

Priority Area 6 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region
Preserving biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils

2nd Steering Group Meeting

Croatia, Zagreb 24-25 October 2011

Participants:

1. Mr Andrej Plenković, State Secretary, National Contact Point for the EUSDR, Ministry of foreign affairs and European integration, Croatia
2. Ms Tea Karaman, Deputy National Contact Point for the EUSDR, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European integration, Croatia
3. Mr Florian Ballnus, Priority Area 6 Coordinator, Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Public Health, Germany
4. Ms Kornelija Pintarić, Priority Area 6 Coordinator, Ministry of Culture, Nature Protection Directorate, Croatia
5. Ms Mira Medić, steering group member, Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction, Croatia
6. Mr Domagoj Marić, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European integration, Croatia
7. Mr Erich Ober, steering group member, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water, Austria
8. Ms Erzébet Gergely, steering group member, Ministry of Rural Development, Hungary
9. Ms Roxana Ionescu, steering group member, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Romania
10. Ms Marta Ciraj, steering group member, Ministry of Health, Slovenia
11. Mr Tomislav Lukić, steering group member, Federal ministry of environment and tourism, Bosnia and Herzegovina
12. Mr Darko Rajhenbah, PA 4 steering group member, Ministry of Regional development, Forestry and Water Management
13. Mr Olivier Baudelet, DG REGIO, European Commission, in advisory capacity
14. Ms Szilvia Bosze, DG ENV, European Commission, in advisory capacity
15. Mr László Perger, Priority Area 4 Coordinator, Ministry of Rural Development, Hungary
16. Ms Renáta Magulová, Priority Area 4 Coordinator, Ministry of the Environment, Slovak Republic
17. Ms Martina Majerová, Priority Area 4 Coordinator, Waste Research Institute, Slovak Republic
18. Mr Harald Egerer, observer, Carpathian Convention
19. Ms Giacomo Luciani, observer, Carpathian Convention
20. Mr Raimund Mair, observer, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River
21. Ms Ana Kobašić, PAC 6, Ministry of Culture, Nature Protection Directorate Croatia
22. Ms Ivna Vuksic, PA 6, Ministry of Culture, Nature Protection Directorate Croatia

Opening the meeting

Ms. Kornelija Pintarić, Priority Area Coordinator for the Priority Area 6 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), on behalf of the Ministry of Culture opened the meeting and welcomed participants at the 2nd Steering Group Meeting.

Mr. Andrej Plenković, State Secretary in the Ministry of foreign affairs and European integration, in his capacity as National Contact Point for the EUSDR welcomed the participants and thank all representatives for their contribution and engagement, which is very important for the success of common project – Danube Strategy. Mr Plenković stressed the successful cooperation between the state of Bavaria and Croatia in the PA6. He also emphasized importance of the attendance of all 14 countries for the effectiveness of the steering group and contribution to the political decision of the High-Level group. Mr Plenković informed attendees on status of Croatian EU negotiation process and achievements related to the Chapter 27 *Environmental Protection* and Chapter 22 *Regional Policy and coordination of structural instruments*. He also informed participants about proclamation Regional Park Mura-Drava and submission of the nomination for the Biosphere Reserve within the framework of the UNESCO “Man and Biosphere” by Ministry of Culture in September 2011.

Adoption of the Minutes Kick Off Steering Group Meeting

Steering Group adopted the Minutes of the Kick off Meeting (Munich, 20 June 2011).

Adoption of Agenda

Chairs presented Agenda ([BACKGROUND MATERIAL EUSDR/PA6/SG2/DRAFT AGENDA rev1](#)) and invited the participants for comments. No additional issues for discussion were raised. SG adopted presented Agenda.

Introduction by PACs and Chair

Six out of 14 countries were present at the meeting. New observers ICPDR and Carpathian Convention presented their work and possible role and opportunities for cooperation in the EUSDR. For Ukraine and Montenegro SG contacts are still missing.

Targets of Communication 715 on Danube Strategy: Revision and Adoption of Targets, issue on soil erosion ([BACKGROUND MATERIAL EUSDR/PA6/SG2/Targets of EUSDR PA6](#))

EC informed that the next High-Level Group meeting (to be held on 21 November) will take the final decision on the targets of the EUSDR. EC referred back to the e-mail exchanges between DG ENV and the PACs, that took place during the summer, on a proposal to amend the targets so as to include a reference to soils, in which PAC suggested to have discussion in the autumn. EC DG ENV representative informed the SG that DG REGIO was open to the discussion. She explained the importance of such an amendment and gave arguments why restoration of soils should be addressed in the practical implementation of the Danube Region Strategy. She noted that the PACs did not provide the EC proposal for the information of other PA6 SG members, which could have helped them preparing for the

topic. After lengthy discussion, SG agreed to make an amendment to an existing target as proposed by EC, in order to read:

- By 2020, ecosystems and their services are maintained and enhanced by establishing green infrastructure and restoring at least 15% of degraded ecosystems, *including degraded soils*

SG agreed that the term “*degraded soils*” refers to the soil that cannot provide functions as the healthy soil due to erosion and pollution. It was agreed to execute, in accordance with the PA6 Rules of procedure (Rule 6(4)) a written procedure on target amendment, baring in mind the date of HLG meeting in November.

Report by PACs

PACs presented what has been done since the Kick Off meeting (Munich, 20 June 2011) as provided in [BACKGROUND MATERIAL EUSDR/PA6/SG2/REPORT BY PACs](#).

Co-chairs informed on the problem of low participation by SG members and discussion was taken how to increase involvement of state representatives. SG endorsed the proposal for sending the letter by PAC to the High Level Group to take action for endorsement of stronger engagement of SG members to the meeting, and if needed nominate new member to the SG. It was discussed to involve other actors than from the ministry level of the countries, focus should be laid on committed and well networked actors. As they have no formal legitimation, it was discussed to separate such a stakeholder network from the official Steering Group, which shall remain the decision taking body.

It was agreed that as a first reaction, the letter from the PACs to the HLG will be sent, raising the issue of low participation. Depending from the reaction, further steps, e.g. the stakeholder network, can be taken into consideration.

Since at least one stakeholder workshop should be held by June 2012 SG discussed the possibility to hold future stakeholders workshops back to back with the SG meeting. PACs concluded that the work on defining criteria (who to involve, and how to involve) should be prepared by PAC in upcoming period.

It was noted that the links to funding programmes is partly achieved, specifically with a meeting of PAC with the JTS of the Interreg IVB South East Europe Programme in Budapest; there is still works to do concerning other relevant funding programmes. Especially the impact of the labelling procedure and of the Letter of Recommendation on the funding programmes needs to be discussed with the programmes. On the question of the limited resources, MS discussed problem for financing the new investments according to the priorities in EUSDR, taking into account 3 NOs of the EUSDR. Priorities/projects are driven by strategic documents, sometimes there are different priorities addressed in them than ones in EUSDR, and generating new projects is not feasible, since they are beyond the margins already set in strategic documents. EC informed that in 5th cohesion report stated that there is still money available for environment, among three areas that need investment nature is mentioned. SG and EC recognised gap for financing possibilities in non MS which emphasized

that financing priorities have been previously defined by operating programmes for absorption of precession funds and only defined priorities can be financed for now.

Databases for PA6 (projects and actors) ([BACKGROUND MATERIAL EUSDR/PA6/SG2/Database](#))

Database should list relevant projects, as a baseline about activities/projects conducted in the Danube region. After gathering information about existing projects and projects in development, a gap analysis in regard to the Action plan of PA6 shall be performed. On the basis of the gap analysis, the focus can be given to the generation and development of projects on topics, which are not or not sufficiently covered by the existent and projects under development. This approach seems to be appropriate also in the light of the fact that the available funds are limited in the current programming period, and funding programmes won't be changed. The EUSDR should nevertheless be reflected in strategic documents for the next programming period after 2013.

Carpathian convention and ICPDR presented their activities/ project in the region and overview table ICPDR activities and related Danube Strategy Actions will be sent to all SG members.

Steering Group - Working Plan ([BACKGROUND MATERIAL EUSDR/PA6/SG2/Working Plan for Steering Group](#))

Different ways to reach the Objectives were presented:

- Systematic review on **existing projects and initiatives** – combine the parallel worlds in the Danube Region to one world. Seeking for networking, synergies, capitalization & transfer.
- **Support projects under development.**
Needs: information about new projects (active and passive), contacts and meeting with project developers, contacts to relevant funding programmes, profound knowledge about funding schemes and evaluation criteria
- **Develop of new projects from the scratch.** Break down each action of the action plan into milestones, deadlines, responsibilities.

Since EC will have to report back to the Council in December 2012, the first report from the Steering Groups by PACs is due by June 2012. The report will indicate about the progress made in the Priority Areas, specifically, if there are a certain number of new and existing projects identified and assigned to the EUSDR / PA6, which are directly contributing to the implementation of the actions and targets of PA6. EC informed the SG that the progress will be measured action per action in each PA and the progress will be assessed. EC stressed that the implementation of the Strategy shall be forward looking, not restricted to collection and labelling of ongoing projects but actually initiating new actions. SG discussed intensely the proposal by DG REGIO of the need for a detailed action plan, breaking down each action of the action plan into milestones, deadlines, responsibilities, whereas the PAC insisted on a step-by-step approach (see discussion on the PA6 SG Working Plan). PAC pointed out that there are more ways how to reach first visible results by June 2012. The SG discussed intensely the two approaches.

SG discussed and agreed that PACs will develop **proposal of matrix** to be sent to the SG members and Observers by soon after the SG meeting for nomination of leading country/organisation for each of the action from the action plan. The nominations of the responsibilities shall be settled until end of November 2011. The nominated countries/organisation shall then perform a first screening for the respective action on existing and emerging projects and activities by the end of the year 2011. Next steps for the actions shall then be defined until June 2012. Details on the proceeding can be discussed within a next SG meeting. SG meeting may be convened to discuss the matrix and responsibilities of SG. Since part of the targets derive for the EU BD Strategy, for defining action under those actions take into account to set milestones and the plan for implementation of EUBD strategy. It was also noted that there are some soft actions which do not need separate project and large funding (adoption of legislation, strategies etc.).

Draft project application form

Application form ([Background material EUSDR_PA6_SG2_Draft project application form](#); [Background material EUSDR_PA6_SG2_Letter of recommendation](#)) was discussed by SG. Some countries expressed the need to keep the Form simple as possible to attract more applicants. Comments presented by SG members will be incorporated in draft Form and distributed by e-mail for approval. Also the wording in the Form will adjusted with wording in labelling criteria document BACKGROUND MATERIAL EUSDR/PA6/SG2/ Project Labelling). The new form with the proposed amendments will be submitted to the Steering Group soon. It will also be presented at the Pillar 2 PAC meeting on 17.11.2011 in Vienna.

The Form was specifically developed for new projects but can also be used for the labelling process of existing projects, as a result of the screening.

The application form for labelling the project "DANUBEPARKS II" was presented to SG at the meeting. It was decided that PAC6 will prepare Written Procedure according to the PA6 Rules of procedure (Rule 6(4)), for granting Letter of Recommendation to the this project and communicate it to all SG members by e-mail for approval having in mind the final date for project submission to the Interreg IVB South-East-Europe Programme.

Project Labelling

([BACKGROUND MATERIAL EUSDR/PA6/SG2/ Project Labelling](#))

Draft Project Labelling criteria were presented, discussed and revised. Agreed criteria are in Annex attached to the minutes. The new criteria were developed in a way that they can be used by PA4 and PA5 as well. This and other aspects of Pillar II cooperation will be discussed on 17.11.2011 by the PACs of PA 4, 5 and 6.

The EC highlighted that the terminology 'project application form', 'criteria for labelling' and 'letter of recommendation from PA' creates confusion as they do not at all suggest that these are different steps and tools of the very same process, namely to have a letter of

recommendation if the project idea submitted by using the application form, fitted to the list of criteria. It was suggested that this discrepancy be solved in order to make the process more understandable for the applicants and the outside world.

Web site

SG members are urged to use Interact web page for communication and exchange of information www.danube-region.eu, and encouraged all members (who haven't done yet) to join the Priority Area 06 Group.

Ending of meeting

The Co-chairs thanked the SG members and observers for their participation and contribution of the successful 2nd SG meeting and informed them that the next SG meeting will be prior to the June 2012 reporting.

Annexes

1. Agenda
2. Project Labelling criteria
3. Presentation PACs
4. List of Participants