



EUSDR PA7 25th Steering Group Meeting

June 2nd, 2023 | University of Belgrade, Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information

Lamačská cesta 8/A, Bratislava + ONLINE (Webex platform)

Minutes

The 25th Steering Group (SG) Meeting of Priority Area 7 (PA7) was organized on June 2, 2023 as a hybrid event. The agenda of the meeting and the list of participants of the PA7 SG meeting are presented in Annexes.

Presentations from the meeting can be found at the following link (in a .zip file):

<https://knowledgesociety.danube-region.eu/steering-group-meetings/>

Joint welcome and opening remarks from the PAC teams and the DG REGIO

The meeting was opened and moderated by **Ms Lubica Pitlova** (Slovak PA7 co-coordinator), who welcomed both on-site and online participants at the hybrid form of the SG meeting organized in Bratislava. Afterwards Ms Pitlova informed participants about a brisk entering of the PA7 to the new programming period with the involvement of PA7 representatives at the joint meeting of the EUSDR national coordinators and PA coordinators, meeting with the Danube Youth Council representatives, Macroregional Strategy week with the involvement of PA7, Knowledge Driven Society event and Horizon Europe Workshop organized for the Danube countries. After receiving very positive response from the participants, Ms Pitlova expressed will on behalf of PA7, in continuation of this type of events. Similarly, Ms Pitlova appreciated the cooperation with PA7 flagship projects and highlighted their first tangible results. To the end of her welcome speech, Ms Pitlova mentioned the new candidates for the Danube Strategy Flagships that will be presented during the SG meeting.

Mr Viktor Nedović (Serbian PA7 co-coordinator) welcomed all participants on behalf of the Serbian PA7 Coordination Team and expressed gratitude to be able to see the participants in person again. Mr Nedovic complemented Ms Pitlova and thanked to Slovenian colleagues for an excellent organization of the event focused on the knowledge society support across the region. Similarly, Mr Nedovic appreciated the support to all PA7 activities given by the Slovenian colleagues during this year. Mr Nedovic added that the work of the PA7 is based on the project activities, but as the expectations are high, PA7 will focus their work more beyond the frames of the project. To the end he wished all participants a fruitful day



*Due to the complications with the Internet connection the official welcome note of Ms Jasinska (DG REGIO) followed after the presentation of Ms Strbac, but we kept the original order for the purpose of the Minutes.

Ms Karolina Jasinska-Muehleck (EC DG REGIO) expressed her pleasure to be on this event on behalf of the European Commission. She has mentioned that she is substituting Ms Elisa Cocco and Mr Johann Magnusson, all dealing with the EUSDR at the DG REGIO. Ms Jasinska-Muehleck congratulated to the inspiring event “Knowledge Driven Society” organized by the Slovenian Presidency of the EUSDR, which was attended by Mr Magnusson, and highlighted a couple of points taken away from this conference, i.e. the need to involve young people in building in what we are doing to keep the region sustainable for future generations; the need to have regional stakeholders on board when fostering the research cooperation (especially when looking for the best knowledge for the sustainable solutions we need); the importance of improvement of the cross-sectoral thinking (going outside of sectoral boxes, and creating alliances when(r)ever needed). These recommendations are in line with the MRS [Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions](#) on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies (2022). Ms Jasinska-Muehleck encouraged participants to have a look into the Report, unless they have not done so, in order to get a wider glimpse on what is happening in the other strategies regions, and highlighted the main conclusions of the Report: 1) As MRS contribution to the green, digital and social transitions is important, all are accelerating their delivery on these topics; 2) MRS have a value added to bring a place-based approach to the cohesion policy, supporting initiatives emerging at local and regional level that could benefit from cooperation at macro-regional level; 3) the importance of bringing young people to the governance, to reach out to young people, empower them and enable them to carry out activities dedicated to their interests. Ms Jasinska-Muehleck appreciated that the DYC members have the possibility to participate in PAs activities. Another point from the Report valid for PA7 activities as well is that MRS are well suited for fostering the enlargement process (in the case of the EUSDR it is an important task to support the EU membership of UA, MD and BiH at the moment). All these points were reflected at the MRS Week organized this year and DG REGIO appreciated the involvement of PA7 in preparing particular sections as well. To the end of her welcome note Ms Jasinska-Muehleck expressed her hope that SG members will find inspiring information from the Report and wished to them a fruitful discussion and good luck with their deliberations.

PA7 UPDATE ON PAST ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE PLANS WITHIN PA7/EUSDR/beyond

Ms Dijana Strbac (Serbian PA7 coordination team) presented PA7 activities from the perspective of the new project for priority area coordinators supported by the Danube Region Programme. This project was approved for the period of 6 years (2023-2028) and the project partners remained the same as in the previous project, i.e., the Slovak Centre of the Scientific and Technical Information and the Serbian University of Belgrade. Ms Strbac briefly informed about the main specific objectives of the project and



the changes in comparison with the previous project. Afterwards the main activities related to the new specific objectives of the project carried out in the first half of 2023 were presented (ppt available).

Ms Nina Bratkova (Slovak NC team) raised a question on PA7 activities related to the official ministerial letters addressing Danube region ministries on the appointment of the PA7 SG members.

Prof Veskovic (University of Belgrade) addressed 2 topics: 1) within HE the EU defined missions, in which among others, the Danube is mentioned in a very specific way, so PA7 should get in touch with other relevant PAs and hence stimulate the participation in these missions; 2) Partnership for regional innovation which represents a new way of tackling smart specialisation strategies; the involvement of more countries/regions in this partnership would be of a benefit and made the partnership more visible.

Mr Tabis (Slovak PA7 coordination team) informed that all letters to the ministers were circulated during these days and PA7 appreciates all the help provided by the NC(s) and SG members.

Ms Pitlova noted that the newly submitted project proposal to DRP “HarmonyMissions” will be addressing the wider involvement of the regional stakeholders in the missions and their promotion as well.

Ms Strbac added that the Infoday on Horizon Europe organized by the PA7 last week also addressed the missions and more detailed information were provided to the participants as well.

Mr Peter Volasko (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia) as the next speaker prepared a detailed overview and outcomes on the successful conference “Knowledge Driven Society” which was organized on May 17-18, 2023 in Congress Centre Brdo in Slovenia and online. At first the rationale and the aims of the conference were introduced. The conference addressed green and digital transitions steering the transformation of societies (including the economy subsystems) in the EU and the Danube region, but Dr. Janez Potočnik added that we are actually entering the „Triple Transition“ – the societal and economical as well. After the conference the recommendations for the final Declaration of the SI EUSDR Declaration will be drafted, published and disseminated for the further development and usage of all these interdisciplinary topics within PA7 and other priority areas. Furthermore, the outcomes of 5 panels of the conference were presented, i.e. *1. How could "Knowledge-driven society" look like in 2040? 2. What competencies will the workforce need to have in 2040? 3. Presentation of international practices in the field of forecasting needs on the labour market 4. The structure of demand and supply for products and services on the markets in 2040 5. How to strengthen synergy at the level of policies and instruments of reform implementation?* At last, the participants could learn more about the institutional priorities of the SI EUSDR PRES, which are: to empower the involvement in EUSDR; to improve the strategic governance of EUSDR; to involve youth and highlight their role in EUSDR; and to continue with the embedding process. As for the thematic priorities the SI EUSDR PRES focuses on the *Transport and Energy Challenges in the Region with the vital importance of transport for food security, trade, tourism and cooperation;*



Sustainable and energy-efficient transport; digitalization, innovation, and jobs in transport. Mr Volasko also mentioned the main events organized under the SI EUSDR PRES which are: Young Bled Strategic Forum (25-29 August 2023), Mediterranean Coast and MRS Week (September 2023), Danube Region Transport Days (3-4 October 2023); Danube Youth Camp & POPRI Start-up Challenge (22-23 October 2023) and 12th EUSDR Annual Forum (24-25 October 2023).

To the end of Mr Volasko's presentation we are adding one poem on the year 2040 written by ChatGPT (required by Ms Natalija Medica, one of the speakers at the Knowledge Driven Society event):

*„But no matter what the future brings,
We must remember the important things,
Love, compassion, and empathy too,
For without these, our world will never renew. “*

Ms Katharina Lenz (Danube Strategy Point) updated participants on behalf of the DSP about their recent activities and the way forward. Ms Lenz has apologized Ms Cristina Cuc (DSP Pillar III Officer), who was not able to attend the PA7 SG meeting this time. In her presentation, Ms Lenz mentioned that the DSP is similarly like the PAs working on the basis of the newly approved DRP project and at first gave an overview about the DSP support frame to their core stakeholders (e.g. a support and guidelines on organizing hybrid events, teambuilding seminars for PACs), another big topic explained was the overall process of the embedding, including its tools, funding and invitation to the EUSDR Embedding Week (starting next week). For EUSDR embedding process and the EUSDR tools elaborated, please visit the following link for more information: <https://danube-region.eu/projects-and-funding/embedding-2021-2027/>. Afterwards a short information on monitoring and evaluation (past, current and future) and brief technical overview on Danube Strategy Flagships (promotion, identification and selection) were presented. The new (and also older) EUSDR Implementation Report(s) can be found here: <https://danube-region.eu/about/implementation-reports/>. As for the DSP communication activities, participants could learn about the new service provider for the official ESUDR website(s), update of the EUSDR smart app based on the updates of the new webpage in order to align communication activities for more visibility. Participants were also informed about a new capacity building exercise, i.e. a Training Needs Analysis will be conducted in order to develop a capacity building framework for the EUSDR core stakeholders in respect to their roles & responsibilities. The next topic was devoted to the involvement of DYC members in PAs, such as letting the DYC members give their input on documents, projects, processes; involving the DYC members in drafting reports, studies, agendas; inviting the DYC members to meetings, conferences, events and (if possible) giving them an active role. At last, the next planned relevant EUSDR events were presented and all information and invitations are available here: <https://danube-region.eu/communication/events/>



Ms Nina Bratkova (SK NC team) raised a question related to the Embedding process and Embedding Week. The question was addressed to the DSP and all PACs, whether it would be possible to provide a platform on the relevant topics on which synchronized call within different countries/regions could be organized. The Slovak NC is at the moment investigating the possibilities, as the EUSDR has been successfully embedded into the Slovakia's recovery and resilience plan and hence trying to find the best ways of its implementation.

Ms Lenz replied that this years Embedding Week is focused on presenting the ways of cooperation among different priority areas, and looking for the common joint actions how they could cooperate together. Similarly, the representatives of the EC and managing authorities were invited to explain the possible ways of funding for the region. After summing this up we will have a clearer idea on how to proceed further.

Mr Ziegler (leader of the project RIS4DANU) asked about more details on the capacity building, what is the more concrete focus on and what methods is the DSP using to assess the capacity building.

Ms Lenz explained that the DSP organizes unfolded (?) workshops to look for the needs from the stakeholders on the possibilities how to bring them easier to the strategy, as for the methods to collect the ideas on the needs, the MIRO visual boards was mentioned. Ms Lenz also referred back to the development of the Capacity building framework, i.e. a concept of a training needs analysis, developed and elaborated by an external contractor (based on the collection and analysis of the training needs and preparing a framework for capacity building through tailored training sessions).

Reports of the PA7 working groups

WG Danube Funding Coordination Network

Mr Christian Gollubits (AT SG member) apologized Ms Martina Hartl (leader of the WG DFCN) who was not able to join the meeting due to other commitments and presented a brief overview of the work of the WG DFCN, primarily {focused on the Danube Region Multilateral call; potential ways for Danube related research in the new Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023/2024 and better connection of the DRP Programme projects to PA7. At first Mr Gollubits presented the summary of the opportunities for Danube region researchers from the PA7 Infoday on Horizon Europe. Individual researchers from the Danube Region may find higher chances in applying for MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2023 and ERA fellowships, with an extra additional budget dedicated to the widening countries, with the deadlines on 13 September 2023. Similarly, ERC offers interesting possibilities, such as visiting fellowships to current ERC holders, for lower performing countries, in order to strengthen their research profile and increase their participation or mentoring initiatives to provide trainings, professional scientific feedback to future ERC applicants. Other possibilities for Danube region scientists can be found within various clusters, with the special attention on many calls open within the Cluster Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources,



Agriculture, ... these calls will be open by the end of this year. As for the missions, the calls within 3 missions are currently open with the deadline on 20 September. As another point, the WG DFCN investigated the possibilities within the Danube Region Programme. As the most relevant opportunities for PA7 are considered within the Priority I Smarter Danube Region and both of its objectives, i.e. Objective 1.1 Enhancing Innovation and Technology Transfer and Objective 1.2 Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship. Mr Gollubits prepared a short overview about the preliminary results of the first DRP Call closed on 20 April 2023. Within this call there were 290 expressions of interest received with 90 projects passing to the second round (with 21 topics within Objective 1.1 and 9 within Objective 1.2). The open questions still remain: *How can we connect the selected projects to PA7? And could we potentially use the Danube Region Programme for submitting projects in the interest of PA7 for the second Call?*

WG European Research Area

Ms Jaroslava Szudi (member of WG ERA) gave participants a brief overview about the history of the working group and its relevance to the EUSDR Action Plan, and then presented the recent activities of this WG. Members of this WG (PA7 + SLORD) contributed to the preparation of the 5th section approved for the EU MRS Week 2023 (24-28 April 2023). This section was coordinated by the PA7 Flagship Project Danube Tech Valley Initiative and led by Dr Katarina Csefalvayova. The section was titled as “The contribution of the Regional Innovation Valleys to cohesive EU via funding & shared knowledge” and its recorded version is available: <https://eumrsweek.regio-events.eu/en/stakeholder-sessions>. As the next point, Ms Szudi talked about the contribution and support of PA7 during the already mentioned event of the EUSDR SI PRES “Knowledge Driven Society” with active participation of Ms Pitlova and Prof Nedovic, as well as Ms Hartl. Another event organized by the PA7 WG on ERA took place last week with a focus on opportunities for Danube Region researchers within Horizon Europe: Infoday on Twinning Call. At last the Ms Szudi mentioned the support (in a form of ASP declarations) to the new DRP projects (HarmonyMissions and SkillSet) passing to the 2nd round of evaluation.

WG Higher Education and Mobility

Ms Ivanka Popović (leader of WG HEM) shared with participants information on updated research results (especially the publications obtained from the WoS) of the Danube Region HEIs in 2022 (.ppt available). In the Table identifying the total numbers of publications we could see growing trend in all Danube region countries. As an ongoing fact Prof Popovic mentioned that the structure of the collaboration between universities happens foremost between neighbouring countries, such Serbia-Montenegro or Czechia-Slovakia. Prof Popovic also pointed out on very few cooperation linkages between Danube region countries and Ukraine (except for cooperation with Germany). As an interesting



way of regional co-publications were shown highly cited publications with co-authors from all Danube countries and more cooperation of this type should be encouraged:

- Breda, J et al., (2021) Methodology and implementation of the WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI), OBESITY REVIEWS, 2021, Supplement 6, DOI 10.1111/obr.13215
- Loeber, J. Gerard, et al. (2021) Neonatal Screening in Europe Revisited: An ISNS Perspective on the Current State and Developments Since 2010, INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NEONATAL SCREENING, Volume7, Issue1, DOI 10.3390/ijns7010015

Afterwards Prof Popovic presented the close cooperation links between the WG HEI and DRC, where the cooperation in previous period focused predominantly on early-stage researchers and how to keep them engaged in academic institutions, improving research assessment, stimulus in a form of young scientist awards and other types of their funding possibilities. In the last part of her presentation, Prof Popovic mentioned support to Ukrainian HEIs, in a form of bilateral engagement and cooperation especially with the neighbouring countries, MSCA for Ukraine which granted 124 scholarships given for mostly UA post-docs. The question of reconstruction of HEIs in Ukraine still remains very important, not only if we look on materialistic side, but especially on maintaining the human potential. The issue of brain drain will need to be checked carefully, and all the EU candidates should have the same opportunities.

Mr Mladen Kraljic (University of Maribor, EUSDR SI PRES) DRC Assembly has approved 2 projects, one of them is a foresight project of the DRC in which a group of 24 students, early-stage researchers and young scientists (from 20 countries) developed scenarios regarding the world of science, university and academia in the region of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe in the year of 2040. More information is available at the [DRC website](#). The second project was dedicated to 3 targets of PA7 (to increase mobilities in the region, to increase the number of joint publications in the region and to enhance the use of research infrastructures), there was an online Call distributed to all DRC universities with 50 applications received within one month. Presidency of the DRC selected 15 candidates (with different interests, various research disciplines). The exercise has shown that youth wish to find close solutions, i.e. if the possibilities within the region exist, they would not hesitate. Based on this the Slovenian Agency responsible for the Erasmus programme decided to foster the doctoral studies in the Danube Region as a pilot programme with the first results coming next year at the DRC General Assembly. Foster doctoral studies. The DRC supported these projects with a sum of 80.000 € and after seeing the positive results and impact of these project, the DRC hopes to continue with similar investments.

WG RIS3

Mr Viktor Nedović (leader of WG RIS3) informed about ongoing and new activities of the working group related to the S3 priority areas in the region, cooperation with the JRC, apart others also regarding the possible cooperation within the Partnerships for Regional Innovation, as its pilot programme is just ending at this moment (started in 2022). The Partnerships are launched as a pilot project, in a spirit of



co-creation practitioners, stakeholders and experts. This Playbook is the initial support document for a pilot phase engaging Member States, regions and groups of regions who have volunteered to co-develop and test the approach, centred on a selection of practical policy tools. A [toolkit](#) to level up innovation in region(s) has been prepared and possibilities for further collaborations will be examined by the WG RIS3. Another important topic the WH is dealing with are the "STI for SDGs Roadmaps" in the frame of the cooperation with the UN, where Serbia and Ukraine were included in their pilot project (in Serbian case the field of the S3, especially the entrepreneurial discovery process – chosen and recognized as an example for other countries) – Serbia was chosen as one of 5 piloting countries in a Partnership in action programme, to share the knowledge that was learnt so far. As for the newly built cooperation and activities, Prof Nedovic mentioned a recent dialogue with a project named [PREP4BLUE](#) funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe program that will set the foundations for co-creating and co-implementing the research and innovation required to achieve Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030. More possibilities for cooperation will be examined within the next period(s). Prof Nedovic also mentioned cooperation with the RIS4DANU project which will be presented later today by Dr Ziegler, as the project was nominated for the next PA7 Danube Flagship project. Last but not least a cross-macroregional cooperation and connection with the EUSAIR was mentioned in particular with the [BLUEAIR project](#) to enhance and streamline innovation collaboration at both territorial and macro-regional levels. Its main goal is to drive a sustainable blue economy in the Adriatic and Ionian Region by promoting collaboration and co-creation among quadruple helix stakeholders from diverse sectors, regions, and countries. WG ERA also participated in the event "Macro-regional perspective of smart specialization in the areas of sustainable blue economy" (in May 2023). Prof Nedovic suggested to invite the project representatives to the upcoming PA7 SG meeting to give a more detailed overview about the project and possibly discuss its outcomes and achievements for the potential use in the future.

Mr Roland Maier-Frei asked a question related to the missions, whether the WG leaders foresee any concrete activities on how we could make a best usage of them, especially those related to the water issues.

Ms Pitlova explained that PA7 decided to join the newly prepared DRP project HarmonyMissions that will closer examine the harmonisation of the implementation of the European missions on the Danube region level. One of the aims of the project is to set up an effective Missions governing model on the Danube region level, especially related to the Missions: [Adaptation to Climate Change: support at least 150 European regions and communities to become climate resilient by 2030](#) and [100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030](#). Ms Pitlova also added the missions were also a part of the PA7 Horizon Europe Infoday and that PA7 remains open for any kind of cooperation in this respect.

Ms Miljana Cosic mentioned in a chat window that Steinbeis Europa Zentrum (leader of the PA8 WG I&TT) is coordinating a project [EcoDaLLi \(ECOsysteM-based governance with DANube lighthouse Living](#) www.interreg-danube.eu Project co-funded by European Union Funds (ERDF, IPA) www.danubeknowledgesociety.eu



[Lab for sustainable Innovation processes](#)) embedded within Horizon Europe Lighthouse Mission 'Restore our oceans and waters by 2030. Ms Cosic expressed her openness to reach out to the project leaders in order to explore more possibilities for cooperation and synergies in order to achieve impact in the future.

Ms Katharina Lenz complemented that the DSP is also involved in supporting stakeholders for getting into EU missions. DSP is in touch with the EC and the respective DGs who are implementing the missions and there are two possible ways on how to contribute as a PA:

- 1) A mission charter on the official Horizon Europe webpage, where any relevant actions or initiatives contributing to the missions can be added, in order to let know about the objectives, foresights for possible future cooperation or mission orientation
- 2) DSP supported a joint meeting organized between PA4, PA5 and PA6 meeting with the EC in order to formulate the targets for the future missions starting next year

Something similar can be then set up with PA7 and other related PAs.

Prof. Veskovic added a bit to the debate on mission that the DG JRC published 2 month ago a working paper called "[Missions and Cohesion Policy: Living separate or dancing together?](#)" which offers rather theoretical and general views about the cohesion policy and macroregions trying to find new roles and new ways to work together. This paper should be disseminated about Danube region stakeholders for the follow up.

Presentation of the PA7 Flagship projects

Ms Pitlova gave a brief overview about the current PA7 flagship projects and their first tangible results. Ms Pitlova also added that at the 23rd PA7 SG meeting last year, the SG approved four flagship projects for labelling and agreed to process and submit three of these projects in the first year according to the [guidance](#) for identifying and listening Danube strategy flagships and pass the remaining one (Excellence-in-ReSTI) in the current round of labelling if the situation allows. At the same time Ms Pitlova welcomed all present representatives of flagship projects and apologized **leaders of the Danube Tech Valley Initiative** who were not able to join the meeting due to the ongoing GLOBSEC 2023 Bratislava forum.

Ms Elke Dall (Centre for Social Innovation, Vienna) appreciated the long-term cooperation with the Danube Strategy and expressed gratitude for receiving the flagship status for the project Western Balkans Info Hub supported by the Horizon Europe funded project POLICY ANSWERS. The Western Balkans Info Hub is based on previous cooperation and information hubs in support to the Steering Platform on Research and Innovation for the Western Balkans. Ms Dall informed the participants about the progress achieved within the Info Hub and showcased it on concrete examples. As a communication tool the Info Hub collects a repository with an archive of more than 5.800 news, 1.900 documents, 800 calls, and 1.400



events. On average, each month the Info Hub moreover registers approximately 5.100 visitors, almost 10.000 visits and 32.000 visited pages (data from May 2023). The Info Hub newsletter service is reaching out 11.437 subscribers (data from June 2023). The Info Hub is however not only a website, but also a social media environment with interesting numbers of stakeholders, with the aim to help researchers and innovators in the region to identify their EU-funding and cooperation opportunities and possibilities to increase their capacities, but information about the multitude of opportunities is not yet widely available. Ms Dall mentioned that by being a Danube flagship project, the Info Hub is achieving a bit more beyond the serendipity of these activities. Ms Dall offered a possibility to prepare a dedicated newsletter (with a monthly topic) with the EUSDR (PA7), in cooperation with the DSP, relevant WGs, within the short future, on macro-regional strategies and their activities/impacts in the region. Furthermore, Ms Dall promoted a save the date on 13 September 2023 for the kick-off for a cooperation and exchange platform on digital/green/health priorities that will take place in Sarajevo focused preliminarily on Western Balkan. This platform shall be working sustainably during the whole project period and focus on exploiting cooperation in missions and possibly also on partnership, S3, research infrastructures, etc. Another way for potential future cooperation, e.g., with the DRC is the possibility of future mobility programmes (young researchers, open access to research infrastructures) with the budget of 100.000 € allocated for this activity (regional mobility towards opening and promoting research infrastructures). Another interesting activity presented were the regional vouchers supporting industry-academia cooperation (with already selected implementing Agency), where the companies will be getting expertise from the universities from the region. From the other activities, participants could learn more about the planned ministerial conference, analytical support (results of a Foresight workshop, profiling ERA integration, monitoring WB Agenda implementation, etc.); capacity building exercise, preparation for pilot activities within regional voucher schemes, cooperation with other projects, e.g. MSCAdvocacy, WBC-RRI.NET, Enterprise Europe Network, etc.

Mr Kraljic thanked for the presentation and expressed interest in cooperation with the Western Balkans Info Hub 1) in the framework of the DRC and also 2) in regards with better access to available research infrastructures, which represent a huge and unused potential in our regions.

Mr Volasko mentioned that the Western Balkan has a very weak representation within the JPND governing Board and asked whether InfoHub could potentially help to address also this topic,

Mr Nedovic noted to Slovenian delegation that it would be of a benefit if Slovenia could rejoin the ministerial / steering platform of the Western Balkan.

Ms Dall explained that due to its complexity she will elaborate these issues on a bilateral level.



Mr Christian Gollubits presented a brief overview about the PA7 Flagship Project MSTC. In 2016 Austria, Czech Republic, Republic of Serbia and Slovak Republic agreed to launch a Pilot Joint Call with 55 applications received in total and 19 projects funded. The second edition of the MSTC was launched in 2019 with the same participating countries, incl. France with 55 applications received and 20 projects funded. The last edition of the MSTC was launched last year with AT, CZ, SRB, SK, FR + Bulgaria and Montenegro as participating countries with 47 eligible project applications waiting for the selection process (June 2023). The next call is planned for Autumn 2024 and new partner countries are still welcome. Mr Gollubits mentioned the aims of the MSTC, the duration of the projects and other practicalities of the call.

Ms Pitlova also referred to the possibility to join the new call for the newcomer countries, as the costs are not very high in comparison to the added value of the call.

Mr Meier-Frei asked about the implementing bodies on national/regional level.

Mr Gollubits replied that in majority of the cases the implementing bodies are national Agencies responsible for research funding activities.

Mr Helmut Habersack (BOKU Vienna) on behalf of the consortia of the [DANUBE 4 all project](#) prepared for participants an overview about the project focused on Restoration of the Danube River Basin for ecosystems and people from mountains to coast, as a contribution to the DREAM (Danube Region Research and Management) flagship project. As for the context Prof Habersack explained the basic information about the DREAM representing a framework/umbrella for other projects and activities. DREAM was among the first Danube Flagship projects and its aim was to boost cooperation between research institutions in the Danube basin (between 2012-2022). The project was based on a bottom-up approach and hence funded by several projects with the total estimated costs cca. 70 mil. €. Prof Habersack pointed on one of the activities of the project, which was the construction of 2 large Responsible River Modelling Centers/hydraulic and environmental engineering laboratories (up to 10m³) to enable research of hydrodynamics, sediment transport, morphodynamics and ecological processes in the various reaches of the Danube River by means of adequate hydraulic laboratories, that provide a significant discharge (up to 10 m³/s without pumping) and space (large scale models). Prof Habersack shared with participants pictures of these centres and explained their work for better imagination and content of the Danube 4 all project. DANUBE4all is an EU 'Lighthouse Initiative' in support of Mission "Restore our ocean and waters by 2030". DANUBE4all aims to restore freshwater ecosystems in the Danube River Basin through the development of a comprehensive, scientifically-based and practically-orientated Restoration Action Plan. The project seeks to address the lack of knowledge, awareness, and participation of local people and business actors in the implementation of freshwater ecosystem restoration. The hope is to restore and to use it at the same time. In this



pursuit, DANUBE4all is an unprecedented co-creation process between scientists, researchers, SMEs, investors, public bodies, policymakers, and local communities. The project takes a multi-sectoral approach to addressing the diverse set of environmental challenges facing the Danube River Basin (such as loss of river connectivity and associated ecosystem degradation, biodiversity losses, and a need for new approaches to nature-based solutions that can help revitalize the way we interact with the river). DANUBE4all also seeks to show both the economic and social benefits of restored ecosystems to local communities and SMEs. The project duration is January 2023 – December 2027 and the total budget is 8.5 mil. €. DANUBE4all will develop a fundamental and fully public Restoration Plan (scientifically based and practically oriented). The overall structure of the project based on the work packages, pillars and phases were explained and the key performance indicators with the means of their verification were introduced. Prof Habersack ended up his presentation with the wish to get more awareness in regards with the restoration need in a more unconventional/optimistic way among a wider public.

Ms Pitlova asked about the consideration of the next PA7 Flagship Project.

Prof Habersack answered that it would need to be discussed, but he thinks that it would be beneficial to continue with the original DREAM project and hence highlight its sustainability via all other related activities.

Mr Oliver Ziegler (IIT Berlin) introduced the [RIS4Danu](#) project aiming at addressing the socio-economic effects of plant closures in the Danube Region by proposing solutions for a broader social sustainable-technological transition through the revitalisation of recently closed industry plants and sites. The RIS4Danu project seeks to elaborate strategic business development plans for the re-opening of 21 disused industrial sites in the Danube region. Participants could learn the most important facts about the project partnership and governance, budget, objectives and impacts. Afterwards an information about Entrepreneurial Discovery Workshops in the project framework and their main results were received. The workshops were held in industrial areas in 11 Danube regions developing green and innovative development plans for the revitalisation of these areas. The individual transformation plans shall be still prepared for these areas. Participants could get an overview about the main results of these workshops. To conclude his presentation, Mr Ziegler added that he believes to get more aligned with the PA7 and EUSDR activities also via the possibility to qualify for a Danube flagship label.

Ms Pitlova noted that the project is fully in compliance with the PA7 activities, more in detail corresponding with the Action 5 dealing with S3 strategies, and suggested the RIS4Danu project for the next round of Danube flagship labelling. She informed participants that more information about the project and labelling process will be disseminated internally during next week, where participating countries can express their opinion by voting per rollam (1 vote per country).



Mr Béla Kardon (Regional Centre for Information and Scientific Development, Hungary) prepared a short presentation about enhancing access and uptake of education to reverse inequalities via their [Inclusion4Schools](#) project. Mr Kardon said that although he is usually representing the research policies and research and innovation projects, at this moment he will talk about the current European challenges connected to education, such as rising inequalities in Europe, growing social disadvantages and disparities, trail behind in access and uptake of education, and about reversing inequalities to enhance economic growth, democracy and equal opportunities for our future generations. All these topics are addressed within the Inclusion4School project which central objective is to support segregated schools in underprivileged regions, in the formation of bonds with their immediate social environments. The aim is to facilitate the emergence of solidary and inclusive school communities and strengthen cooperation of various stakeholders (between teachers, students, parents, social workers, municipal workers, civil activists, researchers and policy makers), to interact with the two parallel running RIA projects to enhance synergies and cooperation between them and amongst the relevant stakeholders and to generate networks for research and policy development. To achieve these objectives, the project partners create professional services like knowledge sharing platforms, evaluation and dissemination of “good practices”. The consortium partners of the project are mainly from the Danube region (Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia + Albania) but with their activities the project partners attempt to reach out to a worldwide audience, trying to make a difference in education. When speaking about the challenges, Mr Kardon mentioned these three levels: 1. Project (educate and train project partners), 2. External partners (to make the project interesting to various stakeholders) 3. Global (especially the effect of the pandemics). Furthermore, the work packages of the project and their main outcomes were introduced, more than 120 of events were organized (such as think-thank workshops, monitoring workshops, conferences, awareness rising events, open school classes, online focus group discussions), methodologies and transformative practices were developed, summer and winter schools were organized. All participants were invited to check more information on project achievements at the project official website and were kindly invited to save the date to the next international conference taking place on 28-29 November this year.

Mr Grygorii Mozolevych (Ministry of Education and Science, Ukraine) gave to participants a brief overview on the current situation in Ukraine. He expressed that one of the Ukrainian top priorities remains the EU integration and added that the inclusion of Ukraine (as associated partner) to the Horizon Europe Programme (in June 2022) is bringing the first tangible results. Mr Mozolevych added that unfortunately due to the war lots of research infrastructures were damaged or destroyed, and some (in Donetsk and Luhansk) were temporarily occupied. At last Mr Mozolevych shared for better imagination a picture (in the attachment) about the drone attacks on research infrastructures from May 2023. He expressed his hope that Ukraine will be able to get through this difficult time and thanked for all the existing support received.



Ms Pitlova thanked for the update on behalf of all participants and expressed hope, deep sympathy and best wishes.

Mr Kardon added that Ukrainian research and education is already a part of the EU since they became an inevitable part of the Horizon Europe and this is already the first step towards the integration opening new cooperation possibilities.

To the end of the meeting **Mr Nedovic**, thanked to all speakers and participants of the 25th PA7 SG meeting, highlighted the meaningful presentations which were pointing out at important topics not only relevant for PA7, but much broader. He thanked for the opportunities to learn still more about the relevant activities for the Danube region, new opportunities for the future, proposals for collaboration and networking. Mr Nedovic expressed his satisfaction with today's meeting and mentioned that after the discussion with Slovenian colleagues there is a possibility to organize the next PA7 SG meeting in Maribor. Last but not least Mr Nedovic once again thanked to the Serbia co-ordination team for the support and wished everyone a nice rest of the day.

Ms Pitlova added that despite the technical difficulties, for which she apologized to all participants, we had a nice meeting, learnt lots of new information, thanked for active participation for both online and onsite participants, and expressed her hope to meet everyone at the autumn meeting in Maribor.



Annex I: Agenda

25th PA7 Steering Group Meeting

2 June 2023 in Bratislava | Centre of Scientific and Technical Information | 9:30 – 15:00 |

with possible participation online

Draft Agenda

Registration link: <https://forms.gle/fapBr4QrZXsLRY2j9>

REGISTRATION AND WELCOME

- 09:00 – 09:30 **Registration (onsite and online)**
- 09:30 – 09:45 **Joint welcome and opening remarks from PACs and EC**
Lubica PITLOVA and Viktor NEDOVIC, PA7 coordinators
Karolina JASINSKA-MUEHLECK, EC DG REGIO

PA7 UPDATE ON PAST ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE PLANS WITHIN PA7/EUSDR/beyond

- 9:45 – 10:00 **Information on PA7 activities in second half of 2022**
Dijana ŠTRBAC
- 10:00 – 10:15 **Information on the conference “Knowledge Driven Society” and forthcoming activities of the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency**
Peter VOLASKO
- 10:15 - 10:30 **Information from the DSP – Update of the activities & the way forward**
Katharina LENZ

SHORT REPORTS ON PA7 WORKING GROUPS

- 10:30 - 10:40 **WG DFCN** *Christian GOLLUBITS*
- 10:40 - 10:50 **WG ERA** *Jaroslava SZUDI*
- 10:50 – 11:00 **WG HEI** *Ivanka POPOVIĆ and Mladen KRALJIC*
- 11:00 - 11:10 **WG RIS3** *Viktor NEDOVIĆ*
- 11:10 – 11:15 **Q&A**
- 11:15 – 11:45 **Coffee break**

UPDATES ON PA7 FLAGSHIP PROJECTS

- 11:45 - 12:30 **Presentation of the approved PA7 Flagship projects (15 min each)**



POLICY ANSWERS, *Elke DALL*

Danube Multilateral Call, *Christian GOLLUBITS*

12:30-12:45 **Q&A**

12:45 – 13:30 **Lunch break**

INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW PROJECTS FOR FUTURE COOPERATION | POSSIBLE FLAGSHIP PROJECTS NOMINATION

13:30 - 14:00 **Presentation of the new proposals for PA7 Flagship projects (15 min each)**

Horizon Europe project RIS4DANU; *Oliver ZIEGLER*

Horizon Europe project *of the team of Prof HABERSACK*

AOB

14:00 - 14:15 **Enhancing access and uptake of education to reverse inequalities within the project Inclusion4Schools**
Béla KARDON

14:15 – 14:30 **AOB**

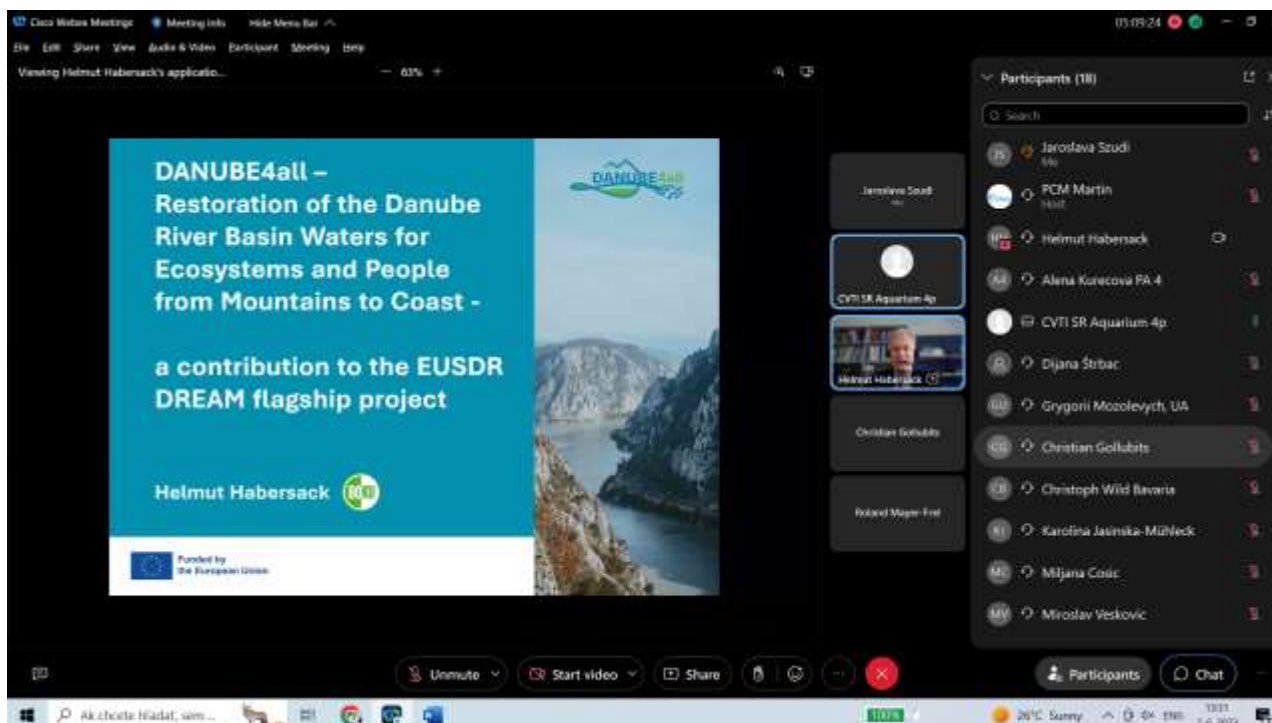
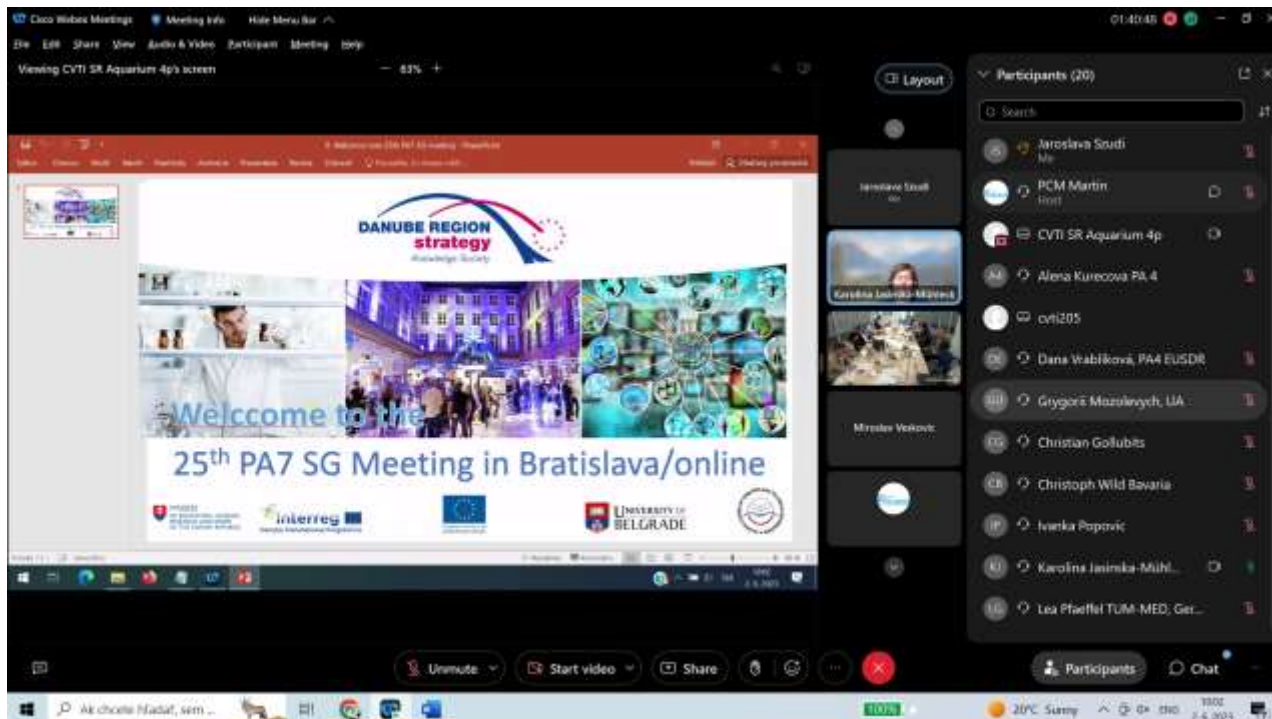
14:30 - 15:00 **Final conclusions, last remarks and farewell**
Lubica PITLOVA, Viktor NEDOVIC

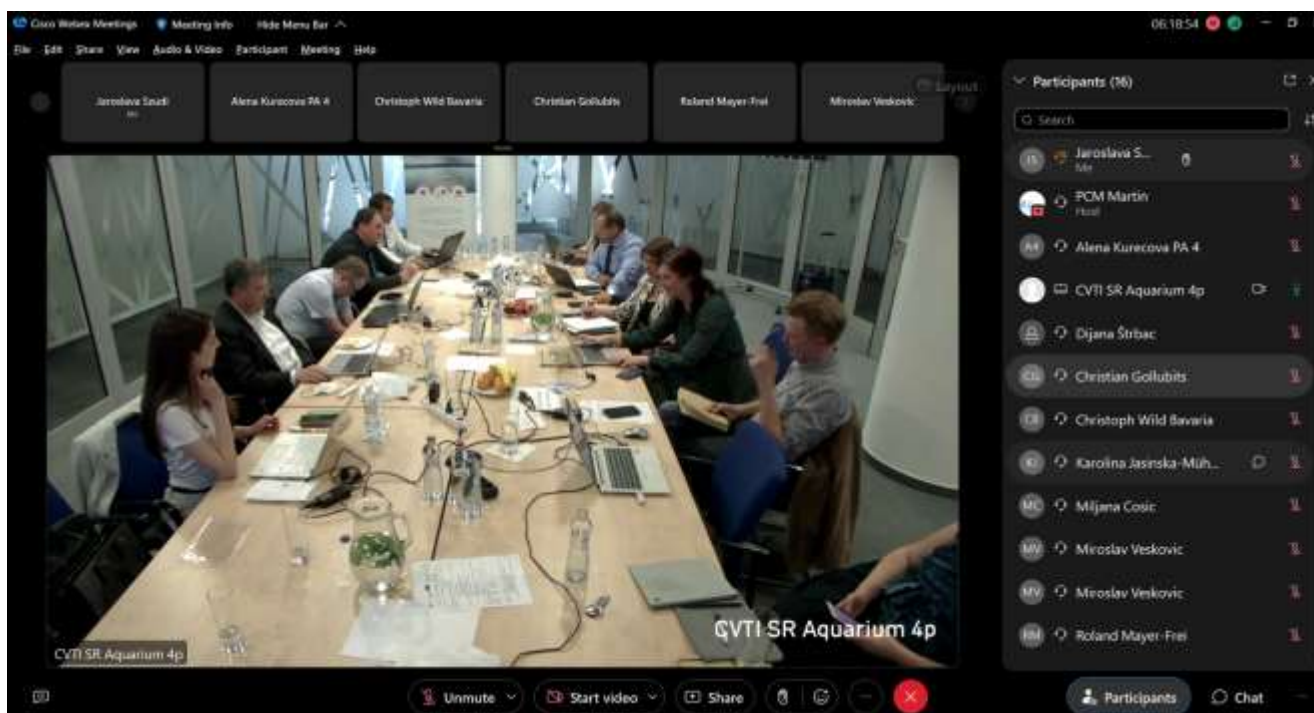
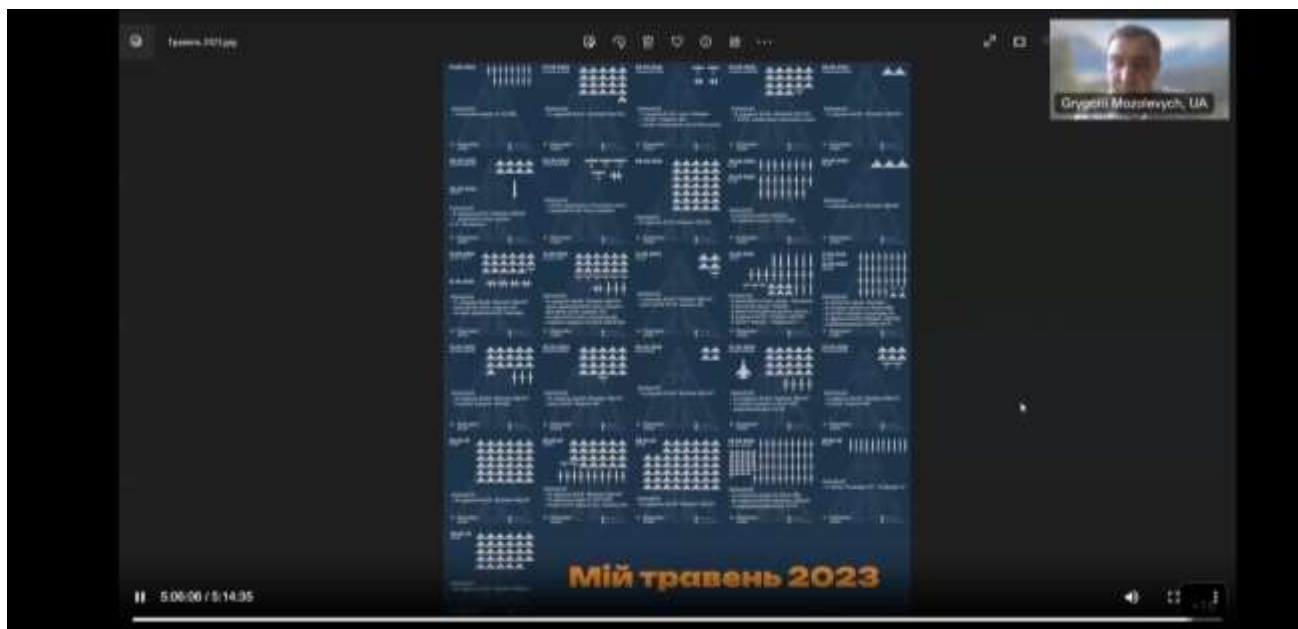
Annex II: List of Participants

1	Elke Dall	Austria
2	Matej Smrek	Slovakia
3	Roland Mayer-Frei	Germany
4	Darina Kupkova	Slovakia
5	Miroslav Veskovic	Serbia
6	Karolina Jasicka-Muehleck	European Commission
7	Béla Kardon	Hungary
8	Oliver Ziegler	Germany
9	Katharina Lenz	DSP
10	Miljana Cosic	Germany
11	Alena Kurecova	Slovakia
12	Danka Vrablik	Slovakia
13	Ivana Lagator	Montenegro
14	Dijana Štrbac	Serbia
15	Viktor Nedović	Serbia
16	Ivanka Popovic	Serbia
17	Tomas Tabis	Slovakia
18	Lubica Pitlova	Slovakia
19	Jaroslava Szudi	Slovakia
20	Sebastian Schaffer	Austria
21	Grygorii Mozolveych	Ukraine
22	Tomas Kern	Slovenia
23	Mladen Kraljić	Slovenia
24	Christoph Wild	Germany
25	Lea Pfaffel	Germany
26	Anna Krivjanska	Slovakia
27	Barbora Banicova	Slovakia
28	Peter Volasko	Slovenia



Annex III: Selected Photos








Enhancing Access and Uptake of Education to Reverse Inequalities

The Inclusion4Schools Project

EUSDR 25th PA7 Steering Group Meeting
2 June 2023
Bratislava, Slovakia

Dr Béla Kardon CSO
RCISD





This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101019150

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