

Joint Statement of the Danube Foreign Ministers

“Sarajevo Danube Declaration”

Sarajevo, 5 November 2025

In 2025, the Danube Region stands at a crucial geopolitical crossroad. While progress has been made on European integration and economic resilience, the Danube Region still faces growing security risks, demographic pressures, and complex development disparities. Strengthening unity, accelerating enlargement, and reinforcing regional cohesion remain essential.

Building upon the Vienna Danube Declaration of 2024, we remain determined to make the Danube Region a space of increasing cooperation, stability and shared ambition. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) plays a pivotal role in bringing together EU Member States and EU candidate countries to collectively address regional challenges and implement common goals.

In a time of global uncertainty and escalating tensions, we stress the importance of multilateralism, dialogue and trust-building as foundations for lasting security. The Danube Region serves as a model for practical cooperation based on shared values and common challenges. We will continue to work together to strengthen the rule of law, democratic governance and institutions, and support mechanisms for early warning, mediation, and coordinated crisis response.

We continue to condemn the Russian Federation’s war of aggression against Ukraine. We express full solidarity with Ukraine and reaffirm our support for its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We call for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the principles of the UN Charter and international law between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

We denounce in the strongest terms missile and drone attacks targeting Ukraine’s Danube infrastructure, which have repeatedly violated the airspace of Romania and the Republic of Moldova. These actions, including damage to vessels and the use of maritime drones on the Danube, constitute a serious breach of the freedom of navigation and undermine the safety and stability of the Danube. The resulting harm affects not only Ukraine but the Danube Region as a whole. We are united in our conviction that the Russian Federation must be held accountable for the damage caused by its aggressive actions. We also reaffirm our continued support for the Republic of Moldova’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and condemn any foreign-backed attempts to destabilize Moldova or undermine regional stability, standing in full solidarity with its efforts to safeguard democratic processes.

The Danube River represents a vital logistical lifeline for the Region, and we strongly support efforts to protect and enhance the freedom of navigation according to the provisions of the Belgrade Convention regarding the regime of navigation on the Danube, as well as efforts to enhance the infrastructure along its course. We condemn the targeted destruction of Ukraine’s

We note the reservations of one Member State regarding the strategic direction of certain EU policies towards Ukraine.

Danube ports that have a critical role for keeping the Ukrainian grain exports flowing which is a key component of the overall global food balance.

We welcome the agreement on the first phase of the Comprehensive Plan to end the Gaza Conflict. Following the partial withdrawal of Israeli forces and the release of all living hostages, we call on all parties to fully implement the agreement without delay, allowing for the establishment of a lasting ceasefire and the unimpeded access and sustained distribution of humanitarian assistance at scale into and throughout Gaza. We reiterate our commitment to international law and the principles of a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace, based on the two-state solution in line with international law and the relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions. This solution envisages the peaceful coexistence of two independent, sovereign democratic states, Israel and Palestine, within secure and internationally recognized borders.

The acceleration of the EU integration process, must remain a strategic priority for the EU, not only as a political commitment, but as a powerful driver of peace, prosperity, reforms, cooperation and reconciliation in the Region. The EU enlargement is an investment in the security, stability and prosperity of our Region. We underline the importance of a merit-based, credible and predictable enlargement process, taking fully into account the political commitment, concrete progress and positive track record of each candidate country.

The Danube Region has demonstrated that macro-regional cooperation serves as a meaningful bridge between the EU and its candidate countries. We encourage the further facilitation of the EUSDR as a supportive platform for aligning national reforms with EU standards, building capacities and facilitating the exchange of best practices. At the same time, we stress the need for all EU candidate countries to enhance their engagement in the implementation of EU reforms. We welcome further support of EU macro-regional strategies in the EU enlargement process, positioning the EUSDR as a tool for gradual EU integration. We welcome the renewed momentum of the enlargement process and encourage the European Commission's efforts to also make the EU "enlargement ready" as expressed in the Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the council on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews.

Strengthening cooperation on civil protection, emergency medical care, disaster risk reduction and preparedness, as well as resilience, is more urgent than ever. Recent floods, droughts, fires, and other climate change-related emergencies highlight the importance of cross-border coordination, data harmonisation and data-sharing, risk communication, early warning systems and capacity building within the Region.

We also underline the importance of effective border control systems, the fight against organised crime, trafficking and corruption, and the promotion of operational cooperation between police and law enforcement authorities across the Danube Region.

We reaffirm our shared commitment to strengthening cooperation in the areas of migration governance and visa policy. Enhanced coordination, the exchange of information and best practices, and closer operational links are key to addressing shared migration challenges across the Region. In this context, cooperation with relevant EU agencies, such as Frontex and the EU

Asylum Agency, where appropriate, contributes to more effective border management, stronger regional security and stability, and the gradual alignment of standards and operational practices.

These necessities are also reflected in the new EU strategic approach for the Black Sea Region. Its forward-looking vision for the Region as an area of peace, stability and prosperity and the aim to connect the extended TEN-T network to the Black Sea ports and Danube infrastructure will strengthen the Region's position as a vital trade and logistical hub.

The future of the Danube Region depends on its youth. Addressing brain drain, youth unemployment and demographic decline is essential to ensure long-term social and economic sustainability. We call for targeted investment in education, upskilling and labour market mobility to foster innovation, entrepreneurship and competitiveness. We commend the ongoing work of the Danube Youth Council (DYC) and the Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON), which play an important role in fostering participatory democracy and strengthening regional identity among younger generations.

In face of ongoing economic crises, competitiveness remains essential for enterprises across the Danube Region, empowering them to adapt, innovate, and drive resilient and sustainable growth throughout the 14 Danube countries.

In alignment with the European Pillar of Social Rights, we support increased access to quality education, vocational training, and inclusive labour markets, including promotion of green and digital skills and fostering gender equality in employment and education.

We also emphasise the promotion of water literacy, digital literacy, and future literacy among youth, consistent with UNESCO's educational and cultural programmes, to foster a culture of sustainability and peace between humans, nature and technology.

The Danube Region is rich in cultural heritage, natural beauty and human capital. We emphasise the importance of sustainable tourism as a mean of promoting economic resilience, interregional dialogue and shared identity. In the post-pandemic context, innovative approaches such as green tourism, eco-agrotourism, creative industries and urban cultural festivals should be supported as part of recovery and transition.

We welcome further cooperation on preserving biodiversity and water quality, promoting the circular economy and supporting the implementation of the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). The active participation and involvement of both public and private sector actors in sustainability efforts across the Danube Region is vital, particularly in the context of the European Green Deal and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We also underline the importance to enhance transnational cooperation in order to achieve an effective flood resilience in our Region as a precondition for its sustainable social and economic development.

Strengthening connectivity and the urgent, yet pragmatic approach to the green transition is key to the Region's development of a modern society, competitiveness and security. We support increased efforts in energy interconnectivity, including the development of regional energy markets and storage capacity. We further encourage the implementation of EU Emissions Trading

System (EU ETS) and Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). These efforts should be aligned with just transition principles, climate targets and decarbonisation efforts, digitalisation of public services and businesses to reduce fragmentation and improve efficiency and the promotion of regional cooperation in green and digital skills development, particularly in underserved and rural areas.

We reaffirm the important role of transport in the economic, social and sustainable development in the Danube Region as well as the necessity of investment in the development and improvement of transport infrastructure in the Danube Region.

We reiterate the importance of embedding the EUSDR priorities in existing and future EU funding mechanisms within the framework of EU Cohesion Policy and Common Agricultural Policy, particularly Interreg, IPA III, the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, the Growth Plan and Facility for the Republic of Moldova, the Ukraine Facility, and the NDICI frameworks according to the Council Conclusions adopted in 2025 on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies. We call for closer engagement of the European Commission in the implementation of EUSDR priorities and continued integration into the next Cohesion Policy cycle (Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034) and encourage all EUSDR stakeholders to provide strategic inputs for the preparation of 2028+ EU funding mechanisms. In doing so, we encourage all EUSDR stakeholders to take into account synergies with third countries, too.

We encourage all EUSDR stakeholders to reflect on new challenges in cooperation and to investigate on possibilities for cross-thematic cooperation to contribute to new thematic EU priorities.

We welcome the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans and the one for the Republic of Moldova as important tools to further support reforms and convergence, and we encourage their alignment with EUSDR objectives.

We welcome the fifth EU Commission report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies and acknowledge the EU Council Conclusions on the same report which recognises the need for the EU macro-regional strategies to constantly adapt to a changing environment and to new emerging needs and challenges, the role of EU macro-regional strategies as key instruments for mutual learning, knowledge exchange and institutional cooperation between the EU, candidate countries and third countries, and which highlights the possibility the EU macro-regional strategies offer to candidate countries to work on an equal footing with EU member states, and supporting the enlargement process.

We recognise the importance and welcome the promotion of cross-MRS cooperation, notably with the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR), particularly in terms of support for EU enlargement and task the EU macro-regional strategies' governance bodies to take concrete action. Mutual learning, institutional cooperation and policy coherence across MRS are crucial for effective regional governance and SDG implementation. We also call for close coordination with the recently adopted EU strategic approach to the Black Sea Region.

We emphasise the importance to apply – wherever appropriate – an inclusive multi-level governance approach addressing the concrete needs and priorities of individual regions, cities and municipalities.

We thank all stakeholders who participate in the 14th EUSDR Annual Forum and the 12th Danube Participation Day, in Sarajevo on 4-6 November 2025. These events demonstrate the strength of the Danube community, the importance of inclusive dialogue and the collective commitment to a shared European future.

We extend our sincere appreciation to Bosnia and Herzegovina for its effective and inclusive EUSDR Presidency in 2025.

We warmly congratulate the Republic of Bulgaria on taking over the EUSDR Presidency for 2026, and offer our full support as it leads the Strategy into a new phase of cooperation and progress.

Together, we reaffirm our commitment to building a more united, secure and prosperous Danube Region.