

EUSDR Thematic Conference on **INNOVATION AND DIGITIZATION** **organised by the EUSDR Slovak Presidency**

held on 22 September 2021 in hotel Bôrik, Bratislava, Slovakia

Rationale

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) is a macro-regional strategy adopted by the European Commission in December 2010 and endorsed by the European Council in 2011 for the purpose of sustainable development of the Danube region. It is comprised of 12 Priority Areas covering the needs of the whole Danube Region, e.g. mobility, energy, tourism, water, environment, knowledge, building capacities, security, etc.

The European Commission in its third report of September 2020 states that strengthening political commitment is essential: the national and regional authorities should be able to provide more strategic leadership at ministerial level to bridge the gap between the strong political commitments and the ability of administrations to follow up on these.

In 2020, a revised Action Plan of the EUSDR Action Plan was adopted to boost a more committed involvement of all stakeholders for the implementation of the Danube Region Strategy. The activities and objectives of the Strategy have been updated to make a better interlinkage between them. There should also be a better link with the Cohesion policy and a more efficient use of European Union funds.

The innovations and digitization are one of the thematic priorities under the Slovak Presidency in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). This topic is following the concept of the European Union of green and digital transition which should finally lead to climate neutrality.

The innovations and digitisation affect all aspects of life in the Danube Region, therefore they should be mirrored in all priority areas. This topic is highly cross-sectoral and creates a significant space for cooperation within the EUSDR.

Logistics

22 September 2021

The event will be organised in hybrid form - online and personal participation. During registration, the participant can choose the form of participation (online/personal).

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Draft Agenda

Danube Strategy - How to boost innovation and digitization?

- Introduction of EUSDR and how to support innovation / digitization to raise competitiveness in the region
- Focusing on experiences / lessons learned by the current and future EUSDR Presidency
- Specific themes:
 - a. Umbrella structure / infrastructure
 - b. Marketing and communication EUSDR
 - c. Concrete Projects

Regional aspects of SME digitization

Many SMEs were forced to accelerate their adoption of digital infrastructures due to the challenges presented by Covid-19. For those who have not, governments have pledged to assist in the process and provide the funds for their digitization, which presents a unique historical opportunity. SMEs represent most businesses in the EU, employing over 100 million people, as a dry source of Europe's growth (55% of EU gross domestic product) and employment (65%). Digitisation of SMEs is the obvious remedy, latching on to the right momentum in Covid-19 aftermath and recovery funds.

Sandboxes – Experiment to innovate

In many EU countries, we can see the raise of the open platforms where the experimentation take place. Innovative companies can test their solutions and develop their innovative products at a faster pace. The question remains how we speed up this process also in our region and more importantly how to build and secure a sustainable ecosystem and infrastructure that will enable the development of innovative and smart application for the whole society.

A Key success factor - Funding

Not only Covid-19 pandemic, but also emerging technologies, new skills required, and disruptive business models have already proved how their huge impact on companies' financing could be. Will we be able to provide financial products that will bring back the competitiveness edge to our companies? What products are the most effective to finance the innovation?