**JOINT STEERING GROUP MEETING OF PA7 AND PA8**

**OF THE EUSDR**

***19th SG meeting PA7***

Videoconference (ZOOM) 3 June 2020, 9:30 – 12:30

**Draft Minutes**

The 19th Steering Group (SG) Meeting of Priority Area 7 (PA7) was organized as a joint meeting with the steering group of Priority Area 8 (PA8) of the EUSDR and for the first time in the history it took place online with the technical support of the Danube Strategy Point.

The agenda of the meeting and the list of participants of the PA7 SG are presented in annexes I and II. Presentations from the meeting were sent to all participants and can be found at the PA7 official webpage on the following link: https://

**Main objectives of the meeting were:**

1. To inform participants about the recent activities and plans related to the EUSDR, DSP and both PAs
2. To exchange views on the new actions and strategic themes of both PAS and find ways and linkages for enhancing future cooperation and better embedding of the EUSDR into EU Programmes
3. To inform about the results of the Multilateral scientific and technological cooperation in the Danube Region and provide information about its future possibilities
4. To introduce analytical studies and policy recommendations prepared by both PAs related to the streamlined funding (PA8); evaluation of given targets (PA7) and evaluation of S3 in the Danube region (PA7)
5. To provide insights from the coordinator of the EUSBSR Policy Area Innovation related to the current situation and support cross-macroregional cooperation

**Joint welcome and opening remarks:**

The meeting was opened and thoroughly moderated by **Ms Mihaela Florea** from the Danube Strategy Point, who welcomed participants, acquainted them with the rules of teleconference and wished a fruitful and successful meeting.

**Ms Lubica Pitlova –** Slovak PA7 co-coordinator welcomed participants to the meeting and thanked DSP for organizational and technical support and highlighted that since the beginning of the Danube Strategy the cooperation of our PA7 and PA8 has been very good and efficient and expressed hope that similarly this joint meeting will become an important milestone accelerating the cooperation. Within her opening speech she mentioned that only a coherent Europe supporting economic competitiveness through research and innovation, digital transition as well as the European Green Deal agenda will be able to react to the COVID-19 outbreak and to potential future crises. Both PA7 and PA8 should join forces in finding ways how to contribute to this positive transition and how to embed the Strategy into European programmes.

**Mr Viktor Nedovic** addressed participants on behalf of the Serbian PA7 coordination team. He emphasized that the major issue in the Danube region in these days primarily concerns the newly adopted action plan and its transformation into future concrete activities and tangible results for the benefit of all of us. Nonetheless, Mr Nedovic touched upon the potentials for intensified cooperation, better delivery of targeted projects, and promotion of embedding exercise of the macro-regional strategies into EU funding programmes.

**Ms Judit Schrick-Szenczi** welcomed participants on behalf of PA8 coordination team and appreciated that both PAs were able to organize a joined meeting. Ms Schrick-Szenczi pointed out that although there have been recently difficult weeks and months, when looking back 2-3 years on work of PA, there have been lots of possibilities for joint cooperation resulting in concrete ideas, projects, initiatives. Nonetheless, she mentioned that with joint efforts, we could reach even more and this meeting could be a great start.

**Ms Nirvana Kapitan Butkovic –** Croatian PA8 co-coordinator welcomed participants and expressed gratitude that after the discussions that took place at a joint meeting of PA7 and PA8 in February in Zagreb, there have been common efforts to organize a joint meeting of both steering groups and despite of all the difficulties we were able to organize it in common online.

**Mr Roland Mayer-Frei**  welcomed all participants on behalf of the DG REGIO Unit D.1. and thanked for the possibility to meet them online. He noted that PA7 has a cross-cutting character and cooperation with PA8 was and still remains crucial for the future. Science, technology and innovation are influencing lots of sectors and policies, therefore they should be an inevitable part of all PAs across region. Cooperation will play a significant role in unlocking the potential of the Danube region as well as in the embedding processes. As already announced European Commission will be focusing on 1. Green deal and 2. Digital agenda; both of the topics with a strategic importance for PA7 and PA8.

**Mr Miroslav Vesković** expressed his pleasure to greet participants on behalf of the DG JRC. PA7 and PA8 represent cross cutting priority areas therefore naturally their cooperation is very important. Mr Veskovic noted that JRC cooperates closely with the DG for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth (and explained that roles of two DGs were merged) and with other DGs within European Commission and will strongly support Danube strategy in the future. He added that he participated in a few meetings of Adriatic and Ionian macro-regional strategy, where they were comparing their achievements with other macroregional strategies. Prof. Veskovic emphasized that cooperation and responsibility are crucial to speed up recovery and bring results.

**Mr Mislav Kovac** addressed participants on behalf of the current Croatian Presidency of the EUSDR and notedthat theCOVID crisis damaged lots of plans of the Croatian Presidency , which was not able to organize thematic meetings. The national coordinators agreed on 2 main documents focused on the embedding process and the EUSDR governance. With the support of the DSP a comprehensive documentation regarding the strategic themes was sent to national coordinator teams to discuss them with the responsible national authorities. Afterwards the feedback will be processed and a joint NC+PAC meeting will be organized in order to receive a common agreement on the final list of priorities and how to put them into practice. Mr Kovac stated as an example that PA9 and PA10 started to communicate with Managing Authority of the ESF. Similarly the inspiration can be taken from other macro-regional strategies (MRSs). The first meeting of all 4 MRSs was organized during MRS week in Brussels, the second meeting is planned to be held online on 17th June (the main focus: embedding). Annual forum is planned to be organized on 22-23 October 2020. HR Pres will soon circulate save the date together with a draft of the concept note of the Annual forum.

**Information from the DSP**

**Ms Mihaela Florea** – presented the activities of the DSP and its plans from November 2019 forward. These activities included information on Support for PACs, NCs and EUSDR Presidency; Revision of the Action Plan and embedding; Evaluation & Monitoring; Communication and Capacity Building. In regards with the plan of activities for 2021-2022 Ms Florea spoke about another supporting measures for NCs and PACs, such as development of assessment for closer cooperation in SGs and attracting stakeholders of the member states as well as assessment for closer cooperation between PACs and relevant stakeholders (funding institutions, DGs, Civil Society Fora, regional/local authorities etc.); organization of workshops and seminars on cross cutting themes and preparation of guidelines for identifying and listing strategic projects/flagship initiatives/light tower projects. As for the communication apart from the standard activities (such as online campaigns, newsletters, webpage and social media updates; promotion materials) DSP will fully support organization of the 9th EUSDR Annual Forum and plans to launch an EUSDR smart application. Within communication activities interactive movies have been prepared. One general video was specially prepared and dedicated to priority areas. DSP keeps being active on social media platforms and there is a recently prepared initiative “Back to school”. Last but not least DSP will focus on the Policy Impact Evaluation in connection with the updated Action Plan + monitoring of PAs + monitoring of embedding of the EUSDR. This evaluation will be based on the operational Evaluation from 07/2019u uniting several processes and providing an extensive and comprehensive tool.

**Update from the DTP**

**Mr Marius Niculae** – DTPproject officer responsible for coordinating the implementation of Priority 1 of the Programme (Innovative and socially responsible Danube region) briefly answered the question asked by Ms Pitlova (Q: What are the DTP possibilities on allocating funds to support strategic themes – especially related to the covid-19 response and potential development of bigger project within SMF scheme?). Mr Nicuale clarified that the decision of allocating the remaining amounts belongs solely to the MC and it is based on the scenarios proposed by the MA namely: 1) new SMF call, 2) further financial allocation for 2nd call projects for capitalization activities or 3) a specific COVID call. Following the last MC meeting the countries decided to take a decision once the available amount (savings) is clear. Estimated time framework for this is September 2020.

Last but not least he mentioned that the DTP team is busy with preparation of the next programme period, but also with finalization of contracting the winning projects from the 3rd call. All successful project applicants were asked to develop new outputs focusing on socio-economical context. One of the conditions that was applied within the 3rd call was that projects have to put more efforts to better embed the Danube strategy into their plan, in order to create better synergy between projects and the Strategy.

**Guidance Paper and further steps for Embedding of EUSDR into EU Programmes**

**Mr Roland Mayer-Frei,** policy officer from the DG REGIO, European Commission referred to the need of the embedding Danube Strategy in the future programmes of the Cohesion Policy 2021-2027. There is a newly adopted action plan now as a very solid ground to start from. Tall priority areas were invited to define up to 3 specific topics which they would prioritize in order to focus clearly on the first steps. Mr Mayer-Frei said that all PAs are encouraged to enhance networks with the managing authorities of the programmes in order to address common challenges of the Danube region, as only a comprehensive approach can lead the EUSDR activities to success and bring significant development for the whole region. He stated several examples of bringing the concrete strategic themes of the EUSDR (and other strategies) to the mainstream programmes. Nonetheless he expressed his interest in learning more about the current PA7 and PA8 orientations and in the discussion during the meting and further implementation.

**Mr Daniel Acs,** President of the Union of Slovak clusters and representative of the PA8 SG and member of several successful project consortia reflected that there is a missing communication within the projects themselves, as projects (and their outcomes) can be the relevant sources how to bring policies into strategies.

**Main findings of the policy recommendation for streamline funding (PA8)**

**Ms Judit Schrick-Szenczi** presented the findings of the results of the recent study of the PA8 focused on the development of policy recommendations for streamlined funding relevant for PA 8, incl. the proposed methods and tools to be used (Task 1); on summarizing the policy recommendations which will be handed over to the Managing Authorities or to the further relevant authorities like the European Commission (Task 2); and on summarizing and shortly describing all existing (post 2020) financing opportunities relevant for PA8, incl. the direct web links and possible the exact contact details of the relevant Managing Authorities (Task 3).

Presentation of Ms Schrick-Szenczi is attached.

**Embedding Activities and Strategic Priorities of the PA7 and PA8 Possibilities for cooperation**

**Ms Pitlova Lubica** briefly summarized all PA7 updated actions with special attention put on three strategic themes with the highest macro-regional relevance and added value for the whole Danube region (and beyond). The chosen strategic themes are:

1. To promote inclusiveness of the European Research Area and crossing innovation gap through capacity building, promoting research excellence and supporting collaboration in EU R&I programmes
2. To stimulate the effective preparation and implementation of national and regional Smart Specialisation Strategies
3. To respond to emerging challenges in the Danube region (e. g. COVID -19 crisis and its negative consequences) through research, innovation and strengthening knowledge society

Ms Pitlova later on explained what concrete actions PA7 proposes to be implemented under these strategic topics, as well as in what PA8 actions can be these topics reflected.

**Ms Nirvana Kapitan Butkovic** similarly wrapped up the PA8 actions as well as chosen strategic themes for PA8, which are as follows:

1. Further development of clusters, clusters and regional development
2. Female entrepreneurship
3. Artificial intelligence/Digitalisation

Her presentation also included the proposed activities within these strategic themes and noted that there are several common topics for PA7 and PA8 such as development of common trainings, development of stronger networks of innovators, improvement of digital capacities, and educational programs, etc.

Both PA7 and PA8 presentations on strategic themes are attached.

* ***Discussion:***

**Mr. Veskovic** appreciated the structured way of presented PA7 strategic themes, however he recommended as already mentioned before by Roland Mayer-Frei that more emphasis and focus should be given to EU priorities such as: green deal and digitization. It will be extremely important to analyze these priorities within the Danube region, and to take them into account in the future.

**Ms Schrick-Szenczi** noted that there might be participants who have not had time to go through the strategic priorities in advance, therefore she recommended to set a deadline for feedback. She also supported the idea to address jointly some programme managing authorities.

**Ms Pitlova** pointed out that the political commitment is still low, also on the EU level as well not only on national. There is a very low willingness to embed the strategy. Otherwise, she supported the idea of a joint addressing of the relevant authorities. Ms Pitlova requested Commission for their recommendation on how to involve the countries more actively.

**Ms Hartl** suggested to PACs to comment in written form on all the strategic themes and proposed actions. Furthermore, she mentioned that PA7 and PA8 have much in common, but specific actions at the moment are not aligned. She expressed her sympathy towards the topics on female entrepreneurship and mentioned that PA7 wants to empower female researchers, but the way of their integration this is not straight forward.

**Ms Schrick-Szenczi** was positiveon finding common topics like female entrepreneurship or topics related to Covid–19. Stakeholders of both PAs should propose their ideas, which should be further discussed and elaborated.

**Mr Mayer-Frei** agreed that participants have to take their time to read through the activities and think what is feasible. He mentioned that the managing authorities will then have hardship to say no.

**Ms Schrick-Szenczi** agreed with what has been said, but mentioned that it is often very challenging to reach out to the higher levels, as only few participants of this meeting are representatives of the ministries. We would need expertise from countries what is missing when we talk about the managing authorities.

**Ms Kapitan Butkovic** proposed to put down the priorities in the next days, distribute them to the SG and wait for their feedback and proposals.

**Review of the Danube multilateral** **calls**

PA7 team delivered three short presentations informing about the multilateral scientific and technological cooperation in the Danube region. All three presentations are at disposal.

**Mr Tabis** spoke about the results of two successfully organized calls. Within the 1st call for applications for 2017-2018 joint projects, with the closing date in September 2016 - 64 projects applied and 19 were selected and funded on national level. Within the 2nd call for applications for 2020-2021 joint projects with the closing date in September 2019 there were 72 project application out of which 20 projects were selected for funding.

The following presentation of **Ms Pitlova** informed on the possibility tolaunch a new multilateral call with the aim to develop project proposals prepared by Danube region researchers within Horizon Europe part „Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area“ which is aimed at increasing excellence in so called widening countries – through cooperation with excellent institutions in Europe.

**Ms Posch** afterwards briefly described “Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area” part of the Horizon Europe programme and mentioned what are the main changes in the Commission‘s proposal regarding this topic.

**Ms Schrick-Szenczi** asked for more information regarding these multilateral calls – who was its original initiator and how exactly was it financed?

**Ms Pitlova** replied that the originalinitiative came from the Austrian ministry - BMBWF, and it was technically organized by dedicated public agencies responsible for research funding in all participating countries.

**PA7 Evaluation of the knowledge society in the Danube region**

**Ms Jaroslava Szudi** presented to participants the results of the analytical study on Evaluation of the knowledge society in the Danube region (2010 – 2018). She mentioned that this study was prepared as one of the project deliverables of the DTP-PAC1-PA7 project and it brings assessment of the current state and progress in the area of knowledge society in the Danube Strategy countries and regions, as well as recommendations for improving the situation in the region.

The completed study was sent to participants prior to this meeting and it was published on the official PA7 webpage. The presentation is attached.

**PA7 study on Governance, financing, monitoring and evaluation of S3**

**Mr Ramojus Reimeris** author of another PA7 study delivered a presentationon Governance, financing, monitoring and evaluation of Smart Specialization - Analysis and guidelines from EU Danube region countries. Mr Reimeris informed participants about the scope of the study, governance and financing guidelines, as well as monitoring and evaluation guidelines.

The study was circulated to participants among supporting documentation prior to the meeting and similarly as the study before it was published on the official PA7 webpage. Presentation from the meeting is attached.

**Report from the Online MRSs meeting**

Ms Florea welcomed among participants a guest speaker from the Baltic region, **Mr Esa Kokkonen** from the Baltic Institute of Finland currently co-coordinating the Policy Area Innovation in the EUSBSR, who introduced activities of the PA Innovation with a focus on the Green Deal and SMEs support. Mr Kokkonen highlighted the importance of the digitalization and the cooperation between companies and universities.

The presentation from the online cross-macroregional coordinators meeting on response to economic challenges (related to COVID-19) is attached.

* ***Discussion and AoB:***

**Mr Daniel Acs** invited PA coordinators and stakeholders to the Danube S3 cluster project – the Policy dialog workshop will take place online on 21 June 10:00 – 13:00. More information will be distributed via e-mail.

**Mr Miroslav Veskovic** emphasized the support of JRC for green a digital transition in the DR.

**Mr Roland Mayer-Frei** asked the non-EU representatives on the issue of embedding. Since Danube universities are taking part in this process, he was interested in knowing inputs from the academia side.

**Mr Mladen Kraljic** from the University of Maribor pointed that every single activity related to cohesion in Europe is welcomed. It is in a high interest of the University of Maribor to streamline activities and get higher attention in the EU programmes. Mr Kraljic mentioned that their university is leading working groups on ICT in both priority areas, where there nowadays focus mainly in the sphere of digitalization. Mr Kraljic expressed hope to reach partners outside the Danube Region who can share their experience and practice and partners from older EU MR Strategies. In this sense he referred to the Demola project between universities and the private sector, in which partners from several EU countries are participating. Major issue of the universities is to get here the governance.

**Ms Ivanka Popovic -** current DRC President answered on behalf of Danube universities thatthe situation with COVID-19 pandemic affected the universities strongly and those universities that have experience in online learning overcame it much easier but still it remains a logistic nightmare. Universities are concerned about the future financing, especially those funded from state budgets. Research excellence funding possibilities will be therefore welcome. There is also concern about the starting of the fall semester. Online learning is a very relevant experience, which showed how crisis management can work. Prof Popovic also reacted to the presentation on PA7 targets evaluation, where all participants could see that many of the targets have been met and cooperation on multilateral level has increased. Ms Popovic is also leading PA7 WG on higher education a mobilities and she mentioned that her team is currently gathering information on research infrastructure, e.g. data about the number of researchers taken advantage of these facilities. The Region has been facing discrepancies in this area (upstream/downstream).

**Final conclusions**

All priority area coordinators thanked to all participants for their patience, contribution and active listening. They thanked to all speakers, representatives of the EC, DTP, Baltic macroregional strategy, not to forget to mention a special thank to Mihaela Florea for her support before and during the meeting as well as for excellent moderation of the meeting. Both PAC teams appreciated the joint organization of this meeting which has brought up lots inspirational ideas, opened possibilities for stronger cooperation in the future with the primary focus on embedding, post COVID-19 recovery, technology transfer and the Green Deal.

Representatives of the European Commission (Prof Veskovic and Mr Mayer-Frei)appreciated they could be present at the joint meeting of both PAs and thanked for interesting contributions. Prof. Veskovic closed up his contribution that the enlargement process is still one of the important current policy discussion, with a high relevance for the Danube region. Mr Mayer-Freithanked to everybody for organization, participation and contributions, and encouraged all participants to build upon this meeting conclusions. He expressed the support of the DG REGIO, including the CBC IPA programmes and the commission to the PACs. He added that we all share the same crisis situation, and we can see the strong reaction from the EC, which brings up new possibilities, and funding sources, therefore it is very important to use the opportunities given in these difficult times and to come up with new proposals, projects and work on more resilient Europe in the longer term.

**ANNEX I: Agenda of the PA7 and PA8 SG Meeting**

**Chair: Ms Mihaela Florea,** Danube Strategy Point

9:30 – 9:50 **Joint welcome and opening remarks**  (max á 3 min.)

***Lubica Pitlova****, Coordinator of PA7 of the EUSDR, Slovakia*

***Viktor Nedović****, Coordinator of PA 7of the EUSDR, Serbia*

***Judit Schrick-Szenczi,*** *Coordinator of PA 8 of the EUSDR, Baden-Württemberg*

***Nirvana Kapitan Butković,*** *Coordinator of PA8 of the EUSDR, Croatia*

***Roland Mayer-Frei****, DG REGIO*

***Miroslav Vesković,*** *DG JRC*

***Mislav Kovac****, Croatian Presidency representative*

9:50 – 10:00 **Information from the DSP**

*presented by* ***Mihaela Florea****, Danube Strategy Point*

10:00 – 10:10 **Update from the DTP**

*presented by* ***Marius Niculae,*** *DTP representative*

10:10 – 10:20 **Guidance Paper and further steps for Embedding of EUSDR into EU Programmes**

*presented by* ***Roland Mayer-Frei****, DG REGIO European Commission*

10:20 – 10:25 **Main findings of the policy recommendation for streamline funding (PA8)**

*presented by* ***Judit Schrick-Szenczi,*** *Priority Area 8 co-coordinator*

10:25 – 11:00 **Embedding Activities and Strategic Priorities of the PA7 and PA8**

**Possibilities for cooperation**

* 10:25 – 10:40 **PA7 Action Plan**  and  **strategic priorities + possible synergies with PA8**

*presented by* ***Ľubica Pitlová,*** *PA 7 coordinator*

* 10:40 – 10:55 **PA 8 Action Plan and strategic priorities + possible synergies with PA7**

*presented by* ***PA 8 coordinators***

* 10:55 – 11:30 **Discussion**

11:30 – 11: 35 **Review of the Danube multilateral** **calls**

*presented**by* ***Tomas Tabis, Lubica Pitlova and Simona Strapacova,*** *PA7 team*

11:35 – 11: 40 **PA7 Evaluation of the knowledge society in the Danube region**

*presented by* ***Jaroslava Szudi****, PA7 team*

11:40 – 11: 45 **PA7 study on Governance, financing, monitoring and evaluation of S3**

*presented by* ***Ramojus Reimeris,*** *author of the study*

11:45 – 11:55 **Report from the Online MRSs meeting:**

**response to economic challenges: mobilising/building support measures**

*invited guest* ***Esa Kokkonen****, coordinator for the EUSBSR Policy Area Innovation*

11:55 – 12:30 **Discussion/ AOB/ Final conclusions**

**ANNEX II: List of Participants with printscreens from the ZOOM**

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| --- | --- |
| Johan |  |
| Daniel | Acs |
| Ghinescu | Anca |
| Balazs | Barta |
| Daria | Bovkun |
| Nina | Bratkova |
| Urban | Bren |
| Silvia | Cangea |
| Miljana | Cosic |
| Renáta | Czabai |
| Ana | Dijan |
| Mihaela | Florea |
| Anca | Ghinescu |
| Monika | Har |
| Martina | HARTL |
| Metzger | Jonas |
| Tamara | Jovanović |
| Tomas | Juhas |
| Nirvana | Kapitan Butkovic |
| Balázs | Kápli |
| Svenja | Kern |
| Judita | Klosakova |
| Esa | Kokkonen |
| Mislav | Kovac |
| Biljana | Kovac |
| Mladen | Kraljic |
| Anna | Krivjanska |
| Ivana | Lagator |
| Roland | Mayer-Frei |
| Gabriela | Mezeiova |
| Mike | Nagorkin |
| Mike | Nagorkin |
| Viktor | Nedovic |
| Marius | Niculae |
| Timo | Niebsch |
| Nikolay | Nikolov |
| Jasmina | Pesic Jotic |
| Ľubica | Pitlová |
| Ivanka | Popovic |
| Miona | Popovic |
| Sergiu | Porcescu |
| Simona | Posch |
| Ramojus | Reimeris |
| Zoran | Ren |
| Judit | Schrick-Szenczi |
| Dijana | Štrbac |
| Jaroslava | Szudi |
| Tomáš | Tabiš |
| Kunze | Ulrike |
| Simona | Vajnha |
| Tatina | Velicov |
| Miroslav | Veskovic |
| Ralitsa | Zhekova |





