

DECLARATION

Achieving functional biodiversity in the Danube-Carpathian Region by mainstreaming ecological connectivity

July 2022

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region "Water Quality" Priority Area (hereafter EUSDR PA 4), the "Environmental Risks" Priority Area (hereafter EUSDR PA 5), the "Biodiversity, Landscapes, Quality of Air and Soils" Priority Area (hereafter EUSDR PA 6), the Carpathian Convention, and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR),

- welcoming the impetus that the European Green Deal, in particular the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy, and the UN Decade on Ecosystems Restoration have provided to sustainable development action across the Danube-Carpathian region as reflected e.g. in the updated Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and the Danube River Basin and Flood Risk Management Plans Update 2021,
- highlighting the benefits of a regional approach to fostering sustainable development,
- recognizing the urgency of reversing the trend of biodiversity loss,
- appreciating that intact ecosystems foster climate resilience of human societies such as flood risk mitigation as promoted by the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change,
- acknowledging that habitat fragmentation in the Danube-Carpathian region is among the leading drivers of biodiversity loss¹ and threats to the environmental, social and economic well-being, and that maintenance and restoration of terrestrial and freshwater connectivity is of critical importance for ecosystem health and achieving good ecological status,

¹ Reporting on habitats and species under the EU Habitats Directive:
<https://nature-art17.eionet.europa.eu/article17/reports2012/>

- acknowledging that integrated spatial and development planning is key to maintaining and restoring ecological connectivity and requires a Whole of Government and Whole of Society approach,

Commit and intensify our joint efforts to

- prioritize ecological connectivity conservation in activities, projects, and plans, and offer our platforms for cross-sectoral and cross-border cooperation toward this goal based on past achievements and knowledge gained,
- reach out to fora in neighboring macro-regions such as the EUSALP and Alpine Convention in order to jointly contribute to the objective of building a truly coherent Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N) while minimizing impacts of transnational energy and transportation networks,
- promote tools for effective application of the “Do No Significant Harm²” approach of the European Green Deal as well as the Mitigation Hierarchy³,
- contribute to mapping of large coherent landscapes with wilderness features, and of terrestrial and aquatic ecological corridors between protected areas, in particular Natura 2000 sites and other natural sites of international and national importance, with the aim of securing their conservation,
- strengthen the management of existing Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) by promoting cooperation across borders and experience exchange,
- support the identification and designation of additional protected areas and OECMs to fill-in gaps in the regional ecological corridor system as requested by the EU Biodiversity Strategy,
- drive capacity-building measures of environmental authorities to enter into fruitful cross-sectoral dialogue on connectivity issues,

² According to the European Commission [definition](#), the *Do No Significant Harm* principle means not supporting or carrying out economic activities that do significant harm to any environmental objective, where relevant, within the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852

³ In line with the [Methodological guidance](#) on the provisions of Article 6 (3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, the Mitigation Hierarchy is a hierarchical procedure where appropriate actions are taken for [no net loss of ecosystems and their services](#) in the following order: avoidance, reduction/minimisation, restoration/rehabilitation and offsetting. This means that the first objective should be to try and avoid or prevent negative impacts. Where this is impossible, damage should be minimised and restoration attempted. Compensation or offsetting should be a last resort.

- promote civil society participation and good governance to maximize impact of our work,
- support public engagement and outreach to increase awareness about ecological connectivity across the region and to gain the support of key stakeholder groups such as land owners, transport or energy infrastructure planners, and river basin managers for ecological connectivity conservation,
- increase transboundary cooperation related to ecological connectivity and river continuity following the example of the world's first 5-country Mura-Drava-Danube UNESCO Biosphere Reserve or the Alpine-Carpathian Corridor.

We herewith call upon national decision makers, the EUSDR National Coordinators, the EUSDR Trio Presidency, the European Commission and non-environmental players engaged in implementing regional agreements and the European Green Deal to join us in these efforts and to provide support in particular by

- facilitating and promoting inter-sectoral, transnational and stakeholder cooperation toward mainstreaming ecological connectivity objectives into spatial and development planning in the fields of transport, energy, river basin management, and tourism, including soft measures such as training and research,
- allocating EU funding to measures that conserve terrestrial and freshwater ecological connectivity, favor nature-based solutions, promote protected areas management, maintenance and restoration of river continuity, and build incentives and compensation measures for relevant land owners,
- mainstreaming EU Green Deal policies (e.g. EU Forest Strategy, EU Soil Strategy, EU Biodiversity Strategy, EU Zero Pollution Action Plan), in particular their targets related to ecosystem restoration, protected areas, connectivity, water and climate into other sectoral policies.

Endorsements:

Endorsed by the Framework Convention on Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) on 2 August 2022

Endorsed by Mr. Róbert-Eugen Szép, President of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River on 25 July 2022

Endorsed by the EUSDR Priority Area 04 "Water Quality" Steering Group on 14 July 2022

Endorsed by the EUSDR Priority Area 05 "Environmental Risks" Steering Group on 14 July 2022

Endorsed by the EUSDR Priority Area 06 "Biodiversity, Landscapes, Quality of Air and Soils" Steering Group on 21 July 2022