



European Union
Regional Policy



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A large green steel truss bridge with multiple arches spanning a wide river. The bridge is supported by concrete piers. The water is calm, and there are trees and buildings visible in the background.

THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE REGION

Cooperating for sustainable
growth and security

December 2010



Connecting the Region

Fairness - a region without backwaters

Travelling for work, tourism and education boosts the economy and, with the second longest river in Europe running through so many EU countries, nature has provided the Region with the perfect means of transport and communication. But the river as a transport route is not being used to its full potential: cargo transported on the Danube is only 10-20% of that transported on the Rhine.

Energy is also vital to prosperity – insecure supplies and a lack of essential infrastructure and maintenance show themselves in the periodic energy crises which hit the region.

The Strategy outlines three priorities which will support change:

- Improve the transport of people and goods by improving the road, rail, air and waterway networks;
- Encourage the use of sustainable energy;
- Help people to meet people through the sharing of culture and tourism.

From removing shipwrecks and unexploded weapons to creating river bus routes linking the major cities along the Danube, the EU Strategy will help a wide variety of projects get off the ground and work for the Region's future. One example is the EU funding of €200 million for the construction of a southern gas corridor. Here's another example.



VIDIN - CALAFAT ROAD AND RAIL BRIDGE

Only one bridge for 400 kilometres along the Danube means ferries are the main way of crossing the river between Romania and Bulgaria.

A new bridge between Calafat, Romania, and Vidin, Bulgaria, will provide a much needed link, stimulating tourism and helping local business make the most of access to international markets.

2012 should see the completion of the bridge, funded to the tune of €106 million by the EU.



Protecting the Environment

A better environment - cooperation for conservation

Pelicans, wolves, lynx and bears all live in the Danube Region, in some of their last remaining territories in the EU. Their lifeline is the Danube and its good environmental status. But protection needs to be everywhere, not just in one country. Almost 7 000 species live on the banks of the Danube and the environment is a clear example of where a strategy for the Region as a whole makes sense.

Europe's environmental health lies in its wetlands, meadows and forests, all of them features of the landscape along the Danube. These vulnerable areas are rich in biodiversity, so we need to restore and reconnect habitats and develop protected areas such as Natura 2000 sites.

While the river is a great friend to transport, it becomes a dramatic foe in times of flooding. Dealing with flooding in isolation simply pushes the problem further along the river, putting neighbouring regions at risk. And, as we saw in October 2010, industrial pollution also knows no borders.

The Strategy outlines three priorities which will preserve biodiversity and protect the quality of life of the people living along its banks and in its basin:

- Restore and maintain the quality of the waters;
- Manage environmental risks;
- Preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soil.

From helping the threatened sturgeon migrate through hydro-electric dams to harmonising information for effective flood risk management, the Strategy sets out to help people find international solutions to international problems. Here's one example.



DANUBEPARKS

Eight countries come together to share their expertise in the fight to preserve biodiversity along the Danube and to protect the flood plain through the use of woodland management.

85% of the total DanubeParks budget of €2.7 million is funded by the EU. The area covered includes 12 nature reserves which vary in size from the Delta Biosphere Reserve, more than 45 000 hectares, to small protected areas.



Building Prosperity

Prosperity - jobs, innovation, growth

From the highest standards of living in the EU to the lowest, the most highly skilled workforce to the least educated, some of the EU's most competitive regions to some of its poorest - when it comes to prosperity, the Danube is a region of contradictions. Some areas are rich in capital but have a small workforce, while in others unemployment is high.

Including everyone in training opportunities and matching workers to jobs across the Region is a basic principle for growth. Better connections between business and research will help spread innovation and jobs. Finally, everyone must benefit from the push to prosperity - 80% of Europe's most marginalised community, the Roma, live in the Region, suffering from extremely poor living conditions and social exclusion. They cannot be left behind.

The Strategy outlines three priorities which will reduce the divide:

- Develop the knowledge society through research, education and information technologies;
- Support business competitiveness;
- Invest in people and skills.

Bringing together people from businesses, national and regional governments and academics every year, learning from and sharing good ideas with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Region, and giving Roma opportunities outside their communities, are some of the actions that are in the pipeline. Here's an example that is up and running.

BAYHOST

The 'Bavarian Academic Center for Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe' (BAYHOST) coordinates academic relations with Eastern Europe and supports academic exchanges between students and scientists.

Bavaria offers one-year scholarships to graduates from Eastern Europe. There are also grants for summer language courses all across the same area and for German courses at Bavarian universities and universities of applied sciences. BAYHOST hosts exchange forums to help the business sector benefit from numerous academic contacts in Eastern Europe.





Strengthening the Region

A safer and well-governed Region

Organised crime and corruption is a challenge in part of the Region. The EU's Strategy sets out actions to turn this around. Making the Danube Region a safe, secure place in which to live and reinforcing its integration within the EU is a top priority and vital for growth and prosperity. Well-functioning administrations are the key to sustainable growth which benefits and involves everyone.

This pillar focuses on two priorities which will help strengthen the Region:

- Build up institutional capacity and cooperation;
- Work together to tackle security and organised crime.

Ideas for turning the concept into a reality include helping authorities in the Region develop guidelines for planning towns and cities, to strike the best balance between infrastructure, environment, social needs and available budgets.

Tackling security issues will include collecting and sharing information on criminals more effectively. Better border controls need to be established using CCTV cameras, biometric passport readers, high-tech surveillance equipment and records on the movement of vessels on the river. Here's another example.

EUROPOL PLATFORM ON CORRUPTION

The Platform for Experts (EPE) would bring together experts from the police and anti-corruption authorities at national and local levels to use a pragmatic, non-political approach to dealing with corruption. It would support the development of working standards, information on public procurement and calls for tender. Quality training on how to improve transparency in business and administrations are essential elements of this project.



Territorial coverage of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region



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EU STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE REGION - A SECURE PRESENT, A BRIGHTER FUTURE

From the Black Forest to the Black Sea, the Danube's 2 850 kilometres flow through ten countries - with four more situated around its basin. Political upheavals have been many, most recently with the break-up of the former Eastern Bloc and the waves of EU enlargement. The combination of multiple nations and a complex social history makes the Region one of the most diverse in Europe, and also one of the most vulnerable. Home to over 100 million residents and covering one-fifth of the EU area, the Union's well-being is inextricably linked to the well-being of the Danube, so the Strategy has to deliver results.

WHAT ARE THE AIMS?

The aims listed in the Strategy as 'pillars' are: connecting the Region; protecting the environment; building prosperity and strengthening the Region.

Modernising road, rail and river routes will connect people and ideas; better energy links and the use of renewable sources will provide secure, cheaper supplies. Urban development can be balanced with the needs of the environment and flood risk. Cooperation

breeds new opportunities – some of the most developed centres of innovation are found here, and their knowledge and capacity can be shared. Corruption and organised crime dog parts of the Region. Putting the latest technology at the disposal of customs officials, sharing expertise to boost transparency, sharing police data – all this can make conflict, crime and marginalisation, things of the past.

WHY IS AN EU STRATEGY NEEDED FOR THE REGION?

Problems which know no borders, like floods or cross-border transport links and many others, are worked on in cooperation, and opportunities which should know no borders are shared for the benefit of all. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region brings the relevant countries together to address common challenges and share expertise.



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MAKING IT WORK ON THE GROUND

In 2008, Romania and Austria sent a letter to President Barroso asking for the Danube to be taken into account more systematically in EU policies. This was followed by a mobilising conference hosted by Baden-Württemberg in Brussels. In 2009, the European Council formally asked the Commission to prepare a strategy for the Danube Region.

The Commission proposed an Action Plan following intensive public consultation. Ministries, regions and NGOs all had the chance to comment on the contents, and the Action Plan has been fine-tuned as a result.

But how to turn ideas into reality? The Strategy establishes four pillars (on connections, environment, prosperity and better public services), as the overall goals. More substantively, the way to achieve these goals is set out in an Action Plan which lists what must be done on the ground. Finally, each area of action is supported by actual projects, either already running or in the pipeline. If these are supported and advance correctly they will turn the pillars from goals into achievements.

There is €100 billion coming into the Region from the Structural Funds alone, along with other available funds. The aim of the Strategy is to ensure that they are used effectively and in a coherent manner.

RESULTS, NOT RED TAPE

The Strategy does not create new institutions – it is not suggesting that more officials are needed. Instead, it will: make the money already on the table go further; help the systems that are working in some areas coordinate effectively across the Region and help areas that are lagging behind catch up through the sharing of expertise. By lining up existing activities and money with the priorities in the Action Plan, we can achieve more, faster.



WHERE TO NOW?

After its adoption by the Commission and its endorsement by the Council during the Hungarian Presidency in the first half of 2011, the Strategy will strive to make the Region as a whole wealthier, help people find good jobs and address other challenges and opportunities.

MEETING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES TOGETHER

The EU is committed to making a success of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region: it is a new and very evident way of addressing some of the key issues in the area, such as floods, jobs and pollution. The European Commission will keep the ball rolling and offers technical support to make sure the funds it pays out are used well and result in action. But it is down to the countries involved to make change happen. The success of the Strategy lies in the hands of those who live in the area - the citizens of the Danube Region. Spreading security and prosperity across the Region must be done by those living there, for those living there.

“The energy will come from you: the Strategy can only provide a framework for your efforts.”

EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn

FACTS AND FIGURES

Unemployment rate



GDP growth, 2009 and 2010*



Source: World Bank

* estimates

2009 2010

The Region needs results. After decades of division and often of conflict, the Danube will use the EU Strategy to make the Region a better place for its people. The objective: to establish a sustainable cooperation framework where countries can agree on a common vision of the future and come together to make it happen.

DID YOU KNOW?

- ...a sturgeon, the fish species of the Danube currently ranked at the "highest risk of extinction" by the UN, lived at the time of the dinosaurs and can measure up to 8 metres in length.
- ...the Danube river once formed the border of the Roman Empire, now called the Danube Limes. There is a plan to ask for the Danube Limes to become a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- ...the oldest university in the region is the Charles University of Prague, founded in 1348.
- ...Vienna and Bratislava are the two closest capital cities in Europe. A pleasant way to travel from one to the other is to take the Twin City Liner – a modern boat that takes 75 minutes to make the trip.
- ...some of the most well-known car industries have their home in the Danube Region. They drive innovation in Central and South-Eastern Europe.



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