**EUSDR PA7 21st Steering Group Meeting**

**2 June 2021 | Videoconference (ZOOM), 9:30 – 12:30**

**Minutes**

The 21st Steering Group (SG) Meeting of Priority Area 7 (PA7) was organized on 2 June, 2021, as an online event with the technical support of the Danube Strategy Point (DSP).

The agenda of the meeting and the list of participants of the PA7 SG meeting are presented in Annexes I and II.

Presentations from the meeting can be found at the following link: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/1ADFCaE6ppCX4890VzkJD1hxmwLUaxU43> and later will be uploaded at the PA7 official webpage – section Documents/SG meetings: <https://knowledgesociety.danube-region.eu>

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**Joint welcome and opening remarks from the PAC teams and EC representatives**

The meeting was opened and moderated by **Ms Mihaela Florea** from the DSP, who welcomed participants, acquainted them with the rules of the online event, encouraged everyone to use the interactive zoom functions during the meeting and she wished a fruitful and successful meeting.

**Ms Lubica Pitlova** (Slovak PA7 co-coordinator) welcomed all SG members on behalf of the Slovak PA7 coordination team. She expressed a special thank for the participation and support given by the EC DG JRC, representatives of the EUSDR Slovak Presidency as well as upcoming Ukrainian Presidency, members of the DTP projects with a strategic importance in fulfilling the PA7 action plan, as well as Danube Rectors Conference and the Danube Strategy Point. She expressed hope that the next SG meeting in Belgrade will be organised as a physical meeting already.

In her welcome note Ms Pitlova mentioned the adoption of the EU COVID-19 Recovery Plan, official beginning of the new programming period, and the Competitiveness Council conclusions (as of 28 May 2021) referring to the possibilities for the Danube Region. EUSDR should become an integral part of the European Research Area (ERA), and we should focus on what has prevented us from being more successful before and use all the potential to be more involved in the future. PA7 shall keep contributing with making more inclusive and bringing benefits for all our countries.

**Mr Viktor Nedović** (Serbian PA7 co-coordinator) similarly welcomed all participants at the meeting. He mentioned that it is time to efficiently organize ourselves in order to implement the EUSDR Action Plan, especially to work on a better integration of the Danube Region into the ERA. We should take the learning from the Horizon 2020 experience and use the opportunities given to us in Horizon Europe. Based on the results of the PA7 survey on Horizon 2020 participation and the planned workshop, we shall build upon the agenda of our future activities. Similarly, we should continue working on the joint activities and future progress of our old and new working groups, taking into consideration cooperation with other programmes, projects and macroregional strategies. Mr Nedovic also emphasized the importance of the S3 strategies, common priorities and value chains that we may help to co-create along the Danube region and beyond – especially across macroregions as we are sharing a lot of common issues. To the end of his welcome note Mr Nedovic wished all participants a successful and productive meeting.

**Mr Miroslav Vesković** (EC DG Joint Research Centre) expressed pleasure for having the possibility to attend the meeting on behalf of the JRC and on his own behalf and to see all colleagues and friends. Mr Veskovic noted that he is looking forward to cooperation on all important topics. He expressed support to the current EUSDR Slovak Presidency and the upcoming UA Presidency – being the first non-EU country presiding the Strategy having many important tasks ahead. Mr Veskovic also added that Slovenia is at the moment presiding the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and emphasized both the cooperation and competitive links between EUSAIR and EUSDR. He mentioned that competition should stimulate both macroregions to move forward the specific topics. Notwithstanding, Mr Veskovic noted that the Analysis on participation of Danube region researcher in H2O2O carried out by PA7 team was an important exercise and we should focus both on the lessons learnt and recommendation on what to do better in the future. Mr Veskovic reminded the horizontal character of the PA7 and highlighted the need keep am active attitude to help to all the other priority areas. He stressed the importance of the digitalisation and Green Deal among the EU policies which should be taken into consideration as the priorities with the high interest. To the end of his welcome note Mr Veskovic wished to all participants a successful event.

After the official welcome note the Agenda was introduced by Ms Mihaela Florea.

**Information on PA7 activities (passed and ahead)**

**Ms Dijana Štrbac** (PA7 support team) presented PA7 activities from the perspective of project management. She explained that the approved Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) project for PACs is currently in its half-time period of implementation. She briefly introduced the main objectives of the project and the content of the three ongoing working packages. Since the beginning of 2021, PA7 team implemented the activities related to project management, communication and thematic work packages. From the most important achieved milestones we can mention participation at many online events organized by DSP and Interact, such Webinar on EuroAccess; Workshop on prerequisites for successful EUSDR implementation; PACs informal consultations on EUSDR Roadmaps; DSP workshop on stakeholder management; Interact meeting on How to better use Capitalisation after 2020. PA7 team organized the [first online stream](https://knowledgesociety.danube-region.eu/promotion-of-danube-region-researchers-and-innovators-first-online-stream/) to promote renowned Danube Region researchers, scientists and innovators to a wider public and contributed to the DSP promotion campaign named # EUSDR10. From the other attended events PA7 members participated at the Adrion special event: Boosting innovation and facilitating the EU integration process to the Western Balkans - the case of S3 Strategies as best practices supported by ADRION and UN STI Forum 2021 on High-Level Side Event on STI for SDGs Roadmaps. As for the policy part of the DTP project PA7 team mainly focused on the analytical part of the data evidence obtained from the survey on H2020 participation, finalization and publication of the [reports on H2020](https://knowledgesociety.danube-region.eu/participation-of-the-danube-region-countries-in-horizon-2020-analysis/) and [cross-macroregional evidence on digital education](https://knowledgesociety.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/sites/8/2021/01/completed-brochure.pdf), organization of the workshop dedicated to presentation of the results from the survey, as well as adoption of the Action plan for Serbian RIS3 (.ppt available).

**Ms Hartl** shortly intervened in order to thank to PA7 coordinators for the updates, for the work done and their efforts.

Similarly, **Mr Veskovic** supported PA7 coordination team and presenters. He suggested to take into deeper consideration the ecologically sensitive quintuple helix, which is currently getting on importance. PA7 should promote this approach whenever we talk about innovation, research and any related activities – environmental issue should be an inevitable part of it.

**Ms Pitlova** thanked for the kind word and added a special thank to both PA7 support teams. **Ms Strbac and Mr Nedovic** thanked for a constant support to Ms Hartl, Prof Veskovic and all PA7 stakeholders.

**Information on the results of the PA7 Survey on participation of the EUSDR countries in H2020**

**Mr Daniel Straka** (lead author of the analysis, executive director of the Slovak Organization for Research and Development Activities) introduced to participants the detailed results of the survey on Participation of the EUSDR countries in Horizon 2020 which was carried out at the beginning of 2021. At the beginning he spoke about the overall aim and methodological part of the report, which was followed by the concrete data on participation of the EUSDR countries in Horizon 2020 and National Systems: Support structures for Horizon 2020 in EUSDR countries based on the information provided by e-corda. The next part of the presentation showed the most important information coming out of the survey results - at first the results obtained from the EUSDR policy makers and secondly the results obtained from the programme participants. To the end of the presentation the set of recommendation was presented:

**Recommendations for EUSDR**

1. Projects supported under EUSDR should focus on **developing cooperation**, which in turn encourage participation in other schemes and programmes, particular in Horizon Europe, COST, Eureka, and Erasmus+.
2. Projects supported under EUSDR should also aim to **support and improve the mobility of researchers** within the region by motivating and supporting the submission of joint projects through Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions.
3. Create a scheme that will **support short-term stays for managers** and NCPs from countries outside the EU at institutions in EU member states.
4. Support for **mutual learning** among the EUSDR countries.
5. Organize a **workshop** for the NCP coordinators and possible applicants to increase the participation in Horizon Europe.
6. Reducing **remuneration** gaps for researchers’ remuneration.

**Recommendation for EUSDR Member States**

1. Consider **professionalization** of support for participation in Horizon Europe by setting up professional NCPs operating in a single institution.
2. Improve the **sharing of information** among the community.

The discussion following to Mr Straka’s presentation brought the following remarks and questions.

**Ms Hartl** thanked for a comprehensive report and noted that the NCPs structures in Austria are mostly centralized in FFG, but there are other forms of support structures in different research organizations. She mentioned that especially the networks in international burros at the universities are effectively helping researchers with administration processes and overall preparation of project proposals. Ms Hartls also referred to the last slide in the presentation regarding recommendations which shall be checked upon by the WG ERA and WG DFCN and we should think about organization of one or two meetings for researchers in fall to help them with the orientation on program and preparation of proposals.

**Mr Veskovic** thanked for the presentation and mentioned that it would be useful for e better overview to normalize the data according to the GDP, number of researchers or according to the ECs financial contribution obtained.

**Mr Straka** explained that the comparison was made according to the total population, as there in Eurostat is unfortunately a lack of numbers of researcher in many countries that are not part of the EU. And as for the normalization according to the financial contribution Mr Straka mentioned that the comparison may be also very tricky, because for example Germany and France pay more than they receive.

**Ms Bovkun** raised a question regarding experience of other associated countries on reimbursement program under H2020 and the usage of this money in their particular cases. Ms Bovkun further explained that there is a special contract signed between associated countries and the EC regarding reimbursement of a part of their financial contribution which can be spent on various supportive activities (e.g. communication, analyses, NCPs network, maybe something else).

**Mr Nedovic** shared with participants the Serbian experience, i.e. the associated countries were regularly receiving back the financial reimbursement for their participation in FPs through the IPA financial instrument. This reimbursement programme is active for a longer period of time, in previous FPs there was a Ministry responsible for science directly responsible also for the distribution of the money received back, however since the beginning of H2020 the Serbian government decided that all the financial reimbursements will go back to the government, so there is no possibility to see when the money comes and how exactly is it used afterwards.

**Information on the PA7 Workshop on H2020**

Following to thepresentation of Mr Strakaon the result of the Survey on Participation of the DR Countries in Horizon 2020 **Mr Tomas Tabis** (PA7 support team) informed participants about the planned Workshop dedicated to the introduction of the survey results to a wider audience. The main aims of the workshop will be: to introduce and discuss the main outcomes of the analysis; to present the possibilities for the DR researchers to increase their participation in Horizon Europe (e.g. widening; synergies; …); to share the best practices and lessons learnt from the selected DR upstream/downstream countries on accelerating participation in research programmes in the future; and to get inputs from the speakers and participants on the future policies and measures. Mr Tabis introduced the highlights of the agenda as well as the confirmed speakers and invited all SG members to attend the workshop as well as disseminate the information further to other potential participants.

The presentation is available online and the promotion of the workshop on social media will be supported by the PA7 team and by the DSP starting after the SG meeting.

**PA7 Working Groups – introductions of the new implementation plans**

**Ms Jaroslava Szudi (WG ERA)** informed participants about the newly established working group focused on enhancing the Danube region participation in European Research Area. She introduced the current WG membership which remains open to any interested new members and the main ongoing and planned activities according to their connection to the updated Action Plan and concrete targeted activities. The timeline and the implementation plan and possible cooperation link across working groups, PAs, DTP projects and other macroregions were presented. From the concrete measures of the WGs Ms Szudi mentioned especially the Survey on DR H2020 participation and the dedicated Workshop presenting results to a wider audience, regular Newsletter informing on EU policies and tools for the support of R&D&I in particular through the ongoing Framework Programme for Research and Innovation – Horizon Europe and the first PA7 online stream with Assoc. Prof. Norbert Zilka on the topic related to the COVID-19 vaccination, which can be found on the [following link](https://www.facebook.com/DanubeKnowledgeSociety/videos/431850701259421).

**Ms Martina Hartl (WG DFCN)** similarly introduced the envisaged activities of the revitalized WG on Danube Funding Coordination Network and their correlation with the EUSDR Action Plan. From the concrete ideas related to the Action 1 can be mentioned, e.g. Screening of the HE Work Programmes for application possibilities, Considering a EUSDR/PA7 specific input to the ERA document once available, Screen the new ERA communication for potential activities within the EUSDR, Check the availability of the seed-money grants – call for ideas for future flagship projects in the region. As for the Action 2 the WG plans to continue with the multilateral call activities; to regularly screen the HE Work Programmes for application possibilities; to continue RI mapping and exploit sharing concepts in the EUSDR (maybe in cooperation with ESFRI and or the JRC) and possibly to include plans for Teaming in the national plans for the structural funds. Within the Action 3 the WG considers a cross-border EUSDR COST info day (webinar); organization of a matchmaking event for EUSDR for the first Twinning Call and collection of good examples of academia/business cooperation for further implementation across the EUSDR (with a possible cooperation with PA8). The A4 from the Action Plan in the frame of the WG would mean checking forthe possibilities to use the structural funds more extensively for Seal of Excellence projects e.g. in Marie Curie scheme and fulfilment of the A5 could work with close cooperation with national and EU institutions in charge (in particular with the JRC) in order to support exchange of information and experience sharing for the purpose of preparation of future strategic R&I documents applicable in the current programming period. Ms Hartl also pointed out that it would be important to get in touch across the WGs for better collaboration and to check how to make use of our structures to organize any relevant events or activities.

**Ms Ivanka Popovic (WG HEM)** mentioned that the pandemic situation brought universities to an unexpected situation deeply affecting the functioning of universities and other educational institutions. In this sense there are lots of relevant topics to be discussed in the frames of the WG HEM. E.g there arose a need for universities to develop the strategies of resilience how the universities can survive in such difficult emergency situations, which can be connected with the fulfilment of the A3 on increased cooperation of universities with SMEs.

**Another important point that considerably changed** the landscape of higher education institutions are the prominent European university alliances (EUA) – there are at the moment 42 universities and the majority of Danube region countries is represented at least by one university. We need to touch upon is the cooperation with the alliances that work in our region as they already set up their 2 years programmes which include among others ways on how to increase the cooperation and capacity building (e.g. in a form of webinars).

In terms of mobilities the WG HEM will be mainly working on a level of a blended mobility. This will be a practice in years to come, as the importance of virtual mobility in the pandemic times has shown to be successful.

As it was already discussed we have not seen many dramatic changes in the terms of research in the Danube area, hence the WG HEM agrees that the focus on NCPs and strengthening the ties among the universities and rectors’ conferences may be helpful step in a right direction.

Ms Popovic also mentioned there is an ongoing exchange of best practices organized in the framework of the Danube Rectors Conference. At the same time, she noted that there is a predominance of many associations and university alliances are coming to a situation that universities are not motivated in the same way to perform, they have different visions and missions and it is becoming hard to motivate them.

If we talk about commitment of WG HEM to A4 on visibility of science in the region, student led innovation is a very hot topic. University of Belgrade within one EUA is engaged in building up capacities in this topic. Another important aspect is to build capacities for ERC grants, i.e. to increase the number of young researchers to apply for ERC grants. WG HEM is in touch with the Agency responsible for ERC grants in order to push this issue forward.

Apart from what had been mentioned WG HEM focuses also cooperation with companies to support student’s entrepreneurship and special focus on female students.

As for the tense topic of brain drain prevention, Ms Popovic would not put universities as those having the key influence in this issue. Universities can train students be more active in the job market and even to empower them to start their own businesses, but only the appropriate climate of supporting employment can keep people of any ages in the countries of their origins.

To the end of her presentation Ms Popovic mentioned a current challenge the Danube rectors’ conference is facing, which is finding creative ways on how to attract members to be more active within the network. Ms Popovic referred to Mr Veskovic previous remark on being more active regarding the topics of sustainable development and maybe to include it among the PA7 targeted activities in order to get a proper response from the universities.

Ms Popovic noted that her mandate of rector of the University of Belgrade is coming to an end on 1 October and she expressed hope for being more active within the current WG and in making progress within other PA7 activities.

**Mr Viktor Nedovic (WG RIS3)** presented a summary what has been done in the previous months and the future work of WG RIS3.At first he mentioned 5 important things from the *Guide to Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation*; i.e. focus policy support and investments on key national/regional priorities, challenges and needs for knowledge-based development, including ICT-related measures; build on each country's/region’s strengths, competitive advantages and potential for excellence; support technological as well as practice-based innovation and aim to stimulate private sector investment; get stakeholders fully involved and encourage innovation and experimentation; evidence-based and include sound monitoring and evaluation systems. On this basis the concrete targeted activities of the WG RIS3 related to the fulfillment of A5 - to further promote, implement and make use of the smart specialisation strategies in the whole Danube Region and to continue close cooperation with national and EU institutions in charge (in particular with the JRC) and A6 - to implement common activities like joint Steering Group meetings, joint support for project proposals, workshops etc.; providing and building on scientific evidence, publications etc. especially where these refer to the Danube Region (e.g. JRC reports) were presented. The concrete steps that the WG RIS3 will be occupied with in the next period are data collection on RIS3 in Danube Region, organization of the meetings with JRC and DTP to discuss the possibilities to design the support for the implementation of the common S3 priorities at regional level, organisation of thematic RIS3/TT workshops,screening and identification of the common priorities in different countries/regions of the Danube region organization of the meetings with JRC on regular bases, STI roadmaps development for SDGs inside the UN pilot, screening the possibilities and funds for interregional cooperation in the Danube region and for joining to JRC thematic platforms, regular updating of the JRC S3 platform by continuous providing of data related to RIS3 in different countries of the Danube region to JRC, regular updating of the JRC S3 platform by continuous providing of data related to RIS3 in different countries of the Danube region to JRC. As for the membership in the WG RIS3, Mr Nedovic mentioned that the WG will consist of Danube region representatives dealing with the RIS3 topics and the membership is still open. The planed frequency of the meetings will be at least twice a year and one of the most important outcomes of the WG RIS3 planned for this year will be the collection of RIS3 and the best practices from the region. The leadership of the WG RIS3 plans to approach the JRC in order to nominate the right contact person regarding the membership in the WG.

**Ms Hartl** referred to Ms Popovic presentation on preparing the capacity for young researchers to apply for ERC grants that there is a specific call for ERA Fellowships dedicated to widening countries which could be a good first step in achieving excellence in ERC starting grants. Secondly Ms Hartl asked whether the mapping of the DRC could be made available to PA7 stakeholders.

**Mr Nedovic** noted that they won a mentioned fellowship and several students had a possibility to visit ERC grantees and confirmed that it is a great experience to attract young researchers and help them in preparing the applications for coming calls.

**Mr Martinek** from DRC shared the mentioned file with all meeting participants.

**Mr Mayer-Frei** greeted everybody from the home-office and expressed hope to meet physically soon again. He also referred to Ms Hartl’s comment and pointed out the Horizon Europe Work Programme on Widening participation that shall be published in June (the week after the SG meeting). He mentioned the calls specially dedicated on how to attract and mobilize talents or balanced brain circulation. Similarly, the third pillar is focused on the research and innovation ecosystem. All these topics would be interesting for Danube region. Mr Mayer-Frei also mentioned that the budget dedicated to these topics will be 450 mil. € in 2021 and nearly 480 mil. € in 2022.

**Ms Pitlova** referred back to Ms Szudi’s presentation on the first PA7 online stream with the Slovak researcher on the topic of vaccination. She encouraged the participants regarding the upcoming similar streams and asked them to propose researchers from their home countries on interesting topics, e.g. climate change to promote their research work to a wider audience in the Danube Region and beyond. Ms Pitlova also returned back to Ms Hartl’s proposal to organize an event in autumn to support the Danube Region participation in Horizon Europe. A very interesting and important topic to be discussed and exchanged would be the support received and used from the structural funds.

**Mr Veskovic** noted that it would be important to exchange more across all microregion on the topics of embedding and digital issues. Both topics would be important for PA7 and the Danube Region as such. Similarly, and important issue, where PA7 should focus more energy in the future are the young researchers. We all should put more emphasis on the work with young people in implementing the strategies across the macroregions. As an idea a dedicated support group composed of young researchers could be established in the frames of PA7. Mr Veskovic added that there are at the moment more than 100 young people awarded by the Danubius’ Young Scientist Award with whom we could work more closer, he suggested to organize a special event which will gather all these young researchers to discuss the general research ecosystem in the Danube Region.

**Ms Hartl** suggested to prepare a special input for working groups on the various topics which were raised today by the presenters. A fruitful exchange of ideas would be needed. As example Ms Hartl raised a question how we can bring together universities that work on some specific issues and topics from the EU agenda – such as digital transition, green transition, health, etc. It would be important to know how to for example to use the university alliances in this sense.

**Ms Popovic** answered to Ms Hartl that alliances also need to show results. So at first she suggested to reach out alliances from our region and to discuss with them what could be done in the region. Secondly it would be important to pick universities working on the concrete SDG topics. Ms Popovic also added that this is something what can make universities, after long and difficult times when they strived for survival, attracted.

**Mr Nedovic** took the floor on behalf of the PA7 coordination team and suggested to have a written input from PA7 SG members to all the meeting topics or any relevant issues raised during the meeting, as we are not able to cover all of the inputs and to take the right decisions. Additional time for action would be needed.

**Ms Florea** added that the DSP is there always ready to support any other additional meeting or activities which will be organized as a follow-up to today’s meeting or later in the future.

**Information from the Danube Strategy Point (DSP)**

**Ms Mihaela Florea** (DSP) prepared a comprehensive update on the DSP activities and the way forward, including information on Support for PACs, NCs and EUSDR presidencies; Embedding process; Monitoring & Evaluation; Communication; Capacity Building and future plans regarding Ukraine’s chairing the EUSDR Presidency and the possible listing/labelling of EUSDR strategic projects.

Ms Florea mentioned the **numerous meetings** organized and supported by the DSP (NC and PAC meetings, EuroAccess Webinar, EU MRS week, the publication of the **Needs Assessment** for closer cooperation in SGs to enhance the participation of the different stakeholder groups of the EUSDR and publication of the **EUSDR Implementation Report 2019** on EUSDR activities and key priorities. The documents are available online on [<http://www.danube-region.eu/>](http://www.danube-region.eu/). Ms Florea noted that DSP is serving as a **communication hub** supporting the **EUSDR SK Presidency** in preparing the further [Embedding process and Discussion Paper](https://danube-region.eu/projects-and-funding/embedding-2021-2027/); actively contributing to the **INTERACT Working Group on** exchange with other MRS in regards of the embedding process. As a next important topic Ms Florea introduced to SG members the **EUSDR Monitoring Tool**. The Policy/Impact Evaluation shall be conducted in 2021, therefore an **SG DANUVAL meeting** took place in April 2021 to define the content and focus of the evaluation to be able to procure and select a relevant service provider. As for the Communication the information on DSP webpage and social media platforms were presented. Ms Florea provided also information on the **new interactive mobile phone application for the EUSDR promotion** and as for the Capacity building topic publications and stakeholders events were presented. From the future news Ms Florea mentioned that **Ukraine will hold the EUSDR Presidency** from November 2021 to November 2022 and passed information on the proposed scope and criteria of the **EUSDR Strategic Projects**.

**Mr Nedovic** thanked to Ms Florea for her comprehensive overview of the DSP activities and additionally raised a question on the last issue mentioned regarding the strategic projects. He wanted to clarify how PA7 team should deal with the previous activities on flagship projects that have been developed along the time. Apart from this Mr Nedovic was interested to hear the opinion in regards with specific question related to an idea raised by the Serbian Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases. The Institute would like to connect the Centres of excellences from 2 macroregions (EUSDR and EUSAIR) which would be working on a development of high-level scientific publications, but also staff exchanges, mobilities of young researchers, etc. Mr Nedovic was interested to hear the DSP opinion on this issue.

**Ms Florea** reacted to the question of the flagship projects and other strategic projects which are running or were previously applied in all priority areas. The Action Plan which is still relatively new and offers a room for projects and processes and all priority areas have liberty in choosing the relevant topics. As for the second question the DSP is dealing with the cross-macroregional cooperation, she suggested to come back to the DSP after the SG meeting to develop a more concrete plan to follow-up.

**Ms Pitlova** made a comment to the process of labelling the flagship and strategic projects based on her experience from previous years. She mentioned that unfortunately she was still missing the purpose of this activity, and she wanted to clarify why this process should re-start. Whether there will be some other benefits for the newly labelled projects beside visibility of the Strategy. And in case the new strategic projects are developed, how are they going to be financed? Will the projects be prioritized in receiving grants in specific schemes, such as DTP calls? What is the main purpose of labelling besides visibility?

**Ms Florea** noted that she has expected such type of question from the very beginning. Prioritizing projects and their funding remains in the hands of the managing authorities. What the DSP expects from strategic projects is to develop campaigns, raising awareness of people and raising visibility.

**Mr Veskovic** agreed with Lubica’s argumentation on the labelling issue. Before we dip into another vicious circle, we should prepare an analysis of previously listed projects to learn more how the projects felt about being recognized as strategic projects. On this basis we would be able to better decide on how these projects can benefit in the future.

**Mr Nedovic** referred to the interventions of the previous speakers regarding the process of labelling. He also mentioned that the has been part of several processes of labelling and choosing the criteria of labelling, therefore he supported the idea of analysis of previously labelled projects in order to learn more and to get recommendations on what and how can be improved in our future attempts.

**Ms Florea** thanked to all comments and she encouraged the other participants to prepare any comments to the DSP in written form before 30 June 2021.

**Final conclusions and AoB + short information from other PAs/EUSDR SK PRES**

Presentation prepared by **PA4 Water Quality team** for PA7 SG meeting was shortly presented by Ms Szudi. The presentation contained information on the planned events and activities, such as EUSDR SK Presidency conferencet on *Climate Change Adaptation (27 September 2021, Bratislava);* *International workshop as platform for knowledge and best practice sharing related to pharmaceuticals in the Danube Region;* Workshop on sewage sludge management in the Danube Region; Development of a study as background document for pilot e-learning material; several leaflets and publications: short movie on PA4 results.

**Mr Kolocany** representing the EUSDR SK Presidency team will send his short note on the main activities (e.g. assistance to the DTP, support of the non-EU countries, embedding process, updating the roadmaps, annual forum) in a written form, because of the problems with connection.

**Mr Sebastian Schaffer (IDM, DRC)** briefly intervened that on 11 June 2021 there is going to be a special event called Donausalon Europa-Forum Wachau, promoting the cross-border and transnational cooperation in the Danube Region and reflecting the 11th anniversary of the EUSDR. Mr Schaffer kindly invited all PA7 stakeholders to participate at this event and shared the following link for more information: <https://www.europaforum.at/en/veranstaltungen/donausalon-europa-forum-wachau/>

**Ms Pitlova** thanked to all participants for their active participation andfor a fruitful meeting**.**

**To conclude the meeting,** Ms Pitlova mentioned that we could learn a lot from the comprehensive results of the last years analysis on the participation of the Danube region researchers in H2020 and the barriers of their participation and on how to be able to prevent them in the future and resulting recommendations. On the workshop planned for the 18 June 2021 we shall build upon the recommendations presented from the analysis also in line with the new framework programme. Ms Pitlova once again invited all SG members to participate at the workshop and to disseminate the information about the event further, as we would really appreciate to have a tangible result from this workshop. As for the PA7 activities in a short future we will organize a meeting of all leaders of PA7 working groups to exchange ideas and on some of the topics mentioned today. Our homework will concern the activity on flagship projects and future labelling, where we need to learn more about their benefits and to conclude what will be the future of the strategic projects.

**Mr Nedovic** also thanked to all participants of the meeting and especially for all the valuable interventions, in particular the involvement and inclusion of the young researchers, better connection and activities that could improve participation in Horizon Europe, special events organized within COST and other umbrellas as suggested by Ms Hartl. To this point Mr Nedovic mentioned our previous experience with COST association resulting into a successful COST Connect Day with a special focus on Energy. Mr Nedovic also expressed his readiness to assist with the communication with COST authorities from his position of a COST scientific committee member. To the end Mr Nedovic thanked for the support and excellent moderation of the SG meeting to Ms Florea (DSP) and expressed hope to see everybody soon at the coming Workshop on 18 June 2021.

**Ms Florea** thanked to all participants on behalf of the DSP and closed the meeting.

**Annex I: Agenda**

**21st PA7 Steering Group Meeting**

Video conference (ZOOM) 2 June 2021, 9:30 – 12:30

**Agenda**

 09:15 – 09:30 **Registration to the ZOOM platform**

 09:30 – 09:45 **Joint welcome and opening remarks from PACs and EC**

*Viktor Nedovic and Lubica Pitlova (PAC7 teams); Miroslav Veskovic (EC DG JRC)*

09:45 – 09:55**Information on PA7 activities (past and ahead)**

*Dijana Strbac*

09:55 - 10:15 **Information on the results of the PA7 Survey on H2020 participation in DR**

 *Daniel Straka*

10:15 - 10:25 **Discussion**

10:25 - 10:35 **Information on the PA7 Workshop on H2020 Survey results**

 *Tomas Tabis*

10:35 - 10:40 **Virtual tea and coffee (short refreshment break)**

10:40 –11:40 **PA7 Working Groups – introductions of the new implementation plans**

10:40 - 10:50  **Introduction of the WG DFCN** *Martina Hartl*

10:50 - 11:00  **Introduction of the WG ERA** *Jaroslava Szudi*

11:10 - 11:20  **Introduction of the WG HEI** *Ivanka Popovic*

11:20 - 11:30  **Introduction of the WG S3** *Viktor Nedovic*

11:30 - 11:45**Discussion**

11:45 – 12:00 **Information from the Danube Strategy Point**

*Mihaela Florea*

12:00 - 12:15 **Discussion**

12:15 - 12:30  **Final conclusions and AoB (short information from other PAs/EUSDR SK PRES)**

**Annex II: List of Participants**

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| 1. Sebastian Schäffer
 | Austria |
| 1. Daniel Martínek
 | Austria |
| 1. Martina Hartl
 | Austria |
| 1. Nikolay Nikolov
 | Bulgaria |
| 1. Judita Klosaková
 | Czech Republic |
| 1. Mihaela Florea
 | DSP (Romania) |
| 1. Roland Mayer-Frei
 | Germany |
| 1. Birgit Ditgens
 | Germany |
| 1. Timo Niebsch
 | Germany |
| 1. Lea Pfäffel TUM-MED
 | Germany |
| 1. Béla Kardon
 | Hungary |
| 1. Balázs Kápli
 | Hungary |
| 1. Ivana Lagator
 | Montenegro |
| 1. Miroslav Veskovic
 | Serbia |
| 1. Dijana Štrbac
 | Serbia |
| 1. Viktor Nedović
 | Serbia |
| 1. Tamara Jovanovic
 | Serbia |
| 1. Ivana Davidovic
 | Serbia |
| 1. Ivanka Popovic
 | Serbia |
| 1. Jaroslava Szudi
 | Slovakia |
| 1. Zuzana Staňáková
 | Slovakia |
| 1. František Koločány
 | Slovakia |
| 1. Simona Posch
 | Slovakia |
| 1. Lubica Pitlova
 | Slovakia |
| 1. Mladen Kraljic
 | Slovenia |
| 1. Grygorii Mozolevych
 | Ukraine |
| 1. Viktoria Karbysheva
 | Ukraine |
| 1. Dasha Bovkun
 | Ukraine |
| 1. Viktoria Gaidar
 | Ukraine |

**Annex III: A picture made at the end of the 21st SG meeting**

