

# 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

19-20 October 2022

Košice, Slovakia, and online

## Report

**Attendants:** 209 on-site participants and 290 registered online participants

### Attachment:

- Joint Statement of the Ministers responsible for the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

# The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

***.:RECOVERY.DEVELOPMENT.UNITY:.***

## ***A sustainable and secure Danube Region***

**19 –20 October 2022, Slovakia & online**

**Venue: Kasárne/Kulturpark Košice,  
Kukučínova 2, 040 01 Košice, Slovakia**

The 11<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum, jointly organised by the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency, the Slovak TRIO Presidency and the Danube Strategy Point with support from the European Commission and the Danube Region Programme, was held on 19-20 October 2022. In light of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, 2022 marked the first year in the history of the EUSDR where the Annual Forum could not be organised on the territory of the country holding the EUSDR Presidency. This year's Annual Forum was organised by Ukraine with the support of Slovakia as EUSDR TRIO Presidency in Košice, Slovakia, in a hybrid format.



## **11<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum EU Strategy for the Danube Region**

19-20 October 2022

**Košice, Slovakia (and online)**  
Organised under the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency



## **DAY 0: 18 October 2022 9<sup>th</sup> DANUBE PARTICIPATION DAY**

The 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Danube Participation Day (DPD)<sup>1</sup> was organised on 18 October 2022 back to back with the 11<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum in an online format. In view of global crises, challenges and current developments that Europe and the world are facing, the 9<sup>th</sup> DPD addressed the issue of *Resilience through Diversity* and, as part of this, the involvement of civil society in the EUSDR for a resilient future. In this context, the questions of ‘*How can civil society participation contribute to (ensure/facilitate) a more resilient and prosperous development in the Danube Region?*’ and ‘*How can multi-sector stakeholder cooperation support the pathway of post-war Ukraine and Moldova toward the European Union?*’ were placed in the central focus.

In three panels and a reflection session, the participants were invited to discuss benefits, expectations, and shortfalls of participation in the EUSDR and how to shape effective ways for dialogue. To this end, in the run-up to the DPD, a survey was conducted by the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) and EUSDR PA 10 | Institutional Capacity and Cooperation, the results of which served as a basis for discussion.

Furthermore, the 9<sup>th</sup> DPD addressed the question of how the EU Strategy for the Danube Region can contribute to the accession process of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova to the European Union, in particular with regard to the participation and involvement of civil society at national and macro-regional level.

Following the 9<sup>th</sup> DPD, **key recommendations**<sup>2</sup> were issued based on the fruitful discussions, aiming at improving and broadening the quality and participation of civil society organisations in the EUSDR and thus contributing to a more resilient development in the Danube Region. The key recommendations can serve as a contribution to the work of the entire EUSDR community to shape effective ways of participation and dialogue and thus strengthen the Danube Region.

## **DAY 1: 19 October 2022**

### **❖ Meeting of Ministers responsible for the EUSDR**

During the 11<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum, the joint meeting of ministers responsible for the EUSDR was held. As a result of the meeting, a Joint Statement of the Ministers responsible for the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region was adopted. The Statement condemns in the strongest terms Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military invasion of Ukraine and addresses issues such as energy security, environmental risks and mitigation of climate change, supply chains, sustainable economic development, and improving the transport infrastructure of the Danube Region.

### **❖ Press Conference and family photo**

As the list of speakers included ministers as well as experts and policy makers from participating Member States and the European Commission, the media programme included a press conference and opportunities for journalists to interview high-level participants from the Member States and the EU. The journalists participated in a networking dinner, enjoyed a project visit, attended the press conference

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<sup>1</sup> <https://danubestrategy.eu/events/9th-danube-participation-day>

<sup>2</sup> <https://danubestrategy.eu/s/Key-Recommendations-for-Civil-Society-Involvement-to-Improve-Resilience-in-the-Danube-Region-9th-Dan.pdf>

and were present during the plenary session, followed workshops and concluded the Forum with the handover of the EUSDR Presidency to Slovenia.

After 4 weeks of manual media monitoring via online research and direct contact with journalists, 43 pieces of coverage on the Annual Forum, of which 41 online articles and 2 YouTube fragments, were collected. The number of articles collected is on the high end in relation to the present number of journalists (11), which can be assumed because of the ongoing tensions in the Danube Region relating to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The articles were published mostly on websites with a national extension. However, some outlets have a more broad, European audience. Out of the 43 articles, 37 were written or produced by journalists present at the Forum.

#### ❖ Opening of the 11<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum

**Oľha STEFANISHYNA** (Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine) opened the 11<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum and thanked the Slovak Republic for hosting the event. A year ago, Ukraine was the first non-EU country to take over the EUSDR Presidency. On 24 February 2022, with the unprovoked full-scale military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the reality has dramatically changed. However, when the war is over, Ukraine will become stronger altogether. Despite the ongoing Russian invasion, Ukraine is glad to see that the European Community has been further strengthened and Ukraine has managed to become a candidate country for membership of the European Union. The EUSDR has been a strong instrument for European aspirations and played an important role in connecting non-EU countries with EU Member States to jointly address current challenges, such as education and labour market, sustainable development of the regions, resilience and independence in various sectors, or the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Dušan VELIČ** (Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic) welcomed all participants to the 11<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum on behalf of the Slovak Republic. It was a historical moment when Slovakia handed over the EUSDR Presidency to Ukraine a year ago, with Ukraine being the first non-EU country to hold the EUSDR Presidency. Despite the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EUSDR stayed strong and is helping Ukraine where possible. Hosting the Annual Forum is a gesture of solidarity from the Slovak Republic to the Ukrainian friends. The EUSDR as a strong instrument for the Danube Region is more important than ever.

#### ❖ Plenary Session: New Challenges & Opportunities for the Danube Region

**Ihor KORKHOVYI**, Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, welcomed on-site and online participants to the Plenary Session *New Challenges & Opportunities For The Danube Region* of the 11<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum. This year's EUSDR Annual Forum is being hosted for the first time by a non-EU country. Since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the solidarity of EU and non-EU countries in Europe has become evident. In these challenging times, it has become palpable how cooperation in the EUSDR works, especially as the EUSDR Annual Forum is successfully implemented with the help of the Slovak EUSDR TRIO Presidency, the Danube Regional Programme (DRP) and the Danube Strategy Point (DSP). Ukraine thus managed to implement the EUSDR Presidency in 2022 as well as possible.

**Oľha STEFANISHYNA**, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, stressed that continued and enhanced cooperation in the current situation contributes to Ukraine's resilience and sustainability. In addition to territorial security, global food security must also be ensured in order to maintain the momentum of developments in these months and overcome the difficulties caused by the Russian war of aggression. The support of partners in Europe, neighbouring countries and

the EUSDR has undoubtedly contributed to winning the war, regaining sustainability, advancing EU integration and ensuring the survival of the economy in Ukraine.

**Elisa FERREIRA**, EU Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms reminded participants that this year's EUSDR Annual Forum should have been held in Ukraine. This was prevented by the unprovoked, illegal and unjustified Russian aggression. Commissioner Ferreira underlined that now and in the future, the collective determination and standing by Ukraine is of utmost importance. This year, Ukraine became the first non-EU country to coordinate the activities of 14 countries that together make up the EUSDR. This is yet another sign of Ukraine's firm commitment to engage with Europe on an equal footing with European Union member states and indeed to take a leading role in European cooperation activities. The Commissioner highlighted the solidarity in Europe, welcoming civilians fleeing the war zone, establishing solidarity lanes, bringing EU and Ukrainian business together to find quick, pragmatic solutions for agricultural exports and with investing €100 million to work with Ukrainian authorities to repair schools damaged by the Russian aggression.

In three successive legislative packages under the new initiative Cohesion Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) €10 billion were mobilised to support those who welcome refugees. The support to Ukraine is unshakeable and has to continue to withstand and prevail against this brutal aggression. However, at the EUSDR Annual Forum the focus shall not be on the aggression of autocracies, but on the cooperation of democracies. Digitalisation, alongside with the Russian aggression, has shown the need for energy independence based on energy saving and renewables. The EUSDR should ensure that also the Danube Youth Council gets off to a good start, and ensuring that youth are properly involved in the policymaking processes. Cooperation is the basis of our European Union, cooperation is the basis of MRS, and cooperation is the antithesis of conflict. The Commissioner wished a successful 11<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum and congratulated the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency for their fantastic work under the most difficult conditions, finishing with "Glory to Ukraine"!

**Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS**, EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, underlined that taking the leading role in chairing a MRS despite the Russian war of aggression shows the commitment of Ukraine to engage, reinforce and take a leading role in pushing European cooperation. It also proves the attractiveness of the EUSDR which offers cooperation on an equal footing between EU member states and non-EU countries. On 23 June 2023, the European Council granted Ukraine and Moldova the status of candidates for accession to the EU. This decision is a strong signal, showing consensus and that the door for membership is open. The EUSDR will further support the accession endeavours, while bringing benefits to the Region among others by reinforcing the integration of river basin management, navigability, simplifying border crossing procedures, planning flood risk prevention and by facilitating fish migration. The European Commission offers funding opportunities and supports the exchange of good practises while taking the legal route with enforcement actions to ensure that citizens are protected, despite the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, and the suspension of collaboration with the Russian Federation and Belarus. For the 2021-2027 programming period €26 million which were initially earmarked for Russia and Belarus were immediately transferred for strengthening cooperation with Ukraine and Moldova. The European Commission has further proposed a new regulation to smoothen the implementation challenges of the disrupted 2014-2020 cooperation and to alleviate the financial burden on Ukrainian beneficiaries. The proposal brings legal certainty and flexibility, allowing the use of programmes' financial liquidity to support new challenges like immigration. Lastly, the Commissioner thanked the Slovak government and the town of Košice for hosting this event, which serves as an excellent example of human compassion and remarkable solidarity of so many present member states.

**Radim DVORAK**, Deputy Head of Representation, Head of Political Section, Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia on behalf Adina Ioana VĂLEAN, EU Commissioner for Transport, delivered the key messages and provided best wishes from the Commissioner to the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency. The EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lane Corridors run on rail, road and inland waterways aligning all sectors in both directions and have become a connecting lifeline for Ukraine's economy while bringing

the country closer to the EU and the single market.

The Danube proved to be a natural lifeline for Ukraine, which highlights the importance of boosting inland waterway capacity setting up the corridors to reach goals set in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. Together with the partners, more than 12.5 million tons of Ukrainian agricultural goods (grain, seed and related products) have been exported via these routes and shared to global markets and third countries in need via EU ports. However, Solidarity Lanes are still needed as they represent the only option for Ukraine to export other goods such as iron, steel, furniture and paper and to import goods needed including fuel, humanitarian aid and items for winterisation. Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine has accelerated its economic alignment with EU markets and the key lifelines with Ukraine's western borders with the EU. The Danube route is the most successful one in terms of volume goods, but also the most complex one to build and logistically maintain as it covers rail, road and inland waterways. Therefore, in the short, medium and to the long-term success, more investments are needed in equipment. The Danube route remains a key connector for goods but it is also for people an indispensable link for Ukraine's reconstruction, the common future and deepened cooperation.

**Tanja FAJON**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia thanked the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency and confirmed that the country deserves all the support and endeavours that secure further support and cooperation. The Danube Region is facing big challenges, trying to recover from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and now facing regional and global challenges caused by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The immediate concerns are energy, food security, transport and migration, taking the spotlight from economic recovery, to green and digital transition. Macro-regional strategies can tackle these emerging challenges in a sustainable way, by providing long-term objectives. The Danube Region is among the most diverse regions in Europe, profiting from a high level of solidarity and cooperation on equal footing of all participating countries. To unlock the full potential of macro-regional cooperation, the development of enhanced capacities on all levels is needed. Slovenia sees great potential for the Strategy in including youth in policy processes as the young generation is motivated, has great ideas and skills to start co-creating a sustainable future. The youth therefore has to be provided with concrete tools and possibilities. Knowledge and science play a crucial role in creating a competitive, sustainable and future-oriented society for generations to come. Slovenia is proud to take over the EUSDR Presidency from Ukraine and will continue to focus on the current challenges in the Region, including energy and transport. In the last year, the EUSDR has shown that it can perform even in the most difficult times.

**Maksym MARCHENKO**, Head of the Odesa Regional State Military Administration, reported from the regional reactions to the full-scale invasion of Russia on the territory of Ukraine, which led to a number of global problems in transports and logistics industries and foreign economic activity. These challenges include the blocking of transport corridors, the stopping of the export of domestic goods as well as the rising prices for wheat, corn and sunflower oil on world markets. One focus is therefore on ensuring that Ukrainian ports are operational to export goods such as grain, oil and other agricultural products. Quick response were required and alternative routes were in waterways and railways were used. Odesa and the surrounding region are strategically of central importance despite the fact that infrastructure was damaged for example the connection of the Black Sea and Danube river corridors. As an alternative route, the transboundary Dniester river became important for exports from Ukraine and imports to the Ukrainian southern regions, as Danube and south Odesa were separated from the territory of Ukraine. By that, also the transport corridor to neighbouring countries such as Moldova and Romania were no longer operational. A broad coalition of support for Ukraine from EU and UN member states launched the *grain initiative* implementing an export of about eight million tons of agricultural products from the ports of Odesa through 225 ships. After the threat of military control of Zmiiny (Snake) Island by the Russian Federation was averted, the passage of ships to the ports on the northern Black Sea coast and to the Danube ports was restored. Further, the Dniester bridge will be reconstructed, a new highway to Bucharest built and new railway according to EU standards constructed at the Belgorod-Dniester port. By these measures, the security in the Danube Region can be strengthened and multimodal transport and



cargo flows through Ukraine to other EUSDR countries can be increased.

**Kvetoslav KMEC**, Agenda 2030, Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, welcomed the participants on behalf of state secretary Dušan VELIČ and underlined the emotionality that accompanies the EUSDR Annual Forum 2022, especially as bombs were again dropped on the territory of Ukraine on that very day. In his speech, the focus lay on common activities to be carried out in the near future. Since the establishment of the EUSDR, there has always been a strong focus on the participating states, which are the owners of the strategy. However, experience shows that there is still a need for improvement in implementing the goals and initiatives. In recent years, NCs and PACs alike have been concerned about the continuous and active participation of members in the Steering Groups. Solutions should be found on how to better involve countries in the thematic implementation to the EUSDR. In this context, the increase youth and youth organisation participation could help to support the activities in macro-regional strategies and to deepen the cooperation among generations providing benefits for all. These topics were also taken up in the revised EUSDR Action Plan of 2020 and implemented under the Slovak EUSDR Presidency and continued under the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency. A clear cross-cutting topic is the decarbonisation and transformation of economies following the European Green Deal to combat the recent financial and economic crises. Had bigger progress and improvements been made in the past, the current situation would be different, looking for example at the dependency on Russian gas in Europe. To secure long-term social and economic benefits it is crucial not to step back from strong climate goals. In finalising the national Operational Programmes, member states should consider investments in other macro-regional countries, to contribute to the fulfilment of the goals of the EUSDR.

**Filiep DECORTE**, Chief, Programme Development Branch, Interim Emergency Director, UN-Habitat Global Solutions Division presented the use of UN Urban Recovery Frameworks (URF) and their application to the recovery in Ukraine. Based on a review of the UN Urban Agenda in April 2022, the tools remain key for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on local level as up to 65% of SDG targets depend on actions in cities taking into account not only cities, but also the areas surrounding. Needs for territorial approaches as devoted to the provision of adequate and affordable housing, urban prosperity and sustainable finance as well as in urban displacement and crises. These elements were confirmed in the 11<sup>th</sup> World Urban Forum held in Katowice in June 2022 to put science and data in the centre of recovery at local level. Therefore, several key principles are required in local and urban crises response: multilevel governance (MLG), areas-based and cross-sectoral coordination, inclusion of all relevant stakeholders in a participatory process as well as increased coordination between humanitarian-, development-, and peace actors. The URF provide the multi-sectoral and area-based institutional and policy framework and related programming to support resilient urban recovery at scale and the renewal of the social contract. Starting from an analysis based on sectoral data integration into urban and territorial understanding of crises impact, the URF provides solid profiling, data platforms, assessment, planning and action plans. The objectives of the URF are the application of MLG, the addressing of policy gaps, the provision of a framework for coordination at different scale levels as well as to ensure the access to finance. In doing so, networking at technical level to share knowledge and innovation is promoted.

**Ihor KORKHOVYI**, Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, summarised that with the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine new challenges emerged in the Danube Region, but it also opens up to new opportunities in a more recovered, developed and united macro-region.

#### ❖ Handover Ceremony of the EUSDR Presidency from Ukraine to Slovenia

**Ihor KORKHOVYI**, Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Communities and

Territories Development of Ukraine, handed over the EUSDR Presidency to **Petra ČESEN ČATAR**, Slovenian National Coordinator, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia. Under the slogan “EUSDR Entering the Decade of the Future”, Slovenia holds the Presidency of the EUSDR from 1 November 2022 until 31 October 2023.

- ❖ **Danube Region Programme Annual Event**- the regional challenges and the new Danube Region Programme (DRP) response- Launching the first Call for Proposals

**Imre CSALAGOVITS, Head of the Managing Authority Danube Region Programme**, the DRP foundation is the territorial analysis, which highlighted both the region's existing challenges in terms of innovation, environment, governance, and energy, as well as the emerging ones related to the region's social aspects. These challenges have become even more severe in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and DRP is prepared to lay the groundwork for addressing them in a coordinated manner among Danube Region countries. With the receipt of EU candidate status for Ukraine and Republic of Moldova, EU integration of Balkan countries became even more critical, and DRP provides the ideal cooperation platform for EU accession preparation. The change of the naming of the programme from Transnational to Regional programme, underlines once again that the programme serves the region and its specific challenges.

Over the years, different participating countries were involved in different programming periods, and the programme had to adapt to the changes although the environment or the political situation represent facts that cannot be changed. Thus, the programme hopes to serve as a platform for future investments and partners especially in the 2022 year, when nearly the entire region is either EU or candidate country.

The new DRP proposes to:

1. Respond to challenges (labour market, demographic change, COVID, energy independence, EU integration) by being closer to citizens, focusing on specific challenges and specific solutions of the Danube macro-region.
2. Shift the geographical scope of the Danube Transnational Programme to the Danube Region Programme, making it clear that the program will support the entire Danube Region with an improved regional and territorial approach that will focus on the program's specific character.
3. Focus on more realistic objectives and support more tangible actions.
4. Create a specific financial instrument to maximize the use of available EU funds, Interreg fund, with no distinction between member and non-member states. Also, a new level of simplification is being implemented in order to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.

Currently, the DRP programme has been finalized and discussed with the EC representatives, the official approval being expected soon. The first Call for Proposals, dedicated to EUSDR support schemes- DSP and PACs is ongoing and the signature of the financing contracts is being planned for spring 2023. Also, the first call for proposals targeting regular projects was open from 29 September 2022 till 21 November 2022 focusing on projects proposals to be submitted for the programme priorities 1, 2, 3 and specific objective 4.2. The Call for Proposals is launched under a two-step procedure, in a first step all applicants being invited to submit expression of interest, with no documentation attached and only the projects invited into the second step procedure are going to develop the full application for financing.

**Nada BOJANIĆ, Assistant Director, Directorate for European Integration, Bosnia and Herzegovina** presented the experience of an IPA country in European Territorial Cooperation projects. Bosnia and Herzegovina currently changed its status in EU candidate country, the official notification from the EC is expected to arrive during December 2022. Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in 6 ETC programmes,



transnational and cross-border programmes, with a high participation rate (54 project partners in 40 projects, attracting a total budget of 5.6 million euros), demonstrating that the capacity to participate in programmes has increase along with the experience gained by the project promoters. The full integration of IPA is now a reality in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the country had to create and develop the structures responsible with programme implementation, respecting the shared management rules. To capitalize on the results of previously implemented projects, Bosnia and Herzegovina created a publication for disseminating the results of the financed projects. In order to strengthen the capacity of the partners to undertake the role of Lead Partner, a call for partners from member states to integrate partners from IPA countries was launched. Ms. Nada BOJANIĆ concluded that Bosnia and Herzegovina is ready to undertake the challenges of the new programming period.

The panel continued with the interventions of the DRP Joint Secretariat coordinators on the innovation, energy and transport, environment, social issues and governance, topics financed by the future Programme. Each of the JS coordinators presented the future funding opportunities, the type of activities to be supported for financing and the partnership involved.

**Simona ENE, Head of Joint Secretariat** introduced programme's novelties, such as the ability to use Interreg funds (ERDF, IPA and NDICI) as a single budget with no additional splits, the possibility for project partners from non-EU countries to undertake on the role of Lead Partner, and the new maximum contribution of funds is 80%, increasing the percentage of own contribution to 20%. The new DRP intends to be a more focused programme, more simplified with no transport actions for financing but with a switch to social topics financing possibilities. The total budget of the DRP is of 215.047.857 euros Interreg funds to be used in common by all the 14 countries participating in the Programme. For the first call for proposals a budget of 91,7 mil euros was launched for applications submitted in a two-step procedure. The maximum duration of projects must be 30 months and the partnership must comprise at least 3 partners from the DRP countries. The applications will be submitted only electronically through the JEMS system. The second step will be launched in spring 2023. All the webinars related to future DRP and calls for proposals can be accessed on the programme's website <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/about-dtp/new-funding-2021-2027/webinars> .

**Andreea STRACHINESCU**, Head of Unit, DG Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission underlined the fact that the European missions represent a new way to bring innovative solutions to some of our greatest challenges, such as the restauration of our oceans and waters by the end of 2030. Horizon Europe mission work programmes for the 2021-2023 period represents the framework for cooperation and innovative solutions, using the principle of associated regions. The key element for further development focuses on the importance of joining forces and creating networks for a transformational change for healthy oceans and waters, thus contributing to the EU green deal objective. In order to be able to reach the common goal, protecting the water ecosystem around us, synergies between regions must be considered by creating networks for identifying common solution.

## **DAY 2: 20 October 2022**

### **❖ Energy Security and Sustainable Economy of the Region**

**Nadija AFANASIEVA** (Ukrainian Institute for International Politics) briefly introduced the priorities of the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency, which focused on the EU Green Deal, European Integration and energy security. Due to several attacks on the Ukrainian energy infrastructure, the energy in Ukraine needs to be turned off at times. Ukrainian citizens are asked to save energy as a matter of survival.

**Yaroslav DEMCHENKOV** (Deputy Minister of Energy of Ukraine on EU Integration) stressed that after 238 days of Russian invasion of Ukraine, millions of Ukrainian families have lost access to basic human needs like water, electricity and gas supply, or access to information. The occupation of the biggest nuclear power plant in Europe, Zaporizhzhia, can lead to nuclear accidents and has therefore put the world a step away from a nuclear disaster. Nevertheless, the EU has never been so united and many countries have diversified their energy sources and agreed on energy sanctions against Russia. Ukraine appreciates all help and is grateful for the support from the countries of the Danube Region. Solidarity and cooperation have been crucial in maintaining the energy system in Ukraine. More than 700 tons of specialised equipment have been received, but even more is needed. The winter will be difficult and safeguarding water and electricity is a main priority.

**Chiara TROVATI** (EC/DG Energy) gave a brief overview of the actions taken at European institutional level to face the energy security threats and diversify energy supply sources. The most important actions include:

- [REPowerEU-Plan](#) to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy and address infrastructure bottlenecks
- [EU Energy Platform](#) for the voluntary joint purchase of gas
- [Emergency regulation](#) to address high gas prices and ensure security of supply

As it was already mentioned before, solidarity is key. By October 2022, only two countries of the Danube Region have signed solidarity agreements in line with the [security of gas supply regulation](#). Main challenges in the Danube Region are high energy intensity, high dependence on Russian gas, coal and oil, decarbonisation of the industrial sector, response to varying prices, energy interconnections with neighbouring countries, storage capacity, as well as the length of permit and planning procedures. The REPowerEU-Plan and the recovery and resilience plans are tools to find solutions to these challenges. The Danube Region could intervene in several areas, e.g. use the potential for renewables (particularly solar, wind and geothermal energy), improve the regulatory framework, digitalise and modernise electricity networks, or improve the energy efficiency in buildings.

**Elizabeth PRESS** (International Renewable Energy Agency) highlighted that all countries from the Danube Region are part of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). Worldwide, 80% of the people live in countries net importing fossil energy. But every country has some kind of renewable energy source to harvest, so there is a level of independency that each country can gain. From technology perspective, the solutions are there and innovation is continuing. In 2021, 81% of additional capacities were renewables, which is not only a policy recognition, but also a reflection of the market, understanding that it is inexpensive, available and in the long-term the better solution. Furthermore, growth in renewable energy goes along with a growth of jobs. But there are also new risks emerging. E.g., to minimise the impact of climate change and extreme weather events, the system needs to be more resilient. IRENA concluded with the recommendation that countries should take a holistic approach, considering value chains and the transition of labour.

**Borbála TÓTH** (Regional Centre for Energy Policy Research) introduced the Danube Strategy Flagship “Diversification of gas supply in the EUSDR” and stressed that the Danube Region is highly dependent on Russian gas, much more than on EU average. The presentation focused on indicators, illustrating e.g. that Moldova is 100% dependent on Russian gas, which in this country is widely used in all sectors, and on simulations showing the gas price development depending on different scenarios. If Europe gets used to consume less gas, prices would stabilise at a lower price. However, consumers need a price signal to react. A lot has already been saved (the demand went back by around 10%), but more needs to be done. So far, mainly the industry has consumed less gas and now it is time that the consumers save gas in the building sectors by turning down the heating. This winter is safe, but without Russian gas, filling up the storages will be a challenge and next winter will be even worse.

**Ana LEGANEL** (Danube Transnational Programme) gave an overview on possible funding sources in the Danube Region. Energy projects could be financed by the Cohesion Fund, Just Transition Mechanism, Modernisation Fund, Innovation Fund, European Energy Efficiency Fund, Connecting Europe Facility (Energy), European Investment Bank, Horizon Europe, LIFE sub-programme Clean Energy Transition, ERDF, IPA, NDICI as well as the Interreg Programmes Danube Region, Central Europe, Alpine Space, ADRION, Euro-Med, Interreg Europe, HU-SK-RO-UA, HR-BA-ME and many other cross-border programmes available in the Danube Region. Potential applicants were encouraged to not miss financing opportunities, as rapid and coordinated measures are crucial.

#### ❖ Parallel Session I: Human Capital and Labour Markets

The Human Capital and Labour Markets is the second thematic priority for the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency and the Ukrainian representatives are members of the EUSDR Priority Area 9, the session was moderated by **Nadija AFANASIEVA** (Ukrainian Institute for International Politics). The current state of play in the Region demonstrates the importance of investing in the development of civil society, human capital and labour markets, which are key to economic and social stability in times of crisis. The Danube Region remains very sensitive to issues of employment and professional training while confronting the unprecedented social, economic and security challenges. The panel focused on current developments in the fields of education, training and employment in the Danube Region.

**Iryna SHUMIK** (Head of the Directorate for VET, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, EUSDR PA 9) underlined the difficulties, the needs and challenges faced by Ukraine due to the COVID-19 and to the war, mentioning that one of the biggest challenges is to ensure high standards of education for students and children while learning was organised digital or combination between face to face learning or digital learning. This is very challenging also for very young people who need to be in schools. She added that face to face learning is necessary for many educational fields (like baking, using specific equipment, etc.) which cannot be learned online. Also, information regarding the reform that started in 2019 in Ukraine for education modernisation aiming to provide new standards based on competency approach and employers needs was presented. The International Ukrainian School that allows every student, every people from any country to join this school and to receive such educational services. Due to the current situation in Ukraine, most available funds are directed to country defence and there is a clear need of additional financing for education, for paying the teachers, for purchasing necessary equipment for schools, etc.

**Maryna POPATENKO** (Deputy Minister, Ministry for Youth and Sports of Ukraine) provided information and statistics about war impact on the youth in Ukraine, mentioning that before 24 February 2022, 10.2 million youths were living in Ukraine and since then over 2 million youth fled abroad. The number of functional working youth centers also decreased from 300 before the war to 143 in August 2022, 60 being under occupation, 9 destroyed and 26 damaged. More than 420 children were killed and other 810 wounded by Russian invaders. She expressed appreciation for Ukrainian youth for standing against Russians, even they lost relatives, families, friends, jobs. The Ministry is continuing to support youth

centers, youth workers, youth councils, youth NGOs and to provide youth necessary services. With the international partners, organisations, Ukraine is developing programmes to support youth and youth centers and youth employment, rehabilitation of youth centers infrastructure, support for youth workers and youth NGOs, youth culture, workforce abroad, learning new languages and prepare for their return. With support from international partners, the Ukrainian infrastructure for youth centers is rehabilitated, support for youth workers and youth NGOs is granted and prepared for the return of the Ukrainians that were forced to leave the country.

**Erja KAIKKONEN** (Head of Policy and Public Outreach Department, European Training Foundation) detailed the cooperation between European Training Foundation and the EUSDR Priority Area 9 on the topic of human capital development from three perspectives: demand- addressing the needs of human capital from the labour market side, the provisions side- how education systems are providing skills and the governance- how civil society and private sector support human development. As 2023 was designated the year of skills at European level, the European Training Foundation focus its priorities on school to work transition, education quality, inclusion and relevance, sustainable entrepreneurial economy and data collection. It was also mentioned the European Training Foundation as support granted to Ukraine in creating e-learning and skills development to rebuilt Ukraine, resource hub for people fleeing the war and looking for continuing their education and work, education and training, weekly analysis of the Ukrainian invasion and the impact on human capital and education. The future perspectives include close cooperation with all partners in the EUSDR, support in capacity building for labour institutions, platforms for employment and skills development.

**Prof. Zdravko KAČIČ** (Rector of University of Maribor) addressed the added value that the Danube Region bring to the European Space along with the challenges for higher education in the new labour markets (lack of “fitness” for job immediately after graduation, rigid accreditation systems with different national standards, dual education- full time vs part time studies etc). One of the solutions proposed is the open access for learning in the Danube Region that will prevent the brain drain. The brain drain challenge as well as the lack of digital skills for ensuring the digital transition is not an issue that only the Danube Region is facing but the entire Europe. In this regard, key digital competencies need to be acquired, being able to predict the skills needed for a future 5-6 years period in order to be able to properly ensure the training for the students at the present moment. Micro-credentials, namely the certification of knowledge and skills in a shorter period of time than the usual higher education should be extended also for the industrial sector and in this regard consultations with the private and civil society representatives are ongoing. The higher education system must adapt to the future developments of the labour markets and the digitalisation trends. The perspectives for cooperation include increase the awareness within the academy community for cooperation at EUSDR level and EU level (university alliances), Danube Rectors conference.

**Anders BERGSTRÖM** (Policy Area Coordinator, PA Education, Science and Social affairs, EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region) shared the perspective of the Baltic sea Region, focusing on three challenges: demographic, related to people living longer and staying healthier longer, integration of migrants due to a high inflow of migrants since 2015 and few non-qualified jobs, skills shortage due to educational systems not able to deliver the needed competencies, vulnerable group of young people help them integrating in the society and finding them a job. The macro-regional strategies have the potential to become powerful tools to address the complex social challenges of a certain region. The most effective implementation format identified is the so-called policy- action process or flagships, defining platforms for collaboration that offers possibilities for its members to take part in development processes producing targeted solutions, sharing experiences and engaging in policy dialogues.

**Stephen Jonathan HALLIGAN** (Senior Project Officer, Danube Region Programme Joint Secretariat) presented the perspective of the new Danube Region Programme, bringing a different focus and a priority that is focused on the labour market, as a new opportunity with national responsibilities in this field. There is a need for creating synergies with other programmes as to avoid duplications and obtain joint

working. It was also presented the challenge of the financing, as the new Danube Region Programme envisages a new cofinancing rate, of 20 percentage and with no prefinancing granting. The new programme also emphasizes the importance of involvement of non EU countries. There were presented the Specific Objective 3.1 and 3.2, including the specific focus activities that are going to be financed, recognising the need and challenges of the area and the financing available.

## ❖ Parallel Session II: Involvement of Youth into the EUSDR

**Śławomir TOKARSKI** (EC DG REGIO) outlined different initiatives of the European Commission in the field of youth. The European Year of Youth 2022 has been an important incentive to include young people in European initiatives. The Youth Action Plan in EU External Action for 2022-2027, the first policy framework for a strategic partnership with young people around the world to build a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable future, was adopted by the EC on 4 October 2022. Meaningful youth participation is considered crucial to reach the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement. Furthermore, the EU will continue to cooperate with youth through existing initiatives such as the EU for Youth programme and Erasmus+. Looking more specifically at EU Cohesion Policy, efforts to involve young people in the policy-making of MRS and Interreg are being continued. At the occasion of the year 2020 marking 30 years of cooperation through Interreg, the Interreg community launched a vast consultation towards young people, to align youth needs and cooperation actions. As a result, the Interreg Youth Manifesto was issued by young people, outlining five areas in which Interreg programmes and MRS can address young people's concerns, including also 12 recommendations to better involve young people. Some successful project examples were highlighted. The EC DG REGIO is pleased to see the launch of the DYC Pilot Action and pointed out that once the DYC has started its actions and is fully functional, long-term funding needs to be identified. Also, the DYC members shall be given a real challenge to tackle, in order to contribute to the future of the Danube Region and see a concrete result. The European Year of Youth 2022 should not be seen as a one-off mobilisation without lasting impact. The EC remains committed to making the European Union accessible to young people, and to hear their voices. Lastly, Mr. Tokarski called the EUSDR stakeholders to be clear about expectations when it comes to working with young people, to recognise the diversity among young people, and to refrain from divisive language in the discourse about "young people" and "older people".

**Irene SCHNAIT** (Danube Strategy Point) gave an overview of the establishment of the Danube Youth Council (DYC). The DYC, a council consisting of two young people from each Danube Region country (28 members in total), has been established as of October 2022. The DYC Pilot Action with a duration of 13 months (October 2022 – October 2023) is funded via Technical Assistance from the EC and co-funded by the City of Vienna. While the European Year of Youth 2022 was an important incentive in the creation of the DYC, the process dates back already to 2021, when the Task Force DYC was founded. After the application window being open from May until August 2022 and a total of 80 applications spanning all 14 Danube Region countries being received, the selection of DYC members was carried out by the Danube Strategy Point in September 2022. Regarding the mission of the DYC, it was outlined that on the one hand, the DYC shall offer the young members an opportunity for real impact and meaningful participation, by allowing them to contribute to the implementation of the Strategy; on the other hand, the Strategy itself shall profit from the young people's input by gaining new perspectives. In order to fulfil this mission, the DYC shall be firmly embedded in the already existing EUSDR governance structure as a non-partisan advisory body. Lastly, the connection to the Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON), a network of youth organisations which shall be established in 2023, was mentioned.

**Biljana POPOVIĆ** and **Julian STÖCKLE** (Danube Youth Council), two recently selected DYC members, expressed their satisfaction with the topic of youth being high on the Strategy's agenda, especially in light of the upcoming Slovenian EUSDR Presidency making the inclusion of youth one of the main PCY priorities. The challenge for young people to gain access to a platform where real institutional change can



be made was highlighted. Moreover, it was pointed out that on a political level, young people's issues and concerns are often brushed off. Even though young people were among the groups most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, they were often not taken seriously. For all these reasons, the newly selected DYC members appreciate the opportunity offered by the DYC, as a framework for meaningful participation. The recently established DYC looks forward to being involved in the Strategy's activities on a thematic (PA) level, and to act as an advisory body in EUSDR core governance meetings. Shedding light on the ways the Strategy benefits from involving young people, three such benefits were pointed out. Firstly, policy-making can only be effective if it includes inputs from the target audience. Secondly, young people can bring an outside perspective due to their more unconventional mindsets, which can be highly enriching especially for old-established institutions. A certain degree of naivety, in this regard, was seen as a great potential, as it opens up new possibilities that one might not even think of after having been inside institutionalised structures for a long time. Research also shows that diversity of perspectives brings better results. Thirdly, young people are typically more flexible when it comes to adapting their views and opinions to new realities. In this regard, Mr. Stöckle outlined how he and other members of his generation firmly believe in the necessity to step up Europe's military support to Ukraine. Finally, the DYC members spoke about their individual motives and motivation to apply to the DYC.

**Claudia SINGER** (EUSDR Priority Area 10) highlighted that although initiatives for the involvement of young people have already been in place for many years, most of these initiatives have not made their way into the mainstream of the EUSDR. In the course of revising the EUSDR Action Plan (2018-2020), an aspect frequently raised by EUSDR stakeholders was the wish for a rejuvenation of the Strategy. This was the starting point for the elaboration of the Guidance Paper for Youth Participation, which was published by EUSDR Priority Area 10 in 2021. In this regard, PA 10 took the opportunity to thank the Danube Youth Network (DYN) for its excellent outreach work. The network of organisations was very helpful in the process of drafting the Guidance Paper, which addressed questions such as: Why should young people be involved in the Strategy? How can they be involved? What can be done? On this basis, along the three major areas capacity building, communication and cooperation, a list of needs was elaborated. E.g. in terms of communication, the use of easy-to-understand language and a more dialogue-based communication (rather than one-way communication) was identified as crucial to involve young people. Keeping it simple can be more effective than using difficult language and over-bureaucratic structures. A constructive culture of failure is considered important for successful cooperation in the Strategy, in order to be encouraged to learn, rather than being frustrated. When it comes to further involving young people (e.g. the DYC) in the work of the EUSDR, PA 10 recommends to approach the mutual exchange with flexibility and fun. Speaking from the perspective of a Priority Area Coordinator, it was highlighted that the already existing structures of the EUSDR governance will have to change, to make room for new perspectives and approaches.

**Stefan BARTH** (Agapedia Foundation / Danube Youth Network) presented the Danube Youth Network (DYN), which has already been active as a network for young people in the Danube Region for many years. Stefan Barth expressed his gratitude towards the Ukrainian and the incoming Slovenian EUSDR PCY for putting youth high on their PCY agenda. With Agapedia Foundation working with young people in Germany and Romania already since 1995, the organisation looks back on 27 years of youth activities in an international context. From the very beginning, a bottom-up approach was used, to identify organisations on the ground who are working in the field of youth, to link them to one another and create meaningful youth projects, which eventually led to the establishment of the Danube Youth Network (DYN) in 2019. With 7 partner organisations from 5 Danube Region countries (BG, DE, HR, RO, RS), the DYN has been a pioneer in youth project cooperation in the Danube Region. Four formats have been developed to bring young people from different DR countries together. In the last years, the goal has been to better embed the DYN into the EUSDR, e.g. through DYN interventions at the Danube Participation Day (DPD) in 2019 or the EUSDR Annual Forum 2020. Furthermore, the DYN was involved in the elaboration of the PA 10 Guidance Paper for Youth Participation (2021). Currently, the DYN is moving into its third implementation phase.



### ❖ Parallel Session III: Strengthened Cooperation and Integration of EU and Ukrainian Companies in European Value Chains

#### ***Presentations***

**Jakub BORATYNSKI**, Director, EC DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Networks and Governance put resilience into the context of current crises. Security (e.g. food, health, cyber security) as potential vulnerability is thereby at its core centre in reacting to the crises where Russia is weaponising the issue of gas supply and directly attacking energy infrastructure of Ukraine being traditionally also an important exporter of energy to Europe which shows vitality of its economy. Solidarity and cooperation between the states in Europe will help to overcome the challenges faced. The most recent proposals from the European Commission include new emergency regulations, such as joint purchasing of gas, mechanisms to limit the prices and new measures on transparent use of infrastructure to on the short term go through the winter and to long term to fully discard Europe's dependency on Russia. Apart from measures taken now, the diversification of raw material is at the heart of a successful digital and green transition. One of key measures in that respect is the *European Critical Raw Materials Act* planned to be proposed by the European Commission next year. The first step within that initiative is to identify which raw materials are absolutely critical by conducting stakeholder consultations followed by joint investments to learn from the crises and being resilient to following crises as in the Commission's *single market emergency instrument*. The American partners notably by the *Defense Production Act* also take external measures.

According to a survey that has been conducted by the European cluster collaboration platform, many companies across Europe taking measures to increase resilience through partnerships, defending common economic and political interests. Cluster cooperation plays here potentially a very important role as it improves skills of employees. Above that, acceleration of investment in research and development of new disruptive solutions, automated production processes, circular economy and reliability of supply chains is needed that would allow to react more swiftly and regionally. Despite these profound changes, clusters can overcome the difficulties by trust and cooperation e.g. in the fields of data, chips and hydrogen and were resilient in times of crises as well. The future of clusters lies in their variety in connecting the dots by bringing together key stakeholders, local decision makers in relevant ecosystems at the local and regional level.

**Antonio NOVO**, President of the European Clusters Alliance introduced the EU Industrial Forum, a cluster fostering the industrial policies at the European level in a co-creation process with representatives from industrial associations, civil society and funding and investment entities. The EU Industrial Forum consist of five Task Forces (TF) with specific thematic foci e.g. TF 2 dealing with green transition and TF 4 on enhancing cross-border and cross-ecosystems investments. TF 4 aims at identifying and recommending areas of high potential for cross-border and cross-ecosystems investments, recommending policy measures to trigger a major investment wave, facilitating matchmaking of stakeholders and strengthening Europe's global leadership in addressing sustainable challenges (economic, climate/energy/environment, social). The European cluster Alliance represents about 900 clusters organisations in different European fora, committees and expert groups covering the whole Danube Region with about 340 clusters mainly dealing with the industrial ecosystem topics of digital, health, mobility, agri-food and renewable energies aspects. In the process, clusters that are already functioning well are supported, but also those sectors that still have development potential, e.g. in the field of proximity and social economy. As regards the Industrial Alliance, most clusters in the Danube Region deal with hydrogen, low carbon industries and microelectronics. The European Cluster Alliance sees clusters as strategic agents for drafting and implementing European initiatives, projects and investments, allocating funding for economic value creation and being strong and resilient partners. Above, clusters

are best and quickest market sensors bringing valuable knowledge to the drafting of the recovery plans by adapting policy instruments. The European Cluster Collaboration Platform also supported Ukraine from the very beginning of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine by creating the EU Cluster support Forum facilitating joint projects and initiatives.

**Alexander YURCHAK**, President of the Ukrainian Clusters Alliance presented the network created in March 2022 as clusters existed in Ukraine already for a long time but were not streamlined and united before. The Ukrainian Clusters Alliance (UCA) is supported by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform and the European Cluster Alliance and is active in all Ukrainian regions with almost 40 clusters covering 1800 companies and 12 international partnerships. The thematic fields cover among others agri-food, engineering, automation, machinery aerospace, textile industries, construction and furniture to support SMEs in basic and critical infrastructure. Above, the clusters are active in export, accelerating outsource and European integration support to SMEs e.g. in internationally organised fairs. Since the establishment of the UCA, 12 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) were signed in order to speed up internationalisation and the integration into international value chains through interregional cooperation, also with Danube Region countries. Fast internationalisation is needed to tackle current challenges. Therefore, the European Innovation Council dedicated €20 million to support Ukrainian more than 200 tech start-ups to seek synergies with EU initiatives. In this respect, together with Czech colleagues from the European Cluster Alliance, a multilateral agenda was created in the field of advanced manufacturing through four MoU and back-to-back exchanges. Due to the ongoing crises, Ukraine is, unfortunately, a good place test resilience of interrelated and integrated value chains for example in raw materials, cyber security and manufacturing. In line with the recovery plan for Ukraine, ten proposals for advanced manufacturing were formulated to also combat attacks by Russia. As regards the Danube Region, smart regions shall be established in the four southern Ukrainian Oblasts together in collaboration with the surrounding Moldavian regions. The UCA confirmed its readiness for further cluster cooperation in Europe.

**Gerd MEIER ZU KÖCKER**, WG-Leader, EUSDR PA 8, VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik highlighted that there are already a lot of clusters active in the Danube Region, however real value chains development is rather missing. SMEs are still facing obstacles when entering new value chains or being part of partly broken value chains. In this matter it has to be differentiated whether parts of value chains are missing or whole value chains have to be developed, which is often overlooked, especially on policy level. Therefore, the development, reconstruction and resilience of value chains has to be considered requiring a new understanding of value chains and supporting schemes to better help SMEs. Within the Danube Region Strategy, Baden-Württemberg supports the Danube Alliance Project, a Danube Strategy Flagship, providing targeted approaches to develop value chains optimisation. Based on identifying value chains most appropriate to support, e.g. not the well-established motor industry, but rather value chains across the Danube Region not covered by big industries so far, the Danube Alliance Project focuses on the miscanthus case, a fast growing biomass generating the use of bio energy and decentralised bio gas, taking into account the whole (not properly set up) value chain as well as key actors. By analysing the key determinants of the miscanthus value chain through digitalisation better predictions for investments and optimisation could be drawn. As a conclusion for the Danube Region, value chains have to be analysed more in-depth with a critical reflection. First key learning show that most cluster managements struggle to support members in value chain development so that new skills and support measures are needed to reduce complexity. Awareness raising and capacity building to establish a new understanding of value chain development is further needed to fill knowledge gaps, offer smart toolsets and to open up funding sources for SMEs, as most cluster managers are not prepared to support value chain management. In this respect, the Danube Strategy Flagship Danube Alliance can support in a cross-regional approach.

### ***Discussion***

**Marek PRZEOR**, Team Leader, Cluster Policy, DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, European Commission thanked all participants asked for examples on how to enhance links between the

presented topics. How can the Ukraine Cluster Alliance be linked to the Danube Region and how can the European Cluster Platform be synergised also in disruptions?

**Alexander YURCHAK** replied that interregional projects and initiatives as presented help to make these linkages, as cooperation in critical industries is most crucial for Ukraine. Besides the cluster development, the analyses tools is helpful to better understand the regional level and the disruptive gaps that are still existing e.g. in value chains development. The identification of disruptive elements in the value chain is important, as Ukraine not only faces classical gaps, but also a lack of data and reallocation of production and actors due to the current crises. In addition, cross-regional and cross-ecosystems cooperation is key.

**Antonio NOVO** complemented that the information flow between clusters has to be improved between the different levels. By enhancing the participation of different actors, their needs and capacity have to be requested to analyse the missing links and take advantage of missing capacities. Ukrainian clusters can be supported to join other consortia in order to facilitate also EU integration. Besides, investments in Ukraine should be fostered by including local representatives and SMEs, as they know the society, capacities and environment. The start-up support presented earlier could be great initiative to start cooperation among European businesses to create joint partnerships.

**Jakub BORATYNSKI** referred to the fact that the European economy is changing fast recently, as supply and value chains change in a fundamental manner. Therefore, decision makers on national and European level should recognise the measures taken in streamlining big strategic processes, but the application and implementation of the measures has to be on the ground in clusters. With the presented measures, an intensive mesh of information, contacts – and ultimately trust – is built, fostering cooperation upon which innovation and investment measures can be built.

**Gerd MEIER ZU KÖCKER** amended that Ukrainian companies should rather be brought back in *again*. For example, the aviation and wooden pallet industries in Germany are heavily suffering because components, which were originally manufactured in Ukraine, are not available anymore. That means there were already well-established value chains starting in Ukraine before that have to be reconstructed with concrete ideas, what kind of value chains are identified, where is a shortage of supply and where Ukrainian SMEs and clusters can play a role in starting cooperation of different countries among specific supply chains. We have to make sure that Ukrainian partners are embedded again. Because a big concern is very often, if you are out once, it is very hard to enter again and that has to be avoided by any means.

**Marek PRZEOR** summarised that this is may only be the starting point of cluster cooperation in the Region as the discussion showed the big potential of collaboration among the cluster and intermediaries actors in the Danube area. EC will support this process of fostering cluster cooperation, bringing in specific supply and value chains and bringing the communities together. Especially in times of crises this is most important to raise awareness about the potential and opportunities of collaboration between clusters of these regions. In this respect, matchmaking is key to bring on board the clusters and the members.

#### ❖ Panel Discussion: Embedding EUSDR into EU Programmes

Embedding represents the process of implementing the strategy into projects and the financing for the process. The panel discussions were split between EU and non-EU countries and non-EU/IPA countries.

**Johan MAGNUSSON**, Team-Leader, DG Regional and Urban Policy, EU macro-regional strategies, European Commission gave an insight of the DG Regio perspective focusing on cooperation as a basis for the Cohesion Policy for the 2021-2027 period and a priority for the funding programmes and the 4 Macro Regional Strategies. The work performed on the embedding topic by the Danube Regional Strategy is an example for all the other macro-regional strategies in Europe. In the current programming period, the European funding programmes have taken into account the support towards macro-regional strategies

to a higher degree and the EC appreciates the progress made in this director. Currently, the programmes are moving into the implementation phase and the process shifts into the monitoring phase of the provisions mentioned into the programmes and the method of implementation.

**Katharina LENZ**, Pillar Officer, Danube Strategy Point, presented a short overview of the embedding process and the EUSDR embedding week. The process focused on reaching an agreement among the EUSDR stakeholders for a shortlist of concise strategic (transnational) topics, providing a consolidated and concise guidance for 'project pipelines' (Danube Strategy Flagships). The matchmaking of 5 strategic topics among programmes include energy efficiency, decarbonisation, climate change, green infrastructure, R&I, mobility, clusters, female entrepreneurship, risk management. Another step in the embedding process was the organisation of a number of five thematic meetings/workshops within the framework of Managing Authority Networks, with Priority Area Coordinators, Programmes, projects, TRIO Presidency, European Commission, Danube Strategy Point – to look for concrete use of the embedding tools to be implemented. The workshops were organised online via Zoom platform, with the participation of 35-50 stakeholders during each session.

**František KOLOČÁNY**, Slovak EUSDR Deputy NC, Transnational cooperation programmes, Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic summarized the activities performed in relation to the embedding process, starting during the Croatian EUSDR Presidency, when the revised action plan was adopted. Slovakia concentrated on 36 short list concentrating on supporting the Managing Authorities during the embedding process, including synchronized Calls for Proposals, encouraging projects contributing to the EUSDR. All these tools are presented within the paper *From Words to Actions* relevant paper for the embedding process.

**Imre CSALAGOVITS**, Head of the Managing Authority Danube Region Programme approached the implementation of the embedding process from the view of the Managing Authority starting with the territorial analysis of the programme, including the consultations with the EUSDR stakeholders from the Steering Groups of the Priority Areas.

**Andreea STRACHINESCU**, Head of Unit, DG Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission emphasized the collaboration opportunities within the Blue Invest plan. For example, within the mission lighthouses the projects proposed for financing must choose associated regions relevant for their projects, as Danube Region is an associated region for the Horizon Europe projects.

**Ioana MÎNDRU**, Managing Authority, Romania-Serbia Interreg IPA CBC Programme shared the experience of the programme in supporting the embedding process by granting additional points for the projects considering the EUSDR, participation within the MA networks together with the Priority Area Coordinators, using capitalization as a tool for developing new projects with added value for the Danube Region.

**Nicole HAUDER**, Evaluation Officer, Danube Strategy Point presented the result of the embedding process, namely the flagship projects, a new tool of EUSDR. Based on the Guidance paper on identifying the flagships, each EUSDR priority area identified 1 up to 3 projects. The list is published on EUSDR website <https://danube-region.eu/projects-and-funding/eusdr-strategic-projects/>. The monitoring of the embedding process is performed during the programming phase by the European Commission representatives, checking that the legal requirements are observed when submitting the Operational Programmes for approval. During the implementation phase, the embedding process can be monitored through the Calls for Proposals published via Euroaccs.ro, the monitoring system of the EUSDR, the monitoring systems of the MAs, programme evaluation.

**Ivana DAVIDOVIĆ**, Head of group for Transnational Programmes and MRS, Ministry of European Integration, Republic of Serbia shared the Serbian experience with the embedding process. The Serbian Ministry of European Integration is functioning as national coordinator of MRS as well as structure hosting IPA and Interreg programmes, using the strategic approach in planning the priorities. 5 IPA windows that

cover EUSDR priorities areas and most priority actions were identified focusing on regional approach for planning and programming. Thus, the Danube Strategy needs to identify a niche in order to act as a functional area, where EU and non EU countries share equal footing, using multi-level governance.

**Besiana NINKA**, Project Manager, Interact working with both macro-regional strategies and IPA instrument. The IPA instrument is providing support to candidate, potential countries as well as to Member States for implementing economic, social, and administrative reforms in order to comply and align with the EU standards and policies. The strategy should serve the territories indicating which the right flow is considering the involvement of different stakeholder, offering the platform for creating strategic networks, identifying the available funds by creating synergies beneficial for the territories.

**Ihor KORKHOVYI**, Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine presented the challenges faced by Ukraine due to the lack of financial instruments available and how a non EU/ non candidate state could be involved in the embedding process. As Ukraine is a decentralized country with strong local initiatives, the key challenge was to promote the strategy and its instruments to the high political level. The Embedding paper prepared by the Ukrainian Presidency included also the perspectives of a non EU country, including implementation models with concrete examples.

Online **Bojan VUJOVIĆ**, Ministry of European Affairs, Government of Montenegro shared experiences of the embedding process in Montenegro. As a representative of the Ministry of European Affairs and EUSDR National Coordinator included the EUSDR priorities in the programming of the new programmes considering the status of a non EU states and the mandatory requirements from the European Commission. Montenegro is part of 10 CBC programmes and additional IPA programmes and included the EUSDR priorities in the programming documents for the next programming period as this is considered useful for the country's accession process and expressed further commitment for continuing the process.

#### ❖ Closing of the 11<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum 2022

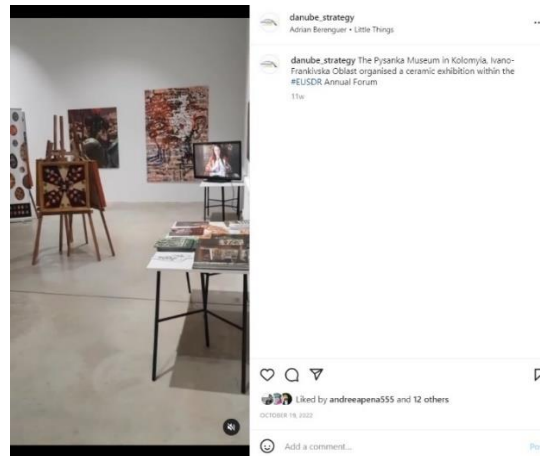
The 11<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum was closed by Michal BLÁŠKO, Slovak EUSDR TRIO Presidency, Johan MAGNUSSON, EC DG REGIO, and Ihor KORKHOVYI, Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine was condemned in the strongest terms, and the achievements of the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency under these unprecedented circumstances were highlighted. The successful implementation of the 11<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum, made possible through the support of the Slovak TRIO Presidency, was regarded as an example for macro-regional cooperation in practice. Ihor KORKHOVYI, Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency, took the opportunity to express his gratitude to the Slovak TRIO colleagues, EC DG REGIO, the Danube Strategy Point, and the Ukrainian NC team, who did tremendous work throughout the Presidency year. Finally, he wished the incoming Slovenian EUSDR Presidency a successful Presidency term, and underlined Ukraine's commitment to remain part of the TRIO Presidency in the upcoming year.

#### ❖ Exhibition of activities of EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators, Danube Strategy Point, and projects

The event enjoyed the presence of some EUSDR relevant project exhibition, together with an exhibition of traditional arts from Ukraine. The Danube Strategy Point and three Priority Areas (PA 4 – Water Quality, PA7 – Knowledge Society and PA 10 – Institutional Capacity and Cooperation) displayed also visuals and



give-aways within the expositional area, where two representatives of the office provided information to the participants and connected the journalists with the NCs and PACs team they wanted to interview.



During the event, a photo exhibition was arranged in the foyer of the building hosting the Annual Forum. The photos exposed reflected the cruelty of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. Another exhibition displaying traditional Ukrainian handcrafts of eggs painting and ceramics was organised by the Pysanka Museum in Kolomyia, Ivano-Frankivska Oblast within the #EUSDR Annual Forum (Exhibition of Collection of the Ukrainian Pysanka and Kosiv Ceramics (Veľkonočné vajíčka).

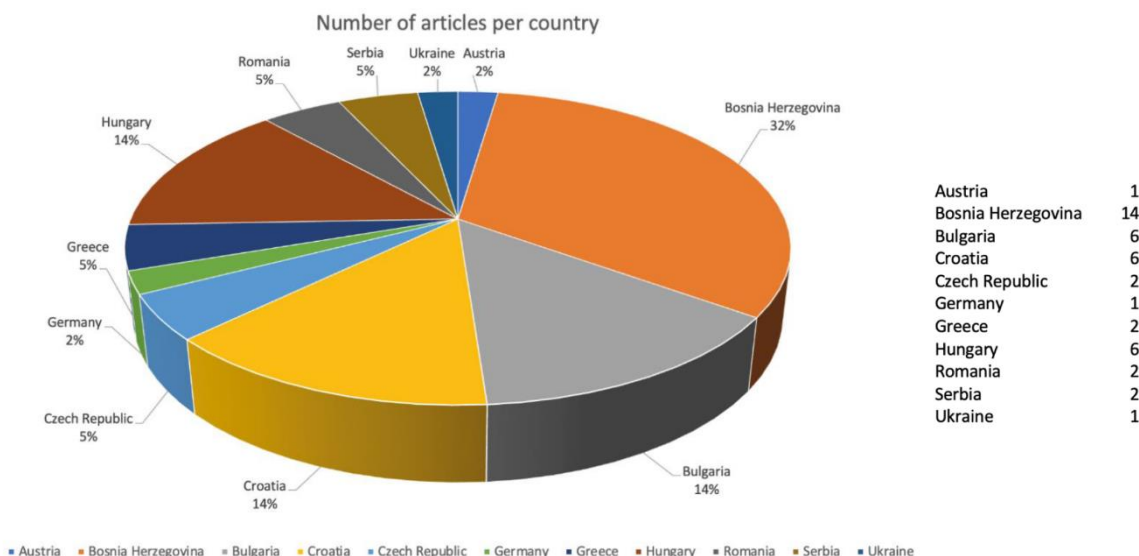
The following projects were present in the exhibition area, displaying materials consisting of the activities and results of the projects and offering information to the participants: OJP4Danube, Danube Cycle Plans, Dionysus, DanuP 2 Gas, CSSC Lab, Tid(y)Up, ARCHEODANUBE, Danube Archaeological eLandscapes.

The Danube Transfer Centre (DTC) Network, flagship project of the EUSDR Priority Area 8, Competitiveness, Working Group Innovation and Technology Transfer, coordinated by Steinbeis Europa Zentrum, organised a side event - an official ceremony of signatures of the newest members, as a celebration of its 10 years jubilee. The DTC network contributes to enhanced networking and capacity building within the whole Danube macro-region in the field of innovation and technology transfer and generates a transnational added value by collaborating in various projects.

### ❖ Media coverage of the event

Based on the information received from the DG REGIO's [report](#) on media coverage, after 4 weeks of media monitoring via online research and direct contact with journalists, 43 pieces of coverage, of which 41 online articles and 2 YouTube fragments, were collected. The number of articles collected is on the high end in relation to the present number of journalists (11), which can be assumed because of the ongoing tensions in the Danube Region relating to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. More articles in the future will quote statements on Ukraine made by speakers during the Forum. The articles were published mostly on websites with a national extension. However, some outlets have a more broad, European audience. Out of the 43 articles, 37 were written or produced by journalists present at the Forum.





The coverage was the most extensive in Bosnia Herzegovina, in total 14 pieces of coverage were gathered there, both Hungary and Bulgaria had 6 articles each covering the event. In Ukraine, a country understandably in great difficulty, one article was published via a national news agency.

Regarding the tone of the media coverage, the articles adopted a neutral and informative tone about the EUSDR Forum. The articles are praising the effort done to offer help and relief in the Danube region and judge Russia's invasion. Given the situation in Ukraine there was a decent amount of media attention going towards the event as many high-profile functionaries and speakers were present and made statements on the ongoing crisis. Additionally, Ukraine should have been the host of the event but due to the circumstances the Forum was held in Košice, Slovakia, a town close to the Ukrainian border.

Based on the data provided within the same report from the European Commission, the main messages that can be found in the coverage as a whole are:

- 1) What is the Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region? Information on what the Forum is and what goals it has, which countries participate, what topics will be on the agenda etc.
- 2) Russia's invasion into Ukraine: the status, the consequences for Ukraine and other EU countries, the difficulties that have arisen.
- 3) The energy crisis and how the Green Deal can possibly offer a solution to this.

Nearly all articles, regardless of the main topic, mention what the Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region is, where and when it is held and what it is about. It is practically always highlighted that the presidency was attributed to Ukraine and that the Forum instead had to take place at Košice.

#### Conclusions:

Journalists from most participating countries were present and the Danube region is currently often in the news with headlines about a raging war at its frontier.

The themes recovery, development and unity came up abundantly during the Forum, practically all in relation to the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis that came with it.


The majority of the articles came from Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Croatia, mostly reporting on the invasion of Ukraine, the energy dependency of these countries, taking in refugees in the Danube region and the transport possibilities of the Danube River.

Overall, the event had good coverage and visibility, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine was the most talked about topic so it may have slightly overshadowed the Forum, on the other hand due to the war the event gathered ample attention.

The Annual Forum was also reflected in the **social media**, the EUSDR platforms on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter being updated with posts on the event and its agenda, during the two days of the Forum:

**Danube Region Strategy**  
20 octombrie 2022 · 🌐

Find more about the #danubeyouthcouncil - how it started, what is its mission and responsibilities




👍👍👍 Ana Marinescu, Andreea Pena și alți 8

1 distribuie

**Danube Region Strategy**  
20 October 2022 · 🌐

The 11th edition of the #EUSDR Annual Forum closes with a last panel discussions about EMBEDDING EUSDR INTO EU PROGRAMMES – Results of the Embedding in EU and non-EU countries



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Live	On post	On shares
10	1	9
Comments	On Post	On Shares
3	3	0
Shares	On Post	On Shares
213 Post Clicks		
74	0	139
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Handover Ceremony of the EUSDR Presidency to Slovenia  
Ihor KORKHOVYI, Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency  
Petra ČESEN CATAR, Slovenian EUSDR Presidency  
Головування України в Стратегії ЄС для Дунайського регіону Danube Region Programme PA10  
"Institutional Capacity" of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region People and Skills in the Danube Region European Commission Eusdr Culture Tourism




👍👍👍 Ana Marinescu și alți 21

9 distribuiri

**Danube Region Strategy**  
19 octombrie 2022 · 🌐

"Ukraine has been granted full membership in the Life Programme this year. [...] That means it can now benefit from Life' support to help restore its environment after the destruction brought about by the Russian invasion. The support will be very broad: for pollution, destruction of ecosystems or other long term effects.  
My thanks to the Slovak Government and to the town of Košice for hosting this event. Your assistance to Ukraine is an excellent example of human compassion. That's the spirit. That is bound to prevail." - Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS, EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries




YOUTUBE.COM

Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS, EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries  
"...this macro-regional strategy collaboration brings enormous benefits tot he region. The strat...

**Danube Region Strategy**  
19 octombrie 2022 · 🌐

Commissioner Elisa FERREIRA at the 11th edition of the EUSDR Annual Forum, Košice, Slovakia, 2022:  
"Ukraine has set its course firmly on the European track. This year Ukraine became the first non-European country to coordinate the activities of the 14 countries that together make up the Danube Strategy. [...]  
Today, dear colleagues, the highlight is not the aggression of autocracies, but rather the cooperation of democracies. We celebrate the achievements of the Danube Stra... Vezi mai mult





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Commissioner Elisa FERREIRA at the 11th edition of the EUSDR Annual Forum, Košice, Slovakia, 2022

👍👍👍 Andra Mihaliciu, Ana Marinescu și alți 5

**Danube Region Strategy**  
19 octombrie 2022 · 🌐

The plenary session of the 11th edition of the #EUSDR Annual Forum has started with a message from Ms. Oľga STEFANIŠYNA, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine


👍👍👍 Tu, Andreea Pena și alți 27

1 comentariu 7 distribuiri

**Post Details**

Danube Region Strategy  
19 October 2022 · G

Igor Kiriukhin, Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency Deputy Minister, Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine  
Dear colleagues, I am happy to be here with you today, which was possible due to the high resistance and bravery of the Ukrainian people and the support of our international partners.  
It is the first time when a non-EU country holds the EUSDR presidency and I am very thankful to our Slovak and Slovene partners, to Danube Strategy Point for their role... See more



**11th Annual Forum  
EU Strategy for the Danube Region**  
19-20 October 2022  
Košice, Slovakia (and online)  
Organised under the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency

**Performance for your post**  
1,547 People Reached

47 Likes	21 On Post	26 On Shares
3 Comments	3 On Post	0 On Shares
5 Shares	4 On Post	1 On Shares

44 Post Clicks  
12 Photo views  
0 Link clicks  
32 Other Clicks

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1,547 People reached  
99 Engagements  
4 shares

Danube Region Strategy · 10u


Dear Danube friends,

Some places are still available for the 11th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. The event will take place on 19-20 October 2022, in Košice (Slovakia) in Kulturpark, Kukučínova 2 street.

Participate on site and use this opportunity for networking and meeting new partners and projects! The organisers offer a dinner for this purpose on Oct 19th!

Agenda and registration link available here: <https://lnkd.in/eTJEZ5jg>

Practical information about travel and accommodation options here: <https://lnkd.in/eDy5iH3>.




**11th Annual Forum  
EU Strategy for the Danube Region**  
19-20 October 2022  
Košice, Slovakia (and online)  
Organised under the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency

Andrea Pena and 31 others · 6 reports

**Post Details**

Danube Region Strategy  
20 October 2022 · G

The second day of the #EUSDR Annual Forum has started. The first session of the day is about energy security and sustainable economic development, as they have become priorities for the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency.  
In this field it is worth discussing the energy crisis in terms of the European Green Deal principles and energy diversification, that is an important issue for all macro-regional strategies... See more



**Agenda**

**Performance for your post**  
1,725 People Reached

47 Likes	19 On Post	28 On Shares
6 Comments	6 On Post	0 On Shares
2 Shares	2 On Post	0 On Shares

53 Post Clicks  
24 Photo views  
0 Link clicks  
29 Other Clicks


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1,725 People reached  
102 Engagements  
2 shares

Danube Region Strategy  
20 octombrie 2022 · G


The 11th edition of the #EUSDR Annual Forum closes with a last panel discussions about **EMBEDDING EUSDR INTO EU PROGRAMMES – Results of the Embedding in EU and non-EU countries**



Tu, Ana Marinescu, Andreea Pena și alți 16 · 1 comentariu 3 distribuiri

Danube Region Strategy @EUSDR - Oct 19, 2022

The 11th edition of the #EUSDR Annual Forum takes place the following two days in Košice, Slovakia!  
Follow for more info! 📺




**11th Annual Forum  
EU Strategy for the Danube Region**  
19-20 October 2022  
Košice, Slovakia (and online)  
Organised under the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency

221 views · 0:01 / 0:45

**Post Details**

Danube Region Strategy  
19 October 2022 · G

The plenary session of the 11th edition of the #EUSDR Annual Forum has started with a message from Ms. Olha STEFANISHYNA, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine



**Performance for your post**  
1,845 People Reached

89 Likes	31 On Post	58 On Shares
2 Comments	1 On Post	1 On Shares
10 Shares	7 On Post	3 On Shares

134 Post Clicks  
61 Photo views  
0 Link clicks  
83 Other Clicks

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1,845 People reached  
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