



EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE REGION

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Abstract Danube macro-region is an area of great interest in terms of the Danube cooperation and at European Union level. By confronting the interests of each participant in the strategy there were generated concrete solutions designed to meet the problems of competitiveness, transport, environmental protection and sustainable development. The participating States are invited to be actively involved in this project being driven by benefits at both macroeconomic and microeconomic level.

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strategy, Danube,
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JEL Codes:
F15

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, Romania and Austria, Danube countries proposed a European project materialized in an strategy developed by the European Commission that covered all countries in the region. This strategy is based, in accordance with EU Commissioner for Regional Development Johannes Hahn as "acting together, can have a much greater impact than if we try to solve problems in isolation". Approaching a problem in a holistic manner, but taking into account the particularities of participating States can generate an action frame properly.

"A macroregion can be understood as a larger region of the European Union based on a defined territory or function, in which a group of states cooperate to achieve specific strategic objectives." (Schymik C., 2011)

EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) is a tool that addresses the problem of macro-regional cooperation and is intended for economic and social development of the Danube macro-region. The entire project concerns the implementation of the cohesion

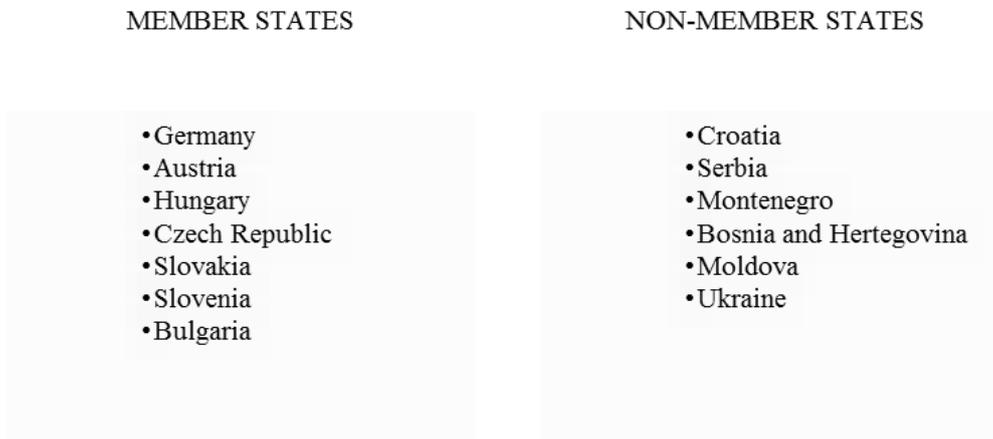
policy and welfare of participating states in conjunction with Agenda 2020 objectives. (MFA,2010)

The strategy aims at increasing local and regional cooperation involving the authorities, the private sector and the NGO so that the process of developing projects for the region comprises a framework that is comprehensive in terms of objectives. This broad framework is needed in terms of policy interdependence connections of participating States in economic, social and political terms.

Failure to solve local problems through the complexity of regional dependencies and interdependencies makes all these actions necessary to be addressed in an integrated, strategic environment, where the development and cooperation projects have a transnational character. (COM 181,2013)

Following the model of the Baltic Sea Strategy, the second strategy is aimed at a macroregion and both participating Member States and non-EU, comprising a total of 14 countries.

Figure nr.1 Participating states in EUSDR



Source: (authors' interpretation)

MAIN OBJECTIVES AND PILLARS OF THE EUSDR

The objectives of the strategy are: (MFA,2010)

1. Ensure and support the economic, social and cultural life of countries and regions in the catchment area of the Danube, in compliance with environmental protection.
2. Reduction of the gap between poorer regions and the richest, according to EU cohesion policy objectives.
3. Efficient use of European funds and attracting new funds for the Danube Region.

Also, the strategy is structured on four pillars (SEC,2010):

- A. Connecting the Danube Region:
- Improved mobility and intermodality
 - Encouraging sustainable energy
 - Promotion of culture and tourism, people to people contacts
- B. Protecting the environment in the Danube region:
- Restoring and maintaining water quality

- Management of environmental risks
 - Conservation of biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soil
- C. Increasing prosperity in the Danube region
- Develop knowledge society through research, education and information technologies
 - Supporting the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development
 - Investing in people and skills
- D. Strengthening the Danube Region
- Improving institutional capacity and cooperation
 - Working together to promote security and tackle organized crime and related problems concerning serious crime.

Actors involved in implementing the strategy are represented by the European Commission, national coordinators and coordinators of the strategy's priority areas.

Figure nr. 2 Involved actors in coordinating EUSDR



Source: (authors' interpretation)

The European Commission has a strategic role in the EUSDR, including in it areas and policies that have correspondence in problematic aspects of each participating state. It also aimed at harmonizing European policies with the objectives in the strategy. The Commission also establishes the lines in case of funding for this project

National Coordinators of the strategy establish the interrelations between the participating countries and the EU, promoting the objectives of the strategy, monitoring the implementation and offering nationwide political support in the implementation.

The actual implementation is done by coordinators EUSDR's priority areas, the relationship with the EU being established by providing regular information. Identifying problems, developing appropriate projects and finding funding sources also enter within their responsibilities.

Romania is the initiator of EUSDR along with Austria, this being generated by the strategic position we enjoy in Europe and beyond, as well as the prospects for economic development that is configured by joining such a group. In addition, Romania has assumed the coordination of important areas such as environmental risks, tourism, water management.

Benefits attracted to Romania after the implementation of this strategy are multiple and are to develop the Danube riverside areas in determining economic, social, cultural ties with others. The economic growth and social welfare by creating jobs and varied employment opportunities, and improving the environment through projects in this area are particularly important.

FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF THE STRATEGY

The Danube Region Strategy together with the Action Plan is a set of measures which come in implementing major goals that bring to the forefront following major objectives:

1. Connecting the Danube Region
2. Protecting the environment in the Danube Region
3. Building prosperity in the Danube Region
4. Strengthening the Danube Region

Each of these objectives subsumes a number of actions to be implemented in the participating states according to the interests and needs of each state, and according to the possibilities of effectively implementation.

Responsibility for the deployment of the Strategy lies to the individual member states and will be implemented through various projects according to the objectives. But for the entire process to take a finality, several preconditions must be met: identify key sectors with problems for which solutions must be found, consistent and logical development projects which will translate fairly the entire action frame and not least funding.

But due to financial difficulties faced by the entire European Union at the moment, and poor economic status of each participating country in the period 2007-2013 there were no additional funds regarding measures under the strategy.

The peculiarities of the ability to attract and absorb structural funds of the countries in the region may aggravate the entire implementation process.

A number of financial instruments support the EU Strategy for the Danube Region: (METIS,2012)

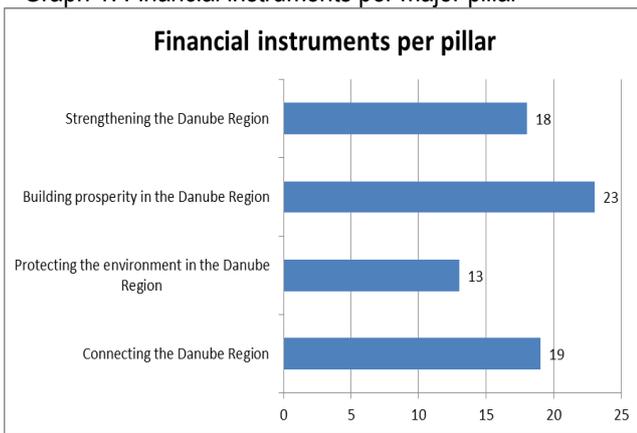
- Non-repayable grants,
- Repayable loans or Guarantees.

Projects of EUSDR are funded through the following institutions:

- European Investment Bank (EIB)
- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)
- European Investment Fund (EIF)
- Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB)
- International Bank for Reconstruction and Development as part of the World Bank Group (IBRD),
- Europe Science Foundation.

A report in 2012 by Metis highlights the number of financial instruments assigned to each major pillar of the strategy, as shown in the figure below.

Graph 1. Financial instruments per major pillar

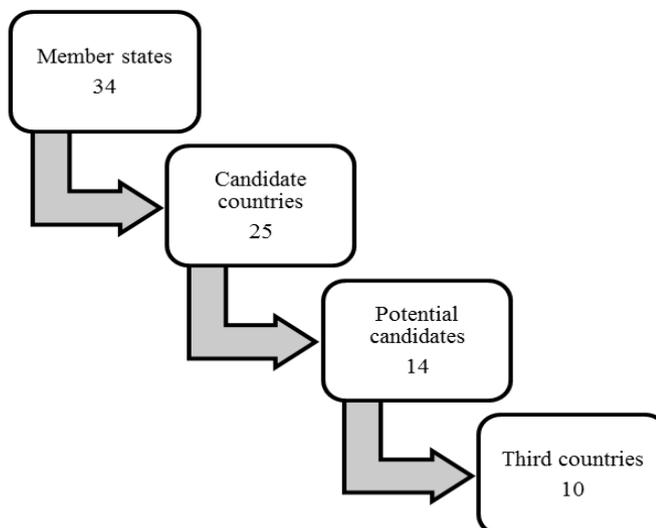


Source: Analysis of needs for financial instruments in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), Metis, 2012

Also in the same report is specified that not all states receive or have access to these instruments, the difference being made by the membership or non-membership, potential candidate countries or emerging development.

In the following figure is shown the number of financial instruments according to the status of each state.

Figure nr.3 Number of financial instruments by country status



Source: Adaptation after "Analysis of needs for financial instruments in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)", Metis, 2012

CONCLUSION

EU Strategy for the Danube Region is an ambitious project both for Member States and for non-member and candidate or potential candidate who engages sustained efforts from each participating country. benefits derived from implementing this project are important and represents a breakthrough in terms of economic, social, welfare or environmental point of view. the extent to which it can be a success is determined by the involvement of the participating states and joint actions that are to be implemented in order to achieve the objectives.

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