

Anchoring European Integration and Democracy through Participation:

The Agenda for Participation in EU Macro-Regional Strategies





Disclaimer: The Agenda for Participation in the Macro-Regional Strategies and Partnerships for Participation is a rolling document that is subject for discussion at the National Participation Days in the macro-regional Strategies as well as at the macro-regional Participation Days from 2017 onwards. The document will be further developed based on the results of the discussion as well as based on the results of the planned activities within the Participation Partnerships.

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The Macro-Regional Strategies of the European Union: Aims and Challenges

Macro-regional strategies (MRS) are an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council in order to respond to the specific needs of so-called 'functional' regions beyond the national scope and below the European level. They have the potential to establish sustainable links between Cohesion, Enlargement and Neighbourhood policies of the European Union (EU) as well as the respective sectoral policies. MRS are aimed at fostering and improving multi-level governance as well as governance as such. They are catalysts for institutional change, fostering the process of Europeanisation, democratisation and reform within the Union and its neighbourhood.

MRS are a unique approach to regional development due to the following innovative features:

- MRS combine cross-sectoral strategies with a place-based approach in order to strengthen territorial cohesion. The place-based approach aims to empower regions by developing spatially adapted solutions and implementing them through participatory governance. The concept of better governance includes the active and structured participation of civil society and local actors, which is a core element of place-based policy-making and a pre-condition for the success of macro-regional strategies.
- MRS provide an interface between European integration and the EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, and have the potential to foster social and economic development, better governance and improved living conditions in the outer border areas of the EU as well as in (potential) candidate and neighbourhood countries by building up joint capacities, competences and cooperation structures.
- MRS provide flexible structures that serve as a testing ground for innovative policies and initiatives.

Macro-regional strategies are based on the principles of no new EU funds, no additional EU formal structures and no new EU legislation, and are seen as an instrument for the optimal use of existing financial resources, the better use of existing institutions and the better implementation of existing legislation. Hence, they can play a crucial role in supporting the necessary investments in infrastructure, economic development, human capital and strengthening institutional and administrative capacity in the EU in its less developed regions and neighbouring countries.

The European Commission's report to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies in 2016¹ states that all four strategies could be further developed, notably regarding governance, result-orientation, targeted and purposeful funding and communica-

¹ COM (2016) 805 final

tion as well as cooperation. Thus, the Commission invites the participating countries and regions to mobilise regions, cities, agencies and institutions such as universities, private businesses and civil society organisations to participate in the implementation and development of MRS. These stakeholders often need pre-financing assistance, small-scale project support and the facilitation of project preparation. Yet, existing programmes and ESI-Funds cannot fully address these needs and therefore fail to appropriately support the relevant stakeholders – civil society and local actors – in implementing the targets of the macro-regional strategies.

In practice, this means that many local administrations, small and medium cities as well as large parts of civil society organizations are unable to profit from the exchange of knowledge, pilot projects, peer to peer learning, and cooperation. Eventually, the lack of access to adequate funding for these stakeholders makes their active and highly needed involvement in the strategies almost impossible. This deficit in the financing landscape largely foils the Commission's invitation – addressing local actors and civil society – to participate in MRS.

MRS require the well-coordinated use of available funding at all levels in order to increase participation and subsequently provide a tangible benefit to participating regions and their citizens.

In 2015, the Ministers in charge of EU Funds, European Affairs and European Integration from the Danube Region as well as the European Commissioner for Regional Policy reiterated the necessity of the alignment of funds and the use of all possible funding sources at national, regional or local level in order to involve the key implementers of MRS.²

In the ongoing planning of the European Cohesion Policy 2020+, representatives from MRS governance, regions and civil society organisations called for the development of easily accessible and manageable funding instruments, small-scale funding, further strengthening the partnership principle and other formats of participation in order to foster the involvement of local actors and civil society in the implementation of all MRS.

Cohesion Policy can only be successful if civil society and local actors are granted the flexibility, trust and financial incentives they need to implement the goals of common European interest.

EUSDR and the involvement of civil society and local actors

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) is one of the four current EU macro-regional strategies, besides the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) of 2009, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) of 2011, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) of 2014 and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) of 2015.

² Joint Statement of Ulm on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

The EUSDR was jointly developed by the European Commission, together with the partner countries and stakeholders from the Danube Region, in order to address common challenges. The region encompasses 115 million inhabitants from 14 countries in the mainland of Europe, from Baden-Württemberg to the Republic of Moldova and Western Ukraine, from the richest to the poorest regions of Europe. Through transnational cooperation, the strategy seeks to create synergies and innovative dynamics between the policies and initiatives taking place across the Danube Region. The EUSDR addresses a wide range of issues; these are divided among 4 pillars and 12 Priority Areas – ranging from transport to security, from qualification to culture, from environment to tourism, and from energy to governance improvement. Each Priority Area is managed by two countries as Priority Area Coordinators (PACs). Each country of the EUSDR has a National Coordinator (NC), who maintains an overview of the implementation of the strategy and its targets of the 12 Priority Areas in their country.

Furthering Democracy, European Integration and Social Innovation through Participation

The Danube Region has a heritage of deep political transformation, including post-fascist and communist transition, national separatism, nationalistic conflicts and the foundation of new states. This makes bridging political divides particularly important. Fostering democracy and European Integration on all levels is essential for the development of the region. Changing mentalities, building confidence amongst stakeholders and improving skills in public administration are pre-requisites for a profound systemic change, but they also take time to bear fruit. Transferring knowledge and exchanging experiences are important tools for strengthening institutional capacities and improving the administrative performance within countries and regions as well as for cooperation across borders. Cities and municipalities, regional administrations, social partners, civil society organisations and academia are crucial stakeholders for the implementation of the EUSDR. The involvement and engagement of local actors in the decision-making processes and policy implementation is needed in order to develop suitable solutions that meet the needs of its target groups, contribute to a smooth and efficient policy implementation and – eventually – to bring the strategy to the ground. Another important issue is the coordination and use of funds, which needs to be improved and strengthened through know-how transfer and further measures such as providing assistance to increase the skills in designing and implementing projects with a cross border and transnational impact.

The Danube Civil Society Forum

The central role of local actors – regional, urban, municipal administrations, social partners, organised civil society and academia – in the implementation of regional development was recognised in the EUSDR Action Plan in 2011. From 2010 onwards, Austria, the City of Vienna and the NGO Foster Europe were involved in the consultations and drafting of the EUSDR actions related to cooperation and local development.

One outcome of this regular exchange was the development of the Danube Basin NGO Project by Foster Europe. The project resulted in the launch of a website that provided information for civil society in the Danube Region. Additionally, Foster Europe developed a roadmap for participation in the EUSDR in cooperation with a group of interested NGOs. Developing the “Guiding Principles of Civil Society in the Danube Region” eventually led in 2011 to the foundation and establishment of the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), which related to the actions of Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” in the EUSDR Action Plan. It serves as an umbrella organisation for the representation of civil society interests in the macro-region and is a platform for dialogue and networking amongst civil society organisations.

EUSDR Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation”

In accordance with the EUSDR Action Plan, Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” (PA10) addresses institutional capacity-building at local, regional and national level, involvement of civil society in public governance, increasing local development and better spending as well as increasing absorption rates of EU funds. PA10 is jointly coordinated by the City of Vienna and the Centre for European Perspective on behalf of Slovenia. The Coordinators of the Priority Area are supported by a Steering Group, composed of representatives from all EUSDR member countries, European and regional institutions, as well as civil society representatives. It serves as an information and communication hub for local, regional, national and European stakeholders responsible for as well as working in the field of institutional capacity building, participative governance and spatial development. The activities of PA10 aim at supporting policy and project development, stakeholder relations and capitalisation in the Danube Region.

In particular, since the third EUSDR Annual Forum in Vienna and the first Danube Participation Day in Eisenstadt in June 2014, high-level representatives from the EU governance and EU institutions recognised the central role of local actors – local and regional administrations, social partners, civil society and academia – for the implementation of the EUSDR targets. Thus, PA10 initiated the Danube Local Actors Platform in the very same year. The Danube Local Actors Platform provides a large, open and inclusive space for the exchange and cooperation of local actors in the Danube Region.

The PA10 Danube Local Actors Platform

The Danube Local Actors Platform (D-LAP) was initiated by PA10 and is a simple and reliable mechanism of transparent exchange and structured dialogue with civil society and local actors. It provides a gateway to gear civil society towards the Priority Areas of the EUSDR, National Coordination, national Ministries and the European Commission and thereby implement them in the developing governance of the macro-region. It provides information and focussed policy recommendations to all levels of the governance system of the EUSDR and, thus, contributes to a sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels.³

In order to enlarge the platform, the DCSF, representing over 40 NGOs in the Danube Region, became an association, closely working with PA10 and developing a series of instruments and measures to further and ensure the involvement and participation of civil society and local actors in the governance of the EUSDR and its member countries.

The Platform communicates via PA 10⁴ and meets twice a year to prepare the annual Danube Participation Day and National Participation Days as well as exchange and discuss current and planned projects and initiatives relevant for civil society and local actors in the region as well as identifying synergies and transnational areas of intervention.

Civil society and local actors in the Danube Region

Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacities and Cooperation” (PA10) and the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) developed a set of measures to further participation of civil society and local actors in the governance of the Danube Region as well as in the EU programmes and funds for project implementation (Partnership Principle). These included the creation of the Danube Local Actors Platform, the implementation and roll-out of 17 Danube and National Participation Days to date and a series of conferences and projects aimed at increasing participation in the Danube Region.

In 2017, PA10 and the DCSF developed the **Agenda for Participation in the Macro-Regional Strategies** in cooperation with macro-regional partners and all sectors. This is a synopsis of the instruments developed and implemented in the last years as well as the proposal of new, far-reaching tools to further participation in the EUSDR and other EU macro regions.

³ Cf. EUSDR Action Plan

⁴ <https://www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/danube-local-actors-platform>

EU institutions and decision makers, MRS member states and regions were invited to join the comprehensive participation instruments and processes developed in the EUSDR from the first Danube Participation Day in Eisenstadt in 2014. MRS, and the European Union as a whole, will only be successful projects if they involve their citizens and an organised civil society as well as local authorities, which are closest to the citizens, as fully-fledged partners in the implementation of the strategies and the furthering of their democratic, European values. With the **Agenda for Participation in the Macro-Regional Strategies**, we want to take a step towards social stability, the rule of law, prosperity and peace in the Danube Region. The Agenda will move participation in MRS from a chain of events to a set of ongoing processes of dialogue and cooperation of state and non-state actors.

From the Eisenstadt Declaration 2014 to the Participation Agenda 2017

Under the Austrian EUSDR presidency in 2014, the DCSF together with PA10 and PA9 (“Investing in people and skills”) organised the first Danube Participation Day with 140 participants from all over the Danube Region in Eisenstadt. The Danube Participation Day was a follow-up initiative after the successful implementation of the “Danube River Show (2012-2015)” project, which collected and exchanged information about civil society’s needs and challenges in cities and regions along the Danube.

The concept of the Participation Days in the EUSDR is based on Art. 11. TEU, committing the EU institutions to “give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views” and to “maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.” In this context, the EUSDR Action Plan from 2011 associated – amongst others – the following tasks with PA10:

- To improve the trust of citizens and stakeholders in political authorities
- To establish a Danube Civil Society Forum
- To ensure sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels
- To support the development of local financial products for business and community development.

One result of the first Danube Participation Day was the Eisenstadt Declaration developing the vision of an open, transparent and regular participative process within the EUSDR. The declaration, served as a rolling document and was extended and amended following the developments in the EUSDR at each Danube Participation Day from 2014 to 2016, traditionally held on the day before the EUSDR Annual Forum. The dialogue concerning participation in macro-regional strategies was extended to partners from the Baltic and the Adriatic-Ionian Region and finally led to the development of the Agenda for Participation for Civil Society and Local Actors in the EU MRS and the Participation Partnerships in 2017.

The following compilation describes the roll-out of the road map and milestones developed by PA 10 and the DCSF as a follow up to the demands made in the Eisenstadt Declarations, as well as the results of the internet survey conducted in May 2017 by PA 10 and the current situation of civil society in the governance of the EUSDR.

The Eisenstadt Declaration was further complemented in Ulm in 2015 and in Bratislava in 2016. Additionally, PA10 and the DCSF steadily contributed together with its partners in the Danube Region to its implementation.

Eisenstadt Declaration:

Organization of regular hearings by NCPs and PACs at the level of the national platforms of the EUSDR with local communities/municipalities and the civil society. The EC High Level Group on macro-regional strategies was asked to reflect the positions formulated at these hearings in close cooperation with local-, state- and non-state actors.

Milestones

- Organisation of National Participation Days and guidelines were developed by DCSF and PA 10 in 2014. PA 10 adopted a new target: "80% of participating countries involve the national, regional and local authorities and CSOs through annual national EUSDR Hearings". In 2017, a mark of 60% was reached.
- PA 10 participated at the EC high level group on macro-regional strategies in February 2017, presenting the "Agenda for Participation" and reporting on the specific challenges of civil society and local actors in the EUSDR.

Eisenstadt Declaration:

The development of a "EUSDR Road Map to Democracy and Participation" involving all the actors at a local, regional, national and macro-regional level, from all participating states and the EU in the interim period before the 4th Annual Forum in 2015.

Milestones

- PA 10–Danube Local Actors Platform (D-LAP) was created in 2014, with a concrete roadmap for its activities, which evolved in the "Agenda for Participation" for civil society and local actors in EU macro-regional Strategies in 2017.
- In 2016, in Bratislava, a joint meeting was held between the Danube Local Actors Platform, the Council of Danube Cities and Regions and the ARGE Donauländer as well as the DCSF. The Cities of the Danube Region were invited to join forces with the Danube Local Actors Platform.

Eisenstadt Declaration:

Stronger and equitable involvement of civil society stakeholders in the EUSDR Annual Fora, which represent the main platform for an official and public dialogue, incorporating local actors and civil society as an integral part of the EUSDR. This includes preliminary consultation of local actors in the preparatory work for the Annual Fora.

Milestones

- From 2013-2016, the results of the meetings of civil society organisations on the day before the EUSDR Annual Forum, were reported to the Annual Forum Plenary and/or discussed in a specific working group organized by Priority Area 10. In 2016, the format of the Annual Forum changed, focusing on specific topics developed by the Presidency. However, participation of project promoters from NGOs and local actors was still encouraged by the Slovak Presidency, and the Danube Participation Day officially presented as one of the side-events of the EUSDR Annual Forum.
- The format of the Danube Participation Day, considered as innovative and successful in the report on MRS from the European Parliament in 2015, was adopted by the EUSBR in 2017 at its Annual Forum in Berlin and is discussed by EUSALP.

Eisenstadt Declaration:

Financing of electronic information tools and adequate person-power to share information on EU programs, projects and funding as well as EUSDR activities in a transparent and timely way within the civil society organisations of the EUSDR.

Milestones

- Priority Area 10 Vienna and the City of Vienna were endorsed by the EC to develop a series of pilot projects and tools for EUSDR stakeholders. Amongst others, a seed money fund for small projects "Start", as well as an interactive website for stakeholders with all relevant calls and financing possibilities in the EUSDR "EuroAccess" were developed. Even though both were very successful, specifically furthering the projects of NGOs and local actors as well as helping these stakeholders to keep informed about project financing and partners, funding was discontinued after the ending of the pilot phase.
- On the EUSDR PA 10 Website, information about activities related to civil society and local actors are to be found.
- The Danube Civil Society Forum and the Danube Local Actors Platform provide a linked web portal and a Facebook account with relevant information for civil society and local actors in the EUSDR.

Eisenstadt Declaration:

Financing and Establishment of a Civil Society Platform, which shall provide focused policy recommendations to all levels of the governance system of the EUSDR, and thereby deliver a simple and reliable mechanism of transparent exchange and structured dialogue with the civil society. Moreover, the Civil Society Platform may serve as the main gateway to gear civil society and Non-Governmental Organisations towards the Priority Areas of the EUSDR, National Contact Points and the European Commission and thereby make them familiar with and integrate into the macro-regional approach.

Milestones

- Priority Area 10 –Danube Local Actors Platform (D-LAP) was created in 2014, with a concrete roadmap for its activities, which evolved in the “Agenda for Participation” for civil society and local actors in EU macro-regional Strategies in 2017. The D-LAP acts as a link to the national, EUSDR and European levels and governance for its members, and over a hundred organisations and local actors from all EUSDR member countries.
- The main partner of the PA 10 Danube Local Actors Platform (D-LAP) is the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), as foreseen and proposed in the EUSDR Action Plan (“To establish a Danube Civil Society Forum”). The Danube Civil Society Forum is financed by its members and supported by Foster Europe, Foundation for strong European Regions.

Eisenstadt Declaration:

Systematic allocation of funds especially by the participating states to build up and maintain the above mentioned participatory structures. This also needs comprehensive coordination and continuous discussions between the participating states.

Milestones

- Funding of the Danube Participation Days as well as the National Participation Days have been difficult; the Austrian, Baden-Württemberg and Slovak Presidencies as well as some Priority Areas and Capital Cities of the EUSDR member states have been contributing. Since 2017, the Baden-Württemberg foundation has been financing part of the events with a project; other funding is national, or derives from Priority Area 10 technical assistance and Foster Europe. However, even if the National Participation Days have been developing, political and administrative support for civil society activities, especially on a transnational or macro-regional level, is still lagging.

Eisenstadt Declaration:

The “Eisenstadt Declaration” invites all EUSDR-stakeholders to start consultations for a “EUSDR Road Map to Democracy and Participation” and invites all participating states and regions to hold national or regional hearings.

Milestones

- The consultation process for the “EUSDR Road Map to Democracy and Participation” merged into the agenda of the National and Regional Participation Days, starting in the Ukraine in 2015 and expanding to nine out of 14 states and the following Danube participation Days. All in all, 14 National/Regional Participation Days and 4 Danube Participation Days have been held since 2014.
- The agenda and implementation of the annual Danube Participation Days is transparently developed with the Danube Local Actors Platform as well as other Priority Areas and, where possible, with the acting EUSDR Presidency.
- In 2017, Priority Area 10 carried out an assessment of the Participation Days in the EUSDR in view of further developing this strategic instrument. In May 2017, Euro Vienna and PA 10 designed an online questionnaire that was sent to EUSDR Stakeholders and representatives of relevant European Institutions. The Assessment reviewed the first three Danube Participation Days (DPD) connected to the EUSDR Annual Fora since 2014 as well as the 13 National Participation Days held till March 2017 in eight of the 14 EUSDR member states. The complete results of the assessment, covering Danube Participation Days and Nationals Participation Days in the EUSDR from 2014 to spring 2017 can be found on PA 10 and DCSF websites.

In 2017, PA10 commissioned a review on the Participation Day format, reflecting on past developments and aimed at identifying the needs of stakeholders for future cooperation. The main findings of the survey confirmed the strategy and activities of both PA10-D-LAP and DCSF. The Agenda for Participation in EU macro-regional strategies with its Participation Partnerships, the Danube Participation Days and the steadily increasing National Participation Days address the needs and challenges of civil society and local actors in the EUSDR, still echoing the Eisenstadt Declaration.

The Agenda for Participation in EU Macro-Regional Strategies and the Partnerships for Participation

The Agenda for Participation in macro-regional Strategies was discussed in 2016-2017 by an international group of relevant MRS stakeholders and key actors to vitalise EU MRS and to tackle Euroscepticism, euro-sclerosis and nationalism. The group has longstanding experience in developing and implementing MRS and European Policies at all governance levels and in diverse socio-political environments. The Agenda for Participation proposes a set of key tools to successfully implement and develop MRS and European integration by widening the basis of MRS through the structured and transparent participation of local actors and civil society.

According to the experience of MRS stakeholders, successful MRS would profit from the following developments:

- Active political support and ownership for an effective top-down implementation
- Stronger and institutionalised participation of local actors and civil society organisations at the local, regional and municipal level in order to enable a sustainable bottom-up approach
- Acknowledging the place-based approach as key aspect of functional regions
- Adequate funding and legal instruments adapted to the needs of implementing stakeholders, including a consistent inclusion of MRS into a revised delegated regulation for the European Code of Conduct on Partnerships (ECCP)
- The mobilisation of media and the larger public as well as opinion leaders and the political level
- Stepping up institutional capacity wherever needed

What aims for the Agenda for Participation in the Macro-Regional Strategies?

The Agenda for Participation aims at maximizing the potential of civil society and local actors by promoting multi-level and participative governance, empowering MRS to tackle the political, economic and social challenges many member countries share. The cooperation between member states, regions, social partners, local actors and the civil society is crucial for the successful development of the MRS.

It has repeatedly been stressed, as in the Commission's 2016 report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, that a stronger involvement of the civil society through consultative networks

and platforms, leading to the institutionalised cooperation at all levels between the political level, administration, local actors, civil society and the social partners is a pre-condition to true European integration. While this is of relevance for all countries participating in MRS, some have made significant progress in establishing structural participation, while others are just starting the process.

The problematic aspects of European as well as national funding have been brought up in many position papers from MRS, regions and city organisations in the on-going discussion about the new period of EU Cohesion Policy 2020+.

Decentralisation, simplification, improved alignment of funds, facilitated access to funding as well as the participation and empowerment of local actors in the development and roll-out of national and macro-regional programs are amongst the reforms that could help to put European cohesion policy on the ground.

This is of particular importance for civil society and local actors, especially – but not only – in countries with low levels of cohesion. However, the implementation of tailor-made instruments, e.g. easily accessible and administrable small project funds and seed money is crucial in all MRS member states. To unfold the full potential of regional development and funding, it is fundamental to re-introduce a culture of mutual trust versus furthering an environment of disproportionate control and mistrust. Therefore, the Agenda for Participation in the MRS will work towards:

- Promoting the involvement of civil society and local actors in MRS policy making at all governance levels
- Promoting the development and implementation of European funds adapted to the needs of civil society and local actors in the on-going planning of the EU Cohesion Policy +2020, specifically the development of easily accessible and manageable funding instruments for smaller projects, which would strengthen the involvement of local actors and civil society in the development of all MRS.
- Improving the knowledge base in macro-regions through:
 - Furthering the sharing of best practices and cooperation between civil society and local actors as well as between the MRS in joint frameworks and platforms;
 - The introduction of national and macro-regional hearings (Participation Days) as structured dialogues between all stakeholders
 - The development of new formats of cooperation between the key decision-makers/ implementers and civil society together with local actors
- Encouraging, via the MRS governance, a notable change in the member countries' political and administrative culture, furthered top-down by adequate leverage through EU funding and political support and bottom-up by the strengthening of civil society and local actors.

How will the Agenda for Participation in EU Macro-Regional Strategies be implemented?

The Agenda for Participation is composed of a set of instruments and actions, aiming to further participation in the MRS and its member states, based on the Eisenstadt Declarations 2014-2016. While some actions have been implemented since 2014, like the Danube Participation Days, National Participation Days or the D-LAP, the Agenda for Participation will further initiate five thematic Participation Partnerships based on the workshops at the 4th Danube Participation Day in Budapest on 17 October 2017. The work within the partnerships will be based on joint action plans. The results of the cooperation will be compiled in the Agenda for Participation Report 2017-2020.

National Participation Days

National Participation Days are embedded in the targets set by PA10, concretely in PA10's target to ensure that 80 % of partner countries involve national, regional and local authorities and civil society organisations through national hearings in cooperation with the EUSDR National Coordinators. In a larger context, this target is meant to contribute to "improve the trust of citizens and stakeholders in political authorities", "establish a Danube Civil Society Forum", and "ensure sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels".⁵

Therefore, PA10 and DCSF also support the organisation of National Participation Day (NPD) events in the different Danube Region countries, cooperating with the National Coordinators of the EUSDR. The Participation Day events thus contribute to the implementation of the EUSDR.

National Participation Days – or national hearings, linked to the national EUSDR governance, gather actively involved, interested, and/or potential stakeholders of the macro-regional strategies at national level. The National Participation Days specifically address civil society organisations and networks, local actors including academia, local and regional public authorities as well as national institutions and experts active in the macro-regional governance. The National Participation Day should also be open to interested stakeholders from abroad such as representatives from PACs, academia, international or interregional organisations (CODCR, DCSF, RCC, NALAS, CEI, etc.). The National Participation Day is the national platform in the structured civil society dialogue of the EUSDR and provides the link between the national public actors (ministries, national agencies, NCP, PACs, etc.) and the stakeholders active in the country. It gives stakeholders the possibility to meet and exchange information in view of possible cooperation on a macro-regional level, to inform themselves about ongoing projects, calls or other possible financing programs or instruments in the EUSDR between the supra-national activities of the EUSDR, at the Annual Fora and the annual Danube Participation Days. This contributes to

⁵ For more information, see the Commission's EUSDR Action Plan and the EUSDR Targets.

a capacity building of multi-sectoral and multi-level, trans-regional, trans-national cooperation on the local, regional and national levels.

The NPD should raise the level of national coordination, participation and knowledge on the national strategy within the EUSDR, raise awareness on the national level and motivate possibly interested actors to join the strategy and become active stakeholders.

National Participation Days have been held, one or more times since 2013 in Serbia, Ukraine, Austria, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Moldova and Baden-Württemberg.⁶

Danube Participation Days

The Danube Participation Days have been developed by representatives of organized civil society and local stakeholders, supported by Priority Area 10 Institutional Capacity and Cooperation (PA10) out of the recognition, growing since 2012, of the necessity for a structural, transparent and regular participation of civil society and local actors in the Danube Strategy.⁷

Macro-regional Participation Days linked to the respective Annual Fora of the MRS like the Danube Participation Day or the Baltic Participation Day serve as the main meeting of civil society in the framework of macro-regional strategies and, starting in 2014, are organised every year as pre-events to the Annual Fora of the macro-regional strategies. The Danube Participation Day is jointly organised by the DCSF, EUSDR-PA10 in consultation with the PA 10 Danube Local Actors Platform and in close coordination with the hosting country, the hosting city and the civil society in the hosting country. The Danube Participation Day is open to all stakeholders from civil society and local actors as well as related international and European organisations and institutions and provides civil society and local actors with opportunities to connect and get involved in the implementation of the EUSDR. It reflects the debates and results of the National Participation Days and serves as lighthouse of participation in the EUSDR governance structure. Since 2014, the Danube Participation Days have grown in terms of participants and kept a broad thematic scope related to its core aim: enhancing the participation of local actors at all levels in the Danube Region.

In May 2017, the National and Danube Participation Day events were reviewed by PA10 through an online questionnaire. The results of the review showed the need for such events, as well as the challenge of further development and financing. A majority of participants (66%) see the Danube Participation Days meeting their needs and expectations, clearly showing the importance and the need for a structured participative approach to the EUSDR at all levels. The feedback also highlights the needs and challenges for the further development of activities in the Danube Region. While confirming the overall orientation of the activities in the EUSDR, stakeholders voiced their need for the further support for

⁶ See Annex 1

⁷ Cf. Gabor Schneider/Stefan Lütgenau (2014): Tapping the full potential of Macro-Regional Strategies- Enhanced bottom-up participation and Multi-Level Governance in the Baltic and Danube Macro-Regional Strategies

project development, funding and regular exchange. The EUSDR stakeholders reiterated that there is a greater need for support and involvement by the European Institutions.

Although the Participation Days and its organizers seeks to meet these expectations, it is clear that the proposals and recommendations of the involved stakeholders go far beyond the format and its current capacities.

Thanks to the financial support from the Baden-Württemberg Foundation, the Foster Europe Foundation and PA 10, the Danube Participation Days will be able to continue at least up to 2018.

The Agenda for Participation, not least as a response to the assessment of the Participation Days, aims to move from an event-oriented approach to a sustainable cross-sectoral process overarching more than one year and more than one macro-regional strategy.

Macro-regional Participation Partnerships

Macro-regional Participation Partnerships are transnational, open platforms working on concrete challenges, solutions and goals. They operate as frameworks for information, cooperation and implementation of participatory processes and policies in the MRS. Acting transversally, they should be facilitating joint MRS responses and actions to common challenges. Striving to enable different groups of European and MRS stakeholders to cooperate towards strengthening participation of civil society and local actors in the MRS governance, in member countries and in EU funding administration, they focus on a range of topics relevant for MRS, coordinated and supported by the institutions of the EU macro-regional strategies, stakeholder platforms and other European and international institutions.

The Participation Partnerships will mobilise through activating a broader range of local actors and NGOs, involving international and European organisations and institutions, gaining effective multipliers for a MRS strategy process in order to assess the state of play and further contribute to participation from bottom-up and top-down with concrete initiatives and projects;

The partnerships are supposed to involve dedicated and knowledgeable partners at the political and administrative level of MRS member states to enable the implementation of actionable policy proposals, projects and initiatives, furthering a change of cultures through dialogue. They should empower stakeholders by creating a setting that facilitates the transnational interaction, nurturing exchange and new expertise as well as effective mechanisms for translating positions and ideas in joint, macro-regional actions, enhancing the capitalisation of ideas, knowledge and projects.

The first Participation Partnerships are proposed along the following themes:

- **Participation: A research perspective**

The Partnership will work on theories, research and good practices promoting participatory governance in order to enhance capacities for multilevel governance in the MRS, developing measures and actions for the strategies.

- **Participation: Building MRS on local governance and multi-level governance**

The Partnership will develop, based on the new guidelines for Participation developed by the Council of Europe, concrete measures for the implementation of Participation at the local level.

- **Participation: A key factor of social innovation and sustainable development**

The Partnership will identify innovative, co-creative and trans-sectoral approaches in order to sustain long term top-down (thinking) and bottom-up (acting) processes (developments).

- **Participation: Designing 2020+ with local actors and MRS**

The Partnership will look at participatory structures that integrate civil society and local actors regional development and EU funding instruments (Partnership Principle) in regard to challenges, good practices and opportunities within the ongoing discussion on EU Cohesion Policy 2020+.

- **Participation: Empowering Roma and vulnerable Groups**

The Partnership deals with participatory approaches to empower vulnerable groups in the macro-regions in order to enable their participation in the shaping of their social and political capital.

The thematically defined Participation Partnerships jointly develop a concrete action plan depending on their structure, topics and funding. The processed challenges, needs, aims and activities should be, if possible, relevant to all MRS.

Activities could consist of the development and/or implementation of pilot projects, the development and/or implementation of a methodology, the organisation of one or more events/round tables, to exchange and disseminate information and develop cooperation, the involvement of new groups of stakeholders in on-going pilot activities or projects to broaden and further implementation and dissemination.

The Partnerships for Participation are coordinated by a lead partner able to ensure continuity and professional, target-oriented development, communication and networking for the implementation of the Partnership as well as reporting to the Agenda for Participation Network.

The Agenda for Participation Report 2017 – 2020

The Agenda for Participation Report 2017-2020 is a rolling document that will give an overview of participatory policies at the European level, the situation of participation in the MRS and present the results of the MRS Participation Days and the Participation Partnerships as well as relevant projects. The Agenda Report is developed through the initiative of the DCSF and PA10, D-LAP with a working group composed of experts. The Agenda Report will be presented and discussed at important macro-regional and European conferences, complement the European Commission's report on MRS in 2019 and should serve as a road map for participation in the MRS in the coming years.

The sustainable impact and the quality of the results of the Agenda for Participation will correlate with the continuity of the work and therefore with the funding opportunities of the organisations participating in the Partnerships and the Network. Lobbying for the Agenda for Participation and adequate funding for its activities will be one of the main tasks of the Agenda for Participation Network.

Annex 1

EUSDR Participation Days 2014 – 2017:

- 1st Danube Participation Day Eisenstadt, Austria (25 June 2014)
- 2nd Danube Participation Day, Ulm, Germany (28 October 2015)
- 3rd Danube Participation Days, Bratislava, Slovakia (2-3 November 2016)
- 4th Danube Participation Day, Budapest, Hungary (17 October 2017)

National Participation Days 2014 – 2017:

- 1st National Participation Day Ukraine (22 April 2014)
- 1st National Participation Day Austria (13 Mai 2015)
- 1st National Hearing Day Serbia (20 October 2015)
- 1st National Participation Day Bulgaria (17-18 March 2016)
- 2nd National Participation Day Austria (9 September 2016)
- 1st National Participation Day Moldova (22 September 2016)
- 1st National Participation Day Slovakia (21 October 2016)
- 2nd National Hearing Day Serbia (24 March 2017)
- 1st National Participation Day Czech Republic (30 May 2017)
- 2nd National Participation Day Bulgaria (16 May 2017)
- 1st National Participation Day Germany (29 July 2017)
- 2nd National Participation Day Ukraine (6 September 2017)
- 2nd National Participation Day and Financial Dialogue Moldova (26-27 October 2017)

For more information see:

www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu & www.danubestrategy.eu

Annex 2

The Danube Region Rolling Document on Participation in the Danube Strategy

Since the first Danube Participation Day 2014 in Eisenstadt, the Danube Local Actors Platform and the participants of the Danube Participation Day have adopted each year a declaration on the state of play and the challenges of civil society and local actors in the EU Strategy for the Danube region (EUSDR), which were presented to the annual forum of the EUSDR and to relevant stakeholders of the strategy. The declaration serves as a guideline and road map for intensified participation and the work of the Danube Local Actors Platform.

2014 Eisenstadt Declaration on Participation in the EUSDR

The European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) has been elaborated to address common challenges and provide comprehensive development in the Danube Region. The EUSDR as an integrated framework attempts to develop improved solutions by a “concrete process on the ground” that is operated by clear strategic visions, concrete concepts and projects. Thus, “by 2020, all citizens of the Region should enjoy better prospects of higher education, employment and prosperity in their own home area. The Strategy should make the Danube Region a truly 21st century region, secure and confident, and one of the most attractive in Europe” (COM (2010) 715 final, p.3).

In this context, the participants of the 1st Participation Day of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region have discussed the opportunities for the enhanced participation of local- regional actors and civil society in the EUSDR implementation.

We believe that the commitment of the civil society and local actors are essential for an effective and successful EUSDR. It is essential to support the EUSDR in its strategic visions as well as in its day-to-day implementation.

Convinced that civil society and local actors play a crucial role in a successful EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the participants of the 1st Participation Day of the EUSDR therefore declare the following:

We believe that the EUSDR needs a clear strategic vision and a strong political commitment, which the projects associated with the EUSDR currently do not provide.

In our vision, the EUSDR is a macro-regional strategy that is building and fostering democracy, good governance and the well-being of the citizens, it is preserving the natural and cultural heritage and it is developing the rich and diverse cultural and economic activities in the Danube Region.

The EUSDR is a multi-national strategy comprising EU member states as well as (potential) candidate states and countries of the European Neighbourhood. It should reach for the standards of participation, transparency and subsidiarity as laid down in the European Union's primary law.

Building, fostering and devolving democracy as well as applying the principle of subsidiarity is a joint task and responsibility for state and non-state actors at all levels of the EUSDR: local, regional, national and macro-regional in all participating states and the European Union.

The introduction of an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society is a precondition for a modern and strong democratic Danube Region.

These ambitious aims, validated by the principles recognised in the Treaties mentioned above, cannot be reached without innovative and transparent structures, both top-down and bottom-up, supporting the dialogue and consultation of all participating actors, thus enhancing EUSDR visibility and improving the citizen's ownership of the Strategy.

In order to facilitate the full implementation of enhanced participation we call for the implementation of the principles of transparency, subsidiarity and improved governance through the following measures:

- I. Organization of regular hearings by NCPs and PACs at the level of the national platforms of the EUSDR with local communities/municipalities and civil society.
The High Level Group meetings shall reflect the positions formulated at these hearings in close cooperation with local-, state- and non-state actors.
- II. Development of a "EUSDR Road Map to Democracy and Participation" involving all actors at local, regional, national and macro-regional level, from all participating states and the EU in the interim period before the 4th Annual Forum in 2015.
- III. Stronger and equitable involvement of civil society stakeholders in the EUSDR Annual Fora, which represent the main platform for an official and public dialogue, incorporating local actors and civil society as an integral part of the EUSDR. This includes preliminary consultation of local actors in the preparatory work for the Annual Fora.
- IV. Financing of electronic information tools and adequate person-power to share information on EU programmes, projects and funding as well as EUSDR activities in a transparent and timely way within the civil society organisations of the EUSDR.
- V. Financing and Establishment of a Civil Society Platform, which shall provide focussed policy recommendations to all levels of the governance system of the EUSDR and thereby it delivers a simple and reliable mechanism of transparent exchange and structured dialogue with the civil society. Moreover, the Civil Society Platform may serve as the main gateway to gear civil society and non-governmental organisations towards the Priority Areas of the EUSDR, National Contact Points and the European Commission and thereby make them familiar with and integrate into the macro-regional approach.

- VI. Systematic allocation of funds especially by the participating states to build up and maintain the above mentioned participatory structures. This also needs comprehensive coordination and continuous discussions between the participating states.
- VII. A future revision process of the EUSDR must be conducted in an open, transparent, and participative way.

We invite all stakeholders of the EUSDR to start the consultation for the “EUSDR Road Map to Democracy and Participation” forthwith.

We invite all participating states and regions to hold their first national/regional hearings in due time before the 4th Annual Forum of the EUSDR in 2015.

2015 Ulm Resolution: Promoting Transparency and Participation through Multilevel Governance

Following the first Participation Day and the Eisenstadt Declaration of 25 June 2014, the overall approach for civil society involvement in the EUSDR is twofold:

- Civil society, social partner and local actors involvement in the governance of the EUSDR
- Strengthening civil society, European citizenship, social partners and civic engagement throughout the Danube Region

Civil society involvement within the framework of the EUSDR implementation should first and foremost:

- Improve conditions for civic participation and encourage participation at the EU, the macro-regional, and the national/regional level
- Communicate the EUSDR to the citizens

A potential revision of the EUSDR Action Plan should be used as opportunity to better enshrine the European principles of participation, transparency and subsidiarity by ensuring the minimum standards of civil society involvement in the EUSDR.

Within the current governance of the EUSDR, civil society involvement matters especially with regard to multi-level governance and project development (Cf. Council conclusions on the governance of macro-regional strategies of 21 October 2014, 16207/14). Currently, the D-LAP implements three actions of the Action Plan (SEC (2010) 1489 final):

- To improve the trust of citizens and stakeholders in political authorities
- To establish a Danube Civil Society Forum
- To ensure sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels

With the Danube Civil Society Forum already being set up and continuously growing in terms of members and capability, a revision of the existing EUSDR Action Plan should regroup those actions which are already being implemented by PA10 through the D-LAP and its partners. In particular:

Make civil society participation an integrated part of the EUSDR governance, on the basis of

- The Participation Day for local actors and CSOs as an integrated part of each Annual Forum of the EUSDR
- Through National Participation Days organised by National Coordinators in cooperation with Priority Area 10 and the DCSF for transparent and regular exchange with non-state EUSDR stakeholders, especially for civil society and local actors, thus developing their respective political culture of participation.
- Participative structures and interfaces to organizations of the civil society for each of the Priority Areas of the EUSDR
- Ensure the parliamentary dimension of the EUSDR through involvement of the EP as well as national and regional parliaments
- Create a strong link and exchange of experience with other macro-regional strategies and research on macro-regional strategies
- Involve European bodies dealing with the topic, e.g. EU Institutions (especially the EESC) or regional institutions in the Danube Region
- Support capacity building in the Danube Region, in cooperation with the PA10 Danube Capacity Platform (D-CAP), in order to enable institutional memory, capacity to participate on regional, national, macro-regional, and supranational levels (e.g. public consultation processes for policies and programmes), sustain bottom-up processes for self-organization of the civil society in a macro-regional context, and project development

2015 Ulm Declaration on the Refugee Crisis in Europe

The refugee crisis in Europe and the Mediterranean represents a defining moment for the European Union and its values of solidarity, human rights, equality and diversity. This is especially true for the Danube Region, which shares a common heritage of conflict, flight, eviction and transformation and is now hit by the direct effects of war and persecution in the Middle East, putting even more stress on those countries still reeling from transformation, the economic crisis and natural disasters.

The last months have shown that civil society organisations everywhere in the Danube Region have been the first to intervene and provide the backbone of activities assisting those fleeing persecution, conflict and war, facilitating their acceptance, transit and integration among our communities. They have shown that it is possible to resist populist tendencies and pressures, to resist reopening old historical rifts, dividing the Danube Region, dividing our populations, and losing the chance to build a shared, peaceful and prosperous Danube Region. In this sense, the refugee crisis could also be an

opportunity for the Danube Region to make a step further in its endeavour to become a truly European Region.

European, national and regional institutions should learn from the actual crisis that they must include Civil Society in their governance and decision making process at all levels, in a structured and comprehensive way that will ensure long-term and sustainable solutions, backed by their citizens.

2016 Bratislava Declaration on funding for empowered civil society and local actors

In the context of the financial, economic, political and social crisis shaking up the foundations of the European Union, the decline of trust in political systems at the European, the national and the local level, hampering a stable and sustainable social and economic development, is evident and its consequences are dramatic.

Civil society, empowered local actors as well as cities and regions are key partners for the stabilization and development of the European Project as well as the Danube macro-region. They can make an important difference in finding solutions for common national or transnational challenges, if they are included in the governance at all administrative levels in the Danube Region.

The stronger involvement of civil society through consultative networks and platforms has repeatedly been stressed, as in the Commission's report to the European Parliament (COM (2016)805 final) on the development of macro-regional strategies. While this is of relevance for all member countries of the strategy, some have made significant progress in establishing structural participation, while others are just starting the process. It is therefore essential to further the exchange at all levels on the practical implementation of participative governance.

This has been furthered in the Danube Region by both National Participation Days and the annual EUSDR Danube Participation Day, held back-to-back with the Annual Forum, where Local Actors of the whole Region have an opportunity to meet and exchange, to develop ideas and projects.

However, European programmes and ESI-funds are not suitable for the financing of such smaller projects, events and cooperation, and are therefore unable to enhance the implementation of macro-regional strategies on the ground by a relevant group of its stake-holders – civil society and local actors. We therefore call on the Member Countries of the EUSDR, the respective presidencies, the high level group, the European Commission and the European Parliament to:

- Ensure and support the organization of the EUSDR Participation Day as well as of National Participation Days.
- Consider the importance of small project funding instruments in the starting discussions on the next European cohesion policy, thus showing their willingness to truly engage, in the spirit of the European treaties, in new ways of governance for the benefit of the Danube Region and promote the idea of active citizenship.





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