifying and possibly harmonising legal requirements.

#### Projects – implementation & monitoring

PA 10 successfully accompanied the two projects **ATTRACTIVE DANUBE** and **CrowdStream** under the first call of the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme as Associated Strategic Partner aiming at achieving the actions and targets of the EUSDR and PA 10. In addition to that, PA 10 supports cooperation of cities and their stakeholders in the Danube Region towards a thematic networking project which shall address human trafficking. The **Danube Cities Against Human Trafficking (D-CAHT)** project raises awareness, identifies common challenges and provides information, know-how and practical tools for local actors by providing a series of round tables and working groups and, beyond that, drafted **Guidelines for Municipalities**<sup>102</sup> in March 2018. Following the project **eGovernance Renaissance in the Danube Region** a follow-up project has been initiated aiming at creating a SAP-based education platform on processes in public administration for students of EUSDR countries, initially funded by the State Ministry Baden-Württemberg. PA 10 also supports capacity building among vulnerable groups of civil society and public administration through the project **AGRIGO4CITIES** and cooperation across borders of the Danube and Adriatic-Ionian Regions through the project **SECCo2**<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> <https://www.euro-access.eu/>

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.bledstrategicforum.org/>

<sup>100</sup> [http://www.bacid.eu/Danube\\_Governance\\_Hub](http://www.bacid.eu/Danube_Governance_Hub)

<sup>101</sup> <http://www.unserboden.at/>

<sup>102</sup> <https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/danube-cities-against-human-trafficking-d-caht/>

<sup>103</sup> See Annex 2, p.21/22



## PA 11: Security

### Cooperation & policy embedding

In December 2018 the activities of PA 11 in cooperation with PA 1A Waterways Mobility were taken up in **ministerial conclusions** in which the Danube Transport Ministers agreed to accelerate the implementation of the Master Plan for Good Navigation Status<sup>104</sup>. Hence, the joint work with PA 1A since 2013 was successfully maintained.

PA 11 strives to promote exchange and has strong ties and cooperates closely with regional and international organisations such as Europol, the Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC), Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). Additionally, PA 11 also initiated cooperation with the Danube Commission on Security of Navigation.

### Highlights

The **practical manual on border controls**<sup>105</sup> aiming at efficient and transparent border control procedures as well as the **recommendations for improved border controls**<sup>105</sup>, which contain general information on control modalities and recommendations for action, are tangible results of cooperation between Priority Areas 11 and PA 1A.

To foster the practical horizontal cooperation and to further promote the simplification, harmonisation and digitalisation of control procedures a joint PA 11 and PA 1A Working Group was established. In April 2017, a Working Group meeting was organised in Vienna (AT) with experts from border police services from seven countries of the Danube Region. Hence, main emphasis was put on the **reduction of red tape in Danube navigation**, which was supported by the aforementioned joint Working Group of PA 1A and PA 11.

### Projects – implementation & monitoring

In September 2016 the Central European **CBRN-E Training Centre**<sup>106</sup>, which is accompanied by PA 11, became operational. The cooperation on bomb disposal is located in Hungary for a 10-year framework. In the first implementation phase the facilities are utilised for national and international CBRN-E trainings for the respective target groups such as rapid response and special police services. In order to enhance future cooperation and exchange, the CBRN-E Training Centre provides expertise and identifies best practices for synergy and development processes.

The Bavarian police concluded in October 2016 to conduct the **Danube Domestic Burglary Project** (DDBP) as a follow-up to the Danube Property Crime Project (DPCP) in cooperation with PA 11 and law enforcement authorities of Germany, Serbia, Austria, Switzerland and Europol. Within the project implementation specific emphasis is put on organised property crime in the field of domestic burglary committed by mobile organised crime groups. PA 11 further supports project *CSDR – Cooperation Southeast – Danube Region* against drug trafficking and project DARIF, improving safety along the Danube waterway<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> <https://navigation.danube-region.eu/documents/>

<sup>105</sup> <https://navigation.danube-region.eu/working-groups/wg-6-administrative-processes/>

<sup>106</sup> CBRN-E stands for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence.

<sup>107</sup> See Annex 2, p.23/24

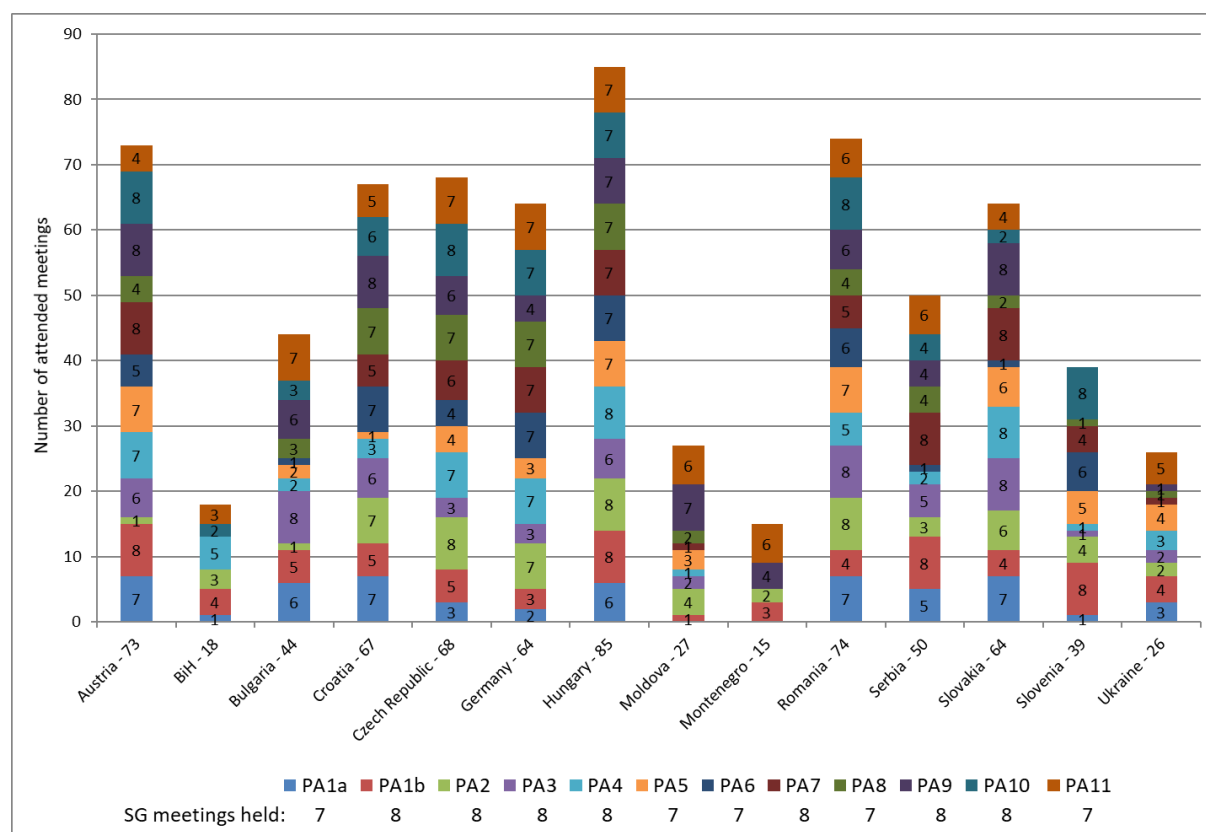
### 3. Comparative Perspective: Findings across Priority Areas

Having taken stock of developments and achievements per Priority Area, the following sections give a compact overview of key aspects across Priority Areas and Pillars with regards to participation in SG meetings, funding and cooperation with financing instruments and cross-cutting activities among PAs, with other MRS and with stakeholders and institutions beyond the EUSDR and MRS.

#### 3.1. SG Meetings & Modus Operandi

SG meetings are to be carried out twice a year and most PACs indeed succeeded in organising two such meetings per year during the reporting period. However, participation of SG members at the meetings greatly deviates between Priority Areas: This concerns participation of member states as well as participation over time. Focusing on the number of attended meetings per country (see Figure 2), some member states strongly participated at SG meetings of each and every Priority Area, such as Hungary, Romania and Austria; followed by Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany and Slovakia. Meanwhile, other member states were selective in their participation in SG meetings. Low engagement of certain member states in different PAs can partially be traced back to different national focus areas. In some cases, SG members have not yet been endowed with the mandate and authorisation to implement effective steps on a national level. In other cases regular attendance is hampered by limited human resources or by restricted means for financing travel and accommodation. In this regard, some PAs asked for stronger financial support of Danube member states.

Figure 2: Country representation at all SG meetings held from 2015 to 2018<sup>108</sup>  
(No separate data available for 2015 and 2016, therefore, meetings from 2015 are included.)

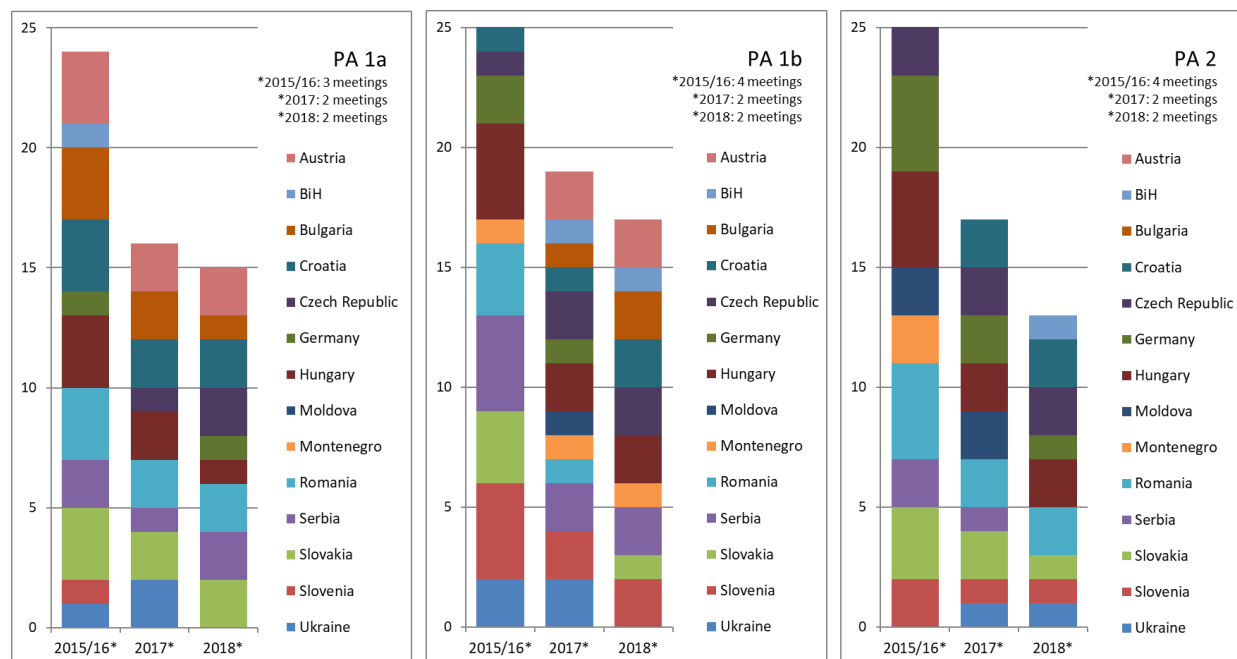


Source: compiled by Metis in the framework of the EUSDR Operational Evaluation, on behalf of DSP; based on information provided by the former HU EUSDR Presidency for 2015-2016 and by PACs for 2015-2018.

<sup>108</sup> For information on which countries coordinate which Priority Area, please see Table 1, p.1.

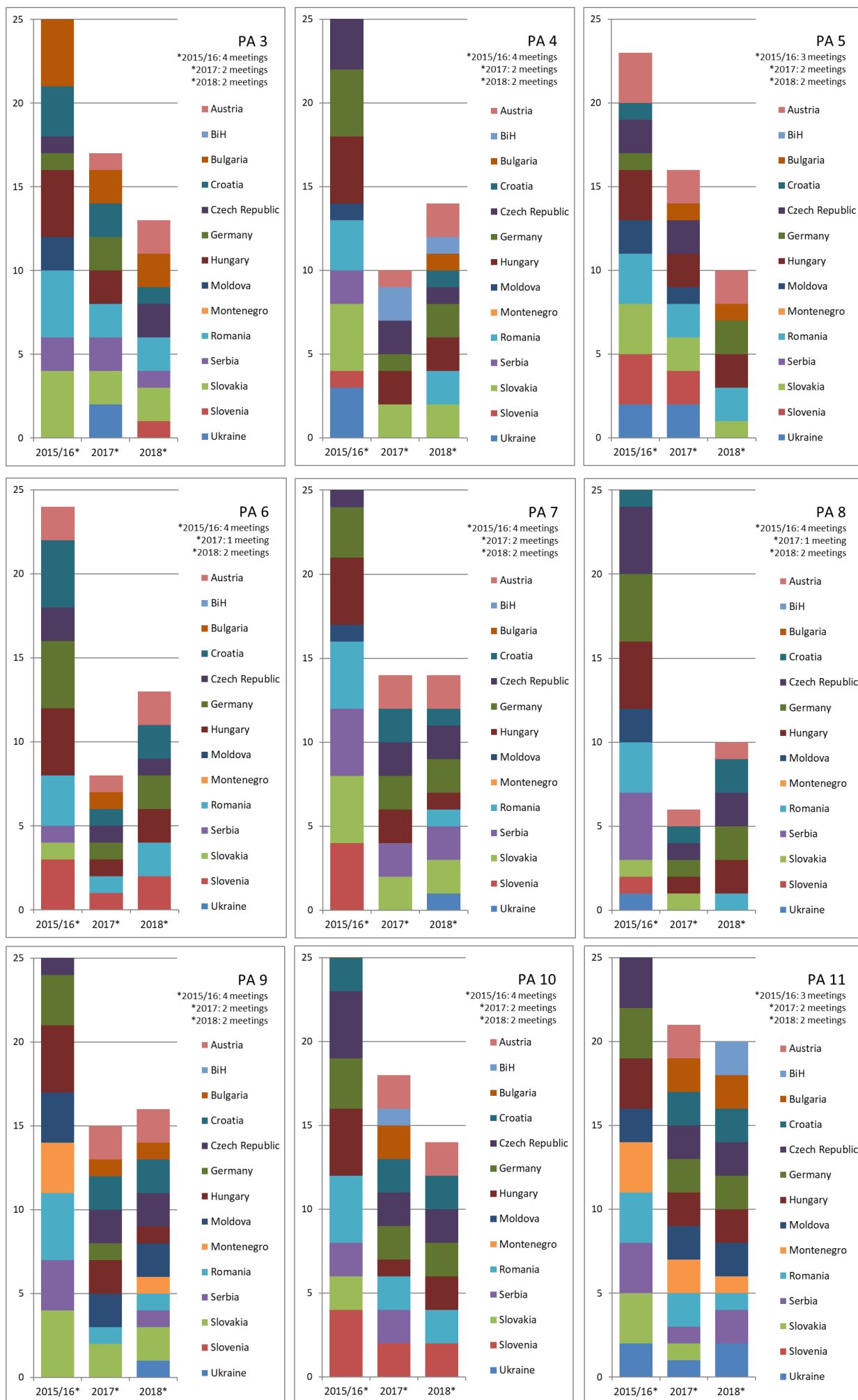
The following graphs give an overview of country participation per Priority Area in the years 2015/16, 2017 and 2018. As for now, no particular trend in SG participation can be identified based on this set of data<sup>109</sup>. Within the scope of the EUSDR Operational Evaluation (to be published in June 2019) the involvement of SG members in their respective PAs is assessed relatively high<sup>110</sup>. Nevertheless, these answers show a wide variation, indicating notable differences between Priority Areas. These findings also seem to run counter to the perception of those Priority Area Coordinators questioned for the Evaluation who state that participation in SG meetings is unsatisfactory. This discrepancy in perception could offer a starting point for discussion when it comes to untapping the full potential of SG participation.

*Figure 3: Development of SG participation over time, along Priority Areas and Danube Countries  
(No separate data available for 2015 and 2016, therefore, meetings from 2015 are included.)*



<sup>109</sup> It is to be extended in the upcoming years to help track future development of SG participation.

<sup>110</sup> With a mean score of 4.43 on a scale from 1 – “very low involvement” to 6 – “very large involvement”



Source: DSP, based on information provided by the former HU EUSDR Presidency for 2015-2016 and by PACs for 2017-2016.

When it comes to the working structure of Steering Groups, the *modus operandi* varies in the sense that some PAs strongly build their activities around Working Groups and Task Forces (TFs) dedicated to sub-themes. For example, PA 1A, PA 7 and PA 8 each have around five to six Working Groups. PA 9 divides its work among eight Working Groups ranging from *Performance of Education Systems* to *Lifelong Learning and Mobility* to *Poverty and Social Inclusion*. Meanwhile, PA 6 has set up seven Task Forces (TF) with representatives from different member states and of different areas such as public service, civil society and science. Their task is to establish work plans with specific measures and to implement these measures through projects. Each TF has a chair who reports to the respective PACs. It has been noted, though, that it can be difficult to attract stakeholders to join Working Groups as travel costs cannot be covered by the Priority Areas. In some cases, solutions have been found for SG members coming from non-EU countries. In the case of WG members a solution is yet to be found.

Considering participation in SG meetings from a PAC perspective, some report SG coordination to be administratively challenging or they encounter difficulties keeping contact lists up to date due to a high fluctuation of staff and poor communication. Other PACs perceive coordination with SG members as satisfactory and effective and can, therefore, put more focus on strengthening relevant external links and cross-border and cross-thematic networks, see chapter 3.3. Just to give a few examples of this external cooperation: PA 1A has established new connections to Ministries of Transport and waterway authorities; PA 4 and PA 5 are pleased to have international organisations such as the ICPDR, Sava Commission and the Carpathian Convention regularly take part in SG meetings; PA 6 has focused on integration of stakeholders from different branches of the triple helix and from different territorial levels (local, regional, national, EU); PA 9 closely cooperates with the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) and the European Training Foundation (ETF)<sup>111</sup>.

As the results of the EUSDR Operational Evaluation show, there is room for improvement when it comes to including additional stakeholders to increase the intended impact of activities. Some Priority Areas would appreciate stronger representation of national authorities to strengthen decision making as well as more engagement of local and regional authorities to foster common perspectives across vertical levels. Also on a horizontal scale, some Priority Areas would find further involvement of NGOs, social partners and business organisations beneficial.

Finally, EC participation in SG meetings differs from Priority Area to Priority Area. On the one hand, PA 1A regularly has representatives of DG MOVE and DG REGIO participate in SG meetings, PA 5 has close ties with EC's Joint Research Centre, PA 6 with DG Environment, PA 7 and PA 8 are in close contact with EC's Joint Research Centre as well as with line DGs, just to name a few examples. On the other hand, the Operational Evaluation has shown that participation of line DGs and DG REGIO is considered unsatisfactory and that there is room for improvement especially within the PAs not mentioned above.

Overall, it can be concluded that opening up some SGs in the sense of inviting additional stakeholders (supra-national, national, regional, local) would not only bring positive effects in terms of participation, but more importantly it would increase the impact of SGs, enlarge the network and bring fresh ideas<sup>112</sup>.

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<sup>111</sup> <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en>

<sup>112</sup> To keep the capacity of decision making, "Rules of Procedure" (RoP) for each SG might need to be revised and updated. DSP, in cooperation with respective PACs, will be focusing on this issue as part of the "PA-Assessment Needs" during 2020.

### 3.2. Funding & Cooperation with Financing Instruments

When it comes to financing projects and activities in the framework of the EUSDR, the Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) is the first and most important source of funding to be mentioned. Accordingly, many efforts have been made to align EUSDR and DTP: EUSDR Priority Areas actively promoted DTP calls such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Call for Proposals and the 1<sup>st</sup> DTP Seed Money Facility Call launched in 2017. PACs partly joined project consortia as Associated Strategic Partners to ensure close cooperation and coordination between their PA and the respective DTP project. In the context of the SMF Call PACs also supported project ideas by means of Letters of Alignment to make sure proposed projects would optimise their alignment with EUSDR activities. Furthermore, Priority Areas, SGs and WGs actively participated in submitting project proposals in the course of DTP calls. Priority Areas of all pillars actively supported project development in the framework of the EUSDR by organising project financing workshops or giving presentations on funding opportunities at several occasions and by keeping their websites up-to-date with information on funding – also going beyond the Danube Transnational Programme. Finally, DTP's Capitalisation Strategy has helped to connect EUSDR Priority Areas with relevant ongoing DTP projects through cross-fertilisation.

Some PAs perceive DTP as “main source of funding” or as “the only programme offering sufficient funding for PA activities”, while other Priority Areas have already embarked on exploring further financial sources (see Figure 4):

For instance, EUSDR projects in the waterways sector (**Pillar 1 – Connecting the Region**) have used the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)<sup>113</sup> which is a key instrument for infrastructure investments at European level. Since transnational cooperation programmes are not intended for infrastructure investment, CEF is an important complementary source of funding in this field. Also a variety of national Operational Programmes (BG, RO, AT, HR, SK) have contributed to EUSDR projects in the waterways sector, such as the Operational Programme for Large Infrastructure in Romania, Investments in Growth and Employment Austria, Competitiveness and Cohesion Croatia and Integrated Infrastructure Slovakia. Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) programmes such as SK-AT, AT-HU, AT-CZ and Serbian IPA funds have also been untapped in the waterways context. Further possible funding sources, specifically in the transport infrastructure field, are considered to be IPA CBC and ENI as well as the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF)<sup>114</sup> and the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI)<sup>115</sup>. PA 1A also considers Horizon2020 as an important potential funding instrument. EUSDR key stakeholders in the transport infrastructure field are also aware of sources beyond EU funds such as the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the World Bank (WB).

As for EUSDR initiatives in the field of **environmental protection (Pillar 2)**, IPA CBC (HU-RS) and ENI CBC (RO-UA-MD and HU-SK-RO-UA) have been used to fund projects or have been applied for. In turn ENI CBC projects have increasingly requested Letters of Recommendations since MRS relevance is taken into account in the course of evaluation of project proposals. Also Interreg Central Europe is

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<sup>113</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility>

<sup>114</sup> <https://www.wbif.eu/>

<sup>115</sup> [EFSI – European Fund for Strategic Investments](#) supports a variety of projects in the fields of infrastructure, energy efficiency & renewable energy, research and innovation, environment, agriculture, digital technology, education, health and social affairs.

seen as relevant for EUSDR conservation and water projects as it covers the western part of the Danube Region and thematically covers two Specific Objectives dedicated to the improvement of environmental management. During the reporting period EUSDR Pillar 2 also submitted several projects to Interreg Central Europe and to LIFE - the EU's environment and climate action programme. Further on, PA 5 follows approved Interreg Central Europe projects on events and workshops as well as it keeps up-to-date with a Horizon 2020 project. Despite positive examples, funding sources in general are perceived to be limited and it has been pointed out that the EUSDR needs better embedding into directly managed funds as well as more seed money for project preparation.

In **Pillar 3 – Building Prosperity**, the funding landscape and relevant networks change yet another time. Next to CBC (SK-AT, AT-CZ, AT-HU), also ESF and ERASMUS+, the EU's programme for education, training, youth and sport, were used for project implementation. Furthermore, EUREKA<sup>116</sup> launched a call specifically dedicated to the Danube Region. Also, **two funds established in Baden-Württemberg** are to be highlighted as they are dedicated exclusively to the EUSDR: on the one hand, a seed money and small project fund by the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg which has supported 70 projects since 2012; on the other hand, a fund by the non-profit foundation Baden-Württemberg Stiftung<sup>117</sup> which has supported 77 educational and cultural projects since the year 2012. **National funding** played a major role in the establishment of the Construction Academy in Moldova, a vocational centre for civil engineers in road construction, cement workers and bricklayers. This project was funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection in cooperation with the Austrian Development Agency<sup>118</sup> and the building company STRABAG. Thanks to the **Danube Funding Coordination Network**<sup>119</sup> (DFCN; WG of PA7) the pillar's funding network further extends to institutions such as the Danube Rectors Conference (DRC)<sup>120</sup>; the Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies (CEEPU); the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) which provides funding for researchers to set up international and interdisciplinary research networks; the EC's science and knowledge service Joint Research Centre (JRC) and Startup Europe<sup>121</sup>. In cooperation with DG CONNECT PA 8 also prepared project ideas on digitalisation for the Digital Europe Programme coming up in the new funding period 2021-2027.

Generally there's an awareness of further EU funding opportunities such as Horizon 2020 and of national funds, but they are not seen to be sufficiently harmonised with the EUSDR and the Strategy is not considered to be taken into account sufficiently by DGs when coordinating financing instruments. This issue was addressed in a joint proposal by Pillar 3 (see p.22).

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<sup>116</sup> [EUREKA](#) is a publicly funded intergovernmental network of 40 countries, supporting R&D and innovation projects.

<sup>117</sup> <https://www.bwstiftung.de>

<sup>118</sup> <https://www.entwicklung.at/>

<sup>119</sup> <https://knowledgesociety.danube-region.eu/working-groups/>

<sup>120</sup> The Danube Rectors Conference is a network of 70 universities in the Danube Region.

<sup>121</sup> [Startup Europe](#) is a networking initiative by DG Connect which connects startups, investors, entrepreneurs, corporate networks, universities, the media etc.



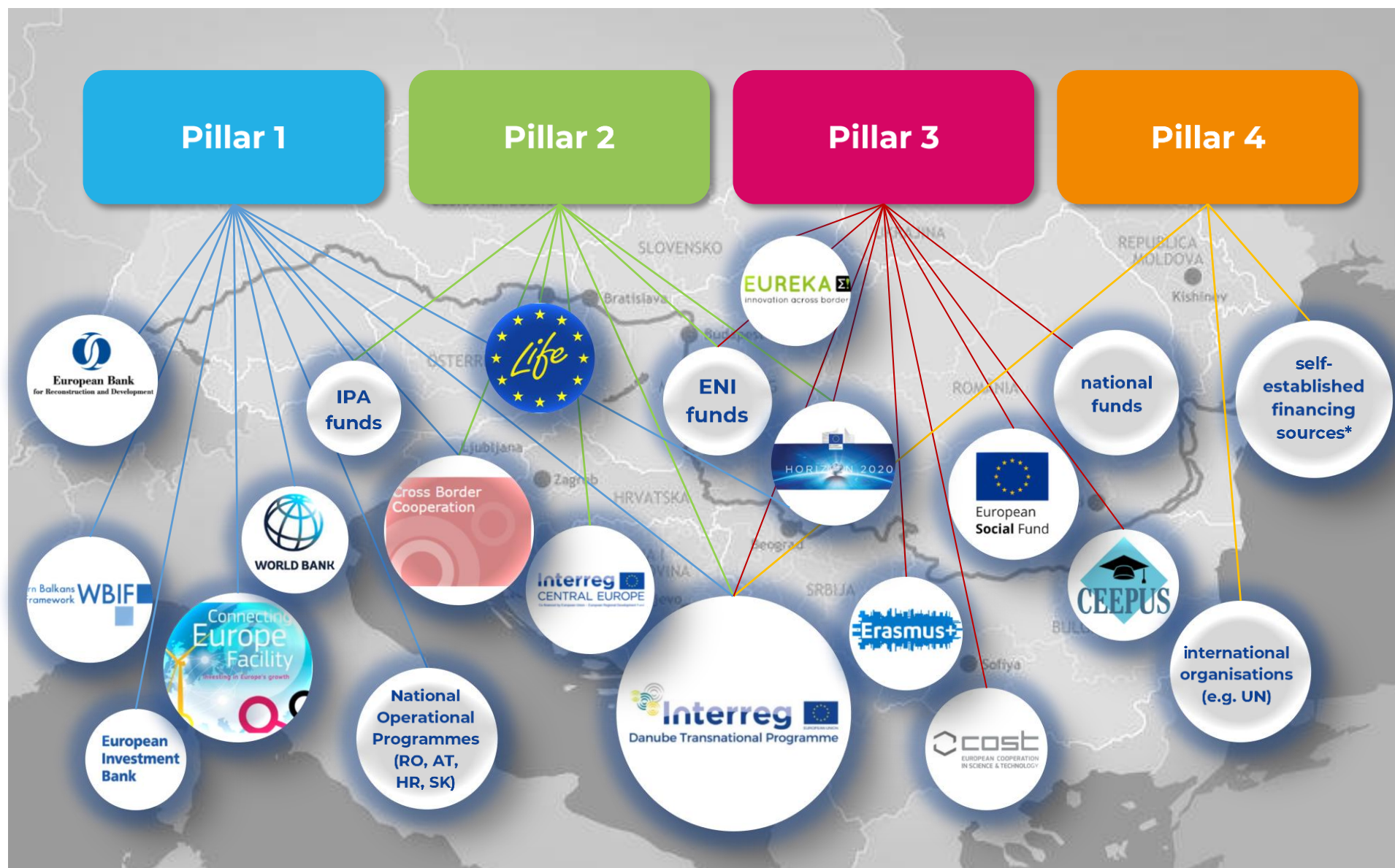


Figure 4: Funding sources taken into account by EUSDR Priority Areas (Source: illustration by DSP)

\*Self-established financing sources refer to the Danube Strategic Project Fund and financing platforms such as the Danube Financing Dialogue and the Donors' Conference.



In **Pillar 4 – Strengthening the Region** – Priority Area 10 (Institutional Capacity and Cooperation) is specialised in strengthening ties between potential projects and donors. PA 10 not only co-organises meetings with the **ESF Managing Authorities of the Danube Region** together with PA 9, it has also initiated various funds: The **Danube Strategic Project Fund (DSPF)** focused on innovative project ideas which respond to the needs of the Danube Region and which have not been funded so far. It paid particular attention to project ideas with an added value at the interface of cohesion and enlargement/neighbourhood policy, also by fostering high participation of EU accession countries such as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro and of EU neighbouring countries such as Moldova and Ukraine. While project lead partners had to be from a Danube Region country, every project had project partners from the Adriatic and Ionian Region. Thematically, all projects put great emphasis on empowering youth and fostering sustainable development. 9 of 12 EUSDR Priority Areas were covered by the selected projects and Priority Areas were involved in their selection. PA 10 acted as Managing Authority and EuroVienna as Implementing Body of the DSPF. The fund built on experience gathered from initiating two previous seed money facilities: the EC's **Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects (TAF-DRP)**<sup>122</sup> implemented between 2013 and 2016 and the **Danube Region Project Fund START**<sup>123</sup> initiated by PA 10 and implemented by EuroVienna between 2014 and 2016.

Another PA 10 initiative was the **Danube Financing Dialogue (DFD)**, which connected small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) from the Danube Region with international financing institutions and national funding sources. Between 2012 and 2016 PA 10 held five editions of the Danube Financing Dialogue, of which the last took place within the reporting period in May 2016 in Bratislava (SK). Building on the experience gained through DFD and on the results of National Participation Days, PA 10 jointly initiated the **Donors' Conference** with the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment of the Republic of Moldova. The Donors' Conference aims at fostering exchange between public and private funding programmes and project promoters; supporting a more strategic use of funding; and facilitating communication and coordination among public and private funding programmes and instruments. The platform also provides a stronger focus on funding from foundations and international organisations such as the United Nations. Last but not least, the **EuroAccess Macro-Regions** tool, which is a project initiated by PA 10, provides information on funding for all four macro-regional strategies.

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<sup>122</sup> [TAF-DRP](#) provided consultant services free of charge to selected project applicants, up to a value of € 25,000 incl. VAT and for a duration of maximum 6 months.

<sup>123</sup> In the framework of [START](#) 48 projects were implemented with a duration of 6 to 12 months, financially ranging from 16.000 € to 68.000 € and with START contributing grants per project between 9.970 € and 39.600 €. The projects were implemented by transnational partnerships in the Danube Region, and covered a wide range of topics, from flood protection measures to Roma integration. As a common element, all projects featured a macro-regional impact and pursued objectives or tackled challenges of the EUSDR.

### 3.3. Cross-cutting Activities

When it comes to cross-cutting activities, three kinds have to be distinguished:

- cross-cutting activities between Priority Areas of the EUSDR
- cross-cutting activities between Priority Areas of the EUSDR and other macro-regional strategies (EUSALP, EUSAIR, EUSBSR)
- cross-cutting activities between Priority Areas of the EUSDR and relevant stakeholders and institutions beyond the EUSDR and MRS

Figure 5 summarises these cross-cutting activities, indicating cooperation across EUSDR Pillars by means of blue lines and cross-cutting cooperation with other MRS and institutions by means of grey lines.

In **EUSDR Pillar 1 – Connecting the Region** (Mobility, Sustainable Energy and Culture & Tourism) several exchange workshops and meetings were organised for all PACs to lay the basis for cooperation among Priority Areas and to harmonise administrative processes. These activities were co-organised with Priority Areas from Pillar 2 and 4. Thematic exchange of experience mainly took place within the Pillar as well as with PAs of Pillar 2 and 4 (joint Working Group of PA 1A and PA 11) and partly with PAs of Pillar 3. Regarding exchange with other MRS, Priority Areas of Pillar 1 participated in several workshops and events for representatives of all MRS. Especially in the transport field, Pillar 1 Priority Areas cooperate with EUSAIR and EUSALP. Representatives of EUSBSR participated in a Steering Group Meeting of PA2. As for cooperation with institutions beyond the EUSDR, cooperation with the EU action programme to develop waterway transport (NAIADES), the Alpine-Western Balkan Rail Freight Corridor, the Carpathian Convention, coordination with Core TEN-T Corridors, the Eastern Partnership Transport Panel, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Central and South Eastern Europe Gas Connectivity (CESEC) can be highlighted.

**Under EUSDR Pillar 2 - Protecting the Environment** (covering Water Quality, Environmental Risks and Biodiversity & Landscapes) several joint intra-pillar events, focusing on funding as well as on thematic exchange, were organised. Furthermore, the issues of pesticides and chemicals as well as migratory fish represent fields of cross-cutting intra-pillar cooperation between PA 4 and 6. A joint workshop with PAs from Pillar 3 was organised on flood protection education in the Danube River Basin. The consideration of biodiversity and conservation has been enforced in several Priority Areas covering all Pillars (e.g. in PA 1A, PA 1B, PA 2, PA 3, PA 8 and PA 11). PA 1A was invited to and gave a presentation on its activities in a PA 4 SG meeting. When it comes to the exchange with other MRS, Pillar 2 Priority Areas used MRS events by Interact for exchange, specifically in the fields of water management and climate and disaster risk reduction. Furthermore, PA 4 organised a cross-MRS workshop on water management and it has an ongoing cooperation with EUSBSR on pharmaceuticals in water.

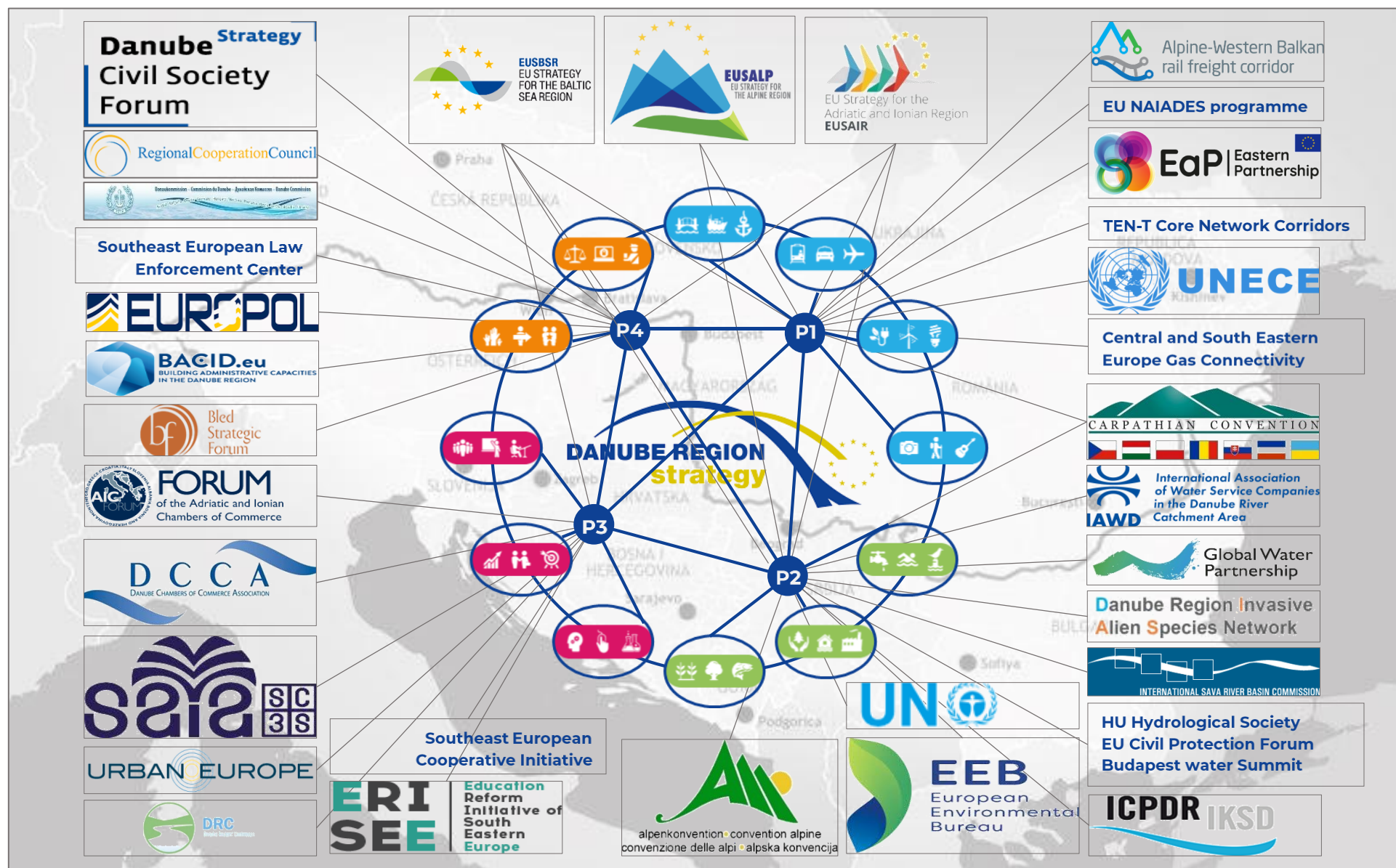


Figure 5: Cross-cutting activities of EUSDR Pillars and Priority Areas (Source: illustration of DSP)

Also in the field of biodiversity, ecological connectivity and green infrastructure cooperation with EUSALP and EUSAIR has been fostered. Specifically, PA6 initiated exchange with relevant coordinators of both strategies in order to explore ways on how to enhance synergies and avoid duplication in terms of actions and funding as well as to increase the efficiency of limited national capacities. PA 4 initiated a cooperation with EUSBSR on pharmaceuticals in water. Links between Priority Areas of Pillar 2 and external institutions and programmes include the ICPDR, the Sava Commission, the International Association of Water Supply Companies in the Danube River Catchment Area (IAWD), the Global Water Partnership (GWP), the Budapest Water Summit, the Hungarian Hydrological Society, the EU Civil Protection Forum, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the Danube Region Invasive Alien Species Network and the Carpathian and Alpine Conventions.

Among the **Priority Areas of EUSDR Pillar 3 – Building Prosperity** (Knowledge Society, Competitiveness of Enterprises and People & Skills) the DTP Capitalisation Strategy has been used to identify cross-cutting topics, for instance by means of a capitalisation workshop. Efforts have been made to create project chains by linking projects of different PAs and facilitating knowledge exchange among these projects. As for inter-pillar cooperation, Pillar 3 Priority Areas are connected to Pillar 4 since Priority Areas 9 and 10 are partly coordinating their efforts, e.g. they co-organised a meeting of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region. Exchange with other MRS does not seem to be as intense as in other pillars, however an exchange with the Baltic Sea Strategy in the thematic field of People & Skills can be highlighted. As for external ties going beyond EUSDR and other MRS, the following institutions are part of the Pillar 3 network: Danube Rector's Conference, JPI Urban Europe – Knowledge Hub for Urban Transitions, the Slovak Academic Information Agency (SAIA), funding programmes such as EUREKA and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, regional chambers of commerce and specifically the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce and the Danube Chambers of Commerce, the South European Cooperative Initiative (SECI), ERI SEE<sup>124</sup> as well as various educational institutions of the Danube Region.

Finally, in **EUSDR Pillar 4 – Strengthening the Region** (Institutional Cooperation and Security) PA 10 in cooperation with EuroVienna aligned Danube Strategic Project Fund projects with all other EUSDR Priority Areas. Regarding cooperation with other MRS, coordination with the Baltic Sea Region and the Adriatic Ionian Region is also fostered in the field of Institutional Capacity & Cooperation. PA 11 cooperates with PA 1A on the reduction of administrative bottlenecks ("red tape") along the Danube river navigation system. Finally, the external cooperation network of Pillar 4 Priority Areas expands across organisations such as the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), Bled Strategic Forum, BACID<sup>125</sup> and the Danube Governance Hub and – in the security sector – it entails Europol, the Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Danube Commission on Security of Navigation and law enforcement authorities of several Danube countries in general.

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<sup>124</sup> The Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE): <http://www.erisee.org/>

<sup>125</sup> The Danube Governance Hub is one of the pillars of the BACID programme (Building Administrative Capacities in the Danube Region).



## 4. Conclusions and Outlook

This report illustrates the many ways in which EUSDR Priority Areas have moved forward in the years 2016-2018 thanks to the commitment and concerted efforts of Priority Area Coordinators, Steering Group Members, Working Group Members, National Coordinators, the Danube Transnational Programme and the European Commission. As PAC and NC reports reflect, **capacity building and funding** have by far been the most discussed issues within the Strategy in this period. This chapter summarises the most relevant conclusions that PACs and NCs have drawn from these discussions and from their experience working for the Strategy. Further dimensions of stock-taking are:

- **the involvement of stakeholder groups,**
- **the alignment of the Strategy with national and EU documents,**
- **routes towards more policy impact,**
- **EUSDR monitoring and evaluation,**
- **progress in cooperation with key stakeholders of the Danube Region.**

They can be seen as snap-shots of the developmental stage of the EUSDR and shall serve as reference points and as a basis for discussion in the efforts to advance the Strategy in the upcoming years.

### Capacity Building to be strengthened

With regards to **capacity building**, this report clearly demonstrates how EUSDR Priority Areas have strengthened their **capacities towards the Danube Transnational Programme** and with Cross Border Cooperation Programmes in the Danube Region: DTP Capitalisation Strategy provides a valuable framework for PAs to exchange experience with DTP projects and to jointly develop new project ideas. So far, the success rate in terms of accepted DTP project proposals varies among Priority Areas for various reasons – while some PAs enjoy a high success rate and perceive cooperation with DTP as successful, others experience difficulties due to a series of declined project proposals:

- Potential levers for the improvement of collaboration between EUSDR and DTP remain further alignment of the programme's specific objectives with the Strategy's Priority Areas<sup>126</sup>, strengthening know-how within SGs and WGs for the design of high quality project proposals and the introduction of simplified cost options to reduce administrative responsibilities on behalf of the PACs.
- The practice of reciprocal invitations to EUSDR NC / DTP MC meetings is considered to be further pursued for securing consistency and mutual exchange.

EUSDR **internal capacity building** has progressed in the sense that cooperation among Priority Areas has grown, be it thematically or regarding technical / administrative issues. Again, the intensity of collaboration and exchange varies among PAs and in some cases there is still great potential. However, collaboration has shown that the harmonisation of PA related interests and an integrated approach to address sectoral policies are to be strengthened:

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<sup>126</sup> "The set-up of the DTP thoroughly considered the EUSDR. As one result of the close alignment of DTP and EUSDR, all DTP Priority Axis and related Specific Objectives show direct linkages to the pillars of one or more EUSDR Priority Areas (see also the DTP Cooperation Programme chapter 4.4.1). However, not all eleven EUSDR Priority Areas are equally reflected by the DTP due to the thematic concentration applied to all territorial cooperation programmes in the EU programming period 2014 – 2020." (DTP 2019, see: <http://www.interreg-danube.eu/about-dtp/eu-strategy-for-the-danube-region>)

- Potential cross-cutting fields of cooperation as identified in the course of a joint Priority Areas meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> May 2017 in Vienna<sup>127</sup> (AT) could serve as a starting point for closer cross-PA cooperation.

With regards to more effective EUSDR internal collaboration, one hindrance has been pointed out repeatedly: The momentum of the Strategy strongly depends on the people involved on the operational level (PACs, SGs and WGs) as well as on the strategic level (NCs, EC). As for the **operational level**, collaboration amongst PACs as well as between PACs and SG members is deemed to be well-functioning in several cases. However, participation in SG meetings also often depends on the political commitment of the respective member state as well as on staff fluctuation:

- These two factors are hard to influence (due to elections, institutional restructuring etc.), but their negative impact can be minimised through transparent and continuous communication among active PA members (be it on project ideas, joint events, SG meetings or organisational issues) in order to strengthen institutional memory.
- With regards to institutional memory, a welcome change was the reestablishment of the Danube Strategy Point in 2018, which is expected to support capacity building within and across Priority Areas in the years to come.
- While balanced participation of different stakeholder groups and member states in SG meetings is to be aspired, national priorities of Danube countries should be respected.
- Within some Priority Areas the established working groups are active to different extents. The need for restructuring some of these working groups has been recognised. In this context, the revision of the Action Plan might be a good opportunity to carry out these adaptations. Also, working group participation might be strengthened through finding funding sources for participants' travel costs.

Capacity building on **strategic level** has proven to be challenging due to the fact that National Coordinators are confronted with a broad portfolio of responsibilities next to EUSDR in their daily work. This can hamper active participation in EUSDR related activities at national level. Meanwhile, the involvement of pre-accession states (RS, BiH, ME) and European neighbouring countries (UA, MD) has progressed in all cases and national working groups are in place except for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Funding participation of pre-accession states and neighbouring countries remains challenging – in the case of the Republic of Moldova participation could only be secured via technical assistance received from the Austrian Development Coordination:

- With regards to the involvement of NCs, the reconsideration of the “3 NOs”<sup>128</sup> (no new EU legislation, no new EU institutions and no new EU funds) and the provision of funding for NC activities has been pointed out repeatedly. One opportunity suggested to support NCs, would be for DTP to consider providing funding for NCs in the new programming period.
- For non-EU and neighbouring countries, the EUSDR is a valuable platform for improving cooperation and integration. However, the tight involvement of non-EU stakeholders has to be further intensified at all levels. Finalising the process of setting up First Level Control systems in the neighbouring member states (UA and MD) is highly anticipated, so ENI funds can start to flow.

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<sup>127</sup> organised by PA 1A and PA 6

<sup>128</sup> EUSDR Communication (COM(2010) 715)

When it comes to **capacity building between PACs and EC/line DGs**, collaboration with DG REGIO is strong, but many Priority Areas would appreciate line DGs to further engage with them and participate in SG meetings to ensure visibility of their activities, coordination with relevant institutions on EU level as well as achievement of the Strategy's objectives. Finally, the last few years of interaction amongst EUSDR key stakeholders have shown that more clarity on the **distribution of tasks and responsibilities** is needed to strengthen ownership and commitment. In this context the rotation of the EUSDR Presidency has proven to be a useful tool to create ownership amongst the member states.

- In order to further increase ownership, the upcoming Croatian EUSDR Presidency together with DSP will support EUSDR stakeholders by proposing improvements in the field of governance.

**Capacity building beyond the EUSDR** in terms of cross-MRS cooperation has started to intensify. With the help of Interact, around a dozen cross-MRS events brought together stakeholders from all macro-regional strategies and from different levels (PACs, NCs), providing room for discussing sectoral synergies as well as over-arching issues such as joint communication and strategic embedding of MRS in ESIF:

- These events are important steps in the right direction and are to be followed up. Especially cross-MRS collaboration on public relations and communication will prove to be beneficial in terms of finding a way to effectively communicate the added value of the EUSDR.
- Since MRS use different terms for precisely the same institutional elements, the challenge in collaboration will be establishing a common language across all 4 MRS.
- Taking over the EUSDR Presidency on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2019, Croatia intends to put a special emphasis on closer cooperation of all four MRS to be established on a regular basis.

### Further Funding Sources to be untapped

Finding opportunities for funding is closely interlinked with capacity building and in this respect the Strategy has taken important steps forward: The Danube Funding Coordination Network (DFCN) was established and has strengthened ties with numerous scientific and academic institutions in the Danube Region and within the EC. This is an important contribution, paving the way for close and effective collaboration on future project proposals. Initiatives on behalf of EUSDR key stakeholders such as the DTP Seed Money Facility and the Danube Strategic Project Fund as well as the two already longstanding funds established in Baden-Württemberg and the EU-independent international funding scheme EUREKA have provided much needed funding for project preparation and project implementation. National funds have also been made available to support matters of the EUSDR. The Danube Project Support Toolkit is a first step towards the establishment and improvement of funding instruments relevant for the Danube Region and **EuroAccess Macro-Regions** already provides practical guidance on funding, including an overview of all financing possibilities in the Danube Region and all other MRS. Coordination with ESF Managing Authorities is secured through joint meetings organised by Priority Areas 9 and 10.

- Building on the progress made and in view of the **upcoming funding period 2021-2027**, all key stakeholders agree on the necessity to work towards a strong alignment of diverse funding sources with the Strategy's activities and objectives in order to secure proper funding of EUSDR projects. This holds for Interreg (both ERDF and IPA) just as much as for "mainstream" ERDF and IPA strands,



the cohesion funds, ESF+<sup>129</sup> and centrally-managed programmes<sup>130</sup>. The current revision of the EUSDR Action Plan<sup>131</sup> allows for seeking synergies and complementarities between the Strategy and programming processes. This might constitute a dynamising factor for a sound coordination of MRS priorities and the Operational Programmes, particularly of ESIF programmes.

- In the course of **programming for the new funding period 2021-2027** there is still the opportunity on national level to take into account the Strategy when drafting specific objectives of the **Operational Programmes so they reflect national priorities** within the EUSDR.
- It remains unclear whether the **budget for Cohesion Policy** will be reduced in the **new funding period** and whether or not this will affect the main funding instruments of the EUSDR (mainly ETC programmes but also LIFE and Horizon Europe and other centrally managed programmes).
- The **administrative responsibilities** that come with project implementation are a challenge to be addressed by introducing more simplified cost options in the upcoming funding period.
- **Continuous exchange of experience with programmes** which are funding or plan to fund projects with a macro-regional scope, shall be further strengthened in order to secure appropriate embedding of MRS objectives during programme implementation and to foster complementary use of funds.
- The experience gained under the DSPF, its preceding funds and under DTP SMF shows that many project promoters face considerable burdens in the implementation of EU funded projects, such as **prefinancing /project preparation and co-financing**. This is seen to be an important lever especially when it comes to strengthening the **involvement of local actors and civil society and NGOs in MRS**.
- Some Priority Area Coordinators report difficulties with **funding programmes due to delayed or cancelled** calls on a short notice. As reported, this hampered a stable project pipeline. For the future, the hope has been expressed that calls will be announced well in advance and opened according to plan.
- **Existing programmes at local, regional and national levels differ** in terms of their territorial scales and the acceptance of DR countries with different legal status (EU-member states, non-EU member states). This remains a barrier for innovative project partnerships to be addressed.
- **Finally, it is much desired that the mobilising of funding for the Strategy will boost political interest on all levels.**

### Stakeholder Groups to be further explored & included

The above mentioned involvement of local actors and civil society in the Strategy has been an issue actively addressed within the reporting period. Efforts have been made across all EUSDR Pillars to involve civil society in various activities. Among many relevant activities in this context, Priority Area 10 contributed to the *Agenda for Participation in EU Macro-Regional Strategies* and cooperated with Bled Strategic Forum to foster the inclusion of youth in the EUSDR (see p. 27f.). Summing up some of

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<sup>129</sup> Ref. Article 13a in the Draft ESF+ Regulation: Member States may support transnational cooperation under any of the specific objectives set out in points (i) to (x) of Article 4(1) of the ESF+ Regulation.

<sup>130</sup> Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), Horizon2020, Erasmus, International Security Fund, the Migration and Asylum Fund, the Digital Europe Programme, Life, Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies (CEEPUS), European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST), Committee for European Construction Equipment (CECE), Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA), Joint Programming Initiatives (JPI), etc.

<sup>131</sup> The revised EUSDR Action Plan is expected to be published by DG REGIO until early 2020.

the comments made by EUSDR National Coordinators: The Strategy needs civil society, local and regional governments and social partners for the realisation of high quality projects. Also a strengthened involvement of private sector actors is seen to be crucial, since small and medium sized enterprises form the largest share of EU businesses, provide the majority of jobs and turnover and are also important for EU regional competitiveness as they often operate on a local scale and play a crucial role in strong regional economies.

- In this context, again more easily accessible funding (pre-financing and support for project preparation) and simplified cost options are crucial.
- In order to bring the Strategy closer to the ground (to civil society, local and regional governments), it is imperative to further invest in the development of a comprehensible and tangible narrative for illustrating EUSDR achievements in the Danube Region. The EUSDR Communication Strategy will be ready by the end of 2019 and may constitute a valuable step forward in this regard.
- The incoming Croatian EUSDR Presidency is already planning to promote macro-regional strategies on a local level with the help of the Croatian Association of Cities and Croatian County Association.

### EUSDR to be aligned with National and EU Documents

As regards outreach to the national level, this report shows that many PAs have succeeded in transferring their agenda onto the national level of various member states: PA 4 facilitated “translation” of the Water Framework Directive into national River Basin Management Plans, PA 6 contributed to advancing the German Masterplan Living Space Bavarian Danube and PA 7 brought forward regional innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) in Serbia, Moldova, Ukraine and Montenegro – supported by the EC’s Joint Research Centre (JRC). Nevertheless, the Operational Evaluation revealed that EUSDR outreach to the national level is perceived to be challenging in many cases (due to the capacity issues on operational level discussed above, see p.41).

- Where applicable, there is still great potential for coordinating national planning documents with the agenda of the EUSDR, especially those which were agreed upon prior to the introduction of the Strategy. The visibility of the Strategy on national level is to be improved especially in those thematic areas which are of high relevance for the respective country.
- In the future the Danube Strategy is also envisaged to be more strongly aligned with new mid and long-term EU strategies. First steps in this direction were taken in the course of the revision of the Action Plan in 2019, when the EC encouraged PAs to orientate their actions and corresponding targets towards strategic objectives provided by the EU and other relevant international strategic documents such as the Sustainable Development Goals by the UN.

### Routes towards more Policy Impact identified

Achieving policy impact on different levels is a challenge which has been discussed repeatedly over the years – not least due to the guiding principle of the “3 NOs” (see p. 42) and the restrictions that come with it. Nevertheless, in certain areas policy impact could be achieved within the reporting period: The activities of PA 1A have brought about a series of ministerial conclusions which have resulted in a political focus on improvements in the field of inland waterway maintenance. The Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF; PA 6) has become a recognised player for sturgeon conservation in the Danube Region. PA 1B established relations with the TEN-T platform, an important decision maker when it comes to transport infrastructure on EU level:

- Several initiatives and projects developed within the EUSDR have a clear impact on policies. The visibility of progress achieved shall be further strengthened.
- To further increase policy impact, project initiatives should be oriented towards and aligned with policy processes as much as possible.
- Focusing on the right project ideas can be seen as one of three cornerstones of a policy impact triangle. The other two cornerstones are building up know-how for the design of high quality project proposals and securing adequate funding (see above).
- Priority Area Coordinators and Steering Groups are at the intersection of project and policy level and, therefore, play an important role in establishing connections between these two levels. In this context, the inclusion of more stakeholders with decision making competencies in Steering Groups has been pointed out as an important lever.
- The commitment at political level and at high administrative level is to be further strengthened to maintain political momentum and to secure strategic relevance. For instance, political meetings with specific thematic emphasis should be held.
- Expectation management with regards to the desired impact of the Strategy seems to be an issue that hasn't been discussed in depth so far. It has been pointed out that the Strategy's key stakeholders have different expectations of the Strategy. This leads to different levels of ambition and can cause frustration. Depending on the sectoral field addressed by the Priority Areas and the institutional capacities in the member states in these fields, it might be more or less difficult to bring about progress.
- The "3 NOs" can also be seen from a positive angle and can be turned into the principle of "3 YESSES" when being understood as making common efforts for better coordination of resources, more coherent implementation of regulations and laws, and operating only minimal structures by making use of those that exist. In this sense, by securing mid-term financing of core governance structures (PACs, DSP), institutional memory and stability can be assured – contributing indirectly to fostering political awareness on MRS.

### EUSDR Monitoring and Evaluation to be redesigned

After the update of EUSDR targets in 2016, the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan has revived the discussion on a functioning monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy. In order to keep up with progress achieved and lessons learned, both on operational / technical and on policy level, developments need to be monitored, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. In this context, the definition of indicators and baselines in the course of the revision of the AP has been a challenge: On the one hand, indicators should be impact orientated, on the other hand it is often not possible to establish causal links between potential indicators and EUSDR activities – the challenge lies in striking a meaningful balance. Another issue connected with monitoring and evaluation is the reporting system in place, which has been criticised by PACs for not being systematic enough while increasing administrative workload:

- In the course of the revision of the Action Plan DG REGIO has provided valuable input on the conceptualisation of targets, activities and objectives and has encouraged PACs to define targets for each activity. In this sense, the revision of the Action Plan has provided a valuable opportunity to improve the prerequisites for monitoring and evaluation.

- One major task of the new Danube Strategy Point is to improve EUSDR monitoring and evaluation. As a first step DSP has commissioned an Operational Evaluation for June 2019 and with a focus on EUSDR governance, communication and stakeholder involvement. An Impact Evaluation is foreseen for 2021. In the meantime Danube Strategy Point is focusing on designing a new monitoring system which will be prepared until spring 2020. This will be used as an opportunity to harmonise reporting activities and to reduce the administrative burden.
- Complementary to the monitoring of EUSDR, cooperation with initiatives generating evidence on territorial dynamics and trends will remain beneficial and may ease the (re-)definition of future foci (e.g. ESPON Macro-Regional and Territorial Monitoring Tool (EMTM) to be prepared until the first quarter of 2020, JRC, Attractive Danube, DTP Territorial Analysis).
- PACs have pointed out that they hope to see developments regarding thematically relevant networks and experts included in the new monitoring in order to enhance the strategic relevance of findings. Furthermore, the success of macro-regional strategies should not only be defined by implemented projects, but also by initiated processes, which would not be in place without the MRS.

### Close ties in the Danube Region on their way

The EUSDR has brought forward a considerable number of *Memoranda of Understanding and Cooperation* between different Priority Areas and international organisations (such as the Carpathian Convention); amongst Chambers of Commerce and amongst line ministries of different member states, thereby, forging consensus on important matters *for* the Danube Region *within* the Danube Region. Furthermore, harmonisation of administrative processes and control procedures along the Danube navigation system have been achieved; first steps to harmonise border cadastres and land registers in the Danube Region have been taken; policy support measures related to preserving Danube water quality were established jointly with ICPDR; contacts between Danube Region business representatives have been strengthened; macro-regional networks in the field of tourism have been developed; round tables on human trafficking have been established; cooperation with the United Nations on resilient infrastructure was initiated; possible modes for future cooperation with universities were set up - the list goes on. In short: Stakeholder circles have been built up and progress is on its way!

- Continuing the above mentioned activities, strengthening the cooperation networks, developing mutual activities and joint proposals among Priority Areas has proven a successful way of cooperation.
- Seeking synergies and avoiding duplication of activities by cooperating with international committees such as the ICPDR or the Alpine Convention has been pointed out to be essential for an efficient use of resources in the efforts for cooperation.

The status quo outlined above shows that many of the challenges addressed in the EC's reports on the implementation of MRS (2016 and 2019) have already been picked up within the EUSDR: dialogue with managing authorities on the alignment of funds with EUSDR priorities is being fostered, synergies and complementarities with existing instruments and organisations in the Danube Region are seized, exchange of experience with other MRS is pursued and EUSDR internal capacity building has been brought forward. In view of the upcoming funding period 2021-2027 especially the challenge of

securing adequate funding will be high on the EUSDR agenda in the next few years. The progress to be made in this regard will hopefully boost Priority Areas and their Steering and Working Groups in bringing cooperation in the Danube Region forward.



*Danube Strategy Point 2020*  
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