



EUSDR PA7 22nd Steering Group Meeting

13 December 2021 | Videoconference (Zoom), 9:30 – 12:30

Minutes

The 22nd Steering Group (SG) Meeting of Priority Area 7 (PA7) was organized on December 13th, 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.

Joint welcome and opening remarks from the PACs and EC representatives

The meeting was opened and moderated by **Ms Mihaela Florea** from the DSP, who welcomed participants, introduced the agenda and acquainted the participants with the rules of the online event.

Mr Viktor Nedović (Serbian PA7 co-coordinator) welcomed all participants and expressed his strong hope that the next events will be organised in person. He emphasised that certain number of countries associated to Horizon Europe last week and signed an agreement with the European Commission which means that several countries of the Danube region have officially joined the current framework programme. Therefore, now higher number of researchers in the region can use the platform for virtual matchmaking and searching for project partners developed within the PA7. In the end of his welcome note, Mr Nedovic wished all participants a successful meeting and expressed his hope to continue cooperation in concrete activities in the future.

Ms Lubica Pitlova (Slovak PA7 co-coordinator) welcomed all SG members on behalf of the Slovak PA7 coordination team and said that if we look back, we can be proud that despite the restrictions caused by the pandemics we managed to start actions which will hopefully lead to accelerating and strengthening participation of the Danube region countries in EU R&I activities. She informed that on 26th November the EU Competitiveness Council adopted conclusions on future governance of ERA and recommendations on Pact for Research and Innovation. With these acts, the Council established a new ERA governance. Integral part are new ERA policy actions and at least half of them match with the PA7 actions.

Mr Johan Magnusson (EC DG Regio) expressed his pleasure for attending the meeting and introduced two activities planned for the 2022. The first one is EU Macro-Regional Strategies Week which usually takes place in the first quarter of the year. It will be probably at the beginning of March and more information will follow soon. If pandemic permits, the event will be organised in hybrid format. The intention is to



create the event which is, in comparison with previous ones, more open to all stakeholders, more targeted and more participative. The second activity is related to the bi-annual report on the state of play of the MRSs which EC prepares for the Council. In order to prepare this report, the EC counts on the inputs of the PAs.

Mr Miroslav Vesković (EC DG Joint Research Centre) expressed his pleasure for having the possibility to attend the meeting and to see all colleagues and friends. He said that we could learn a lot from the Baltic Sea Strategy (which was the first one) but also from other MRSs. The Baltic Sea Strategy has adopted Baltic R&I agenda that can be an inspiration for PA7 to see if something similar could be done for the Danube region. Since PA7 has working groups, it might be beneficial to create a working group dedicated to cooperation and learning from other MRSs. It would give the opportunity to focus on achievements of other MRSs. Mr Vesković informed that the EC is planning to adopt European strategy for universities in the first quarter of the next year which is important for PA7 since it is related to its topics. He said that it is time to consider RIS3 in a slightly different way. S3 is an opportunity to prioritize things in certain country/region, but it is necessary to have some guidance from the top, although the smart specialisation strategy is a bottom-up approach. Green deal and digital strategies have brought the need to direct RIS3 which will offer a better overview in combining bottom-up and top-down approaches. He congratulated to the Slovak EUSDR presidency and Slovak PA7 team for an excellent work done.

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 DTP is offering co-financing to the activities carried out by the PACs, so at the moment is in progress project for the period January 2020 – December 2022. She briefly introduced the main objectives of the project and the content of the three ongoing work packages. Since June 2021, PA7 team implemented the activities related to project management, communication and thematic work packages. In the area of policy development, the team has organised stakeholder workshop „Increasing participation of the Danube Region countries in Horizon Europe“ and a widening event „Facilitating research & innovation cooperation in the Danube region“ (October 28th). They have also participated in an online survey “Policy/impact evaluation of the EUSDR instruments, tools and activities for measuring their impact in the Danube Region” and launched RIS3 survey. In the field of cooperation and coordination, the main achievements are related to participation in relevant events and organisation of the meeting with PA7 WG leaders and Danube Rectors’ Conference (ppt available).

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; Strategic projects and Capacity Building. She informed that the report on needs assessment will be published at the beginning of the next year. The progress in the embedding



process includes relevant events and updating the tools. Results of the survey among EUSDR MA networks are available. The goal of the survey was to see to what extent managing authorities took into consideration actions of each PA. Related to the PA7, general conclusion is that 23 MAs from 8 DR countries said that they would focus on topics such as R&I, S3 and post pandemic recovery. There is an ongoing elaboration of the EUSDR monitoring tool and it is still subject of further improvement. Online impact evaluation, interviews and desk research are in progress. The final report on impact evaluation will be available in April next year. DSP developed EUSDR interactive brochure and PA7 achievements are part of it. DSP is actively working on improving EUSDR social media accounts and in June 2021 was launched the EUSDR app for Android and iOS. Work on strategic projects/processes is in progress and at the moment DSP is focused on consolidating guidance paper and terminology. DSP is organising series of workshops dedicated to PACs on topics indicated in the needs assessment – project management, leadership, management of change, etc (ppt available).

Danubius Young Scientist award

Ms Martina Hartl (Ministry of Education, Science and Research in Austria) informed that Danubius Award was introduced in 2011 and Danubius Young Scientist Award in 2014. The goal of the award is to bring talented researchers from the Danube region into the spotlight and promote networking between the scientists. The community of Award winners is already more than 100 people and they have profound impact on their national policy making communities. She explained that Danubius Award and Danubius Mid-Career Award are awarded by jury selection and there is a rotating system between Natural Sciences and Social Sciences and Humanities every other year. Danubius Young Scientist Award is open to all disciplines, nomination comes from the host institution and assessment is conducted by 3 independent reviewers from the DRC. There is also a very good cooperation with the JRC who kindly invites the award winners to visit their premises at the JRC in Ispra to also shadow researchers for a day and learn more about working in an EU environment.

Ms Ana Salević (University of Belgrade, Danubius Young Scientist Award winner) presented her research interests and the significance of the Award she had won. She explained that she works as a Research Assistant at the Faculty of Agriculture, Department of Food Technology and Biochemistry and that her research interest include encapsulation systems for active food packaging and functional food ingredients, biodegradable materials, natural sources of active compounds. Ms Salević expressed a great pleasure for being part of Danubius Young Scientist Award community. She is very proud and happy that her work was recognized by eminent institutions. She expressed her gratitude to University of Belgrade for nominating her and to Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research and Institute for Danube Region and Central Europe for awarding her. The Award will be a great motivation for her future work. Ms Salević has also presented her research work that was awarded and which is part of her PhD thesis “Synthesis and characterization of active fibers and films based on poly (ϵ -caprolactone) and zein” (ppt available).



Results of the PA7 Working Groups

Ms Jaroslava Szudi (WG on ERA) said that this WG started with its work at the beginning of this year and it is led by Slovak PA7 team with a strong support of the Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information and Slovak Liaison Office for R&D in Brussels. The membership is open and new members are welcome. The WG is based on the new PA7 actions, mainly Actions 2 and 4. Main results of this WG are: two surveys regarding H2020 participation organised, widening event „Facilitating research & innovation cooperation in the Danube region“ (organised as a side event of the Annual Forum), newsletter on RDI news & ERA possibilities, organisation of online streams. Ms Szudi informed that she is in contact with H2020 projects dealing with science communication and this WG will be focused on this topic during the next year. She emphasised that the widening event organised by PA7 with strong support of Austrian Ministry and Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) includes long term platform for virtual matchmaking and asked Mr Ralf König to explain it in detail (ppt available).

Mr Ralf König (Austrian Research Promotion Agency) explained that on the basis of the analysis of participation of the Danube Region countries in H2020, FFG initiated a follow up activity „Facilitating research & innovation cooperation in the Danube region“. Information day was organised on October 28th. It included representatives of the EC and presentation of case studies. Focus of the event were networking opportunities for joint proposals in three widening calls (Twinning, Excellence hubs, ERA Chairs). The virtual platform offers opportunity not only to upload business profiles but also to organise online meetings by sending meeting requests. The statistics from the platform shows that many meetings were cancelled and number of registrations did not increase after the info day on October 28th. Therefore, he proposed further dissemination activities in order to promote opportunities of this platform. This should include activities of the PA7 team, organizers of the event, Danube Region Widening NCPs and other relevant communities (ppt available).

Ms Martina Hartl (WG on DFCN) informed that main activities of the WG on DFCN included cooperation with WG on ERA in organisation of the widening event „Facilitating research & innovation cooperation in the Danube region“. The goal was to include more people from the widening countries in the EU R&I funding programmes. This WG will start at the beginning of the next year with the analysis of partnerships in Horizon Europe projects and potential contribution of the Danube region countries to different missions. She has also announced that the new Multilateral call is planned for 2022 and asked her colleague Mr Christian Gollubits to share more information.

Mr Christian Gollubits (Ministry of Education, Science and Research in Austria) said that the third Multilateral Danube region call is will be launched in spring 2022. He invited all participants to join this initiative and to ask for more information from representatives of Austrian Ministry, PA7 team or their national ministries.



Ms Ivanka Popović (WG on HEM) emphasised close cooperation of this WG with the DRC. At first she commented that universities in the Danube region are eagerly waiting to see the content of the European strategy for universities since at the moment it is not certain what will be in the document. Regarding the new ERA, Ms Popović said that European University Association (EUA) has been selected to be the voice of Europeans in this discussion. Any feedback that comes to the EUA regarding the new ERA, she will pass to the PA7 coordinators since she is a member of the EUA board. In terms of the most recent DRC activities, they have participated in selecting Danubius Young Scientist Award winners and also have adopted new activities on its annual meeting in November 2021, which are related to PA7 targets. Ms Popovic shared with the participants that the DRC has created an Initiative Fund in order to support for graduate/doctoral students in terms of mobility, covering material costs, equipment, services, travel, etc. The application will be very simple, but with strong line of motivation. The budget of this initiative is 50.000 euros and maximum 25 applications will be funded. DRC is planning to implement a project dedicated to exploring the future of science and education in a globalized world. It would be a strategic foresight of the DRC done predominantly by the winners of the Danubius Young Scientist Award. The result will be a document that DRC General Assembly should approve in November 2022. Next year will be organised meeting of Danube region universities which are members of European University alliances in order to share best practices which can be very stimulating for the region.

Ms Martina Hartl shared in the chat section a link of the network of sustainable universities in Austria (<https://nachhaltigeuniversitaeten.at/english/>) and link of Uninetz project (<https://www.uninetz.at/en/about-us>) dealing with contribution of universities to the sustainable development goals. She commented that both of these could be of interest for the WG on HEM. Ms Hartl as a member of Alpine region strategy informed that they will organise in January 2022 workshop with universities from the green transition area and this could expand to the universities from the Danube region.

Mr Daniel Martinek (Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe, DRC Secretariat) added more information about DRC strategic foresight project “The future of research and higher education in globalized world”. It will have four central topics: university autonomy and governance, science and learning in digital era, science and research for decision making, employability of students. The calls for both announced DRC activities (Initiative Fund and Strategic foresight) will be published in mid-January next year on the DRC webpage and in its newsletters.

Mr Viktor Nedović (WG on RIS3) at first explained the concept of smart specialisation as a powerful tool in economic transformation of countries and regions. He said that this working group is mostly related to the PA7 actions 5 and 6, so the concrete activities are shaped as a contribution to these actions. Concerning STI roadmaps for SDGs, there were several events starting with the High level dialogue on the Partnership in Action on Science, Technology and Innovation for SDGs Roadmaps in July 2021. At this meeting was



agreed that Ghana and Serbia coordinate activities at the global level related to the activity “Partnership in action”. As part of this activity, Ukraine was included as one more pilot country from the Danube region in developing STI roadmaps for SDGs. Mr Nedović emphasised that RIS3 survey was launched within this WG in November and that it includes sections related to framework on implementation, challenges/achievements, monitoring, evaluation, thematic platforms and macro-regional S3 partnerships, RIS3 and Covid-19. Since only three Danube region countries have filled out this survey (Montenegro, Slovakia and Serbia), a reminder will be sent in order to finalize this activity by the end of the year. Also, the plan is to increase the membership of this WG by including representatives of the countries in the Danube region, desirably the colleagues who are dealing with S3 in different countries/regions (ppt available).

Fostering regional strengths in RIS3 priority areas

Mr Nikola Radovanović (EC DG JRC) explained that he works in a team dealing with S3 in the EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Region which includes several Danube region countries. Smart specialization has been a successful story in the EU member states who have been implementing it for more than 10 years. In the recent years countries from the enlargement region are increasingly joining this concept and trying to implement it in their own innovation systems. Since it is not easy to do it in a transformational economy, the JRC with the support of other DGs has developed a specific framework that these countries need to follow. As a result of this approach, 4 Danube region countries have entered the process of RIS3 design, while 2 of them have already adopted their own S3 (Montenegro and Serbia). The next step is identifying common priority areas for different countries (i.e. agrifood, ICT, textile industry, energy, machinery). The JRC will publish at the beginning of the next year a very important document focused on value chain analysis for 6 priority domains in the Western Balkans. It will be based on the analysis of data related to employment, patents, publications, value added, exports, revealed competitive advantage. This will offer new information to the surrounding EU member states. Based on the idea of identification of common priority areas, JRC introduced organisation of S3 thematic workshops. The first one, related to agrifood was organised on October 5-6, 2021 and it gathered different stakeholders from the Western Balkans and EU member states. This was an opportunity to discuss in detail where in agrifood each economy has a potential and how to build on a regional strengths. Mr Radovanović informed about the upcoming events organised by the JRC: peer review event in March or April 2022; S3 thematic workshop (probably on ICT) in mid-next year. He invited all participants willing to share experiences and build new networks to attend the events.

Main Results and Achievements of the Slovak EUSDR Presidency

Mr Michal Blaško (Slovak EUSDR National Coordinator) informed that Slovak EUSDR Presidency had different areas of intervention: revision of the action plan in terms of preparation for the implementation, embedding, ownership of the strategy, governance of the strategy. Horizontal priorities of Slovak presidency included cooperation among various stakeholders at all levels and involvement of the non-EU



countries in the activities of the strategy. Thematic priorities of the Slovak Presidency were innovation ecosystem and digitization and climate change and protection of biodiversity. The most important achievements are: background document “From words to action” summarizing concrete measures for integrating EUSDR into EU cohesion policy funds, established a network of MAs responsible for programming, established a task force for better involvement of young people and youth organisations, meeting of ministers in charge of the innovations from the Danube region countries, joint declaration of ministers adopted, thematic conference on innovation and digitalization in September 2021. Mr Blaško also mentioned that the ministry he works at, Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatisation is currently in the final phase of adopting new Slovak smart specialisation strategy for the period of next ten years. Its priority areas are: digital transformation, innovative industry, mobility, healthy society and clean environment.

EUSDR Ukrainian Presidency Programme and Plans

Mr Ihor Korkhovyi (EUSDR national coordinator in Ukraine) stressed that Ukraine is the first non-EU country to preside over the EUSDR from November 1st 2021 to October 31st 2022. Thematic priorities of UA Presidency include: 1) sustainable development of the Danube Region: decarbonisation and transformation of the economy and 2) development of human capital and labor markets. Political priorities are: 1) Embedding EUSDR priorities, implementation and evaluation, 2) Enhancing the institutional capacity of the EUSDR, 3) Strengthening the role of civil society in the implementation of the Strategy. Mr Korkhovyi said that the last political priority includes involvement of youth and therefore UA Presidency plans to hold international hackathon on youth and to continue to work with institutional instruments prepared by the Slovak Presidency. Besides the EUSDR Annual forum, UA Presidency is planning to organise the Municipal forum that will gather representatives of municipalities across the Danube region. The plan is also to organise thematic events, one of them will be related to the Green deal agenda (ppt available).

Information from the DTP

Ms Katalin Kovács-Kasza (MA/JS Danube Transnational Programme) informed that renaming the DTP 2021-2027 is under consideration – word “transnational” might be omitted from the new programme name. She explained the geographical coverage of the programme, participating countries and matching specific objectives of the DTP and actions from the EUSDR Action plan. The Danube programme 2021-2027 will have four priority areas: a smarter Danube region; a greener, low-carbon Danube region; a more social Danube region; a better cooperation governance in the Danube region. Ms Kovács-Kasza highlighted that the ongoing programme will be around 20% less than the DTP 2014-2020. The first call for proposals within the new programme is planned for spring 2022 (ppt available).



Discussion, conclusions and AoB

Ms Lubica Pitlova concluded that the meeting was very fruitful and it included information regarding activities of the DSP, DRC, DTP and RIS3 development. It was a great pleasure to have present Danubius Young Scientist Award winner. She kindly asked SG members to: 1) outreach relevant information about matchmaking possibilities on the virtual platform dedicated to widening calls (<https://widening-cooperation-danuberegion.b2match.io/>), 2) motivate their countries to participate in Multilateral Danube region call than will be launched in spring 2022. Ms Pitlova thanked to the Ukrainian EUSDR Presidency for participation and wished them success. She also thanked to Serbian PA7 team for organizing the meeting and to Ms Mihaela Florea for excellent moderation.

Mr Viktor Nedović on behalf of Serbian PA7 team thanked to all participants and their contribution to the meeting, including different news received from the DSP, DTP, EUSDR presidencies, JRC and DRC. He congratulated to the Slovak Presidency and wished all the best to UA Presidency. The meeting offered new pathways to the PA7 activities and its role as a horizontal PA. He also asked SG members to offer support in collecting answers in the PA7 RIS3 survey and in improving membership of the WG on RIS3 in terms of identifying relevant national experts in this field. He also thanked to Ms Mihaela Florea for the moderation of the meeting and to the both PA7 teams for organizing the meeting.

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

Annex I: Agenda

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| 09:15 – 09:30 | Registration to the ZOOM platform |
| 09:30 – 09:45 | Joint welcome and opening remarks from PACs and EC
<i>Viktor Nedović and Lubica Pitlova, PA7 coordinators</i>
<i>Johan Magnusson, Team Leader - Danube and Baltic Sea Regions, EC DG REGIO</i>
<i>Miroslav Vesković, Coordinator of scientific support to macro-regional strategies, EC DG Joint Research Centre</i> |
| 09:45 – 09:55 | Information on PA7 activities (past and ahead)
<i>Dijana Štrbac, PA7 Support Team</i> |
| 09:55 - 10:15 | Information from the Danube Strategy Point
<i>Mihaela Florea, Pillar Officer, Danube Strategy Point</i> |
| 10:15- 10:35 | Danubius Young Scientist award |



*Introduction – Martina Hartl, Deputy Head of Unit for International Research Cooperation in the Ministry of Education, Science and Research in Austria
Danubius Young Scientist Award Winner – Ana Salević, Research Assistant, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Agriculture*

10:35 – 10:40 **Virtual Tea and Coffee (short refreshment break)**

Results of the PA7 Working Groups

10:40 - 10:50 **WG DFCN** *Martina Hartl, WG leader*
10:50 - 11:00 **WG ERA** *Jaroslava Szudi, PA7 Support team*
11:00 - 11:10 **WG HEI** *Ivanka Popović, WG leader*
11:10 - 11:20 **WG RIS3** *Viktor Nedović, WG leader*

11:20-11:35 **Fostering regional strengths in RIS3 priority areas**

Nikola Radovanović, Senior Policy Officer, Coordinator for S3 Framework for the EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Region, EC JRC

11:35 -11:50 **Main Results and Achievements of the Slovak EUSDR Presidency**

Michal Blaško, Slovak EUSDR National Coordinator

11:50 - 12:05 **EUSDR Ukrainian Presidency Programme and Plans**

Ihor Korkhovyi, EUSDR national coordinator in Ukraine

12:05-12:20 **Information from the DTP**

Katalin Kovács-Kasza, Project and Communication Officer - Innovative and Socially Responsible Danube Region (PA1), MA/JS Danube Transnational Programme

12:20 - 12:30 **Discussion, conclusions and AoB**

Annex II: List of Participants

	First Name	Last Name	Country
1.	Martina	Hartl	Austria
2.	Daniel	Martinek	Austria
3.	Christian	Gollubits	Austria
4.	Ralf	Konig	Austria
5.	Martin Felix	Gajdusek	Austria
6.	Johan	Magnusson	Belgium (EC)
7.	Miroslav	Vesković	Belgium (JRC)
8.	Nikolay	Nikolov	Bulgaria
9.	Zornitsa	Georgieva	Bulgaria
10.	Matthias	Hadesbeck	Germany
11.	Ulrike	Kunze	Germany
12.	Béla	Kardon	Hungary
13.	Balazs	Kapli	Hungary
14.	Katalin	Kovacs-Kasza	Hungary
15.	Ivana	Lagator	Montenegro
16.	Mihaela	Florea	Romania
17.	Ivanka	Popović	Serbia
18.	Ana	Salević	Serbia
19.	Jasmina	Pešić Jotić	Serbia
20.	Viktor	Nedović	Serbia
21.	Dijana	Štrbac	Serbia
22.	Tamara	Jovanović	Serbia
23.	Michal	Blaško	Slovakia
24.	Tomáš	Tabiš	Slovakia
25.	Ľubica	Pitlová	Slovakia
26.	Jaroslava	Szudi	Slovakia
27.	Tomaž	Kern	Slovenia
28.	Nikola	Radovanović	Spain (JRC)
29.	Grygorii	Mozolevych	Ukraine
30.	Ihor	Korkhovyi	Ukraine
31.	Ivan	Petryk	Ukraine
32.	Oleksandr	Slyvchuk	Ukraine



Annex III: Family photo

