

Danube Strategy Flagships 2023



INTRODUCTION

Danube Strategy Flagships are projects or processes that contribute to the implementation of the [EU Strategy for the Danube Region \(EUSDR\)](#), have a clear macro-regional dimension and a multi-level governance approach. They are of high importance for the Danube Region's economic, social and territorial cohesion and for improving the quality of life in the Danube Region.

Danube Strategy Flagships strengthen internal and external communication of the Strategy and the visibility of the topics, initiatives and prospects in the Danube Region. They illustrate the progress achieved in implementing the EUSDR and demonstrate exemplarily significant improvement in the Region that is induced by cooperation.

EUSDR National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators with the respective Steering Groups, in their capacity as representatives and key implementers of the EUSDR, as well as the Danube Strategy Point, are committed to contribute to and promote Danube Strategy Flagships in accordance with the [Guidance Paper for identifying and listing Danube Strategy Flagships](#).

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Joint PA 1a & PA 11 Working Group on Administrative Processes

Process, platform, ongoing since 2013

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 1a Waterways Mobility, PA 11 Security

Submitted by: PA 1a

The joint EUSDR PA 1a & EUSDR PA 11 Working Group on “Administrative Processes” started its work in 2013 and is since then fully dedicated to facilitate and improve control processes in inland navigation, benefitting both the shipping sector (as united in PA 1a) and control authorities (as united in PA 11). Within the broad field of administrative processes, border controls have always been a main source of delays and additional costs for inland waterway transport on the multinational Danube River, which are therefore addressed with priority. In order to ensure the freedom of movement of persons and goods as foreseen in the EU treaties, simple and time-efficient control processes need to be in place at all Schengen external borders and outside the Schengen area.

The activities of the Working Group are based on a joint effort of Priority Area 1a of the EUSDR which is concerned with further developing inland waterways and Priority Area 11, which aims at enhancing transnational cooperation to improve security and to tackle serious and organised crime.

Objectives: The Working Group is a platform uniting (border) control authorities and stakeholders from the shipping industry alike, tackling the reduction of administrative barriers in inland navigation in the Danube Region in an ongoing process.

Need and (expected) impact: The initiative is necessary because control procedures, especially border controls, are a source of delays, in-transparency and unpredictability, hindering the efficient movement of traffic on the Danube. By harmonising, simplifying and finally digitalising such control processes, the administrative burden on transport operators is reduced and simplified for the control authorities, while becoming more predictable.

SIMPLIFICATION: The Practical Manual on Border Controls has been developed to simplify information on a myriad of control forms and processes applicable at and outside Schengen external borders along the Danube. The manual is the first and only one of its kind improving transparency of border controls and reducing market entry barriers for the waterway transportation industry along the Danube. It is publicly and free-of-charge available to waterway users irrespective of their nationality. The manual is being updated on a regular basis.

HARMONISATION & DIGITALISATION: Based on the efforts of the working group, the so-called DAVID-forms have been developed and officially introduced at all border control points at and outside Schengen external borders in Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. They harmonise the data fields of three most often used border control forms (arrival and departure forms, crew lists and passenger lists). Even Slovakia has introduced the forms, although not in the context of border controls but rather port operations. The Working Group is continuing its effort and currently works on the digitalisation of these forms to further reduce the administrative burden.

Recent efforts are also dedicated towards the set-up of a trans-national electronic registration tool (TERM), which enables waterway users to schedule time slots for border controls in a harmonised manner in the countries Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. This will lead to improved plannability and efficiency of border control times for both, the shipping sector and border control authorities alike in all countries at and outside Schengen external borders (as mentioned above).

Furthermore, the use of the transnational control database (IBISWEB) along the Danube is being tackled in order to avoid multiple inspections of vessels and to effectively support the control work of the authorities in a harmonised procedure.

With status June 2022, active users include those control authorities in inland navigation of the EUSDR that are members of Aquapol: Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia, Germany - along the Danube (Czech Republic – Labe / Elbe).

Control authorities in Austria and Ukraine have observer status in 2022 with an imminent full membership in 2023 (due to the Russian invasion, Ukraine's observer status will be implemented in consultation with Ukraine until further notice).

Macro-regional dimension: Countries involved in the Working Group: Germany (as EUSDR PA 11 PAC), Austria (as EUSDR PA 1a PAC) and all countries at and outside Schengen external borders: Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania (in addition to being outside the Schengen area, Romania is PA 1a PAC), Bulgaria (in addition to being outside the Schengen area, Bulgaria is PA 11 PAC), the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Slovakia is also involved, however to a lesser degree, as it has no Schengen external borders.

All countries contribute to the outcomes of the Working Group and have taken national steps for the simplification, harmonisation and digitalisation of border control processes.

Stakeholders involved: The Working Group is formed by stakeholders from the national Ministries of Transport and underlying authorities (port authorities, naval agencies), as well as from the Ministries of Interior and experts from the national border control authorities, including: customs and border police. The countries involved are listed under "macro-regional dimension".

Budget and Funding: As the national efforts to implement the activities of the joint Working Group cannot be monitored, no estimation can be given. It would be possible to implement parts of the Working Group's activities as own projects with different funding sources, possibly Danube Region Programme.

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

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Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan for the Danube and its navigable tributaries

Policy-project-cycle, process, ongoing since 2014

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 1a Waterways Mobility

Unstable and unpredictable fairway conditions along the Danube lead to cargo vessels that are not optimally loaded. This results in unreliable logistics chains and transport prices per transported tonne that are too high to be competitive. For the passenger shipping industry, unstable fairway conditions may prevent voyages from being carried out as planned, resulting in additional costs for cruise operators and an overall loss of image. Apart from structural river engineering-works on a limited number of strategic waterway bottlenecks, proper fairway maintenance helps in securing stable fairway conditions for waterway operators and their customers.

In response to inadequate fairway conditions along the Danube, Priority Area 1a, together with the waterway administrations and Ministries of Transport of the Danube Region, elaborated the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan for the Danube and its navigable tributaries (FRMMP) in 2014. The Master Plan stipulates a target minimum Level of Service of mostly 2.5m fairway depth along the Danube waterway (at Low Navigable Water Level) and defines – for each riparian state – the most important issues that need to be addressed to improve fairway rehabilitation and maintenance activities in order to eventually reach this target depth. The waterway management authorities have also estimated their needed annual operational budgets and listed needed investments for dredging equipment, riverbed surveying and fairway marking equipment.

The FRMMP thus provides a strategic framework for coordinated, concerted action to establish stable fairway conditions along the entire Danube and its navigable tributaries. It was endorsed by 10 riparian states during the Danube Ministers Meeting in Brussels on 3 December 2014. In order to keep the topic of fairway rehabilitation and maintenance on the political agenda of the Danube riparian countries and to regularly obtain a renewed commitment of the Danube Ministers of Transport to the Master Plan, Priority Area 1a in cooperation with DG MOVE organises a meeting of the Danube Ministers of Transport every two years, where Danube Ministerial Conclusions are signed and the implementation of the Master Plan is reaffirmed again and again. After 2014, such meetings were held in 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2022, where an updated version of the master plan was endorsed.

As with any strategy, the document itself does not change anything; projects are needed on the ground to implement it. After 2014, a number of national and also some transnational projects were initiated by the Master Plan, the best known and largest implementation project of the Master Plan was the FAIRway Danube project (2015 – 2021). In recent years, through such projects and with the help of EU co-funding, viable investments have been made that support the waterway administrations of the Danube Region in their maintenance and rehabilitation tasks.

EUSDR PA 1a regularly monitors the implementation status of the Master Plan and on the one hand supports the waterway authorities in the implementation of the Master Plan and on the other hand organises the political support of the Danube Ministers of Transport and the awareness of the necessary financial means through the Danube Ministerial meetings and the signing of Danube Ministerial Conclusions which take place every two years. This policy-project-cycle has proved successful in the past and will be continued by PA 1a.

Objectives: The overall objective is to establish stable and reliable fairway conditions along the entire Danube and its navigable tributaries of mostly 2.5m fairway depth at Low Navigable Water Level.

Need and (expected) impact: The current situation includes unstable fairway conditions – a situation that needs to be changed as soon as possible.

Macro-regional dimension: Countries involved in this process are those Danube Region countries with international waterways: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Romania, Bulgaria, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. As the aim is to establish stable and reliable fairway conditions along the entire waterway corridor, all countries need to be equally involved.

Stakeholders involved: Waterway administrations (waterway managers) of the Danube Region and Ministries of Transport (mostly PA 1a Steering Group members) of the Danube Region. The process is intensively supported by DG MOVE.

Budget and Funding: The process itself needs no funding other than the support the EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) are receiving. This task is part of the coordination activities of the PA 1a Coordinators.

Further information: <https://navigation.danube-region.eu/working-groups/wg-1-waterway-infrastructure-management/>

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Danube Region Transport Days (DRTD)

Stakeholder Conference, network, platform; ongoing since 2012 until at least 2028

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 1b Rail-Road-Air Mobility

Since 2012, EUSDR PA 1b assembles its valued stakeholders e.g. from the European Commission, academia, financing institutions, business representatives and interested general public to collect input across the diverse participants, advance standards of best practice and enable networking.

The purpose of the annual Stakeholders' Conference is to identify guiding principles for selected topics in transport, ascertain the current performance in these areas, and determine how the implementation of EUSDR PA 1b towards its mission can be further improved.

With this information, PA 1b can make effective decisions on its implementation plan. The conference outcomes also provide valuable input for the participants who are able to learn what are the most needed research and project activities for enhanced mobility and multimodality in the macro-region.

Objectives: The objective of Stakeholder Conferences is to achieve high level understanding and support for a common vision on infrastructure and mobility needs in coming years (until 2030, 2040 and 2045) for road, rail and air transport. The outcomes of the Stakeholder Conferences serve and will serve as input for the PA 1b decisions on how to tackle the most important activities of the EUSDR Action Plan. Last but not least the conferences are important for awareness rising and understanding that joint efforts are needed for the international/cross-border projects with clear added value for the Danube macro-region.

Need and (expected) impact: There are several reasons for PA 1b to organise and for participants to attend DRTD conferences, e.g.:

- To network: A big reason for going to conferences is to meet with likeminded people and transport sector peers. DRTD conferences bring together people from Danube Region and beyond who share a common discipline or field, and they are a great way to meet new people in the transport field.
- To expand knowledge and find solutions to problems.
- To present PA 1b and stakeholders' ideas and work to participants.
- For participants to meet with organisers and with each other.
- Learn beyond one's field or interest.

The DRTD conference attendance enhances both one's professional and personal development. The focused nature of presentations, discussions and learning at a conference allows participants to dig deeper with the understanding of transport and mobility topics of interest and of importance for connectivity and enhanced mobility in the Danube Region.

Macro-regional dimension: The Stakeholder Conferences "The Danube Region Transport Days" are organised by the PA 1b coordinators (PACs). During preparations for each conference a great attention is paid that most of the speakers and participants are coming from the 14 Danube Region countries. Of course, there are topics that are best presented by representatives of the European Commission or other national or international institutions from the EU and beyond.

Stakeholders involved: In the last seven conferences participating as speakers were:

- The European Commission (DG MOVE, DG REGIO, CINEA),
- IFIs (EIB, WB, EBRD),
- High level representatives from ministries,
- Academia (University of Belgrade, University of Győr, University of Ljubljana, University of Timișoara, University of Zagreb, etc.),
- International organisations (UNECE, CEI, EIRA-EuroRAP, etc.)
- And many others.

Budget and Funding: ERDF, IPA and NDICI (via transnational programme).

The estimated budget needed for one conference for up to 130 participants equals between EUR 14.000 and 23.000. Costs include: conference room, catering (mostly two lunches and a dinner), promotional material and external support (badges, follow up of registrations, technical support during the conference). Technical visits can be also organised as part of a conference.

Funding instrument: Technical support for PACs offered by the European Parliament enabled the organisation of the first couple of conferences, while in the last several years EUSDR PA1b technical support received through Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) and PA 1b project contract was the source of financing (85%).

Conferences are free of charge and the organisers never seek sponsorship.

Further information: <https://transport.danube-region.eu/conferences/>

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Danube Region Multimodal Corridors

Process; ongoing until 2030 and beyond

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 1b Rail-Road-Air Mobility



The development of an interconnected and integrated transport system in the Danube Region is a challenge of macro-regional relevance and consistent with national priorities as well as with the EU objectives of a more connected, greener and low-carbon Europe. It aims at strengthening transport infrastructure networks relations by identifying multimodal corridors alongside the TEN-T network, including connections between the EU and non-EU member states. In addition, the network shall improve connections between the Northern Adriatic and Black Sea and intermodal connections with the river and seaports of the macro-region.

Objectives: A system of multimodal corridors in the Danube Region, alongside the TEN-T network, aims at reducing infrastructural, technological and legislative gaps and improving accessibility, in order to facilitate cross-border demand flows and transport operations, and strengthen interconnections between the logistics and urban nodes of the Region.

The overall goal is contributing to create a seamless, harmonised and competitive transport system with a twofold scale of outcomes: on the one hand to exploit the strategic geographical position of the Danube Region between

the Black Forest and Black Sea, intercepting the routes from and to the Far East in the context of global trades; on the other hand, to facilitate regional and local connections.

The concept of multi-modal Corridors, crossing and connecting several states, has a macro-regional relevance by definition. In the Danube Region it can include several types of actions and projects, ranging from infrastructural development and upgrading to common functional, quality and safety standards (e.g. those foreseen by Reg. (EU) 1315, establishing the TEN-T network) to soft measures including the development of ICT or other innovative solutions to promote environmental-friendly transports (e.g. micro-mobility, cycling routes...), common safety and security standards and to facilitate cross-border crossings.

Need and (expected) impact: The Danube Region Multimodal Corridors is a policy directed towards the development of a Danube Region-wide multimodal transport network, which contributes to the three principal objectives of the macro-regional policy-making: fostering growth, creating jobs and adapting to climate change. The multimodal corridors are part of the TEN-T and extended TEN-T to non-EU countries which consists of a “core network” layer to be completed by 2030 and a “comprehensive network” layer to be completed by 2050.

A major instrument to facilitate and streamline the coordinated development of the core network is the “transport corridor approach”, in which a set of ten European transport corridors (ETC) have been identified by the European Commission. Newly proposed is the “Western Balkans Transport Corridor”.

The objective of this process is two folded:

- a) to assess the growth, jobs and climate impacts resulting from investments to be made between 2022 and 2030 to implement each macro-regional corridor, in line with the TEN-T network implementation as part of the EU transport policy and
- b) to identify and support additional multimodal corridors with added value for the macro-region e.g. Black Sea – Northern Adriatic Multimodal Corridor.

Planning and decision making on transport infrastructure, including multimodal infrastructure, is time-consuming and a financially demanding task. The results are most often seen after years of hard work.

Macro-regional dimension: Multimodal transport corridors are important for all countries of the Danube Region, the same way as they are of utmost importance for all EU member states.

A well-functioning and modern infrastructure is important for all countries for enabling smooth transport of goods and peoples.

Stakeholders involved: Regardless of the country there are always several stakeholders involved:

- national authorities,
- regional/local authorities,
- the European Commission,
- IFI's e.g. EIB, WB, EBRD.
- International institutions e.g. Transport Community.
- NGOs
- and others.

Budget and Funding: Budget needed: not estimated! Financial sources: national budgets, EU funds (CEF, IPA, NDICI...), bank loans.

Further information & Contact: PAC Slovenia, Ministry of Infrastructure, Mr. Franc Žepič (franc.zepic@gov.si) and PAC Serbia, Ministry of Construction, Infrastructure and transport, Mr. Predrag Petrović (predrag.petrovic@mgsi.gov.rs)

SUSTANCE - Sustainable public transport solutions and innovative governance schemes for improving connectivity in Central Europe

Project: 01.04.2023 – 31.03.2026

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 1b Rail-Road-Air
Mobility, PA 10 Institutional Capacity &
Cooperation
Submitted by: PA 1b

Interreg
CENTRAL EUROPE



Co-funded by
the European Union

SUSTANCE

The SUSTANCE project helps to solve the lack of efficient and sustainable public transport in peripheral and cross-border areas of Central Europe (CE), which have registered an increased mobility, especially at cross-border level, in the last decade.

The lack of public passenger solutions is a challenge for citizens living in sparsely populated areas, leading to an increased dependency on individual mobility and private vehicles. To change this, cooperation is central. A coordinated and jointly developed approach between CE countries, regions and sector stakeholders could ensure that the passenger transport and mobility system benefits from the new technological and innovative approaches and from new cooperation schemes deriving from the transnational partnership.

To achieve this, the project approach will be based on an innovative methodology with Public Transport accessibility of rural, peripheral and cross-border areas being assessed to identify existing gaps and posing the ground for new innovative services.

Close monitoring, assessment and peer review methodology as well as the design, development and implementation of innovative pilot activities and derived joint solutions will lead to the validation of customised intervention action plans that will be developed in cooperation with relevant stakeholders in a bottom-up approach. A special focus will lie on the transferability and replicability of the achieved results.

Finally, cooperation with the Associated Partners will support the setting up of the SUSTANCE transnational cooperation network, with the final aim of promoting the sustainability of the tested initiatives even after the project lifetime.

SUSTANCE Pilot actions focus on:

a) new/enhanced train services

- New direct passenger experimental train connection along the cross-border route Trieste Villa Opicina – Pivka – Šapjane - Rijeka
- Experimental extension to Sopron (HU) of the cross border train service linking Neusiedl am See (AT) to Fertőszentmiklós (HU)
- Feasibility study for improving passenger rail services along the cross-border route Divača-Buzet-Pula and intermodality improvement in Istria Region (HR)

b) ICT tools to improve mobility of passenger

- New ICTP booking service of DRT/Maas in Romagna Region (IT)
- New ICT service for Maas Application (HR)
- New IT tool for bike and rail in HR and neighbouring regions in SI & IT

Objectives: The SUSTANCE project aims at improving public transport connections in Central Europe by:

- defining an innovative methodology for analysing public transport accessibility of specific regions or routes;

- testing innovative passenger train services at cross border level, re-establishing and offering to citizens new/enhanced cross-border public transport solutions as well as exploiting the potential of ICT tools to design new on demand services dedicated to citizens living in peripheral and cross border regions (Demand Responsive Transport Application / Maas applications);
- promoting institutional dialogue among public transport operators, public authorities responsible for public transport planning at regional and national level, associations, agencies and other transport stakeholders with the scope of designing a common vision and shared action plans aimed at improving public transport connectivity in the regions/routes addressed by SUSTANCE

Need and (expected) impact: The introduction of innovative public transport services and solutions to link peripheral regions to the main urban transport nodes and TEN-T hubs will reduce individual mobility and will guarantee positive impacts in terms of reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and will positively impact on socio-economic development of the EUSDR Regions involved (Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia).

Macro-regional dimension: Representatives from five EUSDR countries are involved in the SUSTANCE project proposal: Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy and Slovenia.

Stakeholders involved: Project partners are the following:

- IT - Central European Initiative -Executive Secretariat (Lead Partner)
- IT - Eurac research
- HU - Győr-Sopron-Ebenfurth Railway Corp.
- HR - HZ Passenger Transport Ltd
- HR - Istrian development agency – IDA Ltd.
- IT - Institute for Transport and Logistics Foundation
- SI - Institut of Traffic and Transport Ljubljana I.I.c.
- SI - Slovenian Railways-Passenger Transport, Ltd.

Associated partners are the following:

- IT - EVTZ "Europaregion Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino" GECT "Euregio Tirolo-Alto Adige-Trentino"
- IT - Abteilung Mobilität des Landes Südtirol Ripartizione mobilità della Provincia autonoma di Bolzano
- HR - Istarska županija
- IT - AMR – Agenzia Mobilità Romagna
- IT - Regione Emilia Romagna – Direzione Generale Cura del Territorio e dell'Ambiente
- AT - Verkehrsverbund Ost-Region (VOR) GmbH
- AT - Schieneninfrastruktur-Dienstleistungsgesellschaft mbH (SCHIG)
- IT - Trenitalia - Direzione Regionale Friuli Venezia Giulia
- SI - Ministrstvo za infrastrukturo
- HU - Innovációs és Technológiai Minisztérium

Budget and Funding: Total Budget: 2.013.259 EUR (ERDF, co-financing rate 80%)

The project has been approved in the framework of the first call of the Interreg Central Europe Programme 2021-2027, Specific Objective 3.1.

The kick-off meeting took place in Trieste on 4-5 April 2023.

Further information:

- Project website: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/sustance/>
- Interview: <https://youtu.be/fyeKejd1SYs>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sustanceproject>

- Twitter: @Sustanceproject

The SUSTANCE project capitalises and builds upon the successful results of the CONNECT2CE project, funded by the Interreg Central Europe Programme in the programming period 2014-2020:

- Project Video: <https://youtu.be/qNEAYCqdTII>
- Pilot action – integrated ticket train/bus Trieste Ljubljana: <https://youtu.be/qfp5Ms33Ts>
- Interreg Central Europe video dedicated to CONNECT2CE: <https://youtu.be/FbT1tY64rkM>
- Project Website: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/CONNECT2CE.html>
- EC online news: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2022/02/02-03-2022-connect2ce-facilitates-cross-border-transport-thanks-to-interreg-central-europe

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Enhancing hydrogen economy in the EUSDR

*Policy support, project, process, network; preparatory phase;
planned duration: up to 5-10 years*



Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 2 Sustainable Energy

The Flagship will coordinate actions to foster the development of hydrogen economies in the EUSDR countries at a macro-regional level building on synergies of the national actions and the favourable natural/geographical conditions of the EUSDR (e.g. areas of excellent potentials for green hydrogen production from renewables, tremendous transport facilities: either natural, such as the Danube River, or artificial such as the extended gas infrastructures, etc.). It will analyse the entire hydrogen value-chain (production, transport/storage, end-uses) at a macro-regional level in a comprehensive way in order to make policy recommendations on how to adjust the different strengths/opportunities (e.g. production and transport capacities) and visions (e.g. various end-use development scenarios) at national levels into a transnational context, thus facilitating the development of a fully operational macro-regional hydrogen economy. The analyses will be done by an international expert team from and beyond the EUSDR countries (network) and will be disseminated – also in the form of policy recommendations - via different international workshops, policy conferences, etc.

The Flagship will also foster project generation (including IPCEI projects) in the hydrogen topic, and label selected successful project as flagships. Such first candidate is the project called HyEfre (Driving green hydrogen and efficient renewables integration for a balanced and sustainable central European energy system via targeted entrepreneurial and policy decision-making support) which has been submitted to Central Europe Programme (decision expected in December 2022).

Objectives: To become climate-neutral by 2050 - in line with the European Green Deal - Europe needs to transform its energy system, which accounts for 75% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions. This is also especially relevant for the EUSDR countries, which energy systems are often more outdated and fossil fuel-dependent compared to West Europe. Hydrogen - as an energy vector - can support the decarbonisation of industry, transport, power generation and buildings, and can power sectors that are not suitable for electrification, furthermore it can play a systemic role in the transition to renewable energy sources by providing a mechanism to flexibly transfer energy across sectors, time, and place. This wide-ranging potential of hydrogen provides excellent opportunities for the EUSDR countries to move their energy systems and economies further along the decarbonisation pathways according to their national potentials. The Flagship's objective is to promote the development of a fully operational macro-regional hydrogen economy through different actions (macro-regional analyses, policy recommendations,

dedicated workshops and policy conferences, successful projects, etc.). Hydrogen is an innovative and emerging low-carbon technology, thus the activities directly contribute to the fulfilment of the EUSDR Action Plan.

Need and (expected) impact: Hydrogen economies – though getting an increasing importance in the EUSDR countries – are at their infancy (except for Austria, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg) compared to the western part of Europe. Only five countries have national hydrogen strategies (Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) and are in preparation at various stages in the other EUSDR countries. The different priority topics are defined at national levels according to their economic interests and possibilities and thus have a great variety among the countries (e.g. countries with existing gas pipelines and underground gas storage capacities prioritise the retrofitting of these infrastructures along gas blending with hydrogen and hydrogen storage). Nevertheless, these national strategies lack transnational aspects on how to match the different “puzzles” of the entire hydrogen value chain (production, transport/storage, end-uses) defined at national levels into a coherent macro-regional vision of a fully integrated and efficient energy system, where the amounts of produced (green) hydrogen is fulfilling the demand of various end users.

Macro-regional dimension: All EUSDR countries are cooperating and the expected impacts are relevant to all cooperating countries.

Stakeholders involved: national hydrogen clusters/associations, industry partners from the entire hydrogen value chain, academia, policy- and decision makers, authorities.

Budget and Funding: Flagship projects with their own budgets (potential sources: centrally managed European programmes (Horizon Europe, LIFE Clean Energy Programme, Connecting Europe Facility Programme, etc.), Interreg Transnational Programmes (DRP, CE)

Flagship other process/network activities: est. EUR 10.000/year (source: PAC project)

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Promote local low-carbon energy actions in the EUSDR

Project, process, network; preparatory phase; planned duration: 5-10 years

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 2 Sustainable Energy



The Flagship will enable the spread of comprehensive systems, such as e.g. the “European Energy Award” (EEA) that facilitate the daily operation work of local authorities in their municipal energy planning. Such a “seed project” already exists (EEA along the Danube, supported by the State Ministry of Baden Württemberg), but future new projects are also planned (e.g. addressing the 2022 autumn call of DTP) partly to increase the recognition and adaption of the EEA system in the Danube Region, partly to address new objectives to be elaborated in full details in 2022. One such idea is to establish a network of experts and interested municipalities (“Danube Region Advisory Hub”) that support the set-up of new and the expansion of existing energy communities in a broader sense (going beyond the “prosumer” concept of renewable electricity and smart energy systems, and including local heating systems as well), to assist municipalities to elaborate their Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAP-s), enforce them joining the Covenant of Mayors, harmonise local policies to national and EU strategies, facilitate capacity building and benchmarking, etc.

Objectives: The Flagship activities (existing and future projects, as well as established municipal and expert networks) aim to coordinate and support local, citizen-driven energy actions in the Danube Region to enhance a clean energy transition and fight against energy poverty, thus addressing Action 6 of the EUSDR Action Plan.

Need and (expected) impact: The collective and citizen-driven energy actions that help pave the way for a clean energy transition at local levels have an increasing importance in Europe. They contribute to growing public

acceptance of renewable energy projects and make it easier to attract private investments. At the same time, they have the potential to provide direct benefits to citizens by increasing energy efficiency, lowering their energy bills and creating local job opportunities. Nevertheless, these initiatives are less common in the Danube Region, especially in its eastern part, where energy poverty is a main hurdle.

The Flagship activities are expected to contribute to a better developed and more energy conscious society in the Danube Region with a higher number of municipalities adapting smart energy planning and management and monitoring systems, as well as participating in relevant EU networks (e.g. Covenant of Mayors, Energy Communities, EEA, etc.) and less areas affected by energy poverty.

Macro-regional dimension: All EUSDR countries are cooperating and the expected impacts are relevant to all cooperating countries.

Stakeholders involved: Policymakers and authorities at national, regional (municipal) and local level, energy and climate agencies, energy suppliers, NGOs and engaged organisations and citizens.

Budget and Funding: Flagship projects with their own budgets (potential sources: Interreg Programmes, European City Facility Programme). The current “EEA along the Danube” project is co-financed by the State Ministry of Baden Württemberg by ca. EUR 200,000. Flagship other process/network activities: est. EUR 10.000/year (source: PAC project).

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Diversification of gas supply in the EUSDR

*Policy support, process, network; preparatory phase;
planned duration: 2022-2024 (any beyond if necessary)*



Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 2 Sustainable Energy

The Russian gas import of many EUSDR countries is well above 60%, which makes this part of Europe even more exposed than the EU average. The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing and foreseen energy-related sanctions raise the security of supply concerns as never before. To address this challenge, EUSDR PA 2 has initiated several actions, such as:

- It commissioned a study (subcontractor: Regional Centre for Energy Policy Research- REKK) on how to reduce gas import independence in the Danube Region (to be completed by November 2022). The preparation of this study is being carried out by strong collaboration with the Steering Group members and gas experts of the EUSDR countries.
- Together with REKK and Central European Policy Studies (CEPS) PA 2 is organising a session in the frame of the EU Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW) on 19 September 2022. The session will discuss future potential pathways for reducing the Danube Region’s dependence on the Russian gas import, while still adhering to the European Green Deal. It will present proposed short-, mid- and long term actions on how to diversify the energy supply of the Region’s countries, accelerate the use of the untapped renewable and other alternative energy sources. The session will combine keynotes and discussion of natural gas related high level policy options, economics of potential sectoral measures and ground implementation experiences.
- Based on the outcomes of the study and the results of widespread international discussion expected at the EUSEW conference, policy briefs and other follow up activities are planned for 2023 and beyond.

Objectives: Europe’s sustainable energy policy has been dramatically impacted by Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine and its consequences on the European energy systems. Rapid responses are being formulated

(REPowerEU, IEA 10 point plan, a number of high-level policy papers and studies) which aims to reduce the EU's gas imports from Russia by nearly two thirds by the end of 2022, and to make Europe independent from all Russian fossil fuels well before 2030. These documents mark out the main areas of intervention to pave the way for an accelerated clean energy transition and enhanced market resilience, nevertheless details obviously need to be elaborated. European countries have great differences in their energy systems, national resources, infrastructures, economic development, etc. that determine their responses to these new challenges. This is even more relevant for the Danube Region, where regional disparities are huge and vulnerable consumers need to be protected in numerous provinces against volatile energy prices.

Different activities within this Flagship aim to provide a comprehensive assessment of the gas markets of the EUSDR countries, focussing on their vulnerability related to Russian gas import dependency. The study and the workshop aim to outline different options for the countries how to reduce their gas import and replace them with domestic fossil, or preferably renewable energy resources.

Need and (expected) impact: The ongoing war of aggression on Ukraine has serious impacts on the security of energy supply, especially on those countries (most of the EUSDR countries belong to this category) that heavily depend on Russian gas import. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to deliver different scenarios, how these countries can diversify and secure their own energy supplies. The outcomes of the study and the results of the workshop discussion will highlight future potential pathways for reducing the Danube Region's dependence on the Russian gas import while still adhering to the European Green Deal. It will also present proposed short-, mid- and long term actions on how to diversify the energy supply of the region's countries, accelerate the use of the untapped renewable and other alternative energy sources, and also present some good practices. The results will provide insights to the policy, regulatory, economic and implementation aspects of the green energy transition to stop EU's, and especially the central and east European regions' reliance on fossil gas import from Russia and propose concrete steps with modelled cost estimates and present showcases of decarbonised and efficient heating alternatives.

Macro-regional dimension: All EUSDR countries are cooperating and the expected impacts are relevant to all cooperating countries.

Stakeholders involved: Policy makers, regulators, industry representatives, system operators at EU, national and regional levels, as well as the wider public, as vulnerable consumers are the suffering targets of this geopolitical crisis.

Budget and Funding: est. EUR 10.000/year (source: PAC projects)

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Friends of the DANUBE Camps *(new)*

Project; ongoing, up to 5 years

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 3 Culture & Tourism

Friends of the DANUBE (FOD) Camps provide an opportunity for young people to meet their peers along the Danube Region and to get in touch with local environmental organisations. The programme is organised through theory and practice, with:

- Guided workshops for youngsters, where they have the opportunity to talk with experts from various fields, such as rangers from national parks, researchers from biological institutions, local tourist organisations, water conservation experts, NGOs, etc.

- Practical education with various activities, such as bird watching, kayaking, trekking, tree planting, cycling, camping, or cooking.

Objectives: The goal of the programme is to connect, empower and activate youth in protection and enhancement of biodiversity and to experience the river in adventurous way, through fun and engaging activities.

Need and (expected) impact: FOD Camps are a practical education programme, providing knowledge and skills for young people in the Danube Region.

Macro-regional dimension: FOD Camps give an opportunity for youth to meet their peers along the Danube Region, and to get in touch with local environmental organisations.

Stakeholders involved: nine countries

Budget and Funding: n/a

Further information: <https://www.friendsofthedanube.com/>

Contact: PAC PA 3, Ms Irina Cozma (irina.cozma@mdlpa.ro)



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Sustain and better connect EUSDR Cultural routes

Process; preparatory phase; to be revised after 2 years

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 3 Culture & Tourism

Sustain and better connect all EUSDR Cultural routes (local/regional connectivity with existing or future routes):

Routes4U published a Roadmap for the Danube Region, which summarises the research results and the conclusions drawn during the meeting in Bucharest. The Roadmap highlights recommendations and steps to take in order to successfully develop the Cultural routes in the Danube Region.

Objectives: In order to establish a strong network of members, stakeholders agreed on national co-ordination of the different destinations of the Cultural Route. These national coordination entities should be established in order to ensure the participatory approach with all members and to create a multiplying effect in the implementation of activities.

Need and (expected) impact: The need for a harmonised distribution of tourism flows through macro-regional territories using Cultural Routes to create innovative diversified tourism products; supporting the development of cycling, walking/hiking routes etc., that would better connect all EUSDR Cultural routes. The challenge is to address the regional connectivity of locally micro-managed routes.

Macro-regional dimension: All EUSDR countries will be involved in the process and also representative of existing cultural routes and entities in charge from other macro-regional strategies.

Stakeholders involved: Different categories of stakeholders from local to transnational level.

Budget and Funding: n/a

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Danube Small Projects Fund

Process; ongoing, up to 5-10 years

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 3 Culture & Tourism

The basic idea of the Danube Small Project Fund for Culture (DSPF) is to provide an uncomplicated funding platform for Danube-wide collaboration that can disburse even small amounts (<5,000 €) for the most important costs (travel expenses, organisation etc.) without major administrative hurdles. Such an uncomplicated small project funding scheme has been a long-term desire of the cultural sector in the Danube Region since the very beginning of the EUSDR activities.



Objectives: The Ministry of Science, Research and Arts Baden-Württemberg initiated a pilot action for the DSPF which is to elaborate the final structure and to test the long-term function of this innovative funding platform. The Partners followed the initiative of the Ministry of Science, Research and Arts Baden-Württemberg and agreed to jointly establish a DSPF pilot implementation phase from 2021-2023.

The pilot phase is based on simple online calls at least once per year (depending on funding possibilities). Cultural actors in the Danube Region can describe their concepts and enter them into an online form to apply for funding.

Need and (expected) impact: European Danube Academy, involving all Partners. For the elaboration of the DSPF structure the international translation network Traduki was used as a role model. The concrete preparation of the fund was strongly supported by the long-standing experiences of the Working Community of the Danube Regions (ARGE Donauländer). The final structures and procedures have been discussed and confirmed by all Partners.

Macro-regional dimension: Most EUSDR participating countries are involved at this moment.

Stakeholders involved: The following partners have established a new alliance for culture and creativity in the Danube Region.

Institutional founders of the DSPF:

- Ministry of Science, Research and Arts Baden-Württemberg as initiator
- Province of Lower Austria/Working Community of the Danube Regions (ARGE Donauländer)
- City of Regensburg
- "Kulturreferentin" for the Danube region at the Museum of the Danube Swabians (DZM) Ulm
- Donaübüro GmbH Ulm/Neu-Ulm

The first private partner and co-founder of the DSPF:

- Volksbank Ulm-Biberach eG

Associated partners:

- Danube Cultural Cluster
- Deutsches Kulturforum östliches Europa Potsdam

The DSPF project is coordinated by the European Danube Academy (EDA).

Budget and Funding: The DSPF is funded by financial contributions from various partners throughout the Danube Region. The sides agree to provide an annual financial contribution to the fund. The Ministry of Science, Research and Arts Baden-Württemberg and the Province of Lower Austria/Working Community of the Danube Regions (ARGE Donauländer) offered to contribute a higher annual lump sum which builds the fundament of this pilot initiative.

Further information: <https://danubeculture.eu/danube-small-project-fund>

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Flagship process on adaptation to climate change

Process; 2019-2028

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 4 Water Quality, PA 5 Environmental Risks

Submitted by: PA 4

Climate change is becoming a global challenge and it is a crosscutting issue. EUSDR PA 4 supports a number of related actions in which water availability and water quality are key issues to climate change adaptation as stated in the EUSDR Action Plan (Action 6 of PA 4). Moreover, climate change issues are involved among PA 5 activities.

Among others, PA 4 organised a conference on adaptation to climate change under the Slovak EUSDR Presidency (2021) and prepared a study (2020) and leaflet on water retention measures in urban areas (2021). It supports a number of international projects on replenishing groundwater supplies by managed aquifer recharge (Deepwater-CE), small water and nutrient retention measures (FramWat, OPTAIN), floodplain restoration (DanubeFloodplain), management of drought related risks (DriDanube), water quality and ecosystem services (IDES), local water retention measures (LIFE LOGOS 4 WATERS). PA 4 contributed in the development of a "Guidance paper on Climate Change Induced Water Quantity Issues", prepared in the frame of the JOINTISZA project, focusing on the extreme climate events in Tisza sub-basin scale. PA 4 is planning to assist in setting up an international project to determine water balance for the whole Danube Region and others related to climate change.

Objectives: PA 4 Action Plan, Action 6 objectives:

- Implement water quality measures of the ICPDR Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change.
- Promote concrete measures to control water abstraction and groundwater overexploitation
- Promote the establishment and maintenance of green infrastructure and natural water retention measures (NWRMs)
- Promote water related measures in urban planning
- Raise farmers and public awareness about the importance of soil moisture and soil water retention capacity in soil fertility under changing climate conditions

The process focused on climate change aims at sharing experience and best practices in climate change adaptation emphasising (green) water retention measures, which contribute to better water quality and water availability in

the Danube Region. Many initiatives labelled as “climate change adaptation” have emerged in the Danube Region countries. This indicates growing awareness over the last decade on how important the adaptation component has become in numerous sectors of the economy. There are already good stories and first lessons learnt from introduction of novel approaches in water and landscape management. However, there are still a lot of challenges, which need to be addressed jointly with support at political level from top-down viewpoint, and horizontally by various stakeholders and EUSDR Priority Areas.

Need and (expected) impact: Continuing climate change, especially climate extremes – floods and droughts, pose the challenges on water quality and water availability for all users. This includes increased uncertainty and variability of extreme weather events. Therefore, adaptation strategies in the water sector need to address several emerging trends driven by climate change as interventions on supply and demand side. While supply side adaptation options involve measures for water retention in the country, demand side include measures to ensure water for key consumers and critical infrastructure, including ecosystems. The addressed water retention measures (e.g. polders, lakes, ditches, dams) flatten the flood waves, store the water for dry periods, enable recharging groundwater supplies, and are favourable for ecosystems. Moreover, the potential conflicts among users in drought periods must be clearly managed within emergency plans. Besides water accessibility from a quantitative viewpoint, the adequate water quality should be maintained.

Adaptation to climate change is very difficult since there are not enough relevant data and it often turns into maladaptation: decisions may fail to meet their objectives, and they may even increase vulnerability of other systems. This is a case of water management sector as well e.g. development of an irrigation system may result in water shortage as the consequence of climate change. The implementation of climate change adaptation measures should be considered in complex way. When designing adaptation projects, there is a need to assess the negative externalities associated with infrastructure projects on both ecosystem and human sides.

An expert workshop is planned to be held focusing on climate change adaptation – in close cooperation with PA 5.

Macro-regional dimension: Since climate change is a global problem, it reaches the whole Danube Region. Therefore, the adaptation measures will be functional and effective only if they are applied transnationally, so at macro-regional level. Many of the Danube countries have already adopted the Climate Change Adaptation Strategies and applied first measures to avoid adverse impacts of droughts/floods. However, it is still not enough and to apply measures into practice should be supported and properly implemented.

Stakeholders involved: Policy and decision makers at government bodies of Danube Region countries, international water related bodies, think tanks entities, NGOs, academic and research sector, land users, water service providers, and practitioners in urban planning.

Regular cooperation with the mentioned organisations, ensured by trilateral and SG meetings, joint events.

Budget and Funding: The process has already been partly financed by implementation of the PA 4 relevant projects related to climate change. The transnational projects were financed by Interreg Central Europe, Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, Horizon Europe and LIFE programmes.

The new financing is needed to be allocated for climate change adaptation related projects and processes (e.g. negotiations, meetings, conferences, workshops and public awareness raising campaigns).

Further information:

- <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/DEEPWATER-CE.html>
- <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/FramWat.html>
- <https://www.optain.eu/>
- <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/danube-floodplain>
- <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/dridanube>
- <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/ides>

- <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/jointisza/outputs>
- <https://lifelogos4waters.bm.hu/en/home/>
- https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/sites/13/2019/09/Action_Plan_EUSDR-1.pdf

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Flagship process on migratory fish

Process; 2019-2028

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 4 Water Quality, PA 6 Biodiversity, Landscapes and Air & Soil Quality

Submitted by: PA 4

EUSDR PA 4 in cooperation with EUSDR PA 6 is very active on increasing the knowledge base on migratory fish species, including sturgeon - the Danube endemic fish species, and is looking for possibilities of re-establishing their migration routes. PA 4 supports international projects like the MEASURES project to restore ecological corridors for migratory fish or We Pass I and II projects to enable fish migration at the Iron Gates, and presented a brochure “Promoting Measures to Enable Fish Migration in the Danube River Basin” summarising the current knowledge. PA 4 carried out a study on effects of noise and waves on fish species and a fish migration restoration document, and prepared an animated film about sterlets. PA 4 will also promote hydro-morphological measures to achieve good ecological status of waters needed for fish migration.

Objectives: PA 4 Action Plan, Action 5 objectives:

- raising broad public awareness for the Danube sturgeons as flagship species for the Danube River basin and for the ecosystems and biodiversity of the Danube River basin as a whole;
- fostering sturgeon conservation activities including protection of habitats, restoration of fish migration routes and ex-situ conservation measures;
- closing knowledge gaps concerning monitoring of pressures and planning of measures for fish migration in coordination with PA 6.

There are two major barriers on the Danube River for migratory fish species – Iron Gates in Romania/Serbia and Gabčíkovo Water Structure/Dunakiliti in Slovakia/Hungary. Construction of fish passes in Iron Gates can serve as information base for construction of other fish passes in Danube River (e.g. Gabčíkovo, and upper Danube ones). Migratory Fish Flagship Process will make an effort to facilitate removing the fish barriers on the Danube River.

Need and (expected) impact: In 2021, PA 4 prepared the brochure “Promoting Measures to Enable Fish Migration in the Danube River Basin”. In 2022, PA 4 organised a fish migration working meeting, which provided the platform for discussions about the behaviour of migratory fish species and technical solutions of fish pass designs e.g. the Iron Gates and Gabčíkovo Water Structure. In addition, PA 4 finalised the fish migration restoration document that takes into account the suggestions from the meeting. The document provides a database of relevant information on migratory fish restoration (e.g. methodologies, the investigation on behaviour of fish species, an overview of ichthyocenoses in Middle and Upper Danube), and estimates alternative technical solutions of fish pass design for specific migratory fish at the Gabčíkovo Water Structure. The document serves as the actual knowledge base for designing and constructing fish passes in the Danube River.

Macro-regional dimension: Migratory fish species (e.g. sturgeons) can spawn only in the river without barriers and borders, so this process will affect all countries on the Danube River. Therefore, conservation measures will be effective only in case they are applied at macro-regional level. Moreover, countries and operators of Iron Gates and Gabčíkovo Water Structure should closely cooperate for creating the most feasible solution for fish passes.

Stakeholders involved: ICPDR; PA 6 - Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF); related projects leaders, related hydropower operators (e.g. Water Construction, Slovakia, Hidroelectrica, Romania), experts on migratory fish protection in the Danube Region, experts in the field technical design of fish passes, PA 4 SG members, etc.

Regular cooperation with the mentioned organisations, ensured by trilateral and SG meetings, joint events.

Budget and Funding: The process has already been partly financed by implementation of the PA 4 relevant projects related to sturgeons. The transnational projects were financed by European Commission and Interreg Danube Transnational Programme.

The new financing should be allocated for sturgeon conservation measures projects and processes (e.g. negotiations, meetings, conferences, workshops and public awareness raising campaigns).

Further information:

- <https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/promoting-measures-to-enable-fish-migration-in-the-danube-river-basin/>
- <https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/why-is-it-a-challenge-to-be-a-migratory-fish-species/>
- <https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/fish-migration-restoration-document/>
- <https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/fish-migration-restoration-working-meeting/>
- <https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/ship-noise-and-water-wave-measurement-on-the-hungarian-section-of-the-danube/>
- <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/measures>
- <https://www.we-pass.org/>

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Flagship process on emerging substances

Process; 2019-2028

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 4 Water Quality



EUSDR PA 4 has been very active in the field of emerging substances as they represent a significant risk to the water environment. Although in accordance with Watch List of Directive 2000/60/EC (Water Framework Directive – WFD; Annex X - the substances are specified in detail in Directive 2013/39/EU), there is an obligation to monitor hazardous and emerging substances in surface water, and for groundwater it is not compulsory. Since this list is continually enlarging, currently there is not enough relevant data available on their occurrence as well as on their impacts on ecosystems and humans.

PA 4 organised data collection on microplastic and is supporting international projects and project proposals on plastic and microplastic like Tid(y)Up, PlasticFreeDanube and MapRiverPlastic. PA 4 also helps awareness raising on the plastic pollution of waters by cooperating with the CleanDanube project and by its own brochure on best practices towards reduction of plastic pollution. Furthermore, pilot research was made on micropollutants in the Danube at five wastewater treatment plants in 2021 in Hungary.

Moreover, PA 4 in 2019 prepared a study on the pharmaceuticals occurrence in surface water and groundwater, which had positive impact on policymaking and development. As continuation to this topic, PA 4 plans to organise a conference on pharmaceuticals occurrence in water, when the respected legislation will be valid. Moreover, PA 4 also contributed to supporting the bo-DEREC-CE international project. The established cooperation with the EU Baltic Strategy in hazardous substance issues is promising to solve the challenges jointly. Future activities are also

planned in this flagship process like the upcoming conference on pharmaceuticals or a follow-up of the Tid(y)Up project (Aquaplastic submitted to the DRP call), (micro)plastics' impacts on ecosystems should also be studied further.

Objectives: As defined in the EUSDR Action Plan, PA 4 Action 1 objectives:

- Close knowledge gaps on monitoring of hazardous and emerging substances in surface waters, biota and sediment
- Determine sources and pathways of hazardous and emerging substances emissions
- Quantify water emissions and loads
- Implement prevention and mitigation measures including a more comprehensive evaluation of measures efficiency
- Contribute to capacity building in monitoring, modelling and management of hazardous substances pollution
- Contribute to improved quality of sediments

The flagship process will contribute to achieving the foreseen targets of PA 4 in the upcoming six years.

Need and (expected) impact: The flagship process will contribute to close the knowledge gap on monitoring of hazardous and emerging substances in surface waters, biota and sediment, and will provide updated information on the situation related to hazardous and emerging substances, such as pharmaceuticals, and microplastics in the Danube Region.

The future challenge is not only to monitor the occurrence of hazardous substances in the waters and sediments, but also to investigate their impacts and impacts of their metabolites to humans and biota.

Macro-regional dimension: PA 4 prolongs already established cooperation with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in the field of pharmaceuticals and their removal from waters. Based on the study completed in 2019 PA 4 is planning to organise the international pharmaceutical conference in the future when respected legislation will be valid.

In the past PA 4 organised two macro-regional meetings focusing on water issues and there was one study elaborated about macro-regional strategies by our HU partner (TRENCON company). The first meeting was attended by representatives by all four macro-regional strategies (Baltic, Danube, Adriatic-Ionian and Alpine) and there was an excellent exchange of knowledge and experience, especially in hazardous substances in the water.

Stakeholders involved PA 4 SG members; Baltic Strategy experts; DG ENVIRONMENT experts; International Commission for Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR); International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC); Global Water Partnership Central and Eastern Europe (GWP CEE); NGOs active in plastic pollution; Water companies; laboratories, etc.

Regular cooperation with the mentioned organisations, ensured by trilateral and SG meetings, joint events.

Budget and Funding: The PA 4 project contains a budget for implementing PA 4 actions, including topics listed in this flagship process. The process has already been partly financed by implementation of the PA 4 relevant projects related to hazardous substances, e.g. projects implemented: DanubeHazard M3C, PlasticFreeDanube; TIDY – UP; CleanDanube; bo-DEREC-CE; project proposal MapRiverPlastic). They were financed by Interreg V-A Slovakia-Austria, Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, Interreg Central Europe Programme, and other sources.

The new financing should be allocated for monitoring of hazardous and emerging substances occurrence and for investigation of their impacts on humans and ecosystems. The process will be supported by the organisation of events and public awareness raising campaigns, e.g. meetings, conferences, workshops.

Further information: <https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/>

The process includes also:

- DanubeHazard M3C project (<https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/danube-hazard-m3c>)
- Tid(y)Up project and its potential continuation (<https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/tid-y-up>)
- PlasticFreeDanube project (<https://plasticfreeconnected.com/>)
- CleanDanube project (<https://www.cleandanube.org/?lang=en>)
- MapRiverPlastic project proposal
- Plastic brochure
- Small project on microplastic at WWTPs
- bo-DEREC-CE project (<https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/boDEREC-CE.html>)
- Study on occurrence of pharmaceuticals in the waters of the Danube region Pharmaceuticals cooperation with the Baltic Strategy
- Planned pharmaceuticals conference

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Disaster Management Working Group

Project, process, network, platform; started in 2019, ongoing constantly reviewed and renewed milestones

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 5 Environmental Risks

Extending the cooperation and joint efforts of the countries in the Danube Region presents an opportunity for reaching a common understanding and for developing standards regarding the management of environmental risks. Developing recommendations for the involvement of civil protection organisations and fire and rescue services involved in disaster management would encourage standardised response activities.

The Disaster Management Working Group (DM-WG) was established in 2019 to concentrate on emergency response and preparedness elements of managing environmental risks which are within the scope of EUSDR PA 5.

Objectives:

- Provide a platform for cooperation between relevant stakeholders of the 14 Danube Region countries in the field of disaster management;
- Cooperate with International Commission for the Protection of Danube River (ICPDR) in all activities concerning water management to achieve good synergy and to contribute to their efforts from a disaster response viewpoint;
- Support the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) coordinated by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) in cross-border and regional level disaster management with the involvement of authorities and (volunteer) non-governmental organisations;
- Trigger discussions and activities concerning disaster preparedness and response elements in the management of environmental risks;
- Work on the development of recommendations for volunteer organisations involved in disaster response in the Danube Region;
- Focusing on the development and adaptation of “Minimum standards for civil protection organisations and fire and rescue services involved in international or cross-border disaster response in the Danube Region” at policy and at operational levels;
- Identify existing practices and procedures to minimise duplications.

Need and (expected) impact: In order to improve the cooperation between volunteers and government agencies during international (cross-border and regional) disaster response in the Danube Region, the following policy recommendations were developed, that can help to promote effective collaboration between these groups. The recommendations are targeting strategic decision-makers on a macro-regional as well as national level.

Policy recommendations for the implementation of a macro-regional disaster management framework in the Danube Region:

1. Volunteer registration and management: Having a clear and efficient system in place for registering and managing volunteers can help to ensure that their skills and abilities are effectively utilised in disaster response efforts. This registration should be linked to a management system that allows the coordination and integration of volunteer work into the overall disaster response plan.
2. Training and education: Providing harmonised training and education to both volunteers and government agencies can help to improve their understanding of their roles and responsibilities during flood response and to work together effectively.
3. Clear communication and coordination: Establishing clear communication channels between volunteers and government agencies can help to ensure that information is shared effectively and that both groups are aware of the overall response plan.
4. Cross-sectoral cooperation: Ensuring close cooperation with the flood risk management sector especially in the areas of the flood risk assessment, flood risk and hazard mapping, flood risk reduction by programmes of measures, flood forecasting and warning, strengthening resilience and awareness raising.
5. Regular exercise: Conducting regular exercises (field and table-top) can help to test and improve the coordination and collaboration between volunteers and government agencies in disaster response efforts.
6. Risk and vulnerability assessments: It's crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of flood risks and vulnerabilities, and to use this information to guide flood response planning and preparedness.
7. Flexible funding and resource allocation: Governmental and non-governmental agencies, which are involved in response activities, should have flexible funding mechanisms that allow them to quickly and efficiently allocate resources, including funding, to support volunteer efforts, including equipment, transportation and training.
8. Recognition and appreciation of volunteer work: Recognising and appreciating the work of volunteers can help to foster a culture of volunteerism and civil engagement, which can help to ensure that volunteers are willing and able to respond to future disasters.
9. Insurance and liability protection: governments should provide insurance and liability protection to volunteers in case of accidents or injuries that may happen during the volunteer work.
10. Development of standard operating procedures (SOP) for cross-border/macro-regional deployment of volunteer rescue units.
11. Strengthen knowledge sharing: Maintenance of macro-regional network of focal points and a knowledge portal to share online material (terminology, e-learning, reports and studies), as well as knowledge exchange opportunities (training of trainers, exchange of experts).

Macro-regional dimension: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia

Stakeholders involved

- National-level governmental disaster management organisations
- National-level non-governmental organisations from the field of disaster management
- Research institutes and universities in the field of disaster risk reduction and climate change
- Municipalities, county-level councils
- Rescue organisations

- Water management organisations

Budget and Funding:

- Horizon 2020, DAREnet, EUR 3.500.000
- EU (DG ECHO), DiMaND, EUR 341.608
- EU (DG ECHO), PROFOUND, EUR 631.954
- International Visegrad Fund, Wildfirex, EUR 26.980
- Western Balkan Green Centre, PREP-R, EUR 49.301.400
- INTERREG SKHU, RISKHUB, EUR 395.129
- DTP, WACOM, EUR 1.570.581

**Further information:**

- <https://environmentalrisks.danube-region.eu/>
- <https://disastermanagement-danube.net/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/DiMaNDnetwork>
- <http://darenetproject.eu/>
- <http://profoundexercise.eu/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/ProfoundExercise>
- <https://www.facebook.com/riskhubproject>

Contact: Zsolt Kelemen (budapest@tuzoltoszovetseg.hu)

Nature-based solutions for flood risk reduction

Platform; ongoing; some projects have been finished (LIFE-MICACC, FRAMWAT, DAREnet), some are under implementation (NBS4LOCAL, LIFE LOGOS 4 WATERS & LIFE SANBOIL).

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 5 Environmental Risks

Countries are facing a pressing, complex and interlinked set of environmental crises. In terms of climate change water scarcity, drought and flooding is one of the most frequent and damaging natural hazard globally. While nature-based solutions can reduce flood risk, they are not part of mainstream risk management. However, they can minimise the flood risk and have added value compared to grey solutions (concrete).

In 2023, a study with the title "Supporting the advancement of nature-based solutions in the water management of hillside settlements" was prepared by EUSDR PA 5. In October 2022, a workshop on "Supporting the advancement of nature-based solutions in water management" was organised on Pillar level (PA 4, PA 5 & PA 6). As an outcome of the workshop, a "Policy Recommendation to support the uptake of nature-based practices" was published in December 2022.

The Global Water Partnership (GWP) has established a mission to define, design and launch a community of practice (CoP) related to NBS in 2022. The community will build on the GWP Toolbox – IWRM action hub, which GWP has recently developed and launched.

In Hungary, the Nature-based Solutions Hub (TeAM HUB) was established in 2022. The TeAM HUB is a professional community of organisations and individuals committed to the widespread dissemination of nature-based solutions in Hungary.

Objectives: The EUSDR PA 5 Nature-based solutions for flood risk reduction Platform provides a project example to address flood risk, with policy recommendations according to the topic throughout the Danube Region countries.

Need and (expected) impact: Effective flood risk management is critical to protect people and their livelihoods from flooding and to limit future losses. Nature-based measures and their ability to address flood risk are receiving increasing attention. Until recently, most flood risk management involved conventional engineering measures. These measures are sometimes referred to as “hard” engineering or “gray” infrastructure. Examples include building embankments, dams, levees, and channels to control flooding. Recently the concept of “nature-based solutions”, “ecosystem-based adaptation”, “eco-DRR” or “green infrastructure” has emerged as a good alternative or complement to traditional gray approaches. Nature-based solutions make use of natural processes and ecosystem services for functional purposes, such as decreasing flood risk or improving water quality. The objective is to present principles and implementation guidance for planning, such as evaluation, design, and implementation of nature-based solutions for flood risk management as an alternative to or complementary to conventional engineering measures.

Macro-regional dimension: All Danube Region countries, and in the frame of the LIFE SANDBOIL project another macro-regional strategy is involved, since Italy (Po-river basin) is the lead partner

Stakeholders involved: ministries (Ministry of Interior of Hungary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary), water authorities (OVF, ÉDUVIZIG, KÖTIVIZIG), municipalities, universities (NUPS, UNIBO), non-governmental organisations (ICPDR, WWF, Carpathian Convention, associations (MMK, KBTSZ)

Budget and Funding: CBC Programmes, Interreg DTP/DRP, Horizon Europe, LIFE (Climate Action, Environmental Programme)

Further information: <https://environmentalrisks.danube-region.eu/>

Contact: PAC PA 5, László Balatonyi (Laszlo.Balatonyi@mfa.gov.hu)

Improving the Safety of Tailings Management Facilities in the Danube River Basin

Project; in planning phase

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 5 Environmental Risks

Mining is one of the world’s most traditional industrial sectors, and continues to provide valuable ores and minerals. A significant waste stream however, is generated by these operations. One of the components of mining waste is mining tailings – such as waste rock and mine water – and this all needs to be stored and handled in tailings management facilities (TMFs). Due to the physical characteristics and chemical nature of substances that can be found in the tailings, TMFs pose risks to both environment and population. Pollution of water bodies and the related risk or damage to environmental resources often has a negative transboundary effect too, and accidents at TMFs may lead to long-term negative and chronic effects. More than 300 TMFs are located in the Danube River Basin (DRB), for which adequate safety conditions and measures have to be put in place. Past accident events dramatically demonstrated how serious impacts on people and water resources TMF failures could have.

Objectives: This project proposal aims to close practical knowledge gaps while raising awareness of TMFs and their hazards in the Danube River Basin (DRB) and strengthening the technical and management capacity relating to these facilities.

Need and (expected) impact: Respecting a common set of minimum standards and safety requirements in the DRB to reduce accident risks, providing tools and strategies to improve TMF safety, updating and completing the TMF inventory of the DRB, amending an existing hazard assessment method and integrating land use planning aspects into it (risk), further enhancing and completing a previously developed detailed checklist method, providing recommendations for the Danube Region countries on managing TMFs and ensuring sustainability of the results.

Macro-regional dimension: Potentially all Danube Region countries are going to be involved

Stakeholders involved: Universities, ministries, governmental and non-governmental organisations, associations, institutes and agencies.

Ministry of Interior (Hungary, the Lead Partner), National Association of Volunteers in the Republic of Bulgaria, Fire Association in Split Dalmatia County, University of Ostrava, Middle Tisza District Water Directorate, Budapest Firefighter Association, Csongrád-Csanád County Directorate for Disaster Management, General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations of Ministry of Internal Affairs Republic of Moldova, Babeş-Bolyai University, Harghita County Council, University of Ljubljana, European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Via Carpatia, Ministry of Environmental Protection (Serbia), Vareš Municipality, Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests (Romania), Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic, Slovenian National Building and civil engineering Institute. Associated Strategic Partners: General Directorate of Water Management (Hungary), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Hungary), Rába-Duna-Vág European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation with Limited Liability (Hungary), Association of Rhodope Municipalities (Bulgaria), Harghita County Volunteer Firefighters Association, Municipality of Komárom-Esztergom County, Heves county municipality, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (APC-EG), German Environment Agency, Ministry of Energy and Mining of the Republic of Srpska Bosnia and Herzegovina, The Firefighting Association of Slovenia.

Budget and Funding: Danube Region Programme

Further information: <https://environmentalrisks.danube-region.eu/>

Contact: PAC PA 5, László Balatonyi (Laszlo.Balatonyi@mfa.gov.hu)

Priority Area 6 Task Forces – Stakeholder Involvement, multi-level governance, joint implementation

Process; ongoing (The Task Forces exist as long the activities can be carried out. In the past, some Task Forces were closed, but new ones emerged as well. It is a dynamic process.)

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 6 Biodiversity, Landscapes and Air & Soil Quality

EUSDR Priority Area 6 deals with a variety of topics, all of which have to do with the protection and preservation of our natural resources. We cannot manage these tasks alone. For this reason, PA 6 from the beginning put great emphasis on the involvement of stakeholders, experts and enthusiasts who wanted to work with us to implement the objectives of the EUSDR Action Plan. This has resulted in the establishment of a number of working groups, the PA 6 Task Forces. Here, representatives of civil society, academia and authorities gather to jointly define goals and implement their own work programme. In this way, existing knowledge and experience is pooled and integrated into the governance of the EUSDR. This process is a central element of PA 6 and therefore an EUSDR Flagship that explicitly involves all current six PA 6 Task Forces.

Objectives: The process aims in particular to bring the implementation of the EUSDR and PA 6 to the surface and to give each interested person the opportunity to participate in the implementation. The Task Forces themselves are integrated into the PA 6 Steering Group through their chairs. In this way, multi-level governance can succeed.

In terms of content, the Task Forces deal with the following topics:

- Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF): Protection and reintroduction of Danube sturgeon species.
- Danube Region Invasive Alien Species Network (DIAS): Control and prevention of invasive alien species.
- DANUBEPARKS: Cooperation of protected areas in the Danube Region to improve ecological connectivity.
- SONDAR: Soil protection and sustainable development.
- Danube Landscape Task Force (DLTF): Sustainable landscape development.

- Masterplan Bavarian Danube (WGMPBD): Preservation and strengthening the biodiversity along the Bavarian Danube.

Need and (expected) impact: The starting point for the establishment of the Task Force more than ten years ago was also the initial situation for the EUSDR: a quite high number of topics and activities to be implemented in the area, plus two coordinators and a Steering Group. Here it was obvious: support from the experts from the different regions in the EUSDR, as well as on the different topics in PA 6, was needed. At the beginning, therefore, the focus was especially on networking, from which the Task Forces emerged. The DSTF was the first and now has its own structures, such as Rules of Procedure, Chair and Co-Chair, an Executive Committee and a General Assembly. The Task Forces now play an important role as NGOs in their own right by intervening in political decision-making processes. PA 6 is very proud of this and wants to continue on this path.

Macro-regional dimension: Through the Task Forces, representatives of almost all Danube Region countries are involved in the process, who in turn drive forward the implementation of their Task Force's work programme at regional and local level. In this way, a true multiplier effect is created.

Stakeholders involved: Each of the six Task Forces has around 20-40 members in several countries (please refer to the Task Force Chairs, listed below in the contact section).

Budget and Funding: The Task Forces themselves do not receive funding. Costs for meetings and travel & accommodation can be funded by the PAC projects from the Interreg Danube Region Programme. Most of the Task Forces however develop bankable projects for EU funding programmes (e.g. Interreg A and B, LIFE, Horizon Europe) and PA 6 does the best to support these efforts.

Further information: <https://nature.danube-region.eu/>

Contact:

- Task Force Chairs Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF); Peter Gammeltoft; peter@gammeltoft.de
- Danube Region Invasive Alien Species Network (DIAS); Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IBER-BAS), Teodora Trichkova, trichkova@gmail.com
- DANUBEPARKS - Network of Protected Areas, Nationalpark Donauauen, Georg Frank, g.frank@donauauen.at
- Soil Strategy Network in the Danube Region (SONDAR), Government of Lower Austria, Erwin Szlezak, erwin.szlezak@noel.gv.at
- Danube Landscape Task Force (DL:TF), Harald Kutzenberger; h.kutzenberger@tb-kutzenberger.com
- Masterplan Bavarian Danube (MASTERPLAN); Landratsamt Neuburg-Schrobenhausen, Siegfried Geißler; siegfried.geissler@lra-nd-sob.de

Sustainable Smart Specialisation for the Re-Opening of Industrial Sites in the Danube Region (RIS4Danu) (new)

Project; June 2022 – May 2024

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 7 Knowledge Society

A Horizon Europe project (preparatory action) with the aim to facilitate social-sustainable-technological transition in the Danube Region through the revitalisation of disused industry sites.

Objectives:

- Drafting strategic business development plans for the re-opening of more than 20 recently-closed industrial sites in the Danube Region. Focus is both, on the growth of the digital industries and the

transformation of traditional industries as well as on the integration of sustainable and inclusive growth aspects in the development of transformative activities for structural change.

- Providing tangible policy recommendations. Focus will be on the identification of innovation barriers and on the creation of synergies with other European, national and/or regional R&I funding programmes.
- Further developing the existing Smart Specialisation (S3) methodology towards Sustainable Smart Specialisation (S4) to facilitate “green structural change”. Consortium partners will contribute to the emerging academic and policy debates on linking smart specialisation with mission-oriented policy for sustainable development.

We argue that the re-opening of old industrial sites shows the potential to build transformative resilience in less-favoured regions. These sites could serve as innovation anchors, unleashing opportunities for the entire Region to strengthen their capacity to develop innovative solutions to place-specific ecological, social and economic challenges.

Need and (expected) impact:

- The mitigation of the negative socio-economic effects of plant closure in the 21 selected regions in the Danube macro-region.
- The establishment of new sustainable and inclusive regional industrial ecosystems along the Danube River and the provision of new impetus for green transition in the Danube macro-region.
- A positive contribution to added value, productivity and competitiveness of the 21 selected regions in the Danube macro-region.
- Thus, the advancement of debates on the design and implementation of S4+ in the scientific community in economic geography, regional science, innovation studies and policy studies.

Macro-regional dimension: At the heart of the RIS4Danu project is the goal of applying an evidence-based approach to support place-based innovation for green/digital and inclusive transitions in regions along the Danube River that face manifold economic, social and political challenges resulting from the closure of important industrial sites.

Danube neighbouring states share a proud and centuries-old history of manufacturing and industrial production, yet political upheavals, globalisation and technological advancements have confronted many regions with the challenges of structural transformation and have triggered the closing down of numerous industrial plants and sites. In many regions, plant closures and the associated displacement of workers caused severe socio-economic effects on workers, local communities and regions.

Stakeholders involved: The RIS4Danu project relies on a solid consortium of seasoned partners who have a long history of collaboration and reached a high-level of mutual trust. The participating leading organisations and the associated local support partners and regional authorities and owners of disused industrial sites have been selected for their unique abilities to respond to the project’s specific challenges.

Consortium: VDI/VDE INNOVATION + TECHNIK GMBH (Coordinator), ecoplus. Niederösterreichs Wirtschaftsagentur GmbH, University of Vienna, Anteja ECG D.O.O., BAK S3 Association (Subcontractor)

Associated regional Partners: Smart Expo Ltd. (Croatia), Czech Invest (Czech Republic), IHK Schwarzwald-Baar-Heuberg (Germany), Hajdú-Bihar County Government (Hungary), Intersection / Science and Technology Park Čačak (Serbia), Municipality of Moinesti / City of Sănic Moldova (Romania), Regional Development Agency for Podravje – Maribor (Slovenia), Regional Office of the Banská Bystrica Self Governing Region (Slovakia)

21 private and/or public owners of disused industrial sites in 11 Danube regions

Various participants from Business, Research, Public Administrations and Civil Society in 21 workshops in 11 Danube regions.

Budget and Funding: EUR 1 Mil. (Horizon Europe grant)

Further information: <https://ris4danu.eu/>, <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12708540/>

Contact: RIS4Danu Coordinator, Dr. Oliver Ziegler (oliver.ziegler@vdivde-it.de)

Excellence in research, social and technological innovation project management (Excellence-in-ReSTI) **(new)**

Project, network, platform; February 2017 – October 2019

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 7 Knowledge Society, PA 9 People & Skills, PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation
Submitted by: PA 7

Excellence-in-ReSTI was a project running between February 2017 and October 2019 funded by the Danube Transnational Programme, with the involvement of 11 partners from nine countries under the coordination of the Vienna-based non-profit research institute, Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI).

The main purpose of the project was to increase the knowledge and skills of early-stage project managers and students with regard to managing research, social and technological innovation (ReSTI) projects funded by Interreg or other transnational funding, such as Horizon 2020. For this reason, the project aimed to create a more enabling environment for knowledge transfer within the Danube Region (DR) by focusing on three main activities:

- (1) a tailor-made pilot training programme and a related knowledge platform where information and training materials deemed most relevant for early-stage project managers and students are available;
- (2) an Infodesk with easy-to-use checklists and information available for all stakeholders interested in managing ReSTI projects;
- (3) a strategy and roadmap identifying the most pressing challenges in the management of ReSTI project in the DR, as well as recommending actionable steps leading to viable policy options to provide strategic direction for the improvement of the institutional framework conditions for ReSTI projects in the DR.

Objectives:

- Increase competences in the implementation of research, social and technological innovation projects
- Increase employability of young graduates as project managers in these kinds of projects
- Develop strategies to improve research, social and technological innovation project participation

Need and (expected) impact:

The Danube Region and in particular some of its countries and regions are lagging behind in successfully applying for international funding for, and implementing and managing of ReSTI projects. Ideas are present in the region but early-stage and aspiring project managers and administrators might not be able to 'translate' them to fundable projects due to missing project management-related knowledge and skills.

The Excellence-in-ReSTI project aimed to address this shortcoming through:

- (1) a pilot training programme aimed at young graduates and early-stage project managers interested in enhancing their project management competences and employability.

The project offered a one-year programme (10/2018 – 07/2019) for 25 funded participants (who participated in a blended training programme with online courses and three physical meetings) and 55 non-funded participants (who had a fully online training) with five training modules, i.e. EU policies, project design, project management, social innovation and business innovation. The participants were selected through an online application procedure

and their feedback was used to further enhance the quality of the training modules. The participants successfully finishing module(s) received online badges and a certificate.

The training programme is freely available for all interested persons (after registration) here: <https://resti.academy/>

- (2) a virtual Infodesk aimed at improving project-management related knowledge needed for successful submission of ReSTI projects. During the project duration, all interested stakeholders could ask concrete questions on project management that were answered by the relevant project experts. After the project end, a knowledge base was compiled from these questions (FAQ), which – together with a list of useful project management-related technical terms (glossary) and tools – forms the sustainable part of the Infodesk platform. In addition, interested stakeholders may make a short self-test concerning their existing knowledge level on ReSTI-related topics.

The Infodesk is available here: <https://desk.zoho.eu/portal/excellenceinresti>

- (3) a strategy and roadmap document was finalised after the consultation with external stakeholders, such as policy-makers and policy-influencers from DR countries, with the aim of giving advice on how to improve our current online training system (project-level), and on measures to be taken to enhance PM skills for R&D&I projects (programme-level). The document focused on the recommendations and actions to be taken in support of enhancing R&D&I capacities in each country.

The strategy and roadmap is available here:

https://www.interreg-danube.eu/uploads/media/approved_project_output/0001/33/82c7ba9be52b58725d4c022a3085eec3a919f6f2.pdf

Macro-regional dimension: The following countries were represented in the project: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.

With the exception of Germany, all Danube Region countries were involved in the pilot training programme (as funded or non-funded participants), and all DR countries were involved in the compilation of the strategy and roadmap (through an online consultation process aimed at policy-makers and policy-influencers).

Stakeholders involved: Universities and academic organisations, research organisations, policy-making bodies (responsible for ReSTI project implementation or management), NGOs, CSOs, business organisations (the latter ones mainly through online consultations and interviews within various project activities).

Budget and Funding: The project has been funded by the Danube Transnational Programme (ERDF, IPA) with the overall budget: EUR 1.910.711

As sustainability measures, the project could benefit from networking and further funding provided by EUSDR stakeholders. The funding could serve for making certain training modules of the project and Infodesk more up-to-date.

Further information: <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/excellence-in-resti>

Contact: Project Manager, Centre for Social Innovation, Gábor Szüdi (szudi@zsi.at)

Danube Transfer Center Network - DTC Network *(new)*

Network, ongoing since 2012

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 8 Competitiveness of Enterprises

Steinbeis Europa Zentrum/Steinbeis 2i GmbH as a coordinator of the Working Group - Innovation and Technology Transfer (I&TT) of the EUSDR PA 8, initiated in 2012 the Flagship Project - Danube Transfer Center (DTC) Network. DTC Network, started as an initiative of the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg, aims at supporting the competitiveness of enterprises in the Danube Region with the objective of installing “Danube Transfer Centres (DTCs)”, organised as one-stop-shops to support (mainly) SMEs in regard to the Innovation & Technology transfer, considering relevant S3 priorities. DTCs contribute to the capacity building and improved cooperation within the whole Danube macro-region by the provision of frequent trainings & workshops, application of innovation capacity tools, as well as development and implementation of the projects in the frame of diverse EU funding programmes.

DTC Vision: Turning knowledge into value for our regions, economy and society. Bridging the gap between research and innovation, focusing on improving competences and cooperation between producers and users of knowledge.

In 2023, the DTC Network includes 15 full partners located in 10 Danube Region countries and serves as an exceptional platform supporting the local development on one side and facilitating transnational/international innovation ecosystem building and collaboration through the EU projects on the other side.

Objectives: Support innovation, knowledge and technology transfer at the local level with the aim to bring prosperity in the Region by:

- Improving the innovative ecosystem of the SMEs in the Region
- Facilitating the conversion of knowledge into innovative solutions and stimulating development of new products and services
- Facilitating transnational research and capacity building to support knowledge growth
- Connecting people and organisations for promoting cross-border flow of information and know-how
- Stimulating a culture of responsibility for the wellbeing of society among all stakeholders of knowledge creation and circulation

Need and (expected) impact:

- More collaboration between universities and industry in the Region
- Increase the number of the concrete Technology Offers, Technology Requests and Expression of Interest in the field of innovation and technology transfer
- Increase the participation of the Danube actors in EU innovation and technology transfer financed project
- More attractive business environment and economic opportunities in and beyond the Danube Region
- More innovative and higher value composition business practice, which ensures and advances social and economic well-being in and beyond the Danube Region for overall higher European living standards.
- More collaboration between the political and operational actors.

Macro-regional dimension: Specific Objectives addressed at the macro-regional (EUSDR) dimension:

- SO1 - to identify the main challenges and to improve the framework conditions in innovation and technology transfer in the Danube Region
- SO2 - to foster the cooperation in the field of innovation and technology transfer to generate concrete transnational projects
- SO3 - to support and improve the competitiveness of the Danube Region by generating concrete Technology Offers, Technology Requests and Expression of Interest in the field of innovation and technology transfer

- SO4 - to support cross-fertilisation collaboration in innovation and technology transfer by organising specific thematic workshops
- SO5- to improve policy dialog and public governance in innovation and technology transfer by promoting adequate policies and policies papers
- SO6 - to support and improve the innovation technology transfer framework conditions at the local and regional level through the flagship project “Danube Transfer Center network” as HUBs for SMEs
- SO7 - to support and increase the participation of the Danube actors in EU innovation and technology transfer financed project
- PA8 - TARGET 1.1: Preparation of at least five concrete technology offers and requests.
- PA8 - TARGET 1.2: Involvement of at least 10 new Danube actors in EU innovation and technology transfer financed project.

Stakeholders involved:

- DTC Germany: Steinbeis Europa Zentrum, Network coordinator, Germany
- DTC Cluj-Napoca: Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Network partner, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca, Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, University of Medicine and Pharmacy Cluj-Napoca, University “Lucian Blaga” of Sibiu, Romania
- DTC Nitra: Slovak University of Agriculture Nitra, Network partner, Bioeconomy Cluster, Slovakia
- DTC Novi Sad: University of Novi Sad, Network partner, Serbia
- DTC Slavonija: Baranja and Srijem, Vukovar-Srijem County Development Agency, Network partner, Eko-sustav Ltd., CEKOM – Competence Center for research and Development Ltd., Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek (FAZOS), Croatia
- DTC Panon: Pannon Business Network Association, Network partner, Hungary
- DTC Bucharest: University POLITEHNICA from Bucharest, Network partner, Romania
- DTC Maribor: University of Maribor, Network partner, DIH UM (Digital Innovation Hub), Slovenia
- DTC Zagreb: Croatian Chamber of Economy, Network partner, Croatia
- DTC Ruse: University of Ruse “Angel Kanchev”, Network partner, Bulgaria
- DTC Craiova: IPA CIFATT Craiova, Network partner, University of Craiova, Regional Development Agency Craiova, Romania
- DTC Austria: Carinthia University of Applied Sciences (CUAS), Network partner, Austria
- DTC Iași: Technical University Gheorghe Asachi from Iași, Network partner, Romania
- DTC Odesa: Institute of market problems and Economy & Ecological Research, Network partner, Ukraine
- DTC Kyiv: National Technical University of Ukraine, 'Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute', Network partner, Ukraine

Budget and Funding: There is no direct fixed financial support. Since the foundation of DTC network 2012 until October 2022, a total sum of EUR 31.834.717 funding acquired with partners from the DTC network (including private funds, Interreg, national and regional tenders, Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe, National funds etc.). DTC Network submitted in Nov 2022 – 5 new Interreg Danube Project proposals and in 2023 – 2 new Horizon Europe Project proposals. We are waiting the results of the evaluation with great interest because this is the main source of funding for the DTC network.

Further information: www.dtcnetwork.eu, WG - Innovation and Technology Transfer - PA 08 (<https://danube-region.eu>), Partnerships & Networks - Steinbeis EN (<https://steinbeis-europa.de>)

Contact: Daniela Chiran (daniela.chiran@steinbeis-europa.de) and Miljana Ćosić (miljana.cosic@steinbeis-europa.de)



Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) *(new)*

Network, platform; ongoing since 2010

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 9 People & Skills

The Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) is a regional organisation enhancing and facilitating regional cooperation in the area of education and training. It is mandated by the ministries in charge of education from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and the Republic of Moldova.



Objectives: Regional cooperation in the areas of:

- modernisation of vocational education and training (VET), enhancing cooperation with the business sector and contributing to the quality and efficiency of education and training systems
- cooperation in the higher education system, contributing to the facilitation of recognition of qualifications and enhancements of quality assurance mechanisms
- cooperation in the area of pre-tertiary education, contributing to greater quality of external evaluation and digitalisation of teaching and teacher education and training

Need and (expected) impact: Lack of labour-market relevance of VET is targeted by enhancing cooperation between the education and business sector and through the development of regionally-based occupational and qualification standards, leading to greater employability and mobility opportunities for young people.

Obstacles in the recognition of higher education qualifications are targeted by enhancing cooperation between centres in charge of the recognition of qualifications, leading to a faster recognition process, facilitating the employability and continuing of education across the region.

Quality of pre-tertiary education is enhanced by developing regional standards for external evaluators' competences, peer learning and trainings.

Macro-regional dimension: The processes include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, of which Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova and Serbia are Danube Region countries.

**This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on Kosovo Declaration of Independence*

Stakeholders involved:

- ministries of education
- agencies for vocational education and training
- qualification agencies
- teacher training agencies
- agencies for quality assurance in pre-tertiary education
- agencies for quality assurance in tertiary education
- chambers of commerce
- international organisations

Budget and Funding: Member countries (ministries of education), OeAD – Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation, Austrian Development Agency

Further information: www.erisee.org

Contact: Tina Šarić (tina.saric@erisee.org)

Bringing the Danube Region into Classrooms: Promoting Cooperation of Schools and Teachers *(new)*

Process, network, platform; ongoing since 2012

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 9 People & Skills

Teachers in the Danube Region are connected through annual conferences that promote the development of joint school cooperation projects. These conferences build on the Erasmus+ eTwinning community and online platform. Through innovative projects developed during the conferences, teachers and their pupils from different countries work together across borders on a wide range of topics from various educational subjects.

The conferences are organised by OeAD – Austria’s Agency for Education and Internationalisation in cooperation with PA 9 and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research.

Objectives: The annual eTwinning conferences facilitate school cooperation projects and (partly digital) learning mobility of teachers, staff and pupils in the Danube Region. They make use of the Erasmus+ programme to increase cooperation among education and training institutions.

Need and (expected) impact: Schools across the Danube Region face challenges in ensuring that young people are provided with essential knowledge, skills and competences. Through school cooperation projects, teachers and pupils in the Danube Region can collaborate, learn from each other, and strengthen their digital competences as well as language and intercultural skills. So far, more than 450 teachers participated in Danube Region eTwinning conferences and developed more than 120 projects and many spin-off cooperation (e.g. Erasmus+ projects).

Macro-regional dimension: The Danube Region countries that are part of eTwinning are invited to the annual conferences. Currently, these are the following 13 countries: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

Stakeholders involved: Teachers, heads of school, school staff, staff of eTwinning Support Organisations, and pupils

Budget and Funding: Erasmus+/eTwinning (budget as Austrian National eTwinning Support Organisation with co-funding through the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education)

Co-funding through the PAC 9 project under the Danube Region Programme (and its predecessors)

Further information:

- <https://peopleandskills.danube-region.eu/events/thematic-conference-school-cooperation-in-the-danube-region-2023/>
- <https://etwinning.at/de/> (German)
- eTwinning Danube Region Conference 2023: <https://etwinning.at/de/aktuelles/artikel/2023/06/schulkooperationen-im-donauraum-mit-etwinning-1> (German)



Contact: Head of Sector, Erasmus+ School Education/eTwinning, OeAD-GmbH - Austria’s Agency for Education and Internationalisation, Ursula Panuschka (Ursula.Panuschka@oead.at)



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Danube Youth Network *(new)*

Network, ongoing since 2021

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation

The Danube Youth Network originated from the concept outlined in two initiatives: the pilot project "Danube Youth Participation 2019-2021" and "Danube Youth EUSDR Participation" (2021-2022). These projects were carried out by the EUSDR Civil Society Network in collaboration with five partnering NGOs located in Baden-Württemberg, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Serbia. The lead partner, the Liebenau Foundation, brings 150 years of expertise in social policies and projects.

Objectives: The Danube Youth Network aims at forming a transnational, trans-sectorial, self-organised youth network in the Danube Region for participation, creativity and responsibility. The initiative is about strengthening young people's skills for participation and co-creation to address issues in an open space.

Need and (expected) impact: The EUSDR brings together a range of topics including cross-cutting issues such as digitalisation, e-government, combating youth unemployment, addressing climate and developing health policies. Recognising the significance of youth organisation and young people, they have long been regarded as fundamental to the sustainability of the Strategy and the region's development. Enhancing the capacity to engage young individuals is a pivotal element for the future success of the Strategy.

Macro-regional dimension: The network addresses youth organisations and young people in the Danube Region. For the project the following countries and regions are cooperating: DE (Baden-Württemberg), RO, HR, RS, BG.

Stakeholders involved: PAC 10, Baden-Württemberg State Ministry, RO, HR, RS, BG.

Budget and Funding: The project is currently funded by the Baden-Württemberg State Ministry.

Further information: <https://www.instagram.com/danubeyouth/>, <https://danubeyouth.eu/>

Contact: Fiona Faas (fiona.faas@stm.bwl.de)



Source: The Danube Youth Network (<https://danubeyouth.eu/>)

Cross-border Emergency Healthcare *(new)*

Process, initiative; ongoing

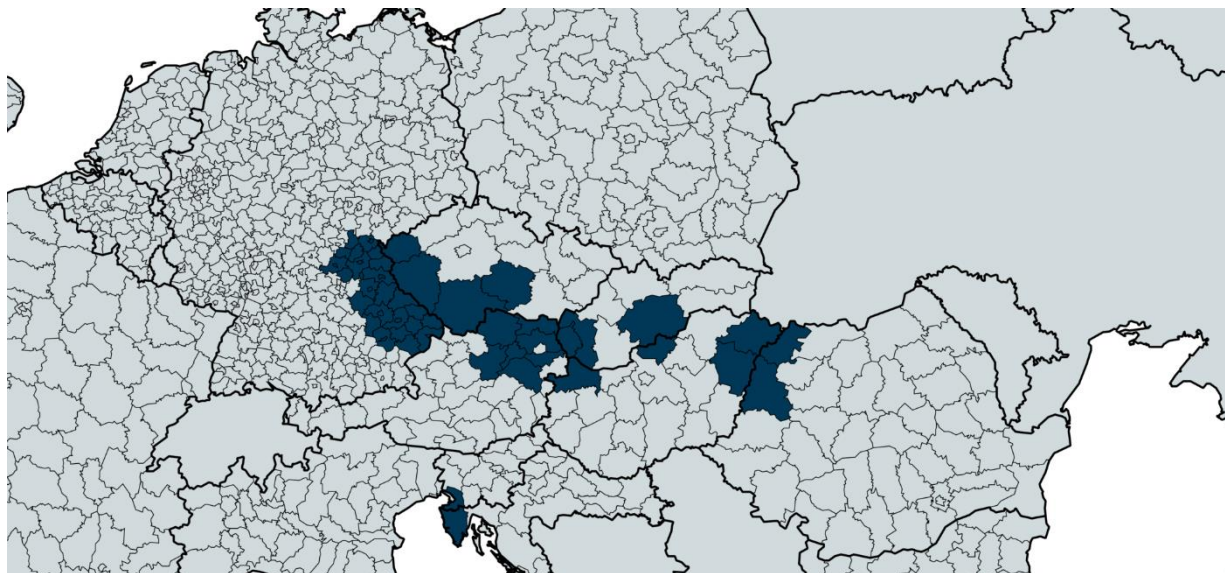
Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation

Smooth cross-border emergency healthcare is a major contribution to better quality of life, in particular for people living in border regions. Thus, this initiative reconciles legal, administrative, technical and cultural aspects of cross-border cooperation. In doing so, the initiative benefitted from a strong political will and dedicated partners.

Objectives: The aim of the initiative is to enhance cross-border patient care and medical services. Specifically, it also aims at expanding inpatient treatment, test feasibility of sharing medical services and promote knowledge sharing among healthcare specialists as well as planning and implementing a cross-border health centres. Despite emergency healthcare not being as widespread as it should be, there are some initial and successful initiatives in place. The project “Healthacross for future” between Austria and the Czech Republic is a good practice example to learn a lot from. By providing such good practice examples this initiative benefitted from a strong political will and dedicated partners.

Need and (expected) impact: In the context of the Danube Region Strategy, it is essential to address the significance of cross-border emergency situations and the trust required in people and services. Additionally, effective cross-border cooperation must overcome language barriers, considering that healthcare is a sensitive domain deadline with confidential data. In the realm of cross-border emergency healthcare, harmonising or reconciling administrative procedures, equipment and communication systems becomes imperatives, all issues which are addressed within this initiative.

Macro-regional dimension: AT, CZ, HU, SK, RO, DE; expected impact on all Danube Region countries



Stakeholders involved: PA 10, Danube Region Hospitals and Healthcare providers, ministries of responsible for healthcare, cities in cross-border regions

Budget and Funding: Interreg cross-border Programmes, Danube Region Programme Seed Money Facility

Further information: <https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/cross-border-emergency-healthcare-in-the-danube-region/>

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Danube Participation Day

Platform, ongoing since 2014

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation

The Danube Participation Days are a format that brings together representatives of local, regional and national public administrations, civil society, the EU and EUSDR governance and further interested stakeholders of the Danube Region Strategy. In

doing so, the Participation Days promote cross-sectoral cooperation, exchange know-how and experience and facilitate better coordination between the EUSDR and projects.



The objective of Participation Days is to strengthen trust between public and private stakeholders for participatory governance and to co-create sustainable solutions for regional development in the Danube Region.

Objectives: The Participation Day format is expected to foster exchange between state and non-state actors about the (implementation of) the EUSDR. By engaging in a regular exchange, the format facilitates trust-building and capacity building for all involved stakeholders.

Need and (expected) impact: The involvement of civil society is one of the key features of macro-regional Strategies. However, due to a perceived lack of capacities, administrative culture, lack of trust etc. the involvement of and communication with civil society fell behind the expectations. In 2014, the Danube Civil Society Forum and EUSDR PA 10 organised the first Danube Participation Day in order to establish a macro-regional platform for state and non-state actors to exchange on the Danube Region Strategy and to formulate concrete needs of civil society organisations in order to get involved in the realisation of the EUSDR and increase ownership.

Macro-regional dimension: The Danube Participation Days are a side event of the EUSDR Annual Forum and address stakeholders from all 14 participating countries of the EUSDR. Likewise, the National Participation Days are supposed to be organised in all Danube Region countries on a regular basis. So far, 80% of Danube Region countries have held at least one National Participation Day.

Stakeholders involved: Danube Civil Society Forum, PAC 10, NGOs in the Danube Regions; NCs and PA 10 Steering Group members

Budget and Funding: The funding of National Participation Days and Danube Participation Days varies;

The Danube Participation Days have been funded/supported by Baden-Württemberg Stiftung, Foster Europe, Interreg Danube Transnational/Region Programme, City of Vienna, EUSDR Presidencies etc.

The National Participation Days have been funded by national/regional funds, different project funding over time.

Further information:

- <https://dcsf.danubestrategy.eu/what-we-do/danube-participation-days>;
- <https://dcsf.danubestrategy.eu/what-we-do/national-participation-days>;
- <https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/participation-day/>

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Collaboration for Dismantling Drugs Distribution and Illicit Laboratories (CO3DIL)

Project, 01.02.2019 – 30.10.2021 (33 months)

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 11 Security



The project focused on international cooperation in the field of detection of illegal laboratories for the production of methamphetamine, including trade in precursors and chemical substances for its production and subsequent distribution networks. The CO3DIL project has been instrumental in linking available information on methamphetamine illicit drug markets in Europe, deepening actionable law enforcement cooperation and naming production, distribution and user trends in this area.

The central motive of the project was operational cooperation in criminal proceedings. During the two years that the project was implemented, 18 operational meetings were held on specific cases, seven joint operational measures, 18 methamphetamine laboratories were seized and 67 perpetrators were apprehended. Furthermore, five expert meetings with a professional educational programme were held in order to create a network of experts covering the issue. All shared experiences have been summarised in a methodological manual that unifies the process of detecting and documenting methamphetamine production and distribution across European police forces and is one of the tools for effective international police cooperation.

Objectives:

Strategic objectives:

- Dismantling storage and production facilities for illicit drugs
- Development of methodology on how to detect, dismantle, classify and follow manufacturing of methamphetamine in illicit labs
- Enhance the collaborative EU member states and third country law enforcement capacity to target drug trafficking relaying on LEA expert network

Strategic focus:

- Detection of illicit methamphetamine laboratories
- Identification of precursors exploited for methamphetamine production and its trafficking routes
- Identification of Organised Criminal Groups and High Value Targets involved in precursors trafficking and methamphetamine production and distribution
- Multi agency approach and strengthening international cooperation

Need and (expected) impact: The project was created with particular attention to methamphetamine and illicit meth labs, which feature in the increasing and significant drug market in the project partner countries. The new EU member states remain the largest criminal markets for synthetic drugs (MDMA, amphetamine, and methamphetamine) which are very dynamic and complex. However, distribution of methamphetamine affects all EU member states.

The Organised Criminal Groups (OCGs) involved in the production of synthetic drugs are highly flexible and have significant financial resources to continually explore new market opportunities and new production technologies and exploit different legally accessible medicaments or chemical substances. Methamphetamine produced in the EU is exported not just within EU MS, but also to other regions of the world, such as Australia and Japan. The online drug market (Internet/Dark net) of meth is growing, which might be seen on numbers of meth seized in parcel shipments worldwide.

At present, most investigations into the EU's illicit drugs are international in scope and cannot be tackled efficiently without strengthening the participation of all participating countries, both within the police, customs, and judicial systems.

The primary objective of the project was to dismantle storage and production facilities of methamphetamine through the strengthening of international drug investigations by enhancing and intensifying the exchange of operational information, knowledge gathering and improving investigation capacity of the drug law-enforcement authorities (LEA). Customs and other national LEA were invited to the project. The idea was that the project would have a positive impact on the reduction of synthetic drug supply on the EU market.

The project challenged the traits and aspects of one of the most dynamic criminal segments of the drug scene, relating to a complex factor of trafficking, money laundering and financing of radicalisation/terrorism-related activities. The existence of different networks and international organisations dealing with drug manufacturing and precursors trafficking enables broader access to information and support. The project made full use of the existing analytical and infrastructure provisions across the EU and the Balkans.

The output of the project was the deepening of cooperation of the network of national experts, exchange of operational information, concrete case investigation, methodology on dismantling illicit meth drug labs, reports etc.

The CO3DIL project offered a platform for dealing with methamphetamine in Europe, an opportunity and support for direct case cooperation, support for existing and long lasting law enforcement activities, law enforcement networking, and practical multi-agency approach. The project also identified new trends in the transfer of production, Mexican OCGs activities in Europe, Afghan meth in Europe via the Balkan route and in new precursors.

Macro-regional dimension: The leader of the project was the National Drug Headquarters of the Criminal Police and Investigation Service of the Police of the Czech Republic. Main partners were the security forces of Slovakia, Poland, Bulgaria and Serbia.

Other participants: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States of America.

The project was supported by international actors – Europol, DEA, Interpol, EMCDDA, Frontex, SELEC, EUSDR.

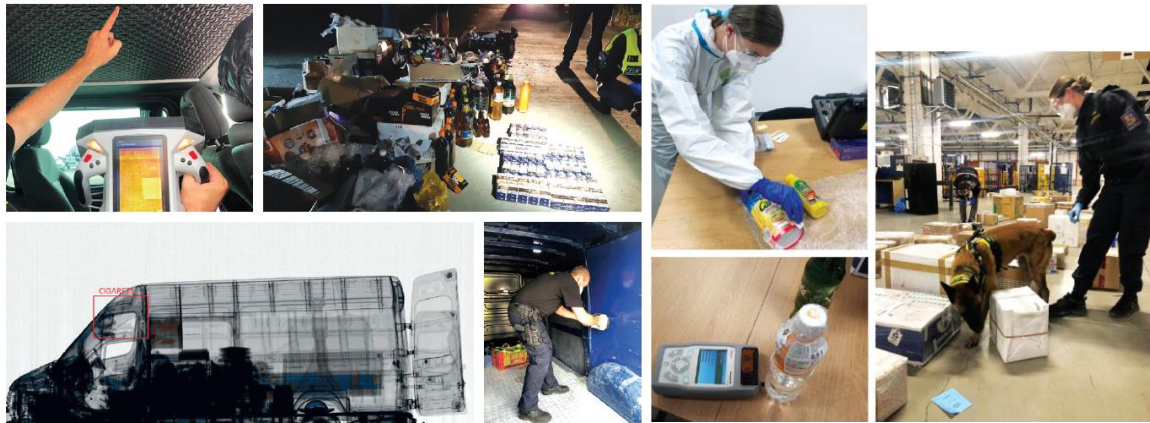
Stakeholders involved: In general - Police, customs and judiciary

- Security Forces – Police – drug units experts
- Customs Drug Units
- Criminalistics institutes
- Prosecutor's offices

Budget and Funding: Total budget: EUR 236.195 (90% of the costs were covered by EU Internal Security Fund; 10% by the Police of the Czech Republic)

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Source: Police of the Czech Republic, CO3DIL Project Final OVERVIEW