



Slovenian Presidency
of the EU Strategy
for the Danube Region

SLOVENIAN EUSDR PRESIDENCY PROGRAMME 2022/23



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BACKGROUND

Slovenia takes over the EUSDR Presidency from Ukraine, the first non-EU country to preside over the Strategy and a country that has been subjected to an unprovoked military attack by the Russian Federation. The EUSDR has just celebrated its 10th anniversary but faces its greatest challenges since its inception. Strengthening political commitment and strategic leadership to implement regional cooperation within the EUSDR is more important than ever.

The Slovenian EUSDR Presidency will **focus on the future development of the Danube Region and on empowered cooperation of all EUSDR participating countries while maintaining full solidarity with Ukraine.**

For the EU and the international community to effectively and sustainably support Ukraine, which remains subject to a war of aggression and military occupation, a dual strategy of "recovery and reconstruction" must be ensured. First, all possible support must be provided for immediate and short-term assistance to the people of Ukraine by providing humanitarian aid and support for the short-term reconstruction of infrastructure damaged by the war. Second, the EUSDR and all EU member states must work together to address the task of rebuilding Ukraine from a medium- to long-term perspective.

Under the slogan **"Recovery, Development and Unity,"** the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency hopes to build on the assistance provided to Ukraine.

The EUSDR can contribute by focusing on capacity building in the areas of administrative reforms, social policy, research, education, and energy security, all of which are thematically related to the reconstruction of the country. This can also be addressed in cooperation with the EU's other macro-regional strategies.

INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES

Under this priority pillar, Slovenia aims to address key recurring challenges in the EUSDR. One of them, which has been the focus of EUSDR assessments and evaluations, is the ability of the EUSDR to achieve greater impact by strengthening the capacity of its implementers. The Danube region is one of the most heterogeneous and diverse regions in Europe, with nine EU and five non-EU countries. In line with the EUSDR's main objective of promoting regional, social and territorial cohesion, Slovenia will promote the EUSDR slogan of "Prosperity through diversity" as an advantage.

To achieve this, it is necessary to focus on the involvement, empowerment, communication and capacity-building of key stakeholders participating in the EUSDR in a structured and strategic way. This will allow the Strategy to reach its full potential in support of the EU's Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies. Strategic capacity building under the EUSDR should also take into account the experiences and lessons learned from the other three macro-regional strategies with different implementation phases and overlapping areas.

The need for exchange and the potential for cooperation and coordination between all four macro-regional strategies will be one of the priorities of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency.

Slovenia will act as a promoter and facilitator of macro-regional cooperation between all countries and all macro-regional strategies.



To this end, the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency has the following **institutional priorities**:

Empowering involvement in the EUSDR

Macro-regional strategies as "policy-to-action networks" contribute significantly to the cooperation between the EU and its neighbouring countries. They are unique in that EU and non-EU countries cooperate on an equal footing. In its conclusions of 3 December 2020, the Council of the EU also recognised the contribution of MRS to the European Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies and called on all countries and the European Commission to strengthen synergies in this regard. The EUSDR provides a unique platform for cooperation on EU-related issues with non-EU participating countries. Exploring the full potential of cooperation of EU and non-EU countries within EUSDR is of great benefit to the EUSDR as a whole.

The **Slovenian EUSDR Presidency would like to pay special attention to stronger and more effective cooperation of all countries in the EUSDR, with a focus on the needs and potentials of non-EU countries.** To this end, the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency will **promote institutional exchange and capacity building among all institutions involved in the implementation of the EUSDR** and propose recommendations for possible improvements.

Improving the strategic governance of EUSDR and macro-regional strategies

All EU macro-regional strategies are dedicated to promoting closer cooperation to find common solutions to joint challenges in a given geographical context. The geographical contexts are specific, but the governance structures of the macro-regional strategies follow similar models. Therefore, all macro-regional strategies face similar governance challenges, such as youth involvement, improved communication, effective and efficient stakeholder engagement, stronger political support or potential participation of non-EU countries in the macro-regional strategies. Therefore, the **Slovenian EUSDR Presidency will prioritise cross-cutting macro-regional cooperation and capacity building on common issues and themes that connect the macro-regional strategies and provide inputs for improved implementation of the EUSDR.** During its EUSDR Presidency, **Slovenia would like to pay special attention to better use of existing formats of macro-regional strategies cooperation to further institutionalise capacity building, knowledge transfer and exchange of best practices between macro-regional strategies.**

Following the implementation of the EUSDR and emerging needs and trends, the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency will also focus on improving and fine-tuning the governance structure and processes of the EUSDR.

Youth involvement and its role in the EUSDR

Youth involvement is an important step forward for the EUSDR to follow up on the engagement of young people in the MRS and in the establishment of the Danube Youth Council. The EUSDR is now the second MRS after EUSALP to have established a Youth Council. Now that the Danube Youth Council will be fully operational, the EUSDR must also provide young people with concrete opportunities, skills and tools to contribute to the implementation of the Strategy. Slovenia is convinced that the youth of the Danube region have the motivation, will and energy to take on this responsibility and help shape a sustainable future from day one.

The **Slovenian EUSDR Presidency will encourage the Danube Youth Council representatives to develop their potential and contribute with their creative, innovative and fresh ideas to the challenges facing the entire region.**

To this end, the youth representatives will work on concrete challenges by learning and applying the “POPRI start-up challenge” method. During the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency, further steps will be taken to **create a EUSDR-wide cooperation framework of youth organisations from the entire Danube region.**

Embedding process – evaluation and further steps

The preparatory phase of the 2021–2027 programming period is a unique opportunity to draw on the political commitment of EUSDR member states, to better interlink the EUSDR with funding programmes, and to leverage potential synergies. On the EUSDR side, a comprehensive approach with multiple tools and processes has been developed and pursued, culminating in the EUSDR Embedding Week and the launch



of the Danube Strategy Flagships. These processes will continue to be implemented, as appropriate, during the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency.

The process of embedding the EUSDR in the 2021–2027 EU programmes is now reaching a final phase with the approval of the programmes and the signing of partnership agreements. The next phase, which is considered the second part of the embedding process, is the implementation phase. One focus will be to **assess the effectiveness of the embedding process and monitor its outcomes**. The aim is to demonstrate how EU funds and funding programmes contribute to the development and implementation of the EUSDR strategic topics and actions. It will allow us to compare actual achievements to planned measures, identify good practice examples and show bottlenecks in embedding the EUSDR into EU-funded programmes. Another focus is further outreach to the centrally managed programmes and continuous dialogue with these programmes on embedding issues.

The Slovenian EUSDR Presidency will also prioritise better alignment and coordination of IPA III and NDICI financial instruments with macro-regional priorities and other specific topics relevant to non-EU countries.



THEMATIC PRIORITIES

The European Commission's third report on the implementation of MRS and the recent Policy/Impact evaluation of EUSDR highlighted the importance of improving cross-sectoral policy coordination to address existing and emerging horizontal topics and challenges.

Horizontal frames relevant to all five *strategic objectives* were defined in the EUSDR Action Plan 2020:

1. Digitalisation
2. Migration and demographic change
3. Climate change and sustainable development

Therefore, Slovenia aims to integrate the horizontal frames into its Presidency programme. At the same time, according to the policy/impact evaluation study, the EUSDR should consider how to approach cross-cutting new challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the circular economy, etc.



To this end, the **thematic priorities** of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency reflect both the cross-sectoral dimension of cooperation in horizontal frames and addressing urgent cross-cutting issues.

Towards the knowledge society and professions of the future

The acceleration of green and digital transition will steer the transformation of societies and economic subsystems in the EU and the Danube region. The labour market and employment opportunities will evolve accordingly. Therefore, the **Slovenian EUSDR Presidency will pay attention to the expected transformation of societies, the role of knowledge in such societies, the professions of the future, the mobility of the workforce, the brain drain and the resulting adjustments that will be required in our societies.**

How will these changes affect our cooperation and connectivity in the region? The **Slovenian EUSDR Presidency aims to include a wide range of stakeholders and views in the discussion**, such as higher education and research institutions, the private sector, youth, policymakers and civil society.

Transport and energy challenges in the region

The Danube region has been facing transport and logistical challenges for years. However, these have been exacerbated since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the consequences of the war in Ukraine and Russian gas and oil blockades have caused fuel and energy prices to skyrocket and continue to threaten energy security in the EU and beyond.

Transport is of vital importance for the region, enabling trade, tourism, and food security and fostering international cooperation and partnerships. Improving the road network and its safety, rail freight and passenger transport, as well as air connectivity, contributes to the full integration of transport modes and has therefore been high on the EU agenda for years. In addition, the transport of various energy carriers represents a new challenge in the current geopolitical situation. **The Slovenian EUSDR Presidency will pay special attention to the future challenges of regional transport in terms of sustainable and energy-efficient transport, the digitalisation of transport and the professions of the future in transport.**

Decarbonisation and energy security in the Danube region countries through diversification of energy supply sources, together with accelerated energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources, will also be the focus of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency.



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ORGANISATION OF THE PRESIDENCY AND PRESIDENCY CALENDAR

Slovenia holds the Presidency of the EUSDR from 1 November 2022 to 31 October 2023. The main tasks of the EUSDR Presidency are to ensure continuity in the implementation of the EUSDR, provide guidance and support to stakeholders, promote cooperation among participating countries, and chair key governance processes. The Presidency also represents the Strategy in meetings with other macro-regional strategies, the European Commission and other external stakeholders.

The Slovenian Presidency would like to act as a promoter and facilitator of macro-regional cooperation and invites all EUSDR stakeholders to participate in the implementation of the Presidency programme.



The Presidency programme will be implemented through the following activity groups:

Core governance meetings

With the support of the Danube Strategy Point, the Slovenian Presidency is planning to organise an informal joint meeting of National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators in the autumn of 2022, a meeting of Priority Area Coordinators in the spring of 2023, a meeting of National Coordinators in the spring of 2023 and a joint meeting of National Coordinators and Priority Coordinators in the autumn of 2023 in advance of the Annual Forum in October 2023. The Slovenian Presidency would like each of these meetings to be preceded by a meeting of the Trio Presidency.

Other meetings and groups

All task forces will continue to operate according to the needs of the Strategy and the stakeholders involved. With the support of the Danube Strategy Point, the Presidency would also like to continue the work of the Network of Managing Authorities, which will be an important tool in the embedding process.

External communication and meetings

The Presidency will represent the EUSDR in all meetings with external stakeholders as needed. In particular, the High-level Group and the MRS Trio Presidencies are important meetings in this regard. The Slovenian EUSDR Presidency will host the MRS Trio Presidencies meeting during the EU MRS Week in Brussels, which will focus on making better use of the cooperation formats between the existing macro-regional strategies, especially the potential for capacity building.

Thematic and capacity-building events

The Slovenian EUSDR Presidency, with the support of the Danube Strategy Point and in cooperation with the European Commission, the Priority Area Steering Groups and Coordinators and other stakeholders, will organise the following thematic events:

Empowering for Involvement in EUSDR

A joint discussion with the European Commission, National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators on the needs and possible solutions to unlock the full potential of macro-regional cooperation.

Danube Region Transport Days

Two international stakeholder conferences, co-organised together with UNECE and the Transport Community, will address the region's transport and mobility challenges. The first conference in 2022 will focus on energy efficiency in transport.

Towards the Knowledge-driven Society and Professions of the Future

An international conference addressing what the knowledge-driven society could and should look like, forecasting of skills and competencies most likely to be needed, and the expected needs of the labour market. The contributions of strategic and R&I foresight to this process are essential.

Young Bled Strategic Forum

Young BSF 2023 will be implemented as a series of preparatory activities and a forum that will bring together young leaders from the region and around the world to discuss the most pressing current issues of their generation and our society. The implemented activities will be interwoven with initiatives that will be carried out in the coming year, the European Year of Skills 2023

Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week

The 8th edition of this traditional series of events is dedicated to the concrete challenges of the coast and its hinterland and offers an opportunity to discuss issues of all macro-regional strategies in an informal setting on the Slovenian coast.

Danube Youth Camp and POPRI start-up challenge

Giving the Danube Youth Council representatives the opportunity to work on concrete challenges while learning entrepreneurial skills will be the focus of the Danube Youth Camp, which will take place before the 12th Annual Forum. As part of the POPRI start-up challenge, young people will address issues of migration, brain drain and talent retention in the region.

12th EUSDR Annual Forum

The most important event of the year, marking the end of each EUSDR Presidency, is dedicated to summarising the programme and priorities of the Slovenian Presidency and to elaborating policy guidelines and recommendations for the future implementation of the EUSDR. The 12th Annual Forum is planned for **24 and 25 October 2023**, so **save the date!**



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CALENDAR OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS DURING THE SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE EUSDR 2022/2023

EUSDR Management & Governance 2022/2023

Scope	Date
Opening event of SI Presidency	1 December 2022
Informal NC-PAC Meeting	2 December 2022
PAC meeting	16-17 March 2023
7th MRS TRIO Presidencies Meeting	Second half of April 2023
NC meeting	15-16 May 2023
NC-PAC meeting	September 2023
12th EUSDR Annual Forum 2023	24-25 October 2023



Main Presidency thematic & capacity building events 2022/2023

Scope	Date
Danube Region Transport Days	28-29 November 2022
Empowering the participation of all countries in EUSDR	2 December 2022
Conference Knowledge-driven society	17-18 May 2023
Young Bled Strategic Forum	25-29 August 2023
Mediterranean Coast and MRS Week	September 2023
Danube Region Transport Days	3-4 October 2023
2 nd Danube Youth Camp & POPRI Start-up Challenge	22-23 October 2023
12th EUSDR Annual Forum 2023	24-25 October 2023



Priority Area, cross-PA/MRS relevant events & SG meetings in 2022/2023

Scope	Date
Danube rectors conference on Digital Transformation of the Danube Higher Education Area in Conditions of Recovery	10 November 2022
Change and stress management	8-9 November 2022
2nd Meeting of the Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence	8-9 November 2022
Conference on Heritage Innovation Technology	9-10 November 2022
Webinar on Digitalisation in Cities and Municipalities	10 November 2022
Because neighbours grow up together. Social inclusion in Central and Eastern neighbourhood CBC programmes and projects	10 November 2022
Eastern European Forum	15 November 2022
Unfolding EUSDR Workshop	16 November 2022
National Participation Day Slovenia in the Danube Region Strategy	17 November 2022
The In-Between Initiative 2.0 - online event	29 November 2022
PA 1b – SG meeting	3-4 November 2022
PA 3 – SG meeting	9 November 2022
PA 8 – SG meeting	15 November 2022
PA 11 – SG meeting	22 November 2022
PA 4 + PA 5 (joint SG meeting)	22-23 November 2022
PA 2 – SG meeting	23 November 2022
PA 9 – SG meeting	23 November 2022
PA 1a – SG meeting	5 December 2022
PA 10 – SG meeting	5-6 December 2022
PA 3 – SG meeting	13 December 2022



The Slovenian EUSDR Presidency is open to other ideas and contributions that can be included in its programme. The Slovenian EUSDR Presidency can be reached at any time at: Slovenian-eusdr.presidency@gov.si.



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