

# EU Strategy for Danube Region



Government of Romania

## The EU Strategy for the Danube Region

The European Commission released, on 8 December, the draft EU Strategy for the Danube Region, which includes the Commission's Communication on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and the Action Plan based on contributions from all states in the Danube basin area.

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) stands for a model of regional cooperation in Europe. Inspired by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region the European Council adopted in October 2009, it implements the new territorial cohesion concept incorporated in the Treaty of Lisbon.

The Strategy generates projects geared at development of the Danube Region and acts as a platform for encouraging partnerships both between local and regional authorities, and between authorities, the private and the nongovernmental sectors on the other.

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### Contributor States:

All the 8 riparian or Danube basin EU Member States and 6 non-EU states (4 riparian states and 2 from the Danube basin).

### Goals:

- ➔ To ensure and support the economic, social and cultural development of states and regions in the Danube basin, while observing environmental protection standards;
- ➔ To narrow the discrepancies between poorer and richer regions, in keeping with the goals of the EU Cohesion Policy;
- ➔ To help make better use of European funds and attract new funds to the Danube Region.

### Scope:

- ➔ *Connectivity* (sustainable transports, energy networks, tourism and culture);
- ➔ *Protection of the environment and water resources, and risk management*;
- ➔ *Prosperity and socio-economic development* (education, research, rural development, competition, internal market);
- ➔ *Improved governance* (institutional capacity and domestic security).

### Adoption:

The Strategy was drafted by the European Commission on the basis of contributions from all the states in the Danube region, through the Directorate General for Regional Policy - DG Regio - and was published in December 2010. For further information information check the website of the European Commission: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperation/danube/documents\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/documents_en.htm). The contributions from the states were obtained following a public consultation process launched by the European Commission, and by each state concerned, Romania included. According to the calendar of the Hungarian EU presidency, the Strategy is to be endorsed at the General Affairs Council (GAC) of April 2011 and to be adopted at the June 2011 European Council. Civil society and nongovernmental organizations, the business environment included, have contributed significantly in the public consultation process, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region basically benefiting the citizens of the participating states.

### Implementation:

The Strategy is to be implemented by each riparian Member State and addresses particularly the local and regional public authorities.

At Community level, it is the European Commission, through the Directorate General for Regional Policy



*European leaders attending the Danube Summit in Bucharest, 8 November 2010*

(DG Regio) that will coordinate the implementation of the Strategy.

A major role in managing the Action Plan is to be played by the national coordinators and the coordinators of the 11 Priority Areas. A Forum is to be held annually to debate issues related to implementation of the specific projects encompassed in the Action Plan of the Danube Strategy.

### Funding:

The projects will be funded through instruments of the current Community financial framework, i.e.:

- ➔ Structural and cohesion funds;
- ➔ The EU's Solidarity Fund;

- ➔ The Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) on research and development;
- ➔ The LIFE+ instrument for environmental and conservation projects;
- ➔ The European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund;
- ➔ The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, etc.

Since the 2007-2013 funding period is halfway, projects already included in the Operational Programmes run in this context are taken into account only for the purpose of continuity with projects to be identified under the Strategy.

Moreover, funds made available by international financial institutions – EIB, EBRD etc. – may be used, based on conclusion of public-private partnerships, and contributions from the national budget or from local budgets can also be considered.

The states having contributed to drafting the Strategy want it to help streamline the current funding procedures and coalesce the efforts to absorb the European funds already committed to financing investment projects.

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### **Involvement of local authorities and civil society:**

Local authorities and civil society can become involved in the political consultation, can take action and influence governmental decisions, can provide feedback both during the research stage for major projects and by submitting studies of their own, documents of a local programmatic nature, specific project proposals, or strategies focusing on the Danube area. Their support will be very useful, attesting that dialogue and internal collaboration, at all levels, work and produce effects. Such contributions will be analyzed and, depending on their coherence, importance and complexity, will be incorporated in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

In the end, the EUSDR must be a strategy of the European citizens, serving their interests.

### **Significance of the Danube Summit in Bucharest:**

The Bucharest Summit of 8 November 2010, organized under the High Patronage of the President of Romania, Traian Băsescu, and hosted by Prime Minister Emil Boc, provided the framework for a final debate on the future Danube Strategy. The chief goal of this top-level conference was to adopt a political Declaration reflecting the riparian states' continued commitment to and support for the future EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

The integral text of the Declaration adopted at the Bucharest Summit is available on the website of Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the section devoted to the Danube Summit:

[http://www.mae.ro/sites/default/files/file/2010.11.08\\_decl\\_summit.pdf](http://www.mae.ro/sites/default/files/file/2010.11.08_decl_summit.pdf)

The Bucharest Summit preceded the publication, on 8 December 2010, of the two constitutive documents: the Action Plan and the European Commission's Communication on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

Beginning in 2011, the riparian states will cooperate to implement the measures and projects which they have politically assumed and which lend substance and value to the European project of the Danube Strategy.

### **Romania's role and contribution:**

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region was initiated by Romania and Austria. Romania has helped develop the Strategy, alongside all the other Danube area states, relying on the national position defined by an interministerial working group created for this purpose.

Considering the region's significant potential in terms of sustainable development, the Danube Strategy is a priority for the Government of Romania. The Action



*The European leaders signed on a board with Danube history stamps*

Plan is aimed at turning the Danube into a backbone of the European space, as part of the Rhine-Main-Danube axis. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensures the national coordination for the project to materialize.

Governmental and local authorities, research institutes, civil society, the academia and the business environment have taken part in a broad public consultation, parallel to the one the European Commission (DG Regio) launched. The role of that process was to publicize, in Romania, the new European project, to make it known to local authorities and civil society alike (business milieu, NGOs, academic circles). This year Romania also organized, jointly with the European Commission (DG

Regio), the Conference on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, held at Constanta and Tulcea (9-11 June, 2010).

Concurrently, the Romanian authorities engaged in bilateral consultations with DG Regio officials to establish the content and priorities for the EUSDR (Action Plan and Communication). Several initiatives related to specific projects were launched at the Bucharest Business Forum, co-organized by the World Trade Institute and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, jointly with the Steinbeis Foundation from the German state of Baden-Württemberg, over 18-19 October 2010.

Beginning in February 2010, Romania has promoted projects in the fields of transport, energy, tourism, agriculture and environment, education and research. For each of those areas, specific goals are to be pursued in the Danube Region, cooperation consolidated through the EUSDR offering Romania the chance to attain them in due time.

#### **Benefits for Romania:**

➔ **Modernization:** the EU Strategy will mainly benefit the economic, social and cultural development of counties along the Danube. However, through economic exchanges, joint projects and the like, the benefits will spill over to other areas in Romania, the EU and the region.

- ➔ **Growing standard of living:** The EU Strategy for the Danube Region will be instrumental in creating jobs and developing business projects.
- ➔ **Environmental protection:** It will be possible to design projects helping to protect the environment and reduce natural risks (e.g. projects to prevent floods or desertification).
- ➔ **Stronger regional cooperation between riparian states:** Romania thus contributes to enhancing the European project, bringing value added to the EU. We are abiding by our previously assumed political commitments and coming up with proposals benefiting all European citizens.

#### **Next stages:**

The process of drafting the EUSDR is nearing completion and Romania will be actively involved in implementing the Strategy. The next steps are:

- to continue the dialogue with riparian states and the future Hungarian presidency of the EU in the first half of 2011;
- to continue the internal dialogue on technical coordination of the priority areas Romania proposed (risk management and observance of commitments assumed);
- to further take action to involve the business and academic environments in implementing the specific projects under the EUSDR Action Plan.

### **EUSDR history:**

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region was born in 2008, at the initiative of Romania and Austria, through a joint letter of the two EU Member States' foreign ministers.

In June 2009, the European Council endorsed the Danube Strategy initiative as a European project and asked the European Commission to develop the Strategy by end-2010. In January 2010, the European Commission launched a broad public consultation on the EUSDR.

The Danube Strategy rallied many participants in public events staged along the river, in Germany (Opening Conference of the public consultation process), Hungary (Conference on economic and social development), Austria – Slovakia (Conference on Connectivity), Bulgaria (Seminar on development of administrative capacity and good governance), and Romania (Closing Conference of the public consultation process).

The Conference “The Danube – River of the European Future” hosted in Brussels, on 7 October 2008, by the Representation of the State of Baden-Württemberg to the European Union, marked the beginning of a political concerting process geared at a new type of cooperation in the Danube area.

The tradition born in Brussels continued in May 2009 at Ulm, where the same German state organized a top-level conference on cooperation in the Danube area (the first Danube Summit). That is how the Ulm Process came into being.

The Danube Summit in Budapest, held on 25-26 February 2010, at the level of prime ministers of states in the Danube basin, highlighted the regional interest in cooperation based on partnerships, on political commitment and support for the new European project on the part of governments and major regional players.

The third Summit was held in Bucharest on 8 November 2010 and adopted a political declaration that reinforced the Danube states' commitment to and support for the adoption of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

**Further information on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region is available in the special section on the website of Romania's MFA (<http://mae.ro/en/node/2135>) and of the European Commission ([http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperation/danube/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/index_en.htm))**