

Guidance Paper for Embedding of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) into EU Programmes

March 2020

1. Introduction

The relevant references of the proposal by the COM for a new CPR, ERDF regulations as well as regulations relevant for IPA III and NDICI and their implementing regulations, represent a great opportunity for the EUSDR to make the breakthrough needed for delivering what is expected from it. It recognises the necessity to include macro-regional priorities – jointly agreed by all participating countries of the EUSDR - in the ESIF, IPA and NDICI 2021-2027 planning and programming documents from the very beginning, and to identify challenges with macro-regional relevance. This requires upgrading the level of coordination among countries, notably among national/regional authorities responsible for ESIF, IPA and NDICI planning and programming.

The revised EUSDR Action Plan (with all 85 actions) would be hard to utilize in the embedding process. Therefore, a *shortlist* of two to a maximum of three strategic topics per PA would need to be generated based on a common denominator. While doing so, emphasis should be placed on the eligibility for ESI, IPA and NDICI funds, the relevance for as many EUSDR participating states as possible and the viable links to Annexes D of the European Semester Country Reports 2019¹ and 2020² and Implementation reports from non-EU countries³.

The identified strategic topics would be part of the embedding process at national/regional level and on the same time, they would also be considered as fundable topics for the DTP 2nd Seed Money Facility (SMF) Call.

2. Proposed Course of Action

PACs play a key role in identifying and thematically and contextually designing the strategic topics. It is of utmost importance that PACs swiftly agree on the concise strategic topics within the 2021-2027 planning and programming process, in order to allow a targeted embedding of the EUSDR into EU programmes.

To this end, the EUSDR NCs are key actors for the embedding process in each participating country and shall coordinate as early as possible with the authorities responsible for the ESI, IPA and NDICI funds. They are best placed to **identify** areas of cooperation with respective national or regional line ministries, **contact** the national and regional managing authorities responsible for ESI, IPA and NDICI funds and **link** them to the relevant ESIF Partnership Agreement and IPA/NDICI Programming Framework for the period 2021-2027.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2019-european-semester-country-reports_en

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2020-european-semester-country-reports_en

³ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/node_en

Hereinafter, parallel and coordinated planning and programming is proposed in cooperation with the EUSDR stakeholders on the one hand and the managing authorities responsible for programming the ESI, IPA and NDICI funds on the other.

With these requirements in mind, **the following steps are proposed:**

I. Based on the new Action Plan, PACs are to propose a shortlist of up to three strategic topics (per PA) to be included in the relevant national/regional operational programmes.

Strategic topics are of key relevance to the macro-regional area which cannot be dealt with by the countries or regions alone and require cooperation within the macro-regional territories. They would be designed to enact larger policy impact on selected actions in the revised EUSDR Action plan within the Priority Areas. Strategic topics could be funded by different sources, but this embedding process requires to specify actions that need funding from ESI/IPA/NDICI funds.

PACs should have in mind at least tentative yet concrete interventions for each strategic topic, which would require coordinated/synchronised financing and implementation from ESIF/IPA/NDICI national/regional programmes. It may, for example, develop key solutions, new methodologies, practices or looking for new forms of cooperation. Strategic topics may above all concern key investments of regional importance.

These strategic topics should meet the following criteria:

- Distinct, undisputed macro-regional relevance within the proposed priority (not necessarily all countries need to apply the same, but the conglomerate of activities should show the clear macro-regional relevance)
- Consistency with highly possible priorities to be set at the national/regional level
- Eligible for funding under the regulatory framework proposed by the Commission for the period 2021-2027.
- Linkage to the Annexes D of the EU country reports 2019 and 2020 and Implementation reports from non-EU countries (if applicable)
- Inclusion of horizontal themes⁴, if possible

A comprehensive guidance for identifying strategic topics suitable to be embedded in the national/regional programmes and to be part of the DTP 2nd SMF call is outlined in Annex A of this document. The table provided in Annex A is to be filled out by PACs and sent to Croatian EUSDR Presidency, the Danube Transnational Programme and the DSP.

The comprehensive table of the Screening of the EUSDR Actions & Funding Sources post 2020 (embedding tool) might support PACs in their selection of strategic topics (see Annex 1a, 1b). The table

⁴ The horizontal themes are: 1) digitalisation; 2) migration and demographic change; 3) climate change and sustainable development.

can also be used by NCs approaching the managing authorities responsible for the strategic planning and programming of the ESIF/IPA/NDICI funds⁵.

Proposed timing: 4. May 2020 delivery of the filled document by PACs (Annex A) to HR PCY, DTP and DSP.

II. The NCs in agreement with the PACs approve the shortlist of strategic topics.

HR PCY and DSP shall consolidate input from PACs and deliver draft shortlist of strategic topics to the NCs immediately after the proposed deadline.

NCs will examine the proposed shortlist in close consultation and coordination with the competent authorities for programming (i.e. ERDF and ESF managing authorities; resp. line ministries in EU member states; IPA/NDICI authorities in non-EU MS.) process in their countries. NCs in consensus with PACs shall approve a final shortlist to be submitted to ESIF/IPA/NDICI national authorities and to DG REGIO and DG NEAR.

Proposed timing: Due to the current situation, the joint NC/PAC meeting (scheduled to 19-20 May 2020) will be postponed.

III. NCs are asked to convene meetings in their countries as soon as possible with the managing authorities responsible for the strategic planning and programming of the ESI/IPA/NDICI funds and other relevant stakeholders.

NCs will be requested to clarify the appropriate approach in each EUSDR participating country and if not done yet, ensure initial contacts with the managing authorities or the relevant line ministries responsible for programming the ESI IPA/NDICI funds. The shortlist of strategic topics shall be the basis for discussion and used for the embedding of EUSDR priorities and actions into the national/regional mainstream programmes.

EUSDR incumbent presidency should initiate a network of national and regional managing authorities responsible for ESI and IPA/NDICI funds. The already established EUSDR ESF Network (were members from all EU-states are invited to join) could be immediately utilised in this respect. The aim is to establish a process in each country where national and regional authorities responsible for ESI and IPA/NDICI funds coordinate their 2021-2027 programming exercise to support the implementation of the Strategy. Such network should then become a permanent tool for coordinating/monitoring the implementation of macro-regional actions (and then projects) included in operational programmes

⁵ The document was developed in the context of the embedding of the EUSDR into EU funds and should therefore be seen as a rolling document of the embedding process. The underlying document is the *Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum and Migration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Border Management and Visa Instrument* of the European Commission as of May 2018 (COM(2018) 375 final). At the moment the elaboration is still in the process of negotiations between EC, EP and Council. As soon as a final version is available, the tool will be updated and sent out.

(OPs) and APs. At EUSDR level, coordination will still be part of the tasks of the NC. As for monitoring, no new structures are intended to be established. NCs may use monitoring committees in operational programmes to secure monitoring. Those NCs not part of MCs shall strive for becoming a member. Additional monitoring tools could be further discussed and, if feasible, jointly developed with DSP.

Proposed timing: ongoing process

IV. Raising awareness on national level

NCs, supported by PACs and by the relevant national Steering Group member(s) and by DSP, could organise thematic events (e.g. conferences, discussion groups, high level meetings, etc.) that involve all main national stakeholders in order to raise the awareness of EUSDR topics in their countries.

DSP will also prepare common provision wording on the Strategy level, which can be used in the process of coordination with managing authorities. The document will be delivered in due time.

Proposed timing: ongoing process

The whole exercise must be considered and implemented as a dynamic process and will continue until the final drafting and submission of the relevant Partnership Agreement and IPA/NDICI programming framework to the COM.

The EUSDR National Coordinators should be considered in every country as indispensable partners during the drafting of relevant Partnership Agreement and IPA/NDICI programmes.

Annex A: Selection of strategic topics

In line with the decisions taken by the EUSDR Task Force on embedding and with the MC approved concept for a second DTP SMF call, PACs are encouraged to select, among the actions present in the revised Action Plan, maximum three strategic topics, which will serve the double objective of being embedded in national/regional programmes of the targeted territories and also be the eligible topics of the second DTP SMF call.

The EUSDR embedding process requires that the main priorities selected by PACs contain the following elements.

1. Macro-regional relevance within the proposed priority and added value for the whole Danube region
2. Linkage to the Annexes D of the European Semester Country Reports 2019 and 2020⁶
3. Consistency with highly possible priorities to be set at the national/regional level⁷
4. Alignment with the ESIF Policy Objectives and Specific Objectives
5. Inclusion of horizontal themes⁸, if possible

These elements are considered a starting point for the selection of the priorities to be included in the second SMF call. Namely, additional elements should be considered accordingly and identified.

- The priority should refer to a specific and identified territorial challenge
- The exact territory of each priority should be defined (countries involved, including regions if applicable)
- The possible type of stakeholders to potentially be involved should be defined
- The selected priority should be addressed by mainstream programmes and by other main EU programmes (CEF, HORIZON Europe, LIFE+, ERASMUS+), if applicable
- The selected priority should be able to generate more than one project

Within the scope of the second SMF call, the following type of projects should stem from the SMF project:

- Sectorial project, where the main topic is addressed in a comprehensive way and is preparing the framework for subsequent subprojects, together with
 - Subprojects linked to the sectorial project, meant to address either a specific issue or a specific identified territory (e.g. through regional programmes)
- or
- Parallel sectorial projects, aimed at addressing a specific challenge and/ or a territory to be monitored in their implementation by the relevant PACs

⁶ Country Reports can be found in the pages: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2019-european-semester-country-reports_en and https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2020-european-semester-country-reports_en

⁷ PAC colleagues should consult SG members and/or the respective NCs.

⁸ The horizontal themes are: 1) digitalisation; 2) migration and demographic change; 3) climate change and sustainable development.

The matrix below aims at helping PACs in identifying the strategic topics⁹. An **example of selected strategic topic is provided by PA5**. This table is to be filled out and submitted to Croatian EUSDR Presidency (eusdr2020@mrrfeu.hr), DTP (danube@pm.gov.hu) and DSP (office@eusdr-dsp.eu) until 4 May 2020.

Priority Area(s)	<p><i><Please, include your Priority Area. In case the selected strategic topic addresses several PAs, please indicate them all.></i></p> <p>PA5 Environmental Risks</p>
Action(s) from the Action Plan	<p><i><Please, include the number and title of the action as indicated in the revised Action Plan. In case the selected strategic topic addresses several actions, also from different PAs, please indicate them all></i></p> <p>3. Strengthen disaster prevention and preparedness among governmental and non-governmental organisations</p>
Strategic topic related to Priority area	<p><i><Please, state the strategic topic related to Priority Area></i></p>
Short definition of the selected strategic topic	<p><i><Please, shortly define the selected strategic priority in general terms, including the addressed territorial challenge defined above></i></p> <p>Floods, drought, wildfires and low-flow events, as well as water scarcity situations and extreme storms, are likely to become more intense, longer and more frequent for the next period due to climate change. Managing these environmental risks require cooperation at regional level concerning the preparedness, harmonisation and innovative approaches for disaster response and risk reduction, along capacity building and public awareness.</p>
Alignment to Cohesion Policy Elements	<p><i><Please, indicate how the selected strategic topic is linked to the Annexes D of the European Semester Country Reports 2019 and 2020 and how it is aligned to the ESIF Policy Objectives and Specific Objectives></i></p> <p>The European Semester also identified climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience as a future investment need on cross-border and macro regional level in case of BG, CZ, DE, HR, HU, SI, SK, RO related mainly to floods, but also drought, forest fires.</p> <p>The selected priority/topic is aligned with PO2, SO iv. Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience.</p>
Objective(s) to be reached	<p><i><Please, indicate what positive change you expect to reach in order to address the territorial challenge defined above></i></p> <p>Strengthened coordinated response mechanisms for natural disasters along the Danube Region</p>
Countries (and/or regions) involved and why/how	<p><i><Please, indicate the countries (and regions, if applicable) to be involved in this topic, the reasons why and how they should be involved></i></p> <p>All Danube Region countries are involved.</p>

⁹ The rows in grey are related to the requirements set by the Croatian EUSDR Presidency and will not be used for the second SMF call.

	<p>Specifically, countries along the Danube river and its tributaries are targeted for actions related to flood response.</p> <p>Cross-border areas of the Danube region, where development of operative flood (or other disaster) management plans and the harmonised management of assets (human resources, equipment, etc.) are needed.</p>
Stakeholders to be involved	<p><i><Please, list the type of stakeholders which should be involved for carrying out this strategic topic. In case different stakeholders according to the different countries are expected to be involved, please indicate so></i></p> <p>The following institutions are involved as stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disaster management agencies/directorates ▪ Water management agencies/directorates ▪ National/regional non-governmental organisations (professional and volunteer civil protection units, professional and volunteer firefighters) ▪ Hydro-meteorological services ▪ International organisations ▪ Local governments/municipalities
Interventions needed to reach the objective	<p><i><Please, outline which type of intervention (e.g. coordinated projects addressing specific different thematic/actions) are expected to be implemented in order to reach the objective above. The listed interventions should provide to the SMF applicant the number and scope of the projects to be developed by the SMF project.></i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training, development capacities and procedures for better preparedness of disaster management 2. Identification of innovative solutions to support disaster management (IT tools, VR, mobile apps, etc.) 3. Strengthening resiliency of national/regional authorities (this type of intervention foresees that a harmonised and standardised approach is developed at transnational level and then applied at national regional level)
Potential financing instruments	<p><i><Please, indicate which financing instruments could be used to fund interventions outlined above.></i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Potential funding instruments of intervention 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DG ECHO UCPM-2020: Prevention and Preparedness for Cross-Border Risks and European Civil Protection Exercises ○ ERASMUS+ ○ CBC Programmes 2. Potential funding instruments of intervention 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Horizon Europe: Pillar 2 Cluster Civil security for Society: Intervention Areas 3. Potential funding instruments of intervention 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interreg DTP ○ CBC Programmes ○ Subsequently: National mainstream programs of at least the 8 countries where the Annex D of European Country Reports future investment need section mentioned disaster resilience