

Dear State Secretary, Dear Coordinators of Priority Areas 7 and 8, Dear Project Partners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic the representatives of 11 Danube countries cooperating within the Danube strategy.

In fact, European Union Strategy for the Danube Region as one of four EU macroregional strategies provides an integrated framework for strengthening cooperation between countries within the region. Bringing together more than 110 million people from nine EU member states and five EU candidate countries it has an important integrative and cohesive function.

The Danube Region plays a vital role in Europe's cultural heritage, environmental resources, and economic potential.

However, it has to be stated, that our region is one of the most heterogeneous European regions. Due to different historical and political development, dissimilarities between countries and within countries persist. This also applies for research and innovation performance.

And we all know that the research and innovation and their transfer into praxis create an important condition for sustainable development and competitiveness.

Indeed, strengthening competitiveness is nowadays one of the biggest challenges not only for the Danube Region but for the whole Europe.

So, I am very happy that today we can host 22 Danube projects dealing with circular economy, sustainability of cities and regions, competitiveness of industry, smart specialisation and technology transfer. These all are important areas which can address this big challenge our region is facing.

I hope that today and tomorrow you will find many new ways and opportunities for capitalisation of the outcomes of your projects and strengthening future cooperation in the Danube region.

I would like to wish you successful and fruitful discussions and results of the workshop!