



Parliament
Austria



Austrian Presidency
of the EU Strategy
for the Danube Region

19 March 2024

Joint Statement

**Adopted by the 9th EU Strategy for the Danube Region
Speakers Conference | Vienna, 18 – 19 March 2024**

Preliminary Remarks

The 9th EU Strategy for the Danube Region Speakers Conference was held in Vienna on 18 – 19 March 2024 and was attended by the Speakers and Presidents or their representatives from fourteen Parliaments/Chambers of eleven Member States, namely the Republic of Austria, Republic of Bulgaria, Republic of Croatia, Czech Republic, Federal Republic of Germany (state parliaments of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria), Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Slovak Republic, Republic of Slovenia and Ukraine. The Conference was chaired by Mr Wolfgang Sobotka, President of the Austrian National Council.

The Conference was divided into three sessions:

- I. Security in the Danube Region
- II. Education for Democracy
- III. The Danube Region as a Cultural, Natural and Science Area

The Speakers of the Parliaments of the Member States of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

underlining the values of the EU of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights;

reaffirming the conclusions of the report from the European Commission on the implementation of the EU macro-regional strategies of 27 June 2023;

acknowledging the conclusions drawn by the Joint Statement of the Ministers Responsible for the Implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, adopted in Brdo pri Kranju on 24 October 2023, especially with regard to its call for a revival of the annual Danube Parliamentary Conferences as one of the main tools for enhancing the political commitment and visibility of the EUSDR;

1. **condemn** the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in the strongest terms, express deep concern regarding its significant threat to the security of the Danube Region, including repeated military strikes on Danube port infrastructure and the freedom of navigation on the Danube as well as its environmental threat to the Danube ecosystem on both sides of the river, express full solidarity with the people of Ukraine, reiterate full support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and full territorial integrity, within its internationally recognized borders, including territorial waters and call for the full compliance with international law;
2. **support** efforts towards achieving a just peace, stability, recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine and providing assistance to the Republic of Moldova;
3. **welcome** the decision to start EU accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova and express full support for the quick continuation of the accession negotiation process as well as welcome the European Commission's recommendation of 12 March 2024 to open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina and reaffirm our full and unequivocal commitment to the EU membership prospects for the Western Balkans and the call for the acceleration of their accession process, including by advancing the gradual integration between the EU and the region.

4. **encourage** to explore all cooperation possibilities to support their accession processes to the EU within the EUSDR and all bilateral and multilateral opportunities on parliamentary level, underlining the role of the EUSDR as an important asset of the EU enlargement process;
5. **highlight** the role of the youth in the endeavour to protect and strengthen our democratic systems and underline the importance of educational programs for children and young people, including digital competencies, critical thinking and active participation, to enhance their abilities to counter disinformation and misinformation;
6. **recognize** parliaments as educational institutions for the promotion of democracy and call for an active exchange of best practices, to enable parliaments to fulfil this role;
7. **reaffirm** the EUSDR's priority areas of sustainable energy, securing water quality, preventing environmental risks, safeguarding biodiversity, protecting natural landscapes and securing air and soil quality in the Danube Region which are assigned to be the main drivers of green transition within the Danube Region in cooperation with the other priority areas and stakeholders;
8. **recognize** the role of science, technology and innovation as drivers of sustainable development and economic growth, including the use of artificial intelligence systems and commit to fostering collaboration to harness the region's scientific and economic potential and address common challenges; at the same time consider the challenges for liberal democracies that emerging technology can pose, particularly in times of social media and artificial intelligence with a view to their impact on the electorate and democratic processes around the world.
9. **emphasize** the importance of protecting and preserving the Danube region's unique cultural and natural heritage and call for enhanced cooperation in the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable management of natural resources;
10. **encourage** enhanced cooperation and regional consciousness within the EUSDR, rooted in the common history, close cultural ties and shared interests and building on the fundamental European values to harness the great potential of the region.

As agreed in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region Governance Architecture prepared under the Croatian EUSDR Presidency 2020 and endorsed as of 22 July

2020, the presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region rotates on a yearly basis following the English alphabetical order of the participating states. Therefore, we hereby declare our full support for the upcoming EUSDR Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2025.