



Slovenian Presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

1 November 2022 – 31 October 2023



SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE EUSDR 2022–2023

Contents

Introduction	4
Slovenian EUSDR Presidency 2022–23	6
Timeline of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency	8
Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region	14
Achievements during the Slovenian Presidency	20
Joint Statement of the Ministers Responsible for the Implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region	25
Impact Stories	30
We have left a trace	32

Introduction

Dear reader, Dear friend of the Danube Region,

In recent years, we have seen that cooperation and solidarity in the Danube Region are not just empty words. We witnessed close cooperation during the pandemic period and stand in genuine solidarity with Ukraine, which is facing unprovoked military aggression from the Russian Federation. Slovenia this year experienced the worst natural disaster in its recent history and we could not have recovered without unprecedented emergency assistance from our friends in the region and beyond.

This is what macro-regional strategies are all about. They promote stronger cooperation and solidarity while finding joint solutions to emerging regional challenges. When faced by war, migration or disastrous floods, we see how inextricably linked we are, regardless of the national or regional borders. Today, regional cooperation is a necessity, not an option.

TANJA FAJON

*Deputy Prime Minister and Minister
of Foreign and European Affairs of
the Republic of Slovenia*

With this in mind, the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency focused on deepening the cooperation across the EU borders. Our continent is undergoing rapid transformation and today, all the participating countries in the Danube macro-regional strategy are either EU members or candidate countries. I invite you to

further explore the potential of macro-regional cooperation so that we are ready for the EU Enlargement by 2030.

Since a successful vision requires action, we cannot lose sight of the goal of our cooperation – prosperity and sustainable development of the Danube Region. I am particularly happy that during our Presidency we tackled the essential question of how our societies will look in 20 years' time and what opportunities there are for the young generation in the region. The future perspective of our region depends on them and our task is to make the region and the European way of life more attractive for future generations.

Dear reader, let me conclude with a commitment and an invitation from our side. Slovenia will continue to strive for more cooperation in the region, but also towards building trust and securing the future beyond its borders. This will remain our commitment in the period 2024–2025 when Slovenia takes a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. I invite you to continue working with us.

ELISA FERREIRA
*Commissioner for Cohesion
and Reforms*

Dear reader,

The Danube Region holds immense potential for development. Over the years, the collective efforts of all stakeholders involved in the Danube Strategy have demonstrated the power of macro-regional cooperation in tackling major challenges and embracing opportunities. Through the commitment and hard work of the Strategy's stakeholders, numerous significant projects were launched in areas ranging from connectivity, energy efficiency, circular economy and water management to entrepreneurship and skills needed for the professions of the future.

I would like to thank the Slovenian Presidency for advancing the objectives of the Danube Strategy during these trying times, which has enabled the delivery of such successful projects.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has tested the resilience and unity of Europe and of the Danube Region deeply. It has highlighted the importance of collective cooperation and security writ large, including on cybersecurity and energy security. But it also reminded us of the importance of safeguarding the values and principles upon which our Union is built, including the notions of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Since last year, together with Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine is on the road to EU membership as an official candidate country. These countries' participation in

the Danube Strategy constitutes a great opportunity to cooperate and benefit from EU policies. On this path, public administration at all levels, together with civil society, NGOs, cluster organisations and all other involved stakeholders, have important roles to play.

The Danube Strategy has a central role in implementing Cohesion Policy and other EU objectives. I am very pleased to see that the priorities of the Danube Strategy are now embedded not only in Cohesion Policy programmes, but in several other relevant EU funding programmes of the 2021-2027 period, including the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument.

The financial investments that flow through the EU budget are meant to make the region more competitive, more resilient, and more sustainable and secure for future generations. This year, the Danube Strategy has reached an important step in the involvement of young people. I am delighted to see the Danube Youth Council now up and running. I really look forward to hearing from youth about how to further develop macro-regional strategies and about their recommendations on policy development. Empowering young people and promoting entrepreneurial and leadership skills of young talents remains a central goal of our strategies.

I would like to once again express my gratitude to the Slovenian Presidency of the Danube Strategy for their commitment and achievements during the past year. Together we are building a better, stronger, and more resilient Europe, where no person and no place is left behind.

Slovenian EUSDR Presidency 2022–23

Slovenia took over the Presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region from Ukraine on 1 November 2022 and holds the Presidency until 31 October 2023.

During its term, Slovenia has focused on the future development of the Danube Region and empowered cooperation of all EUSDR participating countries while maintaining full solidarity with Ukraine. Slovenia has acted as a promoter and facilitator of macro-regional cooperation in and between macro-regional strategies.

The Slovenian EUSDR Presidency has focused on four institutional priorities:

**EMPOWERING
INVOLVEMENT
IN EUSDR**

**IMPROVING
THE STRATEGIC
GOVERNANCE OF
EUSDR AND
MACRO-REGIONAL
STRATEGIES**

**YOUTH
INVOLVEMENT
AND ITS ROLE
IN THE EUSDR**

**EMBEDDING
PROCESS –
EVALUATION AND
FURTHER STEPS**

And two thematic priorities:

**TOWARDS A
KNOWLEDGE
SOCIETY AND
PROFESSIONS OF
THE FUTURE**

**TRANSPORT
AND ENERGY
CHALLENGES IN
THE DANUBE
REGION**

A year of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency in numbers:

32

All governance meetings

40

All thematic and other events

1

Countries acquiring EU candidate status

530

Posts on social media

1.8928

trillion hectolitres (estimate).
Amount of water flown from the Danube River into the Black Sea

1,113,000

(estimate) Babies born in the Danube Region in 2023

Timeline of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency

→ December

→ March

Empowering Cooperation: Opening event of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency & Informal NC-PAC Meeting – 1 & 2 December 2022

With the opening event held on 1 December 2022 at Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia began its Presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). The event was opened by the State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Marko Štucin. In the second part of the event, the one-year programme of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency and its institutional and thematic priorities were presented. The opening event of the Slovenian Presidency of the EUSDR continued with a discussion among EUSDR National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators, focusing on empowering involvement, strengthening the ownership of countries in the EUSDR and unlocking the potential of macro-regional cooperation for EU candidate countries.

Meeting of the Priority Area Coordinators – 16 & 17 March 2023

Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) from 14 countries of the Region, representatives of the Danube Region Programme, the European Commission, the Danube Youth Council and Danube Strategy Point met in Maribor under the auspices of the Slovenian Presidency of the EUSDR.

The meeting focused on the activities in the 12 thematic areas of the EUSDR and the potential cooperation with the Slovenian Presidency priorities, on support to Ukraine and finding synergies between thematic areas.

One of the key topics was youth involvement in the EUSDR and engagement of Danube Youth Council members in the work of the Priority Areas.

→ April

Opening event of the 4th EU MRS Week 2023 – 26 April 2023

On 26 April, the EU MRS Week 2023 opening session took place in a hybrid format with the European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira, and high representatives of countries presiding over the four macro-regional strategies.

State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, Marko Štucin, participated in the opening panel on behalf of the Slovenian Presidency of the EUSDR, where he presented Slovenia's view on the role of macro-regional strategies in solving the challenges Europe is facing, the need for greater energy cooperation and the role of macro-regional cooperation in the enlargement process. The opening session also focused on empowering youth and the European Year of Skills.

7th MRS TRIO Presidencies Meeting (within the framework of 4th EU MRS Week) – 28 April 2023

The Slovenian Presidency of the EUSDR chaired the 7th Meeting of Trio Presidencies of Macro-Regional Strategies and the European Commission. The central topic for discussion was the ensuring continuity and consistency of cooperation between macro-regional strategies under the 4 MRS Trio Presidency format. The Slovenian Presidency proposed a framework for establishing common ground for increasing the effectiveness and coherence of the MRS Trio Presidencies' work.

High-Level Group meeting – 28 April 2023

The final session of the 4th EU MRS Week was the High-Level Group Meeting, chaired by the European Commission, with the participation of the national coordinators of all countries participating in Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS).

The presidencies of all MRS discussed ways to strengthen the ownership of participating countries and further empower key MRS implementers with clear mandates, effective decision-making capacity and a clear vision of how their fields of work contribute to the broader policy context.

→ May

EUSDR Managing Authorities and Programming Authorities Network Meeting – 10 May 2023

The joint meeting of the Network of ERDF & CF Managing Authorities and IPA & NCIDI Programming Authorities on embedding the EUSDR into EU funding programmes took place on 10 May.

The meeting focusing on cross-sectoral and cross-MRS cooperation brought together 80 participants active in MRS cooperation and provided the framework for the relevant stakeholders from the EUSDR managing authorities networks to share their activities and experiences with regard to the MRS embedding process. The Slovenian Presidency highlighted the value of such meetings for the MRS and noted that there is still room for cooperation to bring an understanding of the embedding process on a local, national and regional level.

Meeting of the National Coordinators – 16 May 2023

On 16 May 2023, the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency held the meeting of the National Coordinators (NCs) of the EU Strategy for the Danube region in Brdo pri Kranju (Slovenia).

The meeting was attended by the national coordination teams of all 14 EUSDR participating states and the two main discussions revolved around the Danube Youth Council and the Guidelines on Empowering Involvement, where the Slovenian Presidency presented 12 recommendations for stronger involvement of countries and regions in the EUSDR.

Conference: Towards knowledge-driven society and professions of the future – 17 & 18 May 2023

The first thematic conference organised by the Slovenian Presidency took place on 17 and 18 May in Brdo pri Kranju, focusing on what knowledge-based societies will look like and adapting to the changes brought on by the green and digital transformation.

The discussions focused on the Strategic Foresight Perspective and R&I Foresight Perspective on the knowledge-driven society of 2040, uncovering international practices in the field of forecasting needs of the labour market and competencies required within the workforce, as well as exploring best practices of coordination and integration on the policy level.

Chat with the Presidency – 31 May 2023

A new format for exchange between the Presidency and Priority Area Coordinators was established at the initiative of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency on 31 May. The meeting, titled Chat with the Presidency, offers an informal meeting format and an open floor for communication between the Priority Area Coordinators and the EUSDR Presidency.

The participants of the first informal exchange discussed topics such as the upcoming NC-PAC Meeting, the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum, ways of involving businesses and SMEs in EUSDR, the EUSDR as a cooperation tool and more.

→ June

EUSDR Embedding Week – 12–16 June 2023

The 2nd EUSDR Embedding Week, organised by the Danube Strategy Point under the scope of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency, took place from 12 to 16 June 2023. Each day, a thematic workshop brought together EUSDR stakeholders, programming and managing authorities, TESIM, the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency and the European Commission to provide a forum for joint dialogue between programmes and the EUSDR on embedding and moving from the programming to the implementation phase. This year's edition of the Embedding Week emphasised cross-cutting topics and cross-PA cooperation.

→ August

Young Bled Strategic Forum – 25–28 August 2023

Ljubljana and Bled, Slovenia, hosted young professionals within the activities of the Young Bled Strategic Forum (Young BSF) and Bled Strategic Forum. More than forty young perspective leaders from 25 countries (with 13 EUSDR countries represented and 4 Danube Youth Council members present) joined forces to share past experience and creative energy in a three-day training and capacity-building event that took place between 25 and 28 August 2023. The Young Bled Strategic Forum was organised as part of the Priority Area 10 Institutional Capacity and Cooperation, co-funded by the European Union, and implemented within the activities of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency.

Young BSF 2023 was organised under the title “Mitigating our Butterfly Effect”, underlining the power and responsibility of all stakeholders within our societies to make positive changes and contributions in the short and long term. The activities of the Young BSF continued with active participation within the Bled Strategic Forum, which took place on 28 and 29 August 2023 in Bled, focusing on contributions to “Solidarity for Global Security”.

→ September

NC-PAC Meeting – 18 & 19 September 2023

At the final core governance meeting under the Slovenian Presidency, National Coordinators, Priority Areas Coordinators, the European Commission and the Danube Region Programme focused on the upcoming 12th EUSDR Annual Forum and Ministerial Meeting on 24 & 25 October in Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia.

It was also an opportunity to take stock of the current and upcoming activities and developments of the Strategy on the national as well as on the priority area level, with an emphasis on the inclusion of young people in the EUSDR.

The Slovenian Presidency also presented the results of the Presidency's Guidelines on Empowering Involvement, with 12 recommendations for better EUSDR visibility, funding possibilities, and stronger political and stakeholder involvement.

Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week – 19–22 September 2023

The 8th Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week in Izola was held under the motto "Stronger cooperation for a better future". The Mediterranean Coast Week has become a major cross macro-regional event, hosting representatives from all four macro-regional strategies and enhancing opportunities for thematic cooperation between them. The thematic focus of the 8th Mediterranean Coast Week was circular economy with an exchange of experiences from stakeholders from all MRS. The Slovenian EUSDR Presidency also participated in 8th MRS Trio Presidencies meeting, organised by the Croatian EUSAIR Presidency, where discussion on enhancing cooperation between the strategies, initiated by the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency at the previous meeting in April, continued.

→ October

→ November

2nd Danube Youth Camp and POPRI Start-up Challenge: “From talents to Danube Region Strengths” – 20–24 October 2023

The POPRI Start-up Challenge, organised within the framework of the second Danube Youth Camp, brought together all Danube Youth Council members and young participants from other regions to give them the opportunity to address one of the most pressing issues for young generation: brain drain and talent development in the region. Over three consecutive days young participants worked with well-known entrepreneurs, developers and policy experts to come up with their own recommendations that were later presented in the Annual Forum.

10th Danube Participation Day – 23 October 2023

The 10th edition of Danube Participation Day took place at the University of Ljubljana with the title “Ukraine’s recovery towards EU membership”. It focused on the question of how the EUSDR can strengthen civil society and local actors for a sustainable recovery of Ukraine towards its membership in the EU and what lessons can be learned for the Republic of Moldova. The 10th Danube Participation Day was opened by State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovenia, Marko Štucin, who highlighted the role of empowered civil society for a successful EU integration process.

12th EUSDR Annual Forum – 24 & 25 October 2023

The 12th EUSDR Annual Forum, jointly organised by the Republic of Slovenia, the European Commission and the Danube Region Programme with the support of the Danube Strategy Point, took place live on 24–25 October 2023 in Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia. With the slogan EUSDR Entering the Decade of the Future, the Forum will feature discussions on the EU enlargement and support to the accession countries, the recovery of Ukraine, the embedding process, energy and transport challenges of the Region, youth involvement in the EUSDR and professions of the future.

Austria begins the EUSDR Presidency

Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

24–25
October
2023

Brdo pri Kranju,
Slovenia

EUSDR Entering the Decade of the Future

DRAFT AGENDA

24 October 2023

10:00–11:30

Splendens hall

Beyond Boundaries: Rethinking the Danube's Potential with Emerging Voices

The panel organised by the Danube Youth Council will provide an opportunity to exchange views on how the future of the Danube Region and its “power of youth” is seen by different stakeholders and generations.

Panelists:

Prof. Dr. Zdravko Kačič, Rector, University of Maribor, Slovenia

Elisa Cocco, Programme Assistant, DG REGIO, European Commission

Nataliia Pokhyliuk, ABLE NGO, Germany

DYC communication winner of the POPRI challenge (22-23 October 2023)

Moderator: **Urška Jež**, CEO, Transformation Lighthouse, Slovenia,
and **Maty Mihaľko**, Danube Youth Council (DYC)

9:30–12:00

Brdo Castle

Meeting of Ministers responsible for the EUSDR

(invitation only)

11:15–13:00

The Lobby

Lunch

13:00–13:30

Grandis hall

Official Opening of the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum

Tanja Fajon, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Slovenia

Aleksander Jevšek, Minister of Cohesion and Regional Development of the Republic of Slovenia

Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms (video message)

13:30–15:00

Grandis hall

High-level plenary panel: The EU Enlargement Process & EUSDR

Discussion on the role of MRS cooperation in the framework of the new impetus of the EU enlargement process.

Tanja Fajon, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Slovenia

Alexander Schallenberg, Minister of European and International Affairs, Austria

Elmedin Konaković, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Gordan Grlić Radman, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Croatia

Ana Novaković Đurović, Minister of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism and Coordinator of the Ministry of European Affairs, Montenegro

Tanja Mišćević, Minister of European Integration, Republic of Serbia

Eugeniu Harabara, Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Republic of Moldova

Andrii Taran, Ambassador of Ukraine to the Republic of Slovenia

Moderator: **Igor E. Bergant**, journalist and TV news presenter

15:00–15:15 <i>Grandis hall</i>	Handover Ceremony of the EUSDR Presidency to Austria Tanja Fajon , Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Slovenia Alexander Schallenberg , Minister of European and International Affairs, Austria
15:15–15:30 <i>The Lobby</i>	Break
15:15–15:45 <i>Glass hall</i>	Press conference
15:30–16:30 <i>Grandis hall</i>	Danube Region Programme - A new beginning for cooperation and EU integration Discussion on the future of cooperation and development in the Danube Region and the role that the new Danube Region Programme can play in supporting these efforts, focusing on Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, but not forgetting the Balkan countries. Moray Gilland , European Commission (online) Simona Ene , Head of Danube Region Programme Joint Secretariat, Hungary Ion Gumene , State Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Republic of Moldova Rostyslav Tomenchuk , Director General of the Directorate for International Technical Assistance Coordination, Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine Moderator: Stephen Halligan , Danube Region Programme
16:30–17:45 <i>Grandis hall</i>	Bottom-up recovery and transformation of Ukraine - Supporting Ukraine and Moldova on their way to the EU The panel will be an opportunity to explore the role of local and regional stakeholders and non-state actors (civil society and NGOs) in the recovery of Ukraine and its path towards the EU. The focus of the panel will be on how the EUSDR can build an environment where all these actors could help generate the biggest yields in terms of their contribution to the accession process. Panelists: Eugeniu Harabara , Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Republic of Moldova Oleksandr Nikolaiev , Deputy Head of the Department of International Cooperation and European Integration, Ministry for Communities, Territories and Infrastructure Development, Ukraine Alexander Urbanski , Deputy Chairman of Odessa Regional Council Stefan August Lütgenau , Founding Director of Foster Europe Foundation, Danube Civil Society Forum Nina Čepon , Executive Director, Centre for European Perspective, Slovenia Moderator: Nadija Afanasieva , Ukrainian Institute for International Politics
17:45–18:30 <i>The Lobby</i>	Break
18:30–19:00 <i>Grandis hall</i>	Concert by the Slovenian and Ukrainian Youth Orchestra
19:00 <i>Splendens hall+Lobby</i>	Networking dinner

09:30–11:00

Grandis hall

Knowledge-driven society: a regional search for the competences and skills of future professions

The panel will provide an opportunity to explore the key issues and offer possible recommendations for policymakers, focusing on the knowledge, skills and competences needed in the professions of the future.

Panelists:

Katarína Cséfalvayová, Executive Lead of the Danube Tech Valley Initiative, Slovakia

Prof. Dieter Hertweck, Professor at Reutlingen University of Applied Sciences and former Leader of Work Group Digital Danube of PA 8 EUSDR, Germany

Mitja Jermol, UNESCO Chair on Open Technologies for Open Educational Resources and Open Learning at Jozef Stefan Institute, Slovenia

Viktor Nedović, Director, Serbia Accelerating Innovation and Growth, Entrepreneurship (SAIGE) Project, Serbia

Ildikó Pathóová, Director of the Lifelong Learning Unit at the Secondary Education and LLL Division, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, Slovakia

Duška Rakin and Tamara Živanović, 2022 POPRI award winner for “VeYo”, Serbia

Moderator: **Prof. Dr. Zdravko Kačič**, Rector, University of Maribor, Slovenia

9:30–11:00

Heros hall

Danube Region Programme 2nd call for proposals

The panel will focus on presenting the 2nd call's main features as well as how it differs from the 1st call for proposals. Additionally the presenters will provide examples of best practices in terms of transnational approach.

Panelists:

Simona Ene, Head of Danube Region Programme's Joint Secretariat

Katalin Kovács-Kacza, Project Officer

Natália Liholot, Project Officer

Stephen Halligan, Senior Project Officer

Horst Schindler, Project Officer

Johannes Gabriel, Senior Project Officer

Moderator: **Mirjana Vidanović**, Communication Officer, Danube Region Programme

09:30–11:00

Splendens hall

Mobility & Multimodality: The Impact of Large Projects for Improved Connectivity

Transport infrastructure is a key ingredient in the economic development, supporting personal well-being and economic growth. In addition, goals such as efficient, safe, resilient and sustainable multimodal network should not be neglected when the transport network is planned and expanded.

The main aim of the panel is to look at some of many great projects in the Danube region that contribute or will contribute to improved mobility, connectivity, accessibility and cohesion and explore their implications related to environmental, economic and social issues.

Panelists:

Helmut Adelsberger, Consultant Engineer for Civil Engineering, InfraConceptA, Austria

Zoran Andrić, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ljubinka Ivanović, Acting Director, Directorate for capital and IPA projects, Ministry of Capital Investments, Montenegro

Kristijan Novak, Expert associate for EU funds, The Second railway line Koper-Divača, Ltd., Slovenia

Miodrag Poledica, Director of the Department for Strategy, Design and Development, PE “Roads of Serbia”, Serbia

Moderator: **Vlasta Kampoš-Jelenc**, Head of Unit, Ministry of Infrastructure, Slovenia

11:00–11:30
The Lobby

Break

11:30–13:00
Grandis hall

Enhancing the hydrogen economy in the Danube Region

Hydrogen provides excellent opportunities for the EUSDR countries to move their energy systems further along the decarbonisation pathways. Discussion will focus on the key challenges for the development of the hydrogen economy in the Danube Region and provide some examples of good practices.

Keynote address:

Ádám Balogh, Senior Energy Infrastructure Expert, Energy Community

Panelists:

Marko Bahor, Executive Director for Development and Investments, Slovenian Power Plants Holding, Slovenia

Teodóra Diána Bakk, Chief Operating Officer, University of Pécs, National Laboratory for Renewable Energy, Hungary

Julian Dörr, Researcher, Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Engineering IAO, University of Stuttgart

Vlasta Krmelj, Director of Climate and Energy Agency of Podravje, AMETHyST project partner

Moderator: **Annamária Nádor**, EUSDR Priority Area Coordinator 2 - "Sustainable Energy"

11:30–13:00
Splendens Hall

Entering the decade of future - current and forthcoming water challenges

A panel will provide an opportunity to explore the forthcoming challenges in water management in the Danube Region, which stem from extreme weather events related to climate change, such as heatwaves, floods, drought and water scarcity. Panelists will according to their expertise discuss possible recommendations for policymakers dealing with water management in the Danube Region.

Keynote address:

Birgit Vogel, Executive Secretary, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River

Panelists:

Prof. Dr. Chari Tjaša Giessler Bulc, Regional Chair, Global Water Partnership CEE – Nature Based Solutions

Dario Masante, Joint Research Centre of European Commission, Disaster Risk Management Unit E.1 – European Drought Observatory for Resilience and Adaptation

Márton Pesel, Priority Area Coordinator Hungary, EU Strategy for the Danube Region PA 4 "Water Quality" - Danube Water balance

Danka Thalmeinerová, Priority Area Coordinator Slovakia, EU Strategy for the Danube Region PA 4 "Water Quality" – Climate and migratory fish

Moderator: **Zsuzsanna Kocsis-Kupper**, Priority Area Coordinator Hungary, EU Strategy for the Danube Region P A4 "Water Quality"

13:00–14:30
The Lobby

Lunch

14:30–16:00
Grandis hall

Strategic planning and budgeting - Funding through and beyond IPA III/NDICI in the Danube Region

The panel will explore the IPAIII/NDICI programming framework and how MRS/EUSDR is displayed therein. Based on an open discussion the recommendations for further improvements shall be made to stakeholders at the EU, macroregional and national level as well as regional initiatives in the Danube Region.

Keynote address:

Besiana Ninka, Interact Programme

Panelists:

Sanda Šimić Stambolić, Acting Assistant Minister, Ministry of European Integration, National IPA Coordination, Republic of Serbia

Bojan Vujović, Director General for EU Funds in the Ministry of European Affairs and National Coordinator for the EUSDR, Montenegro

Eugeniu Harabara, Deputy Secretary General, Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Republic of Moldova

Rostyslav Tomenchuk, Director General of the Directorate for International Technical Assistance Coordination, Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers, Ukraine

Zara Halilović, Assistant Director, Directorate for European Integration, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Moderator: **Andreja Jerina**, former National Coordinator for EUSDR, EUSAIR and EUSALP, Slovenia

16:00–16:30
Grandis hall

Closing of the 12th Annual Forum 2023

SIDE EVENTS

20 October 2023

19:00–20:00

Hotel Lipa,
Šempeter pri Gorici

2nd Danube Youth Camp

During a reflection workshop on Saturday, 21 October 2023, the 28 DYC members will look back on their DYC mandate, jointly reflect on experiences, challenges and lessons learnt, discuss the future developments of the DYC and formulate recommendations for its future work, moving from the one-year Pilot Action to a long-term implementation format.

21 October 2023

09:30–16:00

Hotel Lipa,
Šempeter pri Gorici

2nd Danube Youth Camp

During a reflection workshop on Saturday, 21 October 2023, the 28 DYC members will look back on their DYC mandate, jointly reflect on experiences, challenges and lessons learnt, discuss the future developments of the DYC and formulate recommendations for its future work, moving from the one-year Pilot Action to a long-term implementation format.

22 October 2023

12:00–21:00

Primorska Technology Park,
Šempeter pri Gorici

POPRI Start-up Challenge: From talents to the Danube Region's strengths

The POPRI startup challenge, an event that uses the capacity building method for enhancing entrepreneurial and leadership skills will focus on the importance of young talents and possible ways to tackle brain drain in the Danube Region.

23 October 2023

8:00–17:00

*Primorska
Technology Park,
Šempeter pri Gorici*

POPRI Start-up Challenge: From talents to the Danube Region's strengths

The POPRI startup challenge, an event that uses the capacity building method for enhancing entrepreneurial and leadership skills will focus on the importance of young talents and possible ways to tackle brain drain in the Danube Region.

09:00–15:00

*Faculty of Social
Sciences, Ljubljana*

10th Danube Participation Day

The 10th Danube Participation Day under the slogan "Ukraine's recovery towards EU membership" will aim to explore how can the EUSDR strengthen civil society and local actors for a sustainable recovery towards EU membership and what can we learn for Moldova.

24 October 2023

10:00–12:00

Heros hall

Danube Transfer Centre Network Ceremony - Strengthening regional transformation by boosting the competitiveness of the enterprises and turning the knowledge into value for regions, economy and society

Steinbeis Europa Zentrum cordially invite to the Official Ceremony for the Danube Transfer Centre Network. The Danube Transfer Centres (DTC) Network, a flagship project of the EUSDR Priority Area 8 "Competitiveness" (PA8), Working Group "Innovation and Technology Transfer", contributes to enhanced networking and capacity building within the Danube macro-region in the field of innovation and technology transfer. During the Official Ceremony of the DTC Network on 24th of October 2023, 10:00 – 12:00, we would like to celebrate the introduction of new members to the DTC Network and the reinforcement of existing alliances. We are particularly pleased to be able to further contribute to the development and unity of the Danube region and generating a transnational added value, through the initiation and implementation of various projects.

25 October 2023

11:30–17:00

Heros hall

C2Lab – Kick-start your next project

SMEs, clusters, research organisations, social and public entities are invited to join an interactive workshop to meet, network, exchange ideas, and initiative new project proposals. Guided by experts on project creation and management, you have the possibility to forge new alliances and project consortia for the topic of your interest, for example mobility, energy, skills, or networks. You can either join with a concrete project idea, or offer your skills and knowledge in new areas. This workshop is offered by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform and is open to participants from the EU and SMP/COSME countries.

26 October 2023

09:00–15:00

*Austria Trend Hotel
Ljubljana*

C2Lab – Kick-start your next project

SMEs, clusters, research organisations, social and public entities are invited to join an interactive workshop to meet, network, exchange ideas, and initiative new project proposals. Guided by experts on project creation and management, you have the possibility to forge new alliances and project consortia for the topic of your interest, for example mobility, energy, skills, or networks. You can either join with a concrete project idea, or offer your skills and knowledge in new areas. This workshop is offered by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform and is open to participants from the EU and SMP/COSME countries.

Achievements during the Slovenian Presidency



Empowering involvement and improving the Governance of EUSDR – an institutional exchange on the needs and recommendations to empower countries, regions and stakeholders for better cooperation within the EUSDR has led to the preparation of Guidelines for Empowering Involvement and concrete results: revision of Rules of Procedure for National Coordinators and Rules of Procedure for Priority Area Coordinators as well as revision of the EUSDR Governance Architecture Paper.



Enhancing the visibility of the Strategy – through a focused media campaign, nine EUSDR Impact Stories and videos were published targeting a broad audience through social media and other channels. Press releases and information about the EUSDR were published and shared in media across the EU and beyond.



Supporting stakeholder involvement in Priority Areas – the tasks, roles and responsibilities of SG members, including the process of nomination by National Coordinators and the introduction of new stakeholders, as well as the systematic exchange of National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators for better overall support of stakeholder involvement in EUSDR Priority Areas, have been updated based on an overview of countries' participation in Steering Group meetings.



Forecasting the future knowledge-driven society – the first-ever thematic conference on Knowledge-driven society and professions of the future gave an insight into what society and the economy in the Danube Region could look like in 2040. The importance of strengthening synergies and exchanges between different policymakers and stakeholders to improve science, technology and innovation in the Region was included in the Joint Statement of the Ministers Responsible for the Implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.



Giving a voice to the young generation – members of the Danube Youth Council have been involved in a year-long campaign to have their say on the topic they feel passionate about – brain drain and talent development in the Danube Region. Through the POPRI Start-up Challenge, they developed their recommendations that were presented at the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum.



Securing the future of Danube Youth Council (DYC) – the work programme and financing framework for the DYC was endorsed, thereby securing its long-term perspective and work. Also during the Slovenian Presidency, the next generation of the DYC was initiated, enabling 28 young people from all 14 EUSDR countries to continue their engagement with the Strategy.



Keeping embedding as a top priority – the Guidance Paper on Embedding highlighted concrete steps from the programming to the implementation phase and towards successful funding of EUSDR priorities with special focus on embedding in non-EU countries, cross-cooperation between macro-regional strategies and cross-cooperation between the Priority Areas. A joint meeting was held between ERDF/CF and IPA/NDICI managing and programming authorities, with more than 80 participants from various EU, transnational, cross-border, national and regional programmes, programming authorities and EUSDR stakeholders. After successfully holding the 2nd EUSDR Embedding Week, the topic of embedding was also one of the key thematic events at the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum.



Enhancing cooperation across macro-regional strategies – the EUSDR TRIO Presidency hosted the 7th meeting of the MRS TRIO Presidencies in Brussels and proposed a framework for cooperation to ensure its continuity, effectiveness and coherence. The framework has now been taken forward by the Croatian EUSAIR Presidency.

We did it together!

Joint Statement of the Ministers Responsible for the Implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Brdo pri Kranju, 24 October 2023

We, the Ministers responsible for the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (hereinafter referred to as “EUSDR”), gathered on 24 October 2023 on the occasion of the 12th Annual Forum of the EUSDR jointly organised by the Republic of Slovenia, the European Commission and the Danube Region Programme with the support of the Danube Strategy Point:

Acknowledge that the Danube macro-region in the second decade of its existence faces some of the most significant challenges, in the field of energy, economic situation, health (caused by the COVID-19 pandemic) and the continuation of Russia’s unprovoked military invasion of Ukraine.

Condemn in the strongest terms the continuation of Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. **Express** full solidarity with the people of Ukraine, **reiterate** full support for the country’s sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognised borders, including territorial waters, and **encourage** all EUSDR stakeholders to make use of the structures offered by the EUSDR in supporting Ukraine now and in contributing to its reconstruction.

Consider Russia’s repeated military strikes on Danube port infrastructure, grain storage facilities and surrounding areas as undermining global food security by posing a significant threat to the freedom of navigation on the Danube as well as an environmental threat to the Danube ecosystem on both sides of the river. **Encourage** discussion of possible ways to effectively counteract obstruction of free trade navigation.

Express solidarity with the people in the regions severely affected by natural disasters this summer. Their homes were devastated, as was public infrastructure and agricultural land. **Reconfirm** the importance of the macro-regional and EU cooperation on preparedness and response to natural disasters and reconstruction. **Encourage the** enhanced cooperation of officials and volunteer organisations within the EUSDR.

Welcome the EU candidate status granted to Ukraine, Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, herewith making all countries participating in the EUSDR now either member states of the EU or accession candidates. **Recognise** the renewed momentum of the EU enlargement process and **confirm** full commitment of all candidate countries participating in the EUSDR to their EU membership perspective. **Encourage** participating countries and regions to explore all cooperation and capacity-building networks within the EUSDR to contribute to accelerated EU accession process and **invite** all EUSDR core stakeholders to make best use of multi-stakeholder engagement, connecting local, regional and national levels in this process.

Confirm our commitment to cooperation within the framework of the EUSDR to overcome existing and new challenges in the Danube Region and **emphasise** the importance of sustainable regional development, creating synergies between macro-regional strategies and the EU Cohesion Policy. In this context, **welcome** the initiative of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency on empowering cooperation of all EUSDR stakeholders in the fields of visibility, stakeholder involvement and funding for implementation.

Recognise the key roles of the EUSDR National Coordinators as core strategic decision-makers in the EUSDR and of the EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators and the Steering Group members as key facilitators in the implementation and promotion of the Strategy. **Encourage** empowered engagement of stakeholders in the EUSDR Priority Areas and **reaffirm** the indispensable role of the Danube Strategy Point as the Strategy's secretariat, contributing to institutional memory, continuity and efficient implementation of the EUSDR. **Emphasise** the role of the European Commission as a key strategic coordination partner of the EUSDR and call on the Commission to strengthen the involvement of all its relevant services in the core governance of the EUSDR. Encourage future EUSDR TRIO Presidencies to actively pursue synergies and cooperation with other EU macro-regional strategies.

Appreciate the establishment and efforts of the first Danube Youth Council (DYC) and **look forward** to its further active involvement in the Strategy. **Recognise** valuable contributions of DYC members to the implementation of the objectives of EUSDR Priority Areas as well as to the EUSDR Presidency's priorities. **Call** for the continuation of an ambitious DYC working programme and for continued capacity-building support and guidance provided by the Danube Strategy Point, and by applying the POPRI method, a capacity building tool enhancing leadership and entrepreneurial skills of young people. **Recognise** the need to explore solutions addressing local and regional talent retention and development.

Welcome the initiative of exploring possible policy measures, actively supported by regional and national stakeholders such as the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) and the European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) in the field of knowledge excellence, which are pioneering European legal forms of cooperation designed to facilitate and enhance cross-border activities across the European Union. These policy measures need to be harmonised and implemented in the next decades to ensure a socially and economically sustainable and knowledge-driven, competitive society. Based on the outcomes of EC Strategic Foresight, **recognise** the need for more digital, sustainable, personal, social and civic skills and competencies in the Danube Region. **Support** the development of methods and processes of strategic foresight, based on global and EU data, taking into account the needs of the Danube Region. Furthermore, **invite** policymakers and stakeholders to take into account, as much as possible, recommendations made by the DYC concerning talent retention and development in the Danube Region. Also, **take into account** the recommendations of the Danube Rectors' Conference (DRC) based on DRC Strategic Foresight and DRC Initiative Fund projects.

Take note of the profound changes resulting from rapid development of artificial intelligence and **recognise** the need for its regulation without hampering innovation to serve the societies and economies in the Danube Region on their path to sustainable development. **Encourage** strengthening synergies and exchanges between different policymakers and stakeholders to improve cooperation on science, technology and innovation (STI) and education and training cooperation between countries and regions, to establish new Skills Academies, European Universities alliances and Innovation valleys/hubs. **Strengthen** the Danube Region to become the perspective region for quality of study and research for young talents, by enabling the knowledge providers to open their programmes and infrastructure in line with the principles of the Open Access policy and joint research and studies from and to the Danube Region.

Recognise the need to accelerate the green energy transition while ensuring the security of energy supply and support the efforts of the EUSDR in searching for synergies and more intense exchange of best practices among the countries of the Danube Region in deploying clean energy technologies. **Continue** to promote the diversification of energy supply sources and thereby contribute to reducing the dependence on Russian fossil fuels.

Highlight the significance of implementing the European Green Deal in the fight against climate change and environmental degradation and its alignment with the EUSDR's priorities in securing water quality, prevent environmental risks and safeguard biodiversity, protect natural landscapes and secure air and soil quality in the Danube Region. **Emphasise**, in the context of the European Green Deal, the importance of reduced bureaucracy and simplified procedures for its implementation.

Reaffirm the important role of transport in the economic, social and sustainable development in the Danube Region as well as the necessity of investment in the development and improvement of transport infrastructure in the Danube Region. Therefore, **call** upon all interested parties of the EUSDR to strengthen mutual infrastructure connections, develop new logistic routes and seek solutions on sustainable ways to close gaps and remove bottlenecks in the Danube Region transport network, including the support for mobility projects with macro-regional added value. In this regard, **emphasise** the focus on joint activities that promote smart transport infrastructure and services in order to improve their attractiveness and competitiveness by using the latest available technologies and, at the same time, **promote** sustainable modes of transport that support the common goals of climate and environmental protection. Furthermore, **encourage** enhancing the EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes and support the improvement of connections to the Western Balkan region bringing them closer to the EU (Green Lanes).

Take note of the thorough process of aligning the EUSDR priorities with EU, national and regional funds, which is also known as “embedding”, and the possibilities provided by embedding the EUSDR in relevant cohesion policy programmes as well as IPA / NDICI funds. **Acknowledge** the support of the Danube Region Programme in the implementation of the EUSDR and appreciate the decision to consider the entire territory of Ukraine as eligible in the Calls for Proposals. **Highlight** the importance of the networks of managing and programming authorities active in the EUSDR as efficient tools enabling intensified communication and coordination in the field of EUSDR implementation. Furthermore, **call** on the Commission and its services relevant for embedding activities, in particular DG REGIO and DG NEAR, to provide strong support in this process throughout the entire funding period, and to support the process of monitoring the embedding results.

Appreciate the regular organisation of the DARIF Joint Operations since 2013 to develop criminal and law enforcement cooperation along the Danube waterway and conferences at the political level, namely the 3rd Danube Security Conference of Ministers of Interior of EUSDR countries, held at the Representation of the Free State of Bavaria in Brussels on 23–24 March 2023, and the conference “The Danube Region at the turn of times – actively shaping the transformation. Solution approaches for politics and business” on 10 July 2023 in Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg.

Encourage to continue organising ministerial meetings and other political events also on other EUSDR thematic areas at regional, national and EU levels to deepen the political ownership of the EUSDR and call for a revival of annual Danube Parliamentary Conferences as one of the main tools for enhancing the political commitment and visibility of the EUSDR.



In conclusion we, the Ministers of the EUSDR, **appreciate** the work done so far and the efforts made by the stakeholders at a time when the EUSDR has entered its second decade of existence. We **confirm** our political engagement and will continue to rally our efforts to strengthen cooperation within the EUSDR, as well as to provide political guidelines for further development of the Strategy, unlocking the full potential of the Danube Region.

Finally, we **entrust** the EUSDR Presidency 2024 to Austria and wish it every success in chairing the Strategy.



We have left a trace

We have been addressing the challenges of our future during the whole year of the EUSDR Presidency. Those who are most entitled to talk about the future are the young generation. This is why we worked closely with the Danube Youth Council.

We are delighted that the Danube Youth Council became operational during our Presidency. The Danube macro-regional strategy is now the second strategy to have established a youth council. The Youth Council representatives actively participated at the Young BSF and worked on concrete challenges by learning and applying the POPRI Start-up Challenge method for enhancing entrepreneurial and leadership skills. We encouraged them to prepare their own recommendations for the Region. The Danube Council members also organised their own discussion at the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum where they presented the outcomes of the POPRI Start-up Challenge and what they learnt from the one-year NYC mandate.

Petra Česen Čatar

*National Coordinator of EU Strategy
for the Danube Region
Ministry of Foreign and European
Affairs Slovenia*

Having in mind the Region's future, we initiated a discussion on empowering all countries and regions for stronger involvement in the Strategy. During 2023 we pursued our goal and provided concrete Guidelines for future work in the Strategy with twelve recommendations for stronger political and stakeholder involvement, for better visibility and for funding for implementation. I hope the Strategy will now be easier to implement.

The Danube Region and Europe as a whole are undergoing rapid transformation. To understand and react to this transformation the role of quickly evolving science and knowledge is crucial. We addressed the expected transformation of societies, the role of knowledge in them, the professions of the future, the mobility of the workforce and the resulting adjustments that will be required to tackle these challenges.

One focus of our Presidency was to assess the effectiveness of the embedding process and monitor its outcomes. In May, the Guidance Paper on Embedding the EUSDR within the EU Programmes was published. The Second EUSDR Embedding Week took place in June. Our Presidency also prioritised better alignment and coordination of IPA III and NDICI financial instruments with macro-regional priorities and other specific topics relevant to candidate countries.

Macro-regional cooperation involves numerous stakeholders from local, regional and national levels, and provides concrete results such as strategic projects or processes. One of our aims was to increase the future visibility of the Strategy through impact stories. With the presentation of nine impact stories during the whole year, from the DAVID project for better connectivity to the VEGA super-computer, we aimed to present the actual results of macro-regional cooperation to wider audience.

To sum up, while striving to pursue our slogan "EUSDR Entering the Decade of the Future" we were working for brighter future for the whole Danube Region.

Dr. Robert Lichtner
Head of Danube Strategy Point

From its source in the Black Forest (Germany) to its mouth in the Black Sea (Romania-Ukraine-Moldova), the River Danube flows through ten countries, and four other countries as tributaries, on its 2,857-kilometre journey through Europe. As the second longest river in Europe and the most international river in the world, it connects 14 countries and a total of 115 million inhabitants – making it an extremely important region for the whole of Europe in geographical, geopolitical, population, cultural and socio-economic terms. The diversity of the region also holds many potentials and opportunities.

Under the slogan “Prosperity through Diversity”, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region unites states in joint efforts to collaboratively address the issues individual states cannot solve alone, providing a vital tool for the EU’s Cohesion Policy and other EU and global goals.

From 1 November 2022 to 31 October 2023, Slovenia held the Presidency of the EUSDR and set the course for the future development of the Danube Region, focusing on strengthening cooperation among all countries participating in the EUSDR.

In its presidency programme Slovenia focused on engaging stakeholders involved in the implementation of the EUSDR, internal and external communication and capacity building in the EUSDR member states and all stakeholders involved in the EUSDR in a cooperative and committed manner. The Slovenian EUSDR Presidency was also able to draw on its extensive experience and capacity gained through its membership in three out of four macro-regional strategies (EUSALP, EUSAIR, EUSDR). By providing guidance and leadership inside and outside the Danube Region, the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency has demonstrated the success of the EUSDR as an instrument of European territorial and regional cooperation.

Amid multiple crises, the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency has maintained strong support and solidarity with Ukraine, the former EUSDR Presidency, not only expressing the unity of the EUSDR and the EU, but also focusing on supporting the country, still suffering from the invasion, from a horizontal perspective – politically and content-wise.

Moreover, the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency kept the EU enlargement agenda as one of its top priorities and took concrete measures for greater involvement of and cooperation with the Western Balkan countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia), Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, thus emphasising a regional perspective within the EU enlargement process.

The stronger and more efficient cooperation between all actors within the EUSDR, but also the efforts for closer cooperation among the Presidencies of all four macro-regional strategies, have further paved the way for better implementation of the Strategy beyond the first decade.

For the Danube Strategy Point – the secretariat and strategic unit for support, implementation, communication, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation of the EUSDR – the close cooperation and joint efforts between the Presidency and the DSP have demonstrated the stability of the EUSDR governance structures and their continuous evolution. The horizontal approaches and cross-sectoral measures that have been established have provided vital impetus and concrete tools for the EUSDR presidencies to come. Through embedding, monitoring and evaluation measures, the joint work has continued to focus on concrete and tangible ways to attract funding for the implementation of the Strategy and to provide first impulses for the place of the EUSDR in the programming of the new Cohesion Policy beyond 2027. Sustainable engagement and empowerment of young people in the EUSDR was achieved through the Danube Youth Council. By improving existing and elaborating new cooperation formats within the EUSDR governance, the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency and the DSP have also provided a future-oriented framework for better multi-level governance within the Danube Region Strategy, also keeping in mind communication and outreach within and outside the Strategy.

Slovenian Presidency of the EUSDR 2022-2023

Editors: Aleš Rovšnik, Rafaela Križman, Petra Česen Čatar, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs

Technical editor: Ana Novak, Centre for European Perspective, Andrej Juvan, Premedia

Content contributed by: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Danube Strategy Point, European Commission

Translation: Translation Service of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs

Photos: Archives of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Danube Strategy Point, European Commission, Unsplash

Published by: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

Print run: 500

Ljubljana, 2023

The booklet was prepared on the occasion of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in 2023. Brochure is funded by European Union funds.

This paper was supported as part of DRP010004 - DSP 3, an Interreg Danube Region Programme project co-funded by the European Union. The content of this paper reflects the opinion of their authors and does not in any way represent the opinions of the European Union.

