

## **The Cooperation of the Danube Countries within the frames of the Priority Area 11 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region /EUSDR/**

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**Abstract:** The goal of this paper is to underline the importance of the issues, which are object of intervention within Priority 11 of the EUSDR, namely working together to tackle security and organized crime. The author has presented a large scale study on the security issues in European context, reflected in his PhD dissertation. Exploration of the existing EU programming documents and strategic plans for cooperation in the area of security. Through examining the progress of activities and results within the Priority area 11 of the EUSDR, the author outlines the contribution of all Danube countries for the cooperation in security within the Danube region. The paper can attract the attention of academics, stakeholders and NGOs on initiating of projects within the Priority area 11 of EUSDR. The added value of the paper is in finding the interconnection between guaranteeing the security in all its types within the Danube space and the prosperity of the region.

**Keywords:** EUSDR; Priority area 11

**JEL Classification:** Z18 - Public Policy

### **1. Introduction**

The EU Strategy for the Danube Macro-region /EUSDR/ aims at giving a coordinated answer of problems which could be resolved only through a joint approach. It also aims at overcoming the obstacles which slow down the development of the region and the deployment of its potential.

The EUSDR is an important innovation in the territorial cooperation and cohesion because it allows mobilizing of new projects and initiatives on the basis of shared culture of cooperation and common responsibility.

As a macro-regional strategy the EUSDR possesses the **following characteristics:**

- it is an integrated framework, linking the EU member states and non-member states from one and the same geographic territory;
- it seeks for decision of common challenges;
- it uses the closer cooperation for the purposes of the economic, social and territorial cohesion<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperate/macro\\_region\\_strategy/pdf/gov\\_macro\\_strat\\_en.pdf/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/macro_region_strategy/pdf/gov_macro_strat_en.pdf/)

The conception for the EUSDR is established on the basis of the **following principles**:

- *Integration* – inclusion of its objectives in the existing frameworks of the European policies on different levels /European, regional, national, local/, in the existing programmes and financial instruments.
- *Coordination* – avoidance of fragmentation in relation to the policies, strategies and financial resources.
- *Cooperation* between the countries for the purposes of regional development which is oriented towards the external world.
- *Multilevel governance* – applicable to the different levels where the policies are created, without introduction of new levels of decision-making.
- *Partnership* – joint work of EU member countries and non-member countries on the basis of mutual interest and respect<sup>1</sup>.

A specific feature of the EUSDR is that it works without additional financing from the EU, without new institutions and special legislation. These peculiarities require a stronger coordination between the financing, the structures and the policies. The 3-year experience of the implementation of the EUSDR /June 2011 – June 2014/ shows very good results from the work of its bodies, organized in priority areas through a bottom-up process of consultations and political leadership by different countries.

## **2. Main Objectives of Priority Area 11 within the Frames of EUSDR**

Priority Area 11 of the EUSDR "To work together to tackle security and organised crime" is coordinated by Germany and Bulgaria, with the involvement of a wide network of key stakeholders from the 14 countries of the Danube Region. The joint work in the field of security is based on the understanding that the Danube Region with its very diverse member states has to deal with diverse forms of crime, such as drug trafficking, corruption and trafficking in human beings. Studies show that the number of corruption offences and the threat of organized and serious crime in the Danube Region are growing. That's why police, law enforcement and judicial authorities need to cooperate more efficiently, to share information more rapidly, to conduct jointly planned effective operations, to take joint measures, implement joint training initiatives and develop common standards.. The main measures, which the responsible bodies take into consideration within PA 11, are the following:

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<sup>1</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/baltic/com\\_added\\_value\\_ma\\_cro\\_region\\_strategy\\_en.pdf/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/baltic/com_added_value_ma_cro_region_strategy_en.pdf/).

- integration of existing networks, e.g. the network for combating drug trafficking, into the EUSDR.
- intensification of international information-sharing and taking advantage of information sources which are already established by transregional bodies like Europol, Interpol and SELEC.
- improvement of document security for combating cross-border crime, especially illegal migration and human trafficking

Four main objectives are envisaged within the PA 11 whose achievement indicates a significant progress during the period 2011 – 2014.

The **first key objective** is **Security offensive - Reinforcing police cooperation**. The offensive was launched at the Conference of the Chiefs of Police of the European Capitals in Munich in January 2012. On the basis of the joint situation report "Danube Organized Crime Threat Assessment" (DOCTA), presented by EUROPOL and dedicated to the organized crime and corruption in the Danube Region, as well as the Austrian project "Police Equal Performance" (PEP), intended to develop a common police strategy, tailored to the Danube Region, for combating cross-border crime, the following conclusions were drawn as a result of this conference. Necessity of a better coordination between police authorities in order to combat and prosecute criminal offences. Development of coordinated crime control strategies in priority areas such as organized crime, drug trafficking and corruption and strengthening of rule of law. Provision of support by EUROPOL, INTERPOL and SELEC in defining a single geographical crime region.

Realization of a linkage between the Cooperation Southeast Europe for Fighting Drug Trafficking ("AG Südost"), presided over by the Bavarian Criminal Police Office, and the EUSDR. This independent expert body of national police and customs officers, with a current membership of 40 experts, has developed methods for fighting drug smuggling which have been implemented in the investigation procedures of national police forces<sup>1</sup>.

The **second key objective** within the frames of PA 11 is the **creation of Danube centres for cooperation and information**. In the achievement of this goal the first Round Table meeting was organized in Sofia on 18 April 2012, where Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania presented their project ideas. As potential partners Croatia, Germany and Serbia were also represented. Its results can be summarized, as follows:

- a network of contact points or centres to be set up.
- identification of the Mohács center (Hungary) as a main centre

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<sup>1</sup> /<http://www.danube-region.eu/about/key-documents>, EUSDR Report June 2012, Priority Area 11; EUSDR Report June 2013, Priority Area 11/.

- strategic analysis of the necessities and strategic guidelines for further actions to be carried out under the leadership of Romania<sup>1</sup>.

The **third key objective** within the frames of PA 11 is **Security required for individual movements in the world wide web – e-ID** /formerly **Development of a System of border control and document inspection management**. The border control systems used by border police forces, including the technical components for identity checks and document inspection, has to be standardized as far as possible and adapted to EU standards. Particular care has to be taken to ensure compatibility of the systems used by EU Member States and non-EU members.

In the achievement of this goal a symposium on EU Border Management and Security of Travel Documents in the Danube Region in Sofia was held from 18 to 20 April 2012 (Sofia II). The Symposium gathered representatives from 11 countries: - Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, The Slovak Republic, and Slovenia. The participants agreed upon the following three aspects:

Necessity of critical examination of the EU acquis in relation to the security of travel documents and discussion of relevant questions in Brussels at an early stage.

Necessity of new developments, for example relating to smart borders, aiming at establishing a common Entry/Exit System which includes intelligent combination of automated border checks for Union citizens and border checks on non-EU citizens. Exploration of the feasibility of an electronic system of travel authorization for the Danube Region.

Necessity of issuing visas for border checks well before travellers arrive at the border. Although there are differences between the visa lists of EU and non-EU members, local cooperation should in practice be oriented on the interests of the Danube Region<sup>2</sup>.

The **fourth key objective** of the PA 11 is **strengthening the rule of law and combating corruption**. The participating countries work on the implementation of the following projects:

1. Bulgaria and Germany are implementing the Rule-of-Law (RoL) project with the financial support of the RoL Programme for South East Europe of Konrad Adenauer Foundation as well as with Bulgarian national co-financing. On 21/22 May 2012, the kick-off event took place in Sofia. In the framework of the project, the national anti-corruption policies of participating countries and their relevant legislation are presented. As a follow-up, deficits and best practices can be

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<sup>1</sup> [/http://www.danube-region.eu/about/key-documents](http://www.danube-region.eu/about/key-documents), EUSDR Report June 2012, Priority Area 11; EUSDR Report June 2013, Priority Area 11/.

<sup>2</sup> [/http://www.danube-region.eu/about/key-documents](http://www.danube-region.eu/about/key-documents), EUSDR Report June 2012, Priority Area 11; EUSDR Report June 2013, Priority Area 11/.

identified. The unique selling point is that civil society is being involved right from the beginning (Transparency International, Berlin and Bulgaria).

2. Austria together with Slovenia and Slovakia has worked on the European Anti-Corruption Training (EACT) project independently from the EUSDR. The steering group agreed to incorporate the project in PA 11 in September 2011. The work is guided by three fundamental principles which are reflected in three working groups: prevention, investigation and international cooperation<sup>1</sup>.

### **3. Current Projects and Results within the PA 11**

In the period 2011-2014 the cooperation between Danube countries under Priority Area 11 has taken a concrete shape and achieved visible results. The practical-oriented approach in the four thematic areas for cooperation outlined at the first meeting in June 2011 in Sofia (enhancing the police cooperation, strengthening customs and border control through contact centres, border management and document security, strengthening the rule-of-law and combating corruption) has led to concrete results demonstrated in the joint work on very significant projects. Some of them are already finalized and others are in the process of implementation or in the process of their panning.

#### **3.1. Finalized projects:**

Symposium on Combating Cybercrime. An international Symposium „Cybercrime - Building Alliances for a Safer Digital World“ was held on 17 October 2013 in Stuttgart (Germany) with participation of experts from nine EUSDR countries (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Romania and the Republic of Moldova) as well as from France and Switzerland. The symposium proved that cybercrime is one of the key challenges for all law enforcement agencies now and even more in future because more crimes will shift from the real world into the cyberspace. This event is considered as a first step towards establishing a network of Danube region agencies competent in fighting cybercrime.

European Anti-Corruption Training (EACT) – a project with participation of Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia. EACT was carried out under the slogan “Practice Meets Practice”. It takes an approach based on the presentation of examples of corruption cases, the exchange of practical experiences and the development of best practices concerning the fields of police investigation, prevention, prosecution and international cooperation. In order to achieve that aim,

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<sup>1</sup> /<http://www.danube-region.eu/about/key-documents>, EUSDR Report June 2012, Priority Area 11; EUSDR Report June 2013, Priority Area 11/.

three working groups were established (Investigation and Prosecution, Prevention and International Cooperation).

Rule of law. Implementing a comprehensive and integrated approach to preventing and fighting against corruption – a project with participation of Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia. It aims at enhancing trans-border cooperation in prevention and fight against corruption in countries from the Danube region and Western Balkans through elaborating and implementing comprehensive anticorruption policies at national level in compliance with the EU policy in the area of the fight against corruption. The specific thematic focus areas of the project include: 1) conflict of interest prevention, 2) criminal and civil asset forfeiture and 3) addressing organized crime-corruption nexus.

### **2.3. On-going Projects**

Cooperation South-East Danube Region – a project starting on 1 January 2014 with participation of the 14 EUSDR countries. The project aims at strengthening international police cooperation in combating illicit drug trafficking through continued harmonisation with EU standards and practices in the participating countries. The goal of the project is to develop a common strategy for combating drug trafficking in the Danube region and at the same time enhance the cooperation between the participating countries. The project corresponds to one of the main targets of PA 11 “Effective co-operation between relevant law enforcement actors by 2015“.

Setting up Coordination Centre(s) for Border Police Cooperation/ Networking of Existing Centres – a project with participation of Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Moldova. The project idea was defined to be a strategic dimension of the work at the ministerial Danube Security Conference on 6th/7th May 2013 in Munich. It aims at establishment of a network of contact centres within the Danube region.

Setting up the Structure of a Danube River Forum (DARIF) – a project with participation of Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldavia, Ukraine. The main objectives of the project are as follows: 1/ To increase jointly the safety and security of the Danube; 2/ To take harmonised and efficient measures against river related crimes (incl. organised crimes); 3/ To establish transnational, cross border and operative law enforcement cooperation platform for the Danube. The Coordination Centre which was created at the Border Crossing Port at Mohács serves as a common contact point. It coordinates the law enforcement international activities, supports the implementation of joint actions and the transmission of relevant information by the Member States.

**Symposium “EU border management and security of travel documents in the Danube Region” /Based on the applicable EU acquis with a special focus on issues and problems of the Danube region/** - a project with participation of Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, The Slovak Republic and Slovenia, as well as other countries such as Albania, Lithuania. The Symposium provided an opportunity for open exchange of views on security of travel documents, good practices of integrated border management, the efficiency of biometrics, the integration of the National Visa Systems into the European Visa System.

### **3.3. Planned Projects**

PoRIS – Police River Information Service – a project with participation of all EU and non-EU countries along the Danube. The main objectives of PORIS are currently part of the DARIF project. Austria has modified its project objectives and initialized a national study about the legal and technical feasibility of cross-border networking of the River Information Service (RIS) for security purposes in cooperation with the Technical University of Graz and the Via Donau (National inland waterway authority).

Comprehensive assessment on the Danube – a project with participation of all Danube neighbouring countries. The project goal is the realization of an overall assessment of the current situation in the countries along the Danube and the establishment of main directions at regional level to be decided, given the major differences between the law enforcement approaches of the states on the waterway Danube, differences of legislation, institutional development and technical equipment. Based on the results of this assessment, a gap analysis on technical aspects will be realized in order to establish the main directions for making the Danube region a safer place to live and decrease the crime phenomenon.

Cooperation in the area of booby-trap explosive systems and disposal of discarded ammunition – a project with participation of Police of the Czech Republic, EOD Department. Preliminary the partnerships with Slovak Republic and Hungary have been agreed. The idea is to thematically divide the project into 5 blocks: (1) cooperation in the area of tactic reaction in criminal cases while using improvised explosive system, (2) introduction of particular types of improvised explosive means used in the different countries of the Danube Region, (3) cooperation in the area of ensuring the possibilities of the progress of an air bomb fuse disposal, (4) cooperation in the area of protection from war ammunition coming from former Yugoslavia, (5) increase erudition of pyrotechnics as well as increase security in areas with high incidence of unexploded ammunition coming from the World War 2.

Combating corruption in cooperation with Danube region states – a project with participation of Republic of Moldova, National Integrity Centre – Romania, Centre for the Study of Democracy – Bulgaria. The project takes into consideration the conclusions drawn in some feasibility studies about poor endowment of the border crossing points infrastructure, mainly related to video/audio surveillance, which poses a threat to the EU internal security, and creates preconditions for corruption. In order to combat and prevent corruption, and to promote the rule of law, project actions imply enhanced security and EU cooperation in the Danube region, having as priority: 1 – corruption and conflict of interest prevention, 2 – implementation of the best EU practices on corruption prevention and state border surveillance, (through studying best practices of the Danube region countries and other EU states, also through development of a behavior guide.).

**Strengthening the naval transport protection capacities of Romanian Gendarmerie** – a project with participation of General Inspectorate of Romanian Gendarmerie, National Commission for Nuclear Activities Control-Romania, General Inspectorate of Aviation from Ministry of Internal Affairs-Romania, General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations-Romania, Law enforcement agencies from Bulgaria, Ukraine and Serbia. The project aims at protecting the Romanian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian and Serbian population and counter the imminent threat of a security incident over the product transported, particularly due to some hostile actions<sup>1</sup>.

#### **4. Conclusions**

On the basis of the information presented above about the cooperation of the Danube countries on the Priority Area 11 of the EUSDR, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The number of the projects aiming at guaranteeing the security of the Danube countries is constantly increasing.
- In the period 2011-2014 the priorities, objectives and measures in PA 11 are identified and implemented in practice. Among these priorities the following can be outlined: enhancing the cooperation between the law enforcement authorities along the Danube River through a network of contact points for exchange of information; coordinated joint activities and also coordinated control along the Danube River in relation to the travel documents; multi-purpose law enforcement operations with the contribution of Frontex, Europol and EUBAM; implementation of comprehensive anticorruption policies at national level in compliance with

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.danube-region.eu/about/key-documents>, EUSDR Report June 2013, Priority Area 11/



the EU policy in the area of the fight against corruption and strong cooperation in this field;

- Inclusion of the fight against cybercrime in the list of priorities of police cooperation;
- Encouragement of all member states to get involved in the initiatives and projects of PA 11; involvement of the non-EU member countries and associating them more closely in the activities and projects that are of interest for them; cooperation with the non-governmental sector providing scientific expertise.
- Exploration of different possibilities for horizontal cooperation, e.g. Vth SG meeting with the PACs of PA 1a.
- As the Security Area is not among the thematic objectives of the Danube programme active seeking of funding opportunities need to continue further.

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