

Final Report
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**Evaluation of the effectiveness,
communication and stakeholder
involvement of the EUSDR**

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Draft Report

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communication and stakeholder
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List of abbreviations

CBC	Cross-Border Cooperation
CF	Cohesion Fund
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional Policy
DSP	Danube Strategy Point
DTP	DANUBE Transnational Programme
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EIB	European Investment Bank
EP	European Parliament
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EUSDR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
HLG	High Level Group
JS	Joint Secretariat
MA	Managing Authority
MRS	Macro-regional strategy/ies
NC	National Coordinator
PA	Priority Area
PAC	Priority Area Coordinator
SG	Steering Group
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
TNC	Transnational Cooperation

Executive Summary

Strategic dimension

The findings of the evaluation indicate that there have been some **achievements** of the EUSDR at strategic level, but the overall impact of the strategy is not very high. Questions on the **level of change triggered by the EUSDR in different policy fields**, on the impact of the EUSDR on **national or regional laws, regulations and organizational structures** as well as on **planning processes** reached a mean score between 2.6 and 3.2 on a scale from 1 (no change/impact) to 6 (high level of change/impact). Only the consideration of the EUSDR in **bilateral/international issues** was ranked higher (mean 3.7).

The major concrete achievement is the set-up of **cooperation structures** and new partnerships. In some PAs visible progress has been achieved, but in general internal actors largely agree that the momentum of EUSDR has decreased.

The results of the online-survey show that the **cooperation intensity** between key actors in the EUSDR is high at **PA level** and – to a smaller extent – at **national level**. At **Pillar level** and in the **EUSDR in general (cross-pillar)**, the cooperation is less intensive. The survey results also clearly show that **cooperation intensity** in the Danube Region **raised over time** (e.g. intensity of information exchange, mutual understanding, binding rules/processes/structures, etc.).

The assessment of **cooperation with line DGs and other European institutions** showed substantial differences. A major aspect is that good cooperation is essentially **based on good inter-personal relationships**, thus cooperation culture has not fully reached the institutional level.

To tie **budgets and funding opportunities** to the strategy is seen as a major point, which could raise the political interest. Furthermore, the **revision of the Action Plan** has been explicitly raised as an opportunity to rekindle the political interest from the European level (e.g. through definition of cross-cutting topics across the PA).

According to the results of the online-survey, coordinated **funding of projects**, better **cooperation** and better **governance** are needed most in the Danube Region.

The added value of the EUSDR was rated highest in terms of “**Improving existing cooperation mechanisms and networks and/or creating new ones**”, followed by the factor “**Strengthening integration within the Danube Region and cooperation with non-EU countries in the areas of common interest and in addressing common challenges**”. The added-value was rated lowest in terms of factors relating to financing and complementarity of funding sources.

The most relevant factors constituting the benefit are 1) results in terms of projects, actions, networks and processes; 2) greater integration and coordination, mutual learning; and 3) improved cooperation with non-EU and neighbouring countries.

Governance dimension (operational level)

Stakeholder involvement and Steering Groups

Not only at strategic but also at operational level it is important that the right **stakeholders** are **involved**. The evaluation findings indicate that the current state of play is ranked as **satisfactory** but with room for improvement. The lack of persons having actual influence on policy-making was the major point of criticism. Also the involvement of additional stakeholders (e.g. cities, chambers and academia) was suggested in order to increase the added value and impact of the activities.

According to the perception of the online-survey participants, the **Steering Group** they belong to are **composed appropriately** and the involvement of the SG in the PA is relatively high. However, the answers show a wide variation, which indicates large differences between the Priority Areas. The stakeholder involvement also strongly varies between countries.

Key **success factors** for a strong involvement of the SG in the PA are high-level political commitment, ownership and leadership, regular and proactive participation at meetings as well as common projects and actions.

Main **obstacles** for a stronger involvement of the SG relate to the lack of capacities and expertise from part of the SG members. A step-by-step empowerment of SGs might be an incentive that MS invest more in strategy-building. Also a broader expert involvement should be considered. In order to encourage participation in SG it might be useful to combine several meetings and to encourage decision-making.

National outreach and funding sources

There have been some structural and institutional changes brought by the EUSDR, but overall, the **outreach and spill-over to the national level** seems to be **little**. According to the perception of the interview partners, the outcomes of the SG meetings are not sufficiently transmitted to the national level. The few reported exemplary achievements related to institutional change are a service office and inter-ministerial consultation groups.

According to the online survey, the following funding sources are addressed most in the EUSDR: **ERDF (mainly via DTP, but also Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes), Cohesion Fund** and **national/regional funding sources** or development cooperation sources (e.g. BACID, CEI Calls for Proposals). Other funding sources like the **ESF, centrally managed EU funds** or **private funds** play a smaller role according to the respondents. Good EUSDR examples for enhanced intertwining of funds can be found, e.g. in Bulgaria.

Workflows and processes

In order to safeguard efficient and synergetic implementation procedures, well-functioning **workflows and processes** among key actors are vital prerequisites. The participants of the online-survey assessed the general workflows/processes **satisfying, sufficiently transparent** and **rather formal** than informal. The best assessment was reached at PA level, followed by the EUSDR level. Lower ratings are found at national level. The **efforts** that are **needed** to ensure the workflows/processes in relation to the outcome are assessed relatively high at all levels.

On the one hand, **examples** like the revision of the EUSDR action plan (ensuring the bottom-up approach), national inter-ministerial working groups (allowing the inclusion of line ministries and core stakeholders), Danube Participation Days (improving civil society involvement), or seminars, workshops and forums (used for capacity building, exchange of information and cooperation) were mentioned as **workflows/processes that work well**.

On the other hand, participation, transparency and decision making processes on SG level, the interlinkage between MRS and EU Mainstream Programmes, external communication, national coordination or the selection of PACs were mentioned as examples of workflows/processes that **need to be improved**.

Projects and activities of strategic value

Projects and activities of strategic value are an important tool for making results visible. In this context, Interact has highlighted the concept of “**project chains**”, which are projects that are interlinked. This linkage may be a horizontal one (linking topics within a PA or a pillar), it may link projects across funding schemes or with national/regional projects or activities, thus allowing a wider outreach of the strategy. This implies that thematic coordinators of a PA actively build, implement and monitor such linkages. Good EUSDR examples are the DREAM project or Danube Parks.

Another element for triggering changes through the EUSDR are processes put in place. A “**project to policy loop**” is a process where a link between macro-regional processes and a policy change is initiated. In this context, a macro regional process can trigger a policy discussion or even change. Good EUSDR practice examples are NEWADA and Fairway (PA 1a) or vocational training being brought forward in BiH, HU and HR.

External communication and PR

In general, the participants of the online-survey are relatively **satisfied with the EUSDR communication flows**. This is the case mainly at PA level and at EUSDR level. At national level the satisfaction rate is lower. Overall, the **communication and PR tools meet the information needs** on the EUSDR, but only to a limited extent. The assessment on the extent of the communication and PR tools **highlighting the added value** of the EUSDR is less positive.

In terms of specific communication and PR tools, the **EUSDR Annual Forum**, the **Website** (www.danube-region.eu) and the **PA specific websites** achieved highest satisfaction rates. The participants of the online-survey also assessed the **reports** and **publications** relatively good. On the contrary, specific **national websites** related to the EUSDR and **Videos** were assessed rather poorly.

The **visibility** of the EUSDR varies for the different target groups. Not surprisingly, the strategy is most visible for the **key stakeholders of the EUSDR** (NCs, PACs, SG members) and least visible for the **public**. However, participants of the online survey also assessed (estimated) the visibility for **other stakeholders** (like multipliers, experts, authorities, politics, associations, interest representatives, civil society, media, academia) very low.

General findings, cross-cutting and transversal issues

Involvement, dedication, interest

- **Staff fluctuation** limits the strategic outreach, the options for concrete action and it is a major obstacle to anchor and stabilise institutional cooperation. A **stable institutional memory** is required in order to counteract the adverse effects. This could be an ancillary function of the DSP.
- In many cases, the persons sent to meetings lack the capacity and/or mandate to **take decisions**, which creates frustration and diminishing commitment.
- **Common projects and actions** are considered as a major success factor in terms of mobilising internal forces as well as in attracting political interest and thus reinforcing the momentum.
- In general, **working more towards “political results”** (e.g. ministerial meetings, mandates by ministers, etc.) would further raise the political interest. This could be highlighted more in the PAC’s DTP working programmes 2020-2022.

Expectations

It seems that the EUSDR has a problem with **expectation management**. Several internal actors see that expectations raised are too high thus causing frustration.

- A major point is the trade-off between **far-reaching goals and a very limited number of policy levers**. One might consider to reduce the number of issues addressed, develop concrete actions in a limited number of areas and thus develop success stories to broaden or rekindle the interest of a wider group of stakeholders.
- A second mismatch in expectations relates to the **ownership** of the strategy. Actors at different levels complain about the lack of involvement:
 - MS see that a strong role in facilitation and coordination by the EC is required;
 - Actors at the European level see deficiencies in the ownership of respectively the commitment to the Strategy by the MS involved;
- The expectations related to the **role and tasks of the DSP** are quite diverse and demanding. It is a longlist that certainly requires prioritisation and should be re-evaluated against the available resources.

Budget and levers

- Many respondents referred to the **3 'Nos' as the major limiting factor**. Appropriate allocation of resources should be secured.
- **Simplification** within EUSDR structures and processes should become a deliberate objective. Levers to reduce the administrative burden such as Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) should be considered.
- Strategic levers such as **cooperation across programmes** should help that 'embedding the strategy' goes beyond compliant formulations in national strategy documents towards actual coordination and alignment of priorities.

Finally...

It might help to dedicate more energy to find simple but convincing pictures for the desired future of the Danube Region. The evaluation has shown that the cohesive element in EUSDR are the interpersonal relationships slowly progressing towards institutional relationships. To exchange more openly on visions and ideas might be an element to tighten the networks.

1 Introduction

This Report responds to the Terms of Reference for the “Evaluation of the effectiveness, communication and stakeholder involvement of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)”. The Danube Strategy Point (DSP) as Contracting Authority asked for a service provider to conduct this operational evaluation. To support the implementation of the evaluation and to represent the EUSDR key implementers and stakeholders the Steering Group DANUVAL has been installed.

The client asks for an operational evaluation of the EUSDR, based on the evaluation plan. The objectives are

- to aim at enhancing the governance of the strategy and provide an evidence-base for the macro-regional processes and workflows, as well as the needs for transnational governance
- identify well-functioning processes that origin in the macro-regional processes
- take stock of the existing knowledge,
- identify obstacles in the implementation of the strategy and develop recommendations how to overcome them
- identify cross-funding processes and project chains
- identify potential additional stakeholders
- develop appropriate conclusions for the future revision of the Action Plan

The evaluation questions focus on workflows, processes, and success factors for a synergetic implementation, on gaps and obstacles to a successful implementation, the potential need of additional partners and the efficiency of communication flows. The evaluation questions are complemented by an indicative list of evaluation questions for the operational/governance evaluation of the Evaluation Plan (Version 1.0, January 2019).

Though the focus of the questions is mainly on operational and governance related aspects, this needs to be complemented by a strategic dimension in order to capture the nature of the Macroregional framework.

2 The methodological approach

2.1 Theory based evaluation

Different theoretical concepts have been used for this operational evaluation: one is based on the concept of added value in order to have a framework against which achievements or bottlenecks and obstacles can be assessed. The second is a theory of cooperation, which allows us to understand different phases (or – as explained below – a ladder) of cooperation. Finally, though not explicitly scientific, also the concept of project chains that trigger impact on stakeholders and policy actors has been used.

The first is based on an academic paper¹ on measuring the added value of the EUSDR, the second on a theory of cooperation, which has been developed in various studies and evaluations of territorial cooperation². Finally, the Input paper by Interact on how MRS deliver is considered as very relevant to identify causalities between governance actions and change induced with stakeholders³.

2.1.1 Added value of MRS

Starting point is the purpose of the MRS: to provide an integrated framework to address common challenges through cooperation. MRS aim at policy integration, coordination, cooperation, multi-level governance and partnership of national and regional actors in the macro-region. The hypothesis behind this macro-regional framework is that an increase in the ability and intensity of cooperation leads to better results in economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The concept paper argues that any evaluation of a MRS needs to take into account the nature of the EUSDR as a strategy: even if there are four pillars, 12 policy areas and 57 concrete targets, there are no dedicated funds, no formal institutions and no legislation, and there is no time frame that could act as reference framework. The character of the strategy needs to be open, soft and rather visionary in order to serve the purpose of stimulating cooperation.

2.1.2 Stages of cooperation for building social capital

However, in order to enfold integrative dynamics, cooperation needs to develop over time and enfolds in different stages. In order to reflect this, we have to take note of the different nature of cooperation: it can vary from a simple exchange of information and move up on a cooperation ladder to arrive at joint strategies. The major argument is, that cooperation needs to be built, and that different stages of cooperation are necessary, before a real strategic cooperation can be achieved.

Important pre-conditions are knowledge about the context of the cooperation partners, where information exchange is most important. Built upon this, joint working structures, agreements on cooperation issues and harmonisation of working methods may arise. The next level are joint pilot actions and projects. Common strategies, action plans and

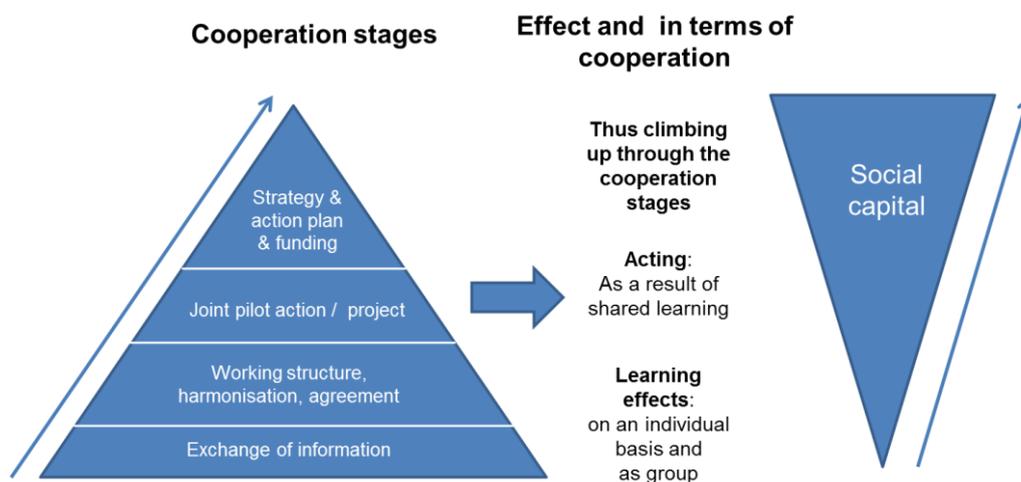
¹ Chilla T., Sielker F., 2016, Measuring the Added Value of the EUSDR – Challenges and Opportunities. Discussion paper, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. <https://www.danube-region.eu/about/policy-development>

² This approach has been developed in various evaluation studies dealing with territorial cooperation, among these: Gruber/Handler/Pucher (2017). Interreg added value 2020+. Reflections on cooperation frameworks and instruments based on Austrian experiences. (client: State Chancellery of Austria). The work refers to the study: Metis GmbH (2016) Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions (client: European Commission).

³ Interact (2018), How do macro-regional strategies deliver: workflows, processes and approaches. Input Paper in the framework of the EUSBSR – Horizontal action “Capacity”

joint funding is on the top of the cooperation hierarchy. The effects move up from joint learning to joint acting and result in the building up of social capital.

Figure 1. Stages and effects in cooperation



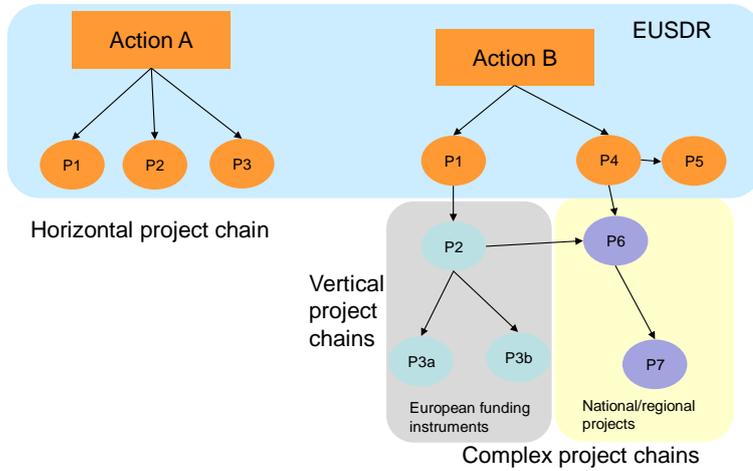
Source: Metis GmbH and Convelop (2018): conclusions: Austrian perspectives on Interreg post-2020

This approach is relevant for assessing the progress of the EUSDR, but also for appraising the status and progress in the different pillars and policy areas. It was used for formulating the questions on the intensity of cooperation and analysing them.

2.1.3 Project chains and project-to-policy-loops for triggering change

Projects and activities of strategic value are an important tool in the EUSDR for making results visible. In this context, Interact has highlighted the concept of “project chains”, that are one mechanism for developing macro-regional processes. Project chains are projects that are interlinked. This linkage may be a horizontal one (linking topics within a PA, an action or a pillar), or it may link EUSDR strategic projects with projects in other funding schemes (Cohesion policy, Horizon 2020, etc.) and/or with national/regional projects or activities. This implies that thematic coordinators of a PA actively build, implement and monitor such linkages. It will allow a much wider outreach of the Strategy. Examples for this can be found already, but are not reported explicitly in reports.

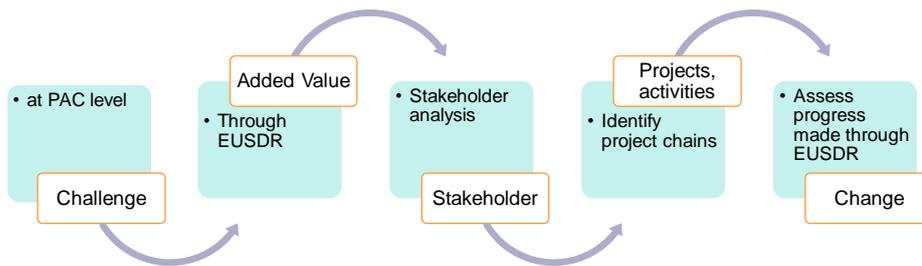
Figure 2. Models of project chains



Source: own consideration based on Interact (2018) p. 7

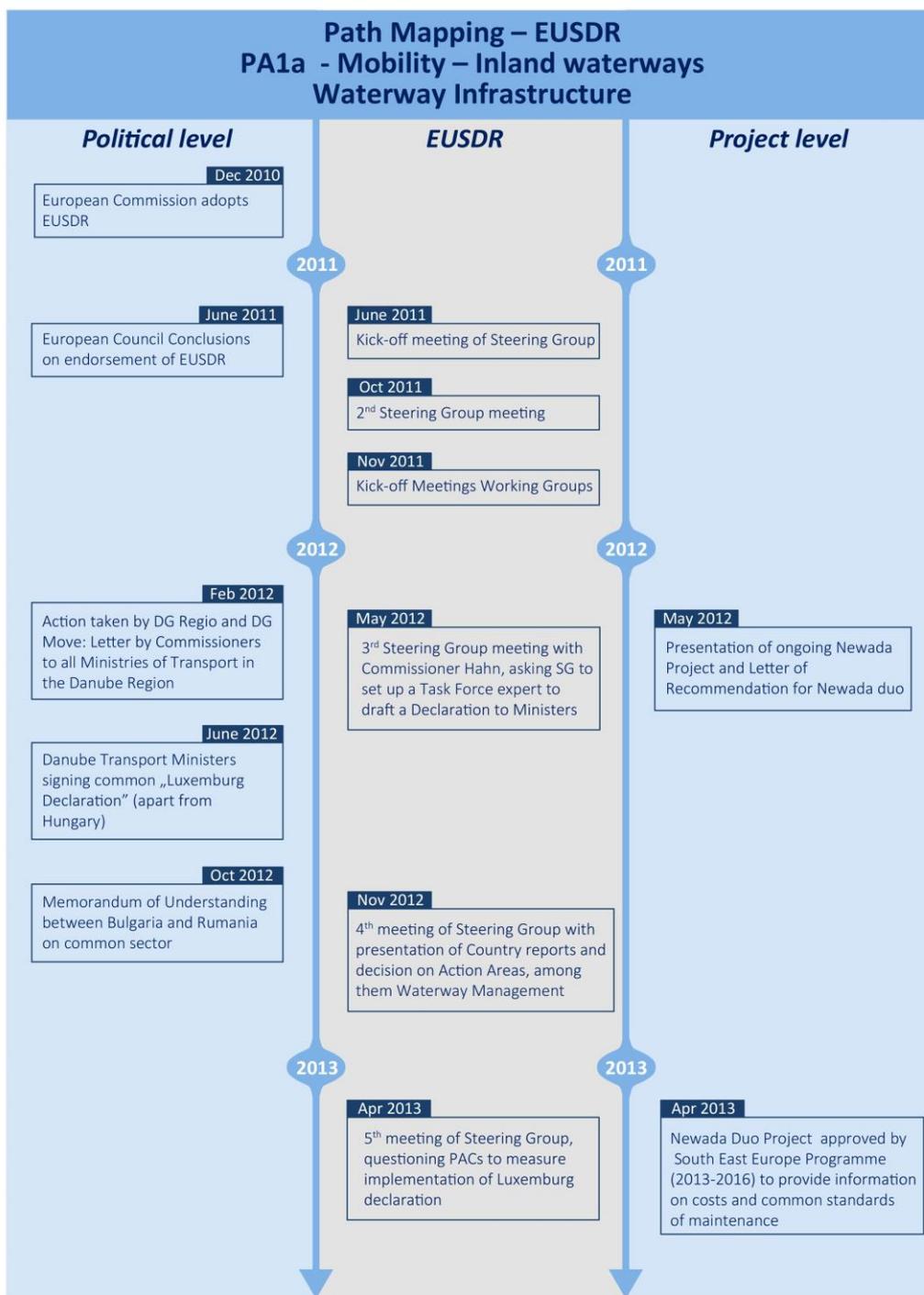
The second element for triggering changes through the EUSDR are processes put in place. Interact (2018) describes this as the “project to policy loop”, which is a process where a link between macro-regional processes and a policy change is initiated. In this context, a macro regional process can trigger a policy discussion or even change. An example is that activities in PA 1a – Navigation a number of projects (NEWADA and Fairway) developed from a Steering Group initiative over a Masterplan to national action plans (based on ministerial conclusions). This example has also been researched in depth as part of empirical research, where the link between the political level and the project level has proven to be of importance to first develop further strategic visions, and second test implementation activities (see figures 4 and 5). The EUSDR has in this context proven to allow for coordination and development of targeted paths.

Figure 3. Scheme for a project to policy loop



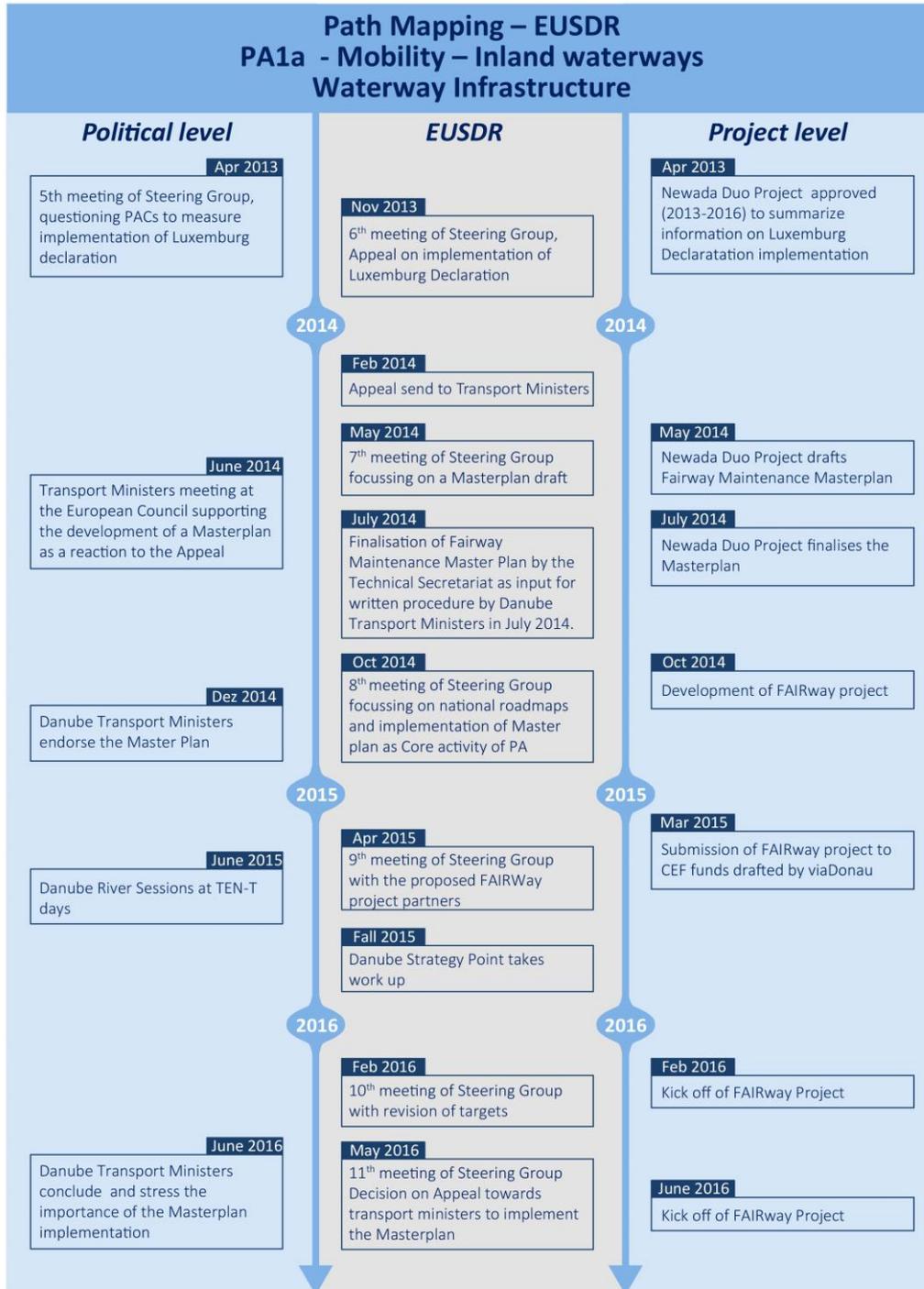
Source: Interact (2018)

Figure 4. Example for a project to policy loop – Path mapping of PA 1a – Mobility (1/2)



Source: Sielker, Franziska (2017). Macro-regional integration: new scales, spaces and governance for Europe? Doctoral thesis. [<https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-fau/frontdoor/index/index/docId/8517>]

Figure 5. Example for a project to policy loop – Path mapping of PA 1a – Mobility (2/2)



Source: Sielker, Franziska (2017). Macro-regional integration: new scales, spaces and governance for Europe? Doctoral thesis. [<https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-fau/frontdoor/index/index/docId/8517>]

2.2 Methods for data and information collection

This Operational Evaluation of the EUSDR, which was carried out in April and May 2019, is based upon various sources of information. The methods that were used for data and information collection are desk research, an online-survey and interviews with different stakeholders.

2.2.1 Desk research

The evaluation team looked at a range of sources, particularly existing reports and information presented at websites from the PACs and NCs, reports by the EC, studies on the EUSDR (by Interact, the EC, the EP) and academic literature (see Bibliography). The documents were screened and analysed in order to get background information, to provide evidence and to draw a comprehensive picture of the status quo. Based on this analysis, a summary of the state of the art of academic literature on macro-regional strategies and a reflection of the wider political-economic developments of the EUSDR was done.

2.2.2 Online-survey

In order to collect a wide range of information the views of all relevant stakeholders, a broad online-survey was conducted. The target group of the survey includes the PACs, the NCs, representatives of the European Commission involved in the EUSDR, authorities working in the field of fund management (e.g.: Managing Authorities or Joint Secretariats of ESIF OPs etc.) and other stakeholders considered as relevant (e.g.: representatives of universities).

The questionnaire was designed in close cooperation with the DSP and comprised a main part for all stakeholders as well as specific parts only for PACs, their SGs and for NCs. The questionnaire is presented in the annex to this report.

The survey was conducted via “survey monkey” and sent to the target groups via the DSP on April 24, 2019. After one reminder and nearly three weeks time to answer the questionnaire, 93 responses could be collected. 8 of them had to be sorted out because they were incomplete (just clicked through). This leaves **85 valid records**, which can be seen as a reasonable number for a well-founded analysis and to draw representative conclusions. The actual number of respondents per question is shown with the results per question as it can differ from the total number of respondents. This fluctuating number of replies results from two reasons. First, which is the case for all target groups, the addressees were free to skip questions. Therefore, not all respondents answered all the questions. Second, the participants were forwarded to different sections of the questionnaire, depending on their answers on the questions on their connection to the programme (questions no. 33 and 50). While most of the stakeholders received only a limited part of the questionnaire, the PACs (and their SGs) and NCs received the longer version of the survey.

Analysis of closed and open questions

The survey consisted of closed questions that were quantitatively analysed with Excel, and open questions, which were qualitatively analysed. The comments are presented in this report in a compact form. In some cases, where only little qualitative comments were received, the answers can be individual opinions and do not necessarily reflect the view of the whole target group. Nevertheless, the answers are very valuable for a better understanding of the ratings as well as to receive suggestions for improvement.

Characterisation of the participants

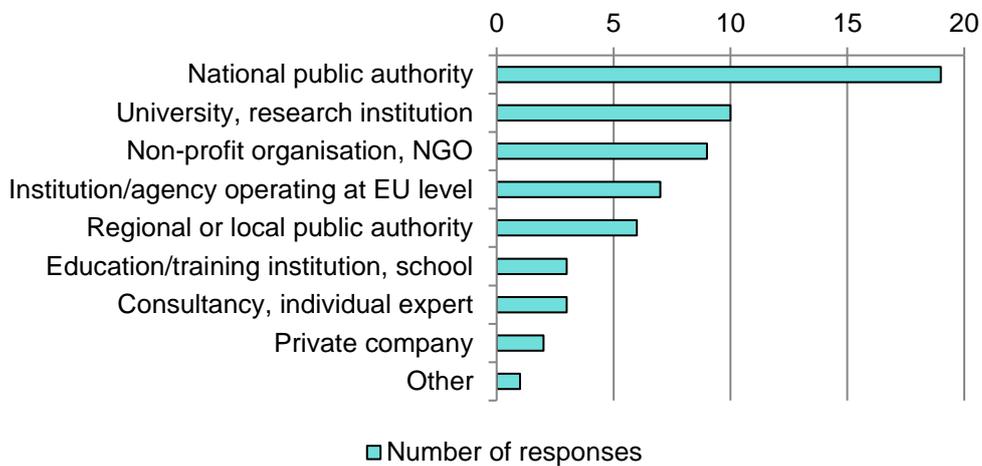
In order to receive authentic answers and protect the participants' data, the survey was realised anonymously. However, some general questions on their institutions and activities were included.

Institutions and organisations

Most of the participants represent national public authorities and organisations established / managed by national public authorities (37%), followed by universities (19%) and NGOs (17%). Together these three institutions make up almost three quarter of the participants. The following figure shows the representation of various institutions / organisations by number, beginning with the most frequent.

Figure 6. Respondents by institutions and organisations

Please categorize your institution according to the following types:



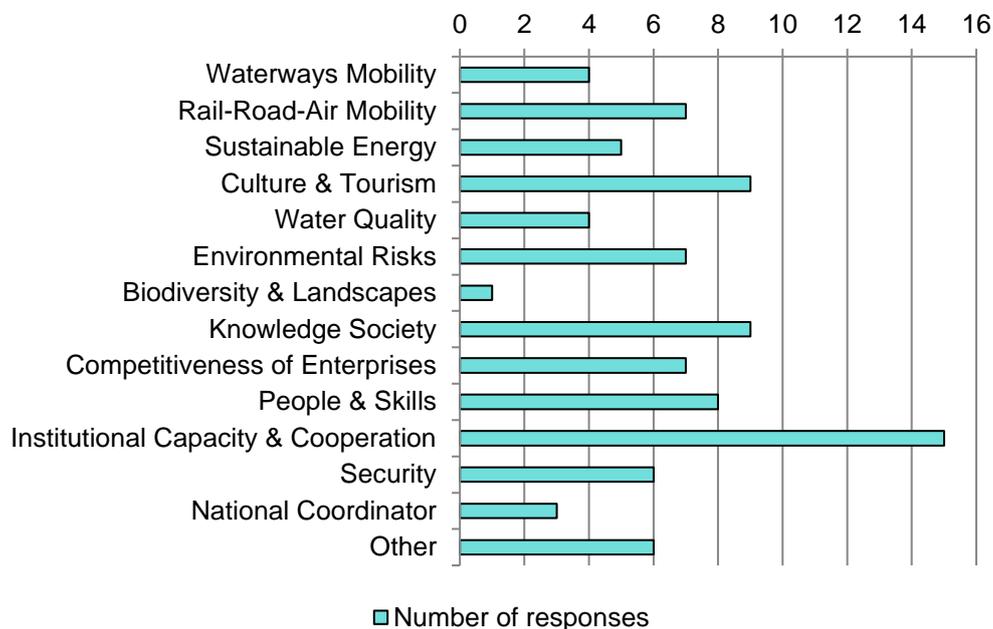
Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 52

Priority Areas

In total, all Priority Areas are covered by respondents. The area where by far the most participants are active is Institutional Capacity & Cooperation (29%). The next figure shows in which PAs the participants are active (multiple answers were possible).

Figure 7. Respondents by area of activity

In which Priority Area(s) is the focus of your activity?



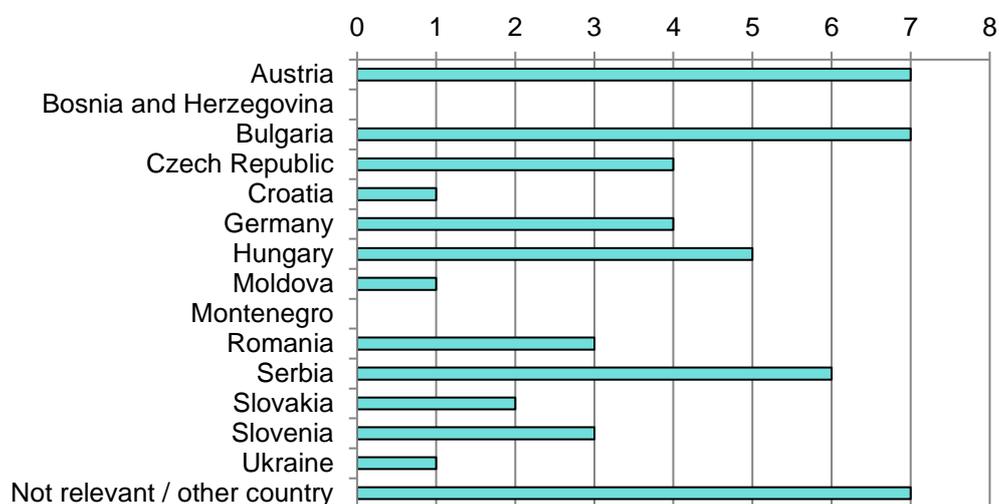
Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 51 (multiple answers were possible)

Countries

Participation by country shows a wide disparity. Most participants are working for Austria or Bulgaria (each 14%). Also Serbia and Hungary are represented well. On the contrary, no answers from Bosnia and Herzegovina or Montenegro could be collected. The following figure shows the number of responses by country.

Figure 8. Respondents by country

Which country are you working for?



Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 51

2.2.3 Interviews

To double-check the information from the online-survey and to go into detail in specific fields considered interesting and relevant for the evaluation, Metis conducted 26 semi-structured interviews.

The following stakeholders were interviewed (a detailed list of interview partners is presented in the annex):

- 5 Priority Area Coordinators
- 7 National Coordinators
- 3 European Commission representatives
- 5 ETC programme representatives (CBC and DTP)
- 3 Representatives of mainstream programmes (ESF, ERDF and Horizon2020)
- 3 Multipliers (civil society, economic etc.)

3 Stocktaking of existing knowledge about the EUSDR

3.1 Strategic dimension

3.1.1 Characteristics of the EUSDR

In June 2009, the European Council invited the European Commission (EC) to develop a strategy for the area around the Danube. Between July 2009 and December 2010, the strategy was jointly developed by the EC, the Danube Region countries and stakeholders in order to address common challenges. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) was adopted by the EC in December 2010⁴ and endorsed by the European Council in 2011.⁵ The EUSDR was the second macro-regional strategy adopted at EU level and seeks to create synergies and coordination between existing policies and initiatives taking place across the Danube Region.

Objectives of MRS

Macro-regional strategies (MRS) provide an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council, to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area relating to Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area. They thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion. The main idea behind is to establish a framework for policy integration, coordination, cooperation, multi-level governance and partnership. Cohesion policy should contribute, but the focus is much wider, reaching to national, regional and local players in the macro-region.

Framed by the 3 “Nos” (no new EU legislation, no new EU funds, no new EU institutions), MRS have a rather informal governance structure (with Steering Groups and Priority Area Coordinators) at an operational level and the EC (DG REGIO), a High-level Group and National Coordinators at a strategic level. At this stage, however, existing works have indicated that these 3 “Nos” have partly been overcome and that this initial standpoint led to more creative/experimental ways of cooperating, e.g. by linking the programme with EUSDR PA's, or PACs have the opportunity to finance themselves partly through a project financed by the Danube Transnational Programme.

EUSDR Territory

The area covered by the EUSDR stretches from the Black Forest (Germany) to the Black Sea (Romania-Ukraine-Moldova) and is home to 115 million inhabitants (see the following map). A total of 14 countries participate in the EUSDR, among which are 9 EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), 3 Accession Countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia) and 2 Neighbourhood Countries (Moldova, Ukraine).

⁴ European Commission: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. European Union Strategy for Danube Region. Brussels, 08/12/2010, COM(2010) 715.

⁵ Council of the European Union: Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region. 3083rd General Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 13 April 2011.

Figure 9. The EUSDR Territory



Source: <http://www.danube-region.eu/about>

For the current evaluation, it is important to consider the diverse character of the territory, which covers very different types of development issues and different types of stakeholder.

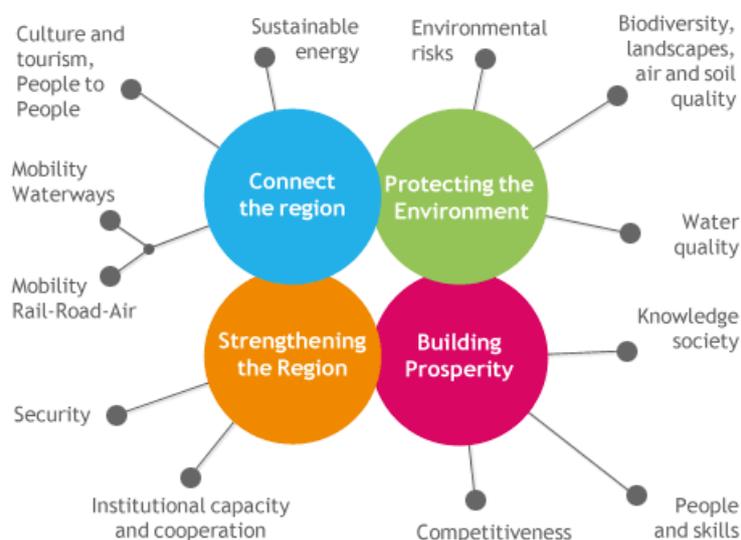
3.1.2 Thematic focus

The EC's Communication on the EUSDR of 2010 was accompanied by an **Action Plan**⁶, which aims to go from 'words to actions' by identifying the concrete priorities for the macro-region (see figure below).

This Action Plan sets out **four "Pillars"** that are at the core of the Strategy and address the headline issues in the Danube Region. Related to these pillars are **12 "Priority Areas"** representing the main areas where the EUSDR can contribute to improvements (either through tackling the main challenges or through seizing the main opportunities).

⁶ European Commission: Commission Staff Working Document, Action Plan. Accompanying document to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions European Union Strategy for the Danube Region COM(2010) 715. Brussels, SEC(2010) 1489.

Figure 10. EUSDR – Pillars and Priority Areas



Source: <http://www.danube-region.eu/>

For each PA, the Action Plan also presents the issue and indicates the related main problems. Finally, the document clearly indicates who is responsible for implementation and follow-up, and it aims to assign the responsibilities to different administrative levels and actors within the Danube Region. Targets of the EUSDR were concretized in the first year of implementation by the Priority Areas and were revised in the first half of 2016. Each of the PA has a number of targets and actions. It has to be added that the EUSDR Action Plan is currently under revision. The revised Action Plan is expected to be finalized in autumn 2019.

PA, actions and targets constitute the framework for the implementation. They need to be coherent and consistent in order to allow smooth processes and an efficient implementation. However, it is not task of this evaluation to look into the thematic fabric of the EUSDR.

3.2 Governance dimension

3.2.1 Governance structure

The governance has been an increasing issue of discussion in order to safeguard the success of the macroregional approach. Governance describes “the process to be addressed - how and by whom the Strategies are implemented, joint actions initiated and financed”⁷. The EC document on governance defines the following key task of governance system:

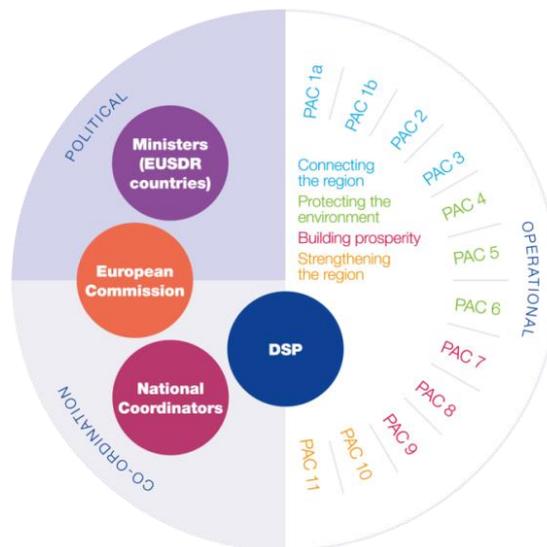
- MS and EC involvement at high political (i.e. ministerial) level providing political commitment and strategic orientation,
- NC at national level, with high level officials in each participating country who coordinate work at senior administrative level,

⁷ EC (2014), Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies, COM(2014)284, May 2014, Brussels

- Experts responsible for each thematic priority or horizontal issues from each participating country forming a steering group (coordinated by the PACs).

In concrete terms, the governance and management architecture of the EUSDR⁸ is established with the following types of actors within different settings / structures⁹:

Figure 11. The EUSDR governance structure



Source: <http://www.danube-region.eu/>

- **European Commission:** The European Commission (EC) helps to root the Strategy in EU policies through contacts with stakeholders in the Danube countries, by establishing links to EU decision makers as well as through institutional support provided by the EU. DG REGIO facilitates actions of the participating countries. It also coordinates the Strategy at the policy level, assisted by a “High Level Group” (HLG)¹⁰.
- **Priority Area Coordinators (PACs):** Each Priority Area (PA) is jointly coordinated by two participating countries (or regions), which work in consultation with the EC, relevant EU agencies and regional bodies. PACs are designated for all PAs (one for each) who ensure – together with their **Steering Groups (SGs)** – the implementation of the Action Plan defined for the PA by agreeing on planning with targets, indicators and timetables, and by making sure there is effective cooperation between project promoters, programmes and funding sources. They also provide technical assistance and advice. The coordinators work in consultation with the EC, and relevant EU agencies and national/regional bodies.

⁸ See on this: p. 23, European Commission: Commission Staff Working Document, Accompanying the document 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. {COM(2016) 805 final}. Brussels, 16.12.2016, SWD(2016) 443 final. <http://www.danube-region.eu>

⁹ Source: <https://www.danube-region.eu/about/governance>

¹⁰ The High Level Group (HLG) on macro-regional strategies is made up of official representatives from all EU Member States. It assists the Commission in the policy coordination of the Strategy. The Commission consults the HLG for modifications to the Strategy and the action plan, as well as for reports and monitoring. The HLG also addresses policy orientation and prioritisation.

- **National Coordinators (NCs):** At national and regional level, NCs coordinate and keep an overview of the participation of their country in the implementation of the EUSDR. They also serve as the link between the political level and the PAs. NCs promote the Strategy and inform relevant stakeholders on the national level of key developments, take own decisions or prepare decisions to be taken at the political level. In addition, regular meetings of national Ministers of Foreign Affairs and sectorial ministers aim to ensure and renew the political commitment. NCs also assist the EC in its facilitation role.
- **Danube Strategy Point (DSP):** The DSP was established in 2015 to improve the implementation process of the EUSDR and to support the EC in its coordination tasks of the EUSDR. The DSP also supports exchange among PACs and NCs. Metis reviewed the activities of the DSP in the years 2015 and 2016, mainly addressing three aspects, these being the performance in relation to the work plan, as well as the efficiency and the effectiveness of the DSP's activities¹¹. After a shutdown in September 2017 and a relocation to Vienna and Bucharest, the DSP continued its activities in autumn 2018 with a new mandate to 2021.
- **Ministerial meetings:** At each Annual Forum, the EUSDR invites Member States' ministers that highlight the events themes, and in which the needs for cooperation are outlined. Some Priority Areas (e.g. PA1a) address their line ministers to gain broader policy support.

The EUSDR is implemented, among others, through projects and processes, where the main mechanisms are supposed to trigger change with the actors and stakeholders involved.

Based on a joint statement in 2014, strategic projects are defined as projects of high impact and visibility for the EUSDR. They would frequently be a result of policy developments and discussions within an EUSDR Priority Area¹². They also could serve as pilot example for desired future change. Strategic projects may be single projects or a group of projects contributing to a PA or processes contributing to a PA. They may be preparatory or investment projects, where a number of criteria must be fulfilled (like having a macro-regional dimension, contribute to the implementation of the EUSDR, be realistic, have a clear financing plan etc.). This approach was further developed in the recent past. Now the DSP tries to have projects and activities with a strategic value without providing complex criteria but count on the expertise of the actors of strategy (mainly PACs) to identify best practice examples.

Quite a number of projects and activities with strategic value have already been implemented in all four pillars of the EUSDR.

¹¹ The review included suggestions on how to improve the work of a future DSP, e.g. by clearly defining the exact role and function of the future DSP among EUSDR key implementers prior to the start of the DSP's activities, or by introducing the role of a "Deputy Head of Office" to ensure a smooth functioning day-to-day work process.

¹² Based on a Joint Statement by Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Participating States of the EUSDR and the European Commission in June 2014, where a joint approach for labelling strategic projects was adopted. It became of the DSP's task to support the implementation of strategic projects; see DSP (2016), EUSDR – Strategic Projects – Concept Paper, https://www.danube-region.eu/attachments/article/616561/Strategic%20projects_FINAL.pdf

When assessing the governance system, the EC report in 2014¹³ asked for stronger political leadership and decision-making and greater clarity in the organisation of the work.

Since then Interact has provided analytical and guidance on governance related issues, especially on strategic projects and processes.

The second EC report on the implementation of MRS issued in 2019¹⁴ stresses the importance of the cooperation aspects, especially as EU-Member and Non-Member States participate on equal footing with a special mentioning of Moldova and the Ukraine (their regions along the Danube). Progress is mentioned also in the involvement of the civil society. Also the rotating presidencies supported by the Trio (previous, current and future presidency) has been judged to provide good results.

The stakeholders are the key to the implementation of the strategy. As a strategy is a concept that is much less specified than thematic policies or programmes, the participation and engagement of stakeholders is one of the most important factors for the success or failure of the implementation. Projects and processes are important tools for the stakeholders to cooperate, make the EUSDR visible and bring tangible results. This is a core of the assessment in the current evaluation.

3.2.2 The added value of MRS

First attempts to evaluate the added value date back to the 2013 internal evaluation on macro-regional governance by the European Commission and the revision of the Baltic Sea Region Strategy in 2012/2013. Following these events, the European Commission and Interact have launched a series of studies and participatory workshops to explore ways to measure the added value of MRS and to position them in the wider EU context.

The Council conclusions on added value of macro-regional strategies in 2013¹⁵ define the value added of MRS as

- strengthening integration of the Member States and cooperation with interested non-EU countries in the areas of common interest and in addressing common challenges
- mobilising a variety of available financing sources and the relevant stakeholders
- improving existing cooperation mechanisms and networks and new ones
- developing and improving access to financing for relevant projects.

The EC Report concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies in 2013¹⁶ analyses a few factors that constitute the added value of MRS:

- Results in terms of projects, actions, decisions, networks
- Improved policy development

¹³ EC (2014), Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies, COM(2014)284, May 2014, Brussels

¹⁴ EC (2019), 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, COM(2019) 21, 29 January 2019, Brussels

¹⁵ Council of the European Union (2013), Council conclusions on added value of macro-regional strategies, General Affairs Council meeting, October 2013, Luxembourg

¹⁶ European Commission (2013), Report from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies, June 2013, Brussels

- Improved value for money
- Greater integration and coordination
- Tackling regional inequality and promoting territorial cohesion
- Promoting multi-level governance
- Improved cooperation with neighbouring countries

Political commitment and the governance of the strategy are stressed to be crucial success factors.

In a more recent study on the Added Value of MRS, commissioned by INTERACT in 2017¹⁷, a more differentiated approach is presented, that emphasizes the importance of capitalisation.

3.2.3 Future challenges in the post-2020 era

The aforementioned second EC report on the implementation of MRS highlights a number of governance-related challenges in the EUSDR that will have to be addressed in the years to come:¹⁸

- First, it appears that despite achievements of the EUSDR, the political momentum seems to decline and there is a need to renew the ownership and commitment of the participating countries.
- Second, the participation in Steering Groups of the PA is considered to be unsatisfactory, which generates frustrations with the PAC. This also includes the participation of line-DGs of the EC, as well as participation of DG Regio representatives.
- Third, some participating countries have not appointed NC or members of SC for quite some years, which again leads to quite uneven levels of participation.
- Fourth, some representatives have no decision-making competence in their national context. This is considered to be hampering implementation on the national level.
- This leads to the effect, that some of the actions foreseen in the Action Plan cannot be achieved.
- The absence of the DSP (during the shutdown in 2017 and 2018) also hampered the EUSDR governance processes, in particular in relation to the coordination between the different PA.
- Another critical issue mentioned are low capacities in staff dedicated to the EUSDR.
- There are also difficulties of monitoring the results and achievements of the EUSDR, which makes it difficult to communicate the results of the strategy.

The ongoing (first) revision of the Action plan now offers the possibility to tackle some of these challenges.

¹⁷Interact Programme, Added value of macro-regional strategies – programme and project perspective, February 2017

¹⁸EC (2019), 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, Commission staff working document, 29 January 2019, Brussels

This evaluation has an important role in highlighting what works and what does not work in the governance system and in identifying where and how improvements can be achieved to bring new life to the EUSDR.

3.2.4 Themes, developments and the fitness for future of the EUSDR

Since the EUSDR came into being, the political landscape in the European Union changed considerably. This includes the wider (geo)political dynamics on the one hand and changes in priorities and themes that have been propelled on the other hand. The EUSDR sets its own goal in 2011 as following:

“By 2020, all citizens of the Region should enjoy better prospects of higher education, employment and prosperity in their own home area. The Strategy should make this a truly 21st century region, secure and confident, and one of the most attractive in Europe.” (COM 2011, p. 2)

In order to achieve its goal, the evaluation of the EUSDR may include comments on the EUSDRs capacity to react to contemporary challenges. Some of the main geopolitical dynamics that affect Europe and that will have impacts on the Danube Regions Strategies opportunities for implementation are listed below:

- Changes of the internal balances of different parties and wider political opinions in the European Union resulting in an increasing representation of (far)right-wing parties. These developments are relevant both for the national as well as the European level.
- Long-term differences remain in debates following the debates in 2015 around migration flows, which has led to temporary reintroduction of border controls.
- Ongoing Brexit negotiations have changed the power relations within the European Parliament and Council already now. Brexit leads to debates around the future of the EU.
- The flows of foreign investments in the Danube Region, e.g. through the one-belt one road-initiative or in Belgrade’s City Centre, which affects large parts of the EUSDR.

As regards to themes and political priorities that have received increasing attention over the last decade are, amongst others, (1) digitalisation and the use of e-government, (2) youth employment strategies, (3) health policies, (4) climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies or the (5) European Pillar of social rights.

The future recognition of the EUSDR by the political level as well as the compliance of the EUSDR’s thematic priorities with the overall political priorities and funding streams, may be impacted by the EUSDR’s capacity to relate to these dynamics.

These developments are particularly interesting against the background of the literature analysed. Macro-regional strategies have been highlighted as a concept of “experimentalist” or “evolutionary” governance, which are operating across “soft spaces” (Gänzle et al. 2018, Gänzle and Mirtl 2019, Sielker 2017, Allmendinger et al. 2014 among others).

3.2.5 Literature summary and thematic foci

Since macro-regional strategies have entered the toolbox of territorial cooperation in Europe in 2009, academic literature has found a substantial proliferation of publications

analysing different aspects. The main disciplines that have concerned themselves with macro-regional strategies are political study, European studies, international relations and geography and spatial planning, including transport and environmental studies.

Table 1. Literature summary

Theme	Argument	Exemplary Authors
<i>Geopolitical challenges</i>	Geopolitical challenges have mostly been discussed in relation to the EUSAIR, notably by Stocchiero, Cugusi and more recently by Belloni as the leading scholars. The main argument is that the collaborative working mode within the EUSDR and the equal representation across borders can help overcome geopolitical challenges through exchange. More concretely, the participation of third-state countries in the south, but as well with Russia in the Baltic sea have been seen as important side effects for macro-regions. Apart from the EUSAIR these arguments have not been taken further after an initial proliferation of literature. Within the Danube Regions governance, committees and projects third countries show less representation than EU member states. In the first years of the EUSDR, an institutionalised cooperation in the region has been considered as a game changer to overcome geopolitical differences, an argument barely taken up today anymore.	Stocchiero A 2010, Stocchiero 2015, Deimel 2011, Coroban 2011, Cowi Study 2017, Stratenschulte and Setzen 2011
<i>Macro-regions role in peace development</i>	This line of research argues that macro-regions represent an attempt of involving European neighbour states as part of an institutional space and political cooperation, and therefore play an important role for peace development. The argument has recently been made for the Adriatic-Ionian Region. The importance of including third States has been recognised for the Danube Region respectively. However, there is no reflection about the Ukrainian Crimea Crisis or the migration crisis in this line of research. Within grey literature, these developments have also not been researched.	Belloni 2019, Sielker and Vonhoff 2015, Sielker 2017.
<i>Contribution to Cohesion and strategic cooperation.</i>	The argument brought forward is that macro-regional strategies may contribute to cohesive development of Europe directly and indirectly. More recently, the debate has turned towards the relationship of MRS with ETC programmes as well as with ESIF funds.	Dühr 2011, Samecki 2010, Plangger 2016, 2017
<i>Macro-regions as soft space and strategic cooperation</i>	The main argument brought forward is that macro-regions are an example where a multi-level governance structure allows for cooperation across administrative, political spaces allows cooperating for functional relations. A softer and more functionally oriented approach to spatial conceptions may allow stakeholders to cooperate better and more effectively. In the initial phase, macro-regions were hailed to develop strategic policies for the region. More recently, the initial euphoria has been analysed as having drifted away with macro-regions thinking and acting in national boundaries and the main impact stemming from project implementation. One argument brought forward is that macro-regions may harden an observation suitable for the Danube macro-region. The ESPON ACTARES Project analysed macro-regions as one example of soft territorial cooperation in the EU, coming to the conclusion that every soft governance form needs	Allmendinger et al 2014, Chilla and Sielker 2013, 2015, Sielker 2012, 2016 2017, Schmitt and Metzger 2012, Stratenschulte and Setzen, ESPON ACTAREA Project 2017

Theme	Argument	Exemplary Authors
	to build on some harder elements that create the baseline for cooperation.	
<i>Macro-region, multi-level governance, experimentalist governance and fuzzy governance</i>	<p>The main argument in this line of research is that macro-regions are an example for new forms of governance and cooperation that operate through trial and error. This line of argument was particularly brought forward by Gänzle, who extensively worked on the Danube Region.</p> <p>Macro-regions are part of the EUs multi-level governance system with impacts both horizontally and vertically on governmental decisions. Macro-regions are considered largely additional element to the system, not replacing existing structures.</p> <p>Within some macro-regions and particularly within the Alpine Region existing institutional settings have been reshaped, and macro-regions led to certain extend to a reshaping in powers of agendas and project decisions.</p> <p>Another aspect discussed has been the role of the civil society, albeit not on within the academic realm.</p>	Gänzle et al. 2017, Gänzle and Mirtl 2019, Gänzle and Kern 2013, 2015, Wulff 2015, Sielker 2016, 2017, Chilla and Streifeneder 2018
<i>Macroregional strategies, rescaling and European integration</i>	<p>Macro-regional strategies are leading to rescaling despite no transfer of formal competences. The main argument is that the narratives, agendas and debates influence the decision-making on other levels. Sielker has presented evidence for the case of the development of the Danube waterway, and the ways funding was changed due to the coordinated efforts from a priority within the Danube Region.</p> <p>Initial debates highlighted the opportunities for third state involvement and the opportunities the EUSDR gives further EU enlargement. With the exception of Serbia's slow progression in the application to become an EU Member, the EUSDR is not deemed as having driven further integration of countries.</p>	Sielker 2017, Lenz 2019, Stead et al 2015, Gänzle and Kern 2015, Vonhoff and Sielker 2013
<i>Macro-regions and its role in environmental protection</i>	Macro-regions take up emerging issues such as eutrophication or water quality. Yet, the study finds that transnational cooperation initiatives such as HELCOM and the ICPDR were expected to contribute to the implementation of MRSSs, limited concrete measures were taken to this end by the proponents of the strategies. This is partly attributed to instruments and bodies not having adopted their working methods.	Gløersen et al. 2019

Foci in academic work

The academic debate has been led around certain lines of research and conceptualisation as well as that for some regions by some academics dominated the debate. For the EUSDR Sielker and Gänzle have been relevant, for the EUSAIR Stocchiero has been relevant, for the Alpine Region Chilla and Streifeneder, Plangger as well as Gløersen have been relevant. For the Baltic Sea Region, the overall authorship is a more diverse with Gänzle and Kern, as well as studies from Nordregio being most relevant.

Overall, literature that conceptualises macro-regions or concerns itself with one macro-region remains steady, but the peak has been reached. Aspects of macro-regional coordination feature more in research that concerns itself with particular problems in that region. Overall, one must establish that the literature published around macro-regions

remains with a small set of researchers that have consistently worked on macro-regions. This becomes evident when compared to other themes that have caught considerably more attention, such as Interreg or cross-border cooperation.

Within the Danube Region much research remains within national silos. This is due to language competences and the subsequent challenges of international publishing. It as well reflects the different national political priorities, and academic cultures.

Research is to be found on particular issues such as soil or water quality. This research often is located in the region, but is not necessarily relevant to the performance of the region or directly linked to the political construct. Evaluation can therefore barely draw on this literature when identifying the merits of the EUSDR. However, it may be worthwhile to consider for Priority Areas to identify the link of their work to current research programmes, and in particular to Horizon 2020 projects. Much of academic work does not necessarily relate around a specific region. However, in particular since the Brexit vote, research on Cohesion in the EU, and subsequent empirical work has increased considerably.

Assessment of overall performance in macro-regions

Academics concede that the initial hopes of macro-regions to transform the way of coordination between governmental level and the impact this coordination might have on wider funding streams have not been achieved. Macro-regions have a higher impact within sector policies than within priority areas that seek for local implementation and less national steering (Sielker and Mirtl 2017, Roggeri 2015). The relationship with the funding programmes is considered as complex. The established funding landscape continued to operate in existing working modes and framework, reluctantly taking up a macro-regional narrative.

Assessment of the Danube Region Strategy in Academia

The Danube Region Strategy is considered a game changer in bringing a joint effort for cooperation and coordination in this particular region across the Iron Curtain. In the development phase and the first years of the EUSDR the argument that the EUSDR would allow to build a feeling of unity in the region as well as help prepare third countries while preparing for EU membership. Overall, however literature remains critical upon the actual changes the EUSDR has brought, with a more positive evaluation by Sielker as well as by Lenz through a master thesis as regards to the capacity of the EUSDR to shape agendas and develop a knowledge basis for the whole region. The initial role macro-regions were given to fill a gap between these EU wide strategies and the project-oriented focus of the funding programmes (for further exploration see Dühr 2011, Stead 2011, Sielker 2012, 2016, Chilla & Sielker 2015), has only partly been considered to have become truth. First assessments by Metis have given an indication of the implementation of the EUSDR. The role of the civil society has been a particular development within the EUSDR and the development of the participation day. All macro-regions have in one way or the other a focus on the EUSDR; however, an institutional participation day does not necessarily exist.

Overall, academic literature displays few empirical analyses that would allow for an evaluation of the performance of the EUSDR.

4 Appraisal of the progress of the EUSDR

This chapter shows the findings of the evaluation that are based on the online-survey and the interviews. The target group includes PACs, NCs, representatives of the EC, authorities working in the field of fund management and further stakeholders considered as relevant.

4.1 Strategic dimension

4.1.1 Stakeholder involvement at strategic level

According to the PACs who participated in the online-survey, DG REGIO was highly involved in the implementation of the EUSDR (e.g. through co-organisation of PACs, NC meetings, other EUSDR events, presenting main EUSDR results etc.). Also DG MOVE and to a smaller extent the DGs EMPL and HOME were involved. In addition, the DGs ENVIRO and DG NEAR were mentioned.

As for other institutions and stakeholders, the Minister's level was rated highest in terms of involvement in the EUSDR at strategic level. Other institutions like the EP, CoR, EIB, EESC, EBRD or World Bank showed only little involvement, according to the respondents.

In the interviews, there have been substantial differences in the assessment of the cooperation with line DGs and other European Institutions at strategic level. A major aspect is that good cooperation is essentially based on good inter-personal relationships, thus cooperation culture has not fully reached the institutional level. The aspect might require a case-by-case approach when looking for improvement options.

4.1.2 Progress and impact of the EUSDR

Achievements of the EUSDR at low scale

The findings of the evaluation indicate that there have been some achievements of the EUSDR at strategic level, but on a rather low scale. The results of the online-survey show that the overall impact of the strategy is not very high. Questions on the **level of change triggered by the EUSDR in different policy fields**, on the impact of the EUSDR on **national or regional laws, regulations and organizational structures** as well as on **planning processes** reached a mean score between 2.6 and 3.2 on a scale from 1 (no change/impact) to 6 (high level of change/impact). Only the consideration of the EUSDR in **bilateral/international issues** was ranked higher (mean 3.7).

The following table shows the mean results (weighted average) from the online-survey in relation to the progress and impact of the EUSDR at strategic level, before some concrete examples will be given. It should be mentioned that these questions were only put to the PACs and NCs and thus the results are a picture drawn by the core actors rather than overall assessment.

Table 2. Progress and impact of the EUSDR

Question	mean	n
From your point of view, did the EUSDR trigger change in your policy field ? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no change) to 6 (very high level of change).	3.2	20
Did the Strategy (Priority Area) produce impact on national/ supranational/regional laws, regulations or organisational structures ? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no impact) to 6 (very high impact).	2.6	19

Question	mean	n
Did the Strategy (Priority Area) have an impact on national/regional/local planning processes ? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no impact) to 6 (very high impact).	2.9	20
Was the EUSDR taken into account in the relevant Council formations , their preparatory bodies and/or in political documents? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no consideration) to 6 (very high consideration).	3.0	18
From your point of view, was the EUSDR taken into account in bilateral/international issues ? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no consideration) to 6 (very high consideration).	3.7	7

Source: Online-survey 2019, specific question for PACs and NCs

In terms of change that the EUSDR achieved in the policy fields, aspects in relation to better cooperation and information exchange were mentioned most. Furthermore, a better policy dialogue, greater visibility and engagement of actors, the development of innovative funding solutions, the rejuvenation of the role of existing regional initiatives along the Danube River, or benefits from the capitalisation strategy have been stated.

Examples of an impact on laws, regulations and organisational structures that were mentioned are, for example, a national coordination mechanism for activities under the EUSDR that was created with a decision of the Council of Ministers in 2012. The mechanism was refined in 2015, where the composition and responsibilities of the National High Level Group, the National Coordination Group and the National EUSDR Coordinator were systematised. Other examples are the establishment of a funding programme (including staff) or network (e.g. the Danube Funding Coordination Network DFCN), a joint statement on the embeddedness of ESIF with MRSs objectives, and policy papers (mainly related to the new cohesion policy, Horizon Europe legislation).

In terms of planning processes, one participant highlighted that the EUSDR is reflected in strategy papers for regional development. Also ETC programmes, national OPs (see chapter 4.2.7 for examples), regular joint conferences and Participation Days were mentioned. The latter are seen as a unique platform to gather public administration representatives and civil society organisations and/or to coordinate the implementation of the EUSDR at national/regional level.

The assessments of the extent to which the EUSDR is taken into account in governmental agreements (coalition pacts) are highly differentiated. While two NCs stated that the EUSDR is not mentioned in governmental agreements, one stated that the EUSDR is marginally taken into account and another one emphasized that the EUSDR is taken into account in several strategic documents at national level.

A similar picture revealed the consideration of the EUSDR in external affairs / cooperation strategies. One country highlighted that the EUSDR is taken into account in bilateral and multilateral agreements with countries from the Danube Region. Another NC also stated that during bilateral meetings on government level there are often discussions on how to better cooperate within EUSDR relevant topics. However, it was also stated that the EUSDR is almost not taken into account.

Room for improvement for relationship with EU and other framework strategies

The relationship with EU and other framework strategies has a good dynamic but there is room for improvement. Although the EUSDR is contributing to EU framework strategies, this contribution and added value needs to be further promoted and communicated to the stakeholders of the framework strategy. More effort could be done

to increase the connection to the Western Balkans process and to other relevant strategies (e.g. Roma Strategy) and funding programmes at EU level. According to participants, there is not enough understanding of the importance of MRS by EU framework strategies. However, the EUSDR cooperates with other MRS and they inspire each other.

Political commitment, financial and human resources needed to improve implementation of Priority Areas

Political commitment on national and EU level is needed to improve the implementation of Priority Areas. This goes along with better coordination among political actors and commitment to support cross-border products. All stakeholders including the political level should take the Strategy itself seriously. Participating countries are in charge of appointing NCs, PACs and SG Members. Hence, continuous efforts of participating countries are needed for empowering NCs and PACs and for supporting them to fulfil their tasks, as well as for ensuring appropriate representation of EUSDR countries in Steering Group Meetings. Some other suggestions for improvement that were made by participants include a technical secretariat for some PAs, more direct participation from the Commission services (not only from DG REGIO) and more trainings ideally with experts and B2B meetings.

Only two people made suggestions on how to improve the political commitment. These include ensuring better coordination of the Strategy through a stronger and institutionalised participation at local, municipal, regional and national level, establishing partnerships and uniting around common strategic projects and an increased communication of success stories to the general public and to decision makers in the Danube Region.

Cooperation patterns as main achievement

In the interviews, there has been a large agreement among the PACs that the set-up of structures has worked quite well. Some of the PACs highlighted concrete achievements – it is mainly the emergence of new and unprecedented cooperation patterns. However, there was no consensus on actual strategic achievements but rather single opinions such as contribution to prioritisation.

The impetus of the Strategy is on decrease

Largely core EUSDR actors agree on the statement that the momentum of the EUSDR has decreased, but in some PAs visible progress has been achieved. Building the momentum depends largely on the persons involved. There is a lack of incentives to establish stable institutional cooperation patterns and high staff fluctuation is an obvious impediment to reap benefits of institutional cooperation (see chapter 4.2.5 for more detail). High staff fluctuation among PACs and NCs is one of the major impediments to raise the political profile of the strategy. Staff fluctuation and lack of political backing also limit the outreach at national level – a recurring perception is that the strategy stakeholders are single persons / entities working rather isolated in line ministries.

The findings of the interviews show that the EUSDR should consciously use the revision of the Action Plan to rekindle the interest in the Strategy. According to the interviewees, a stronger alignment of budgets to MRS would enhance the added-value and raise the political interest by the European Commission and national governments. Participants suggest that the alignment of funds with other programmes could be done, e.g. through cooperation between different programs, such as Cohesion funds, IPA, or CBCs.

Stronger involvement of the EU might be an incentive to raise the profile and political awareness. Major conferences on topics, which attract political interest (e.g. security), might raise the interest of the political level. Increased budgets tie to – respectively earmarked for the MRS (with the EU being in a leading role to provide the funds) would allow for more visible major projects – this is seen widely as the most effective lever to attract political interest. A recent example is the effect of BRI – Belt and Road Initiative – a massive Chinese investment strategy touching the EUSDR and thus creating high political visibility. Hence, policy and funding packages at EU level might help to raise the interest at national level. Micro-funding might be used to attract the interest of the local level. Funding sources are analysed in more detail in chapter 4.2.7.

Furthermore, it seems that the EUSDR has a problem with expectation management, as several internal actors see that the expectations raised are too high and thus causing frustration. To further increase the impact of the EUSDR, it requires a cross-sector approach and the Strategy should be better embedded in a cross-programme approach at the European level. From the perspective of PACs, there is still homework to be done: several internal actors refer to the need for the improvement of internal communication. Another issue is to reflect on more effective ways to communicate results.

4.1.3 Added value of the EUSDR

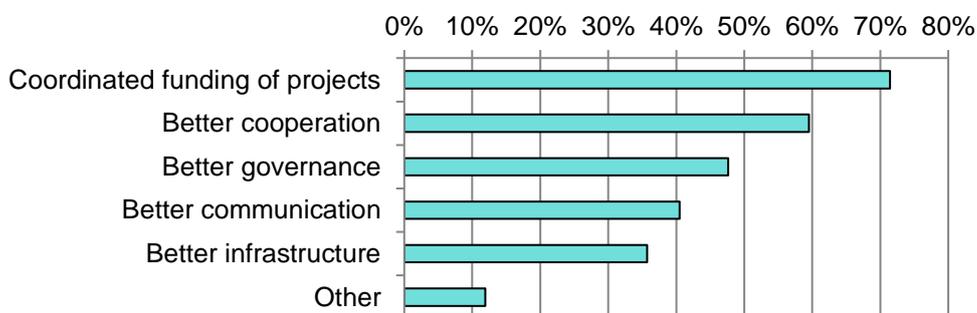
A coordinated funding of projects is needed most in the Danube Region

According to the results of the online-survey, **coordinated funding of projects** and **better cooperation** are needed most in the Danube Region (71% and 60% consent). Also **better governance** was chosen often as a need in the Danube Region. **Better communication, better infrastructure** or other aspects are also important but less relevant (see the following figure).

Other aspects that were mentioned are most often also related to the alignment and technical implementation of funding of projects. Furthermore, aspects like the development of common rules and criteria; a multi-channel communication strategy for the people, not only for stakeholders; better cross-border and trans-national planning; education and academic training; or better institutional capacities are among the answers.

Figure 12. Needs in the Danube Region

In your opinion, what is needed most in the Danube Region? Please choose max. 3 answers.



Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 84

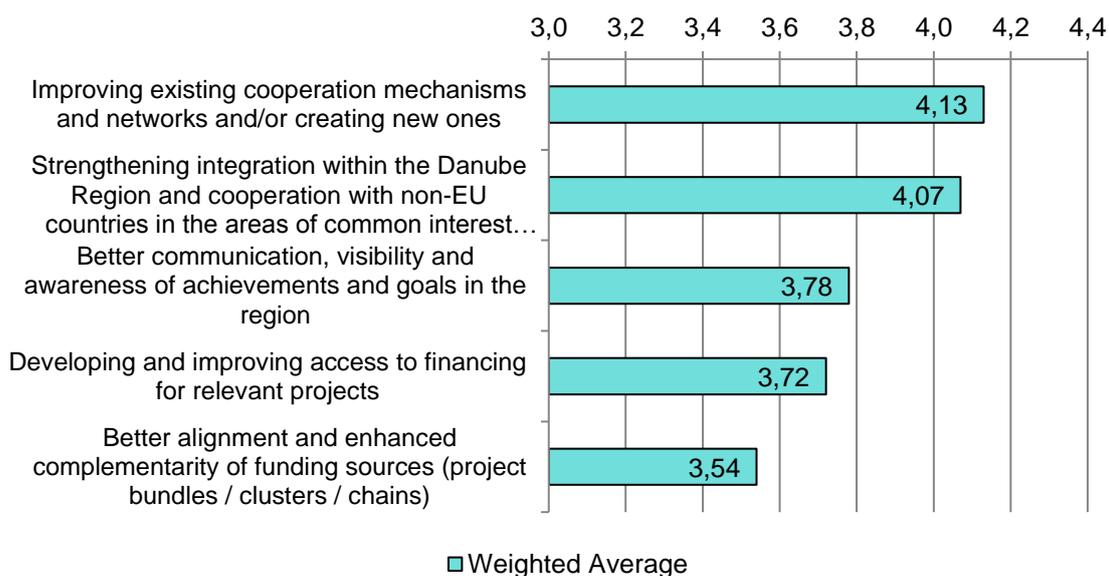
High added value in terms of cooperation and integration

While most of the stakeholders agree on the statement that the impetus of the strategy is on decrease, there is also a broad agreement on the overall importance of the strategy.

The added value of the EUSDR was rated highest in terms of “**Improving existing cooperation mechanisms and networks and/or creating new ones**” (mean 4.13 out of 6). In addition, the factor “**Strengthening integration within the Danube Region and cooperation with non-EU countries in the areas of common interest and in addressing common challenges**” was rated high (mean 4.07 out of 6). The added-value was rated lowest in terms of factors relating to financing and complementarity of funding sources (see figure 13). This low result also relates to the participants’ suggestion of a stronger alignment of budgets to MRS, as already mentioned in chapter 4.1.2. In the interviews, cooperation supporting partnerships to tackle common challenges has been the most frequently mentioned added-value. Another one is the geo-political aspect of bringing non-MS closer to the EU. Another finding from the Danube Civil Society Forum is that it perceives the EUSDR as cooperation framework for the subnational level.

Figure 13. Added value of the EUSDR

In your opinion, how high is the added value of the EUSDR? Please rate the added value in terms of the following factors on a scale from 1 (very low) to 6 (very high).



Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 84

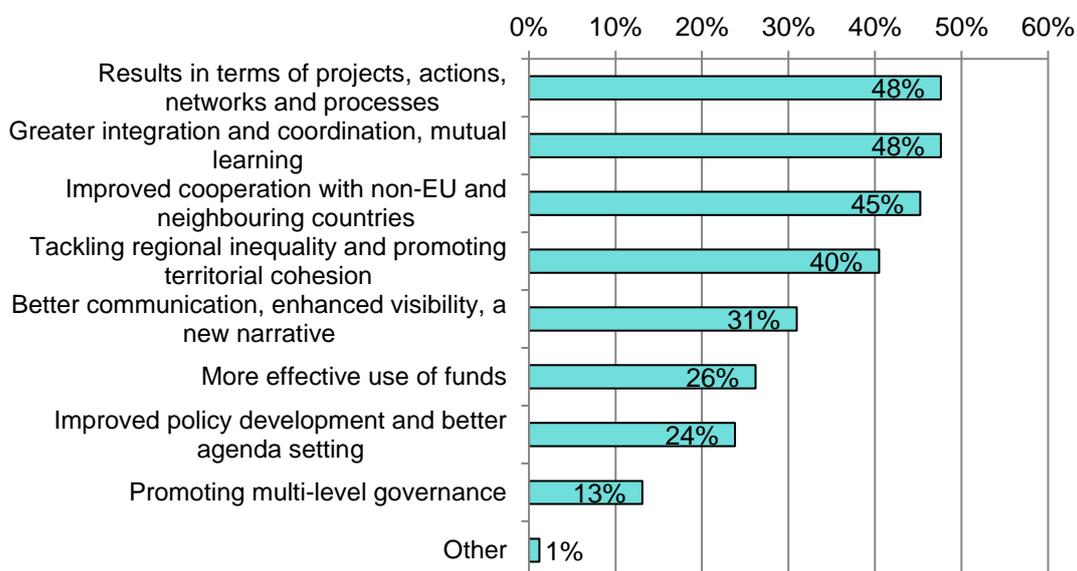
Cooperation, integration and results of projects constitute the added value

The three most relevant factors that constitute the benefit of the EUSDR according to the online-survey are the following (see figure 14):

- Results in terms of projects, actions, networks and processes
- Greater integration and coordination, mutual learning
- Improved cooperation with non-EU and neighbouring countries

Figure 14. Factors that constitute the added value

In your opinion, which are the most important factors that constitute the added value of the EUSDR? Please choose the 3 most relevant factors.



Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 84

Looking beyond national and EU borders to tackle common issues by the realisation of joint projects is a key added value for thematic areas

The added value of the macro-regional approach is to a great extent to look beyond national or even European Union borders to tackle common issues by realising joint projects. The macro-regional approach contributes towards issues of high macro-regional and transnational significance, e.g. trafficking in human beings, Roma integration, civil society involvement. The macro regional approach has increased the attractiveness of the Danube as tourist destination also outside of Europe and has enabled the creation of cross-border products. Particularly in the transport sector, it has opened new doors for the implementation of projects beyond the European Union. It also contributes to countering activities of major third countries, which undermine the EU's position in the region. The macro-regional approach enables better cooperation and exchange of know-how and experience in relevant sectors within the Danube Region. Implemented projects and outcomes, such as policy approaches and policy papers, are of added value to the thematic areas.

3 'Nos' as limiting factor to enhance added-value

The results of the operational evaluation show that the 3 'Nos' are perceived as obstacle for enhancing the added-value of the EUSDR, particularly regarding funding. As can be found in chapter 4.1.2, participants highlighted the need for stronger alignment of budgets to MRS to enhance the added-value of the Strategy. As already outlined in the EUSDR Communication (COM(2010) 715), the EUSDR "is implemented by mobilising and aligning existing funding to its objectives, where appropriate and in line with overall frameworks.", building upon the 3 "Nos" principle. Some may argue that the development of the Danube Strategy Point can itself be considered as a new structure, albeit not being

formal, and that the mentioning of macro-regional objectives as guidance for structural and cohesion funds can be considered a change in legislation. It is a common agreement that this principle can also be seen from a positive angle and turned into “3 Yes”, when being understood as making common efforts for better co-ordination of resources, more coherent implementation of regulations and laws, and operating only minimal structures by making use of those that exist – that enabled constructive contributions from all parties.

Respondents from the online survey further highlighted the need for a better-coordinated and integrated implementation of the Strategy at different levels. Increasing visibility and communication of results to the general public and the private sector was underlined several times by participants. This could be done through the realisation of joint major strategic projects with a significant impact and added value to the macro region, e.g. in the fields of economic development, tourism, or preservation of the environment. Joint solutions are of importance to overcome interregional disparities through such common initiatives.

Other suggestions to improve the added-value of the EUSDR include cooperation between different programmes and institutions such as better alignment of MRS with other EU policies or Council of Europe standards. Enhanced capacities of PAs to be able to plan and implement transnational actions, as well as the establishment of ad hoc transnational units would be required. The added value could also be increased by taking into account the current realities and differences between the EUSDR countries. This could be done through a differentiated approach (e.g. topics supported) based on their needs.

Thematic concentration and focus on key areas for enhanced added-value

Furthermore, several respondents would favour a ‘thematic concentration’, meaning to address a smaller number of issues at priority level, which would increase the options for and the probability of visible achievements in a limited number of key areas. According to one respondent, the obvious candidates for key areas would be water and biodiversity management. Another aspect that was brought up is that the EUSDR could be used as a lever to strengthen awareness for the global dimension – thus attracting SMEs and foster economic cooperation and integration across Danube Region.

4.2 Governance dimension (operational level)

4.2.1 Stakeholder involvement at operational level

Not only at strategic but also at operational level it is important that the right stakeholders are involved. The evaluation findings indicate that this has not been completely reached but current state of play is ranked as satisfactory.

According to the experience of the survey participants, the **relevant stakeholders are involved in the implementation of the EUSDR at PA/SG level** (mean 3.67 on a scale from 1 of 6 with 6 being best; n = 51). However, there is room for improvement and respondents proposed additional stakeholders and partners that should be involved to increase the added value and/or impact of the activities.

More engagement with municipalities, civil society and private sector needed

Participants have expressed the need to increase the representation of national authorities of the Danube Region Countries, as the decision-making levels are often not

represented at meetings. Regarding additional stakeholders, respondents would like to see more municipalities and local and regional authorities involved to support the visibility and promote common lines of thinking ‘on the ground’. Stronger involvement of civil society organisations (e.g. the security area was mentioned), NGOs and social partners was also mentioned as additional stakeholders to support a wider dialogue, the mutual exchange between different groups of actors and thus the emergence of new cooperation patterns. Additionally, respondents expressed the need to approach the private sector more actively, e.g. SMEs, infrastructure managers for railways, roads and airports, companies who operate in the Danube Region. Lastly, academia and think tanks, as well as Managing Authorities and other funding institutions (development cooperation, World Bank etc.) or other international, regional organisations (e.g. RCC, IOM, NALAS etc.) are additional stakeholders that should be involved in the EUSDR.

In the interviews, the statements on stakeholder involvement reveals a wide range of opinions, but the majority of respondents sees a lack of persons having actual influence on policy-making. Several interviewees also made the controversial proposal to broaden the fundament of the involvement, which means to invite also cities, chambers and academia.

Dialogue and consultation formats and thematic events key for better stakeholder involvement

Respondents in the online survey have mentioned the need to continue dialogue and consultation formats, such as the National Participation Days, to improve stakeholder involvement. Face-to-face meetings are considered as very important. The organisation of thematic events at the Annual Forum could be a good way to include other stakeholders, for example by introducing a session dedicated to entrepreneurs (e.g. key speakers, success stories, trends, advices etc.). As already elaborated in chapter 4.1.3, respondents have proposed to change the “3 Nos”, particularly referring to funding, into a yes to better include these stakeholders in the EUSDR. Press conferences were also suggested as a possible way to enhance stakeholder involvement, as it would increase visibility.

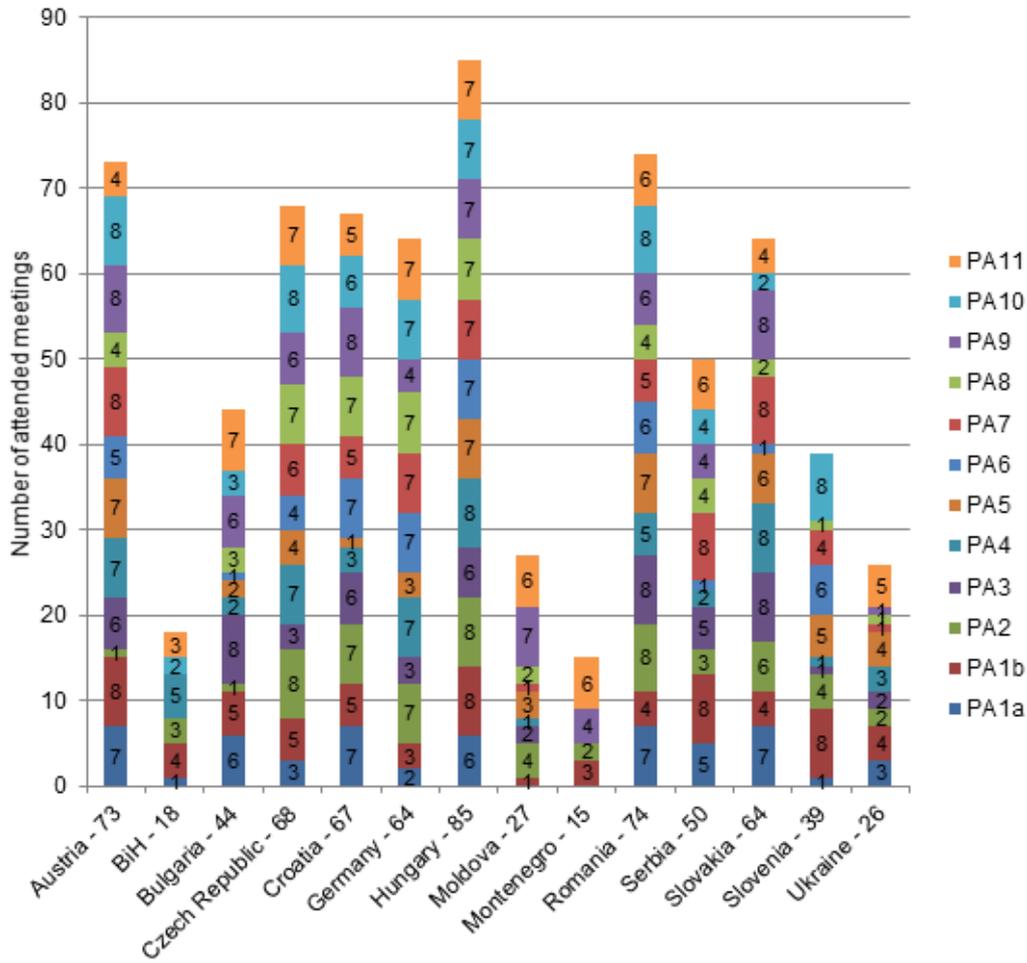
4.2.2 Steering Groups

According to the perception of the online-survey participants, the Steering Group they belong to are composed appropriately (mean 4.32 on a scale from 1 of 6 with 6 being best). The involvement of the SG in the PA is assessed relatively high with a mean of 4.43 on a scale from 1 (very low involvement) to 6 (very large involvement). However, the answers show a wide variation, which indicates large differences between the Priority Areas.

It has been emphasized that PAs are „energized“ by the specific/prominent ownership of a „core group“, by the active participation of a DG and/or an existing international organisation and/or other factors of involvement and ownership. These factors are of high relevance for the success and the momentum of the EUSDR work.

The stakeholder involvement also varies between countries. While some countries are very active, others show only little participation in SG meetings. An assessment on the SG participation by country from 2015 to 2018 revealed that on the one hand, Hungary, Romania and Austria have been very active, and on the other hand, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova have not attended many meetings (see the following figure). The pattern remained similar over time.

Figure 15. Country representation at SG meetings 2015 - 2018



Source: Metis, based on information provided by PACs.

Challenging capacity issues but sound processes – transparent and responsive decision-making, planning and consultation processes

Only few respondents commented on the composition, functioning and communication within the Steering Group. Some respondents criticised the lack of participation of SG members in meetings. They underlined that SG members should have certain decision-making powers and actively participate in meetings, otherwise the meetings are restricted to a rather superficial exchange of information. Several respondents stated that the scope of some PAs was comparatively broad making it difficult for SG members to cover and follow-up on all addressed issues. Seen from a country perspective, the outreach of the strategy is rather unevenly distributed – the activity levels of SG members vary to a significant extent. Continuity of staff among SG members would be very important to build and strengthen capacities, but according to respondents, this is hardly the case. Generally, the decision-making, planning and consultation processes were considered as transparent and responsive.

Ownership, commitment and active participation are key success factors for a strong involvement of the SG in the PA

Key success factors for a strong involvement of the SG in the PA are ownership of the Strategy, high-level political commitment as well as regular participation and proactive contribution at meetings (see chapter 4.1.2). According to the respondents, it is necessary to have an understanding of the Strategy on national level and to be willing and open for cooperation in order to have a strong involvement of the Steering Group. Good governance, strong NC support, project examples and the choice of the venue are also success factors that were named. It was suggested that the ownership of the contribution to the Action Plan could be increased by encouraging the members to share their initiatives or initiatives of related stakeholders, or by jointly developing the activities for the Strategy implementation. This is in line with the Strategy document, which underlines that the responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy lies with the participating countries.

The findings of the interviews indicate that for success it requires mainly

- Leadership of NCs and PACs
- Having the right persons in the SG
- Common projects and actions

Staff constraints and financial resources hamper a stronger involvement of the Steering Group

Main obstacles for a stronger involvement of the SG relate to staff constraints and financial resources. For some SG members, the EUSDR is only a marginal part of their job, which makes it difficult to reserve and justify ample time required for traveling. Having limited staff resources for the EUSDR means that the administrative work, related to participation in the activities rests again on the shoulders of the stakeholders: this obviously limits the room for work on the contents. The location of meetings was also mentioned as an obstacle for a strong involvement. Other obstacles are the different political priorities that make it difficult to find a common interest sphere, insufficient backing from involved line ministries, lacking political commitment and a permanent fluctuation of staff.

The interviewed PACs perceive the lack of capacities and expertise from part of the SG members as the major obstacle. A step-by-step empowerment of SGs might be an incentive that MS invest more in strategy-building. Also a broader expert involvement (including persons from academia or civil society organisations) should be considered as capacity reinforcement.

Clear definition of responsibilities, reduced administration for cooperation and financing of travels to improve the Steering Group

Participation at meetings and stable personnel are key for a well-functioning Steering Group. Having this in mind, interviewees suggested to simplify or reduce administration for coordination and to invest more in the management of the PA. Clear definitions of the functions and responsibilities of all SG members including PACs would be necessary to improve the Steering Group. The need for stronger rights for participation and control of implementation was expressed. One person suggested that SG members should be involved more in the future Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) technical assistance (TA) project. SG meetings and other events should be organised as appealingly as possible, by including interesting and relevant topics. Financing of travel

costs, particularly of non-EU Member States, could also solve some of the above-mentioned issues regarding non-participation of members. Additionally, it was suggested to provide logistics to PA coordination to be able to organise events in other MS.

Interviewees suggest that in order to encourage participation in SG it might be useful to combine several meetings and to encourage decision-making. The tendency of answers is that it is weak, taking into account also the fact that many respondents complained about the lack of motivation and proactive approach in SGs.

According to the interviewed PACs, there is stronger interest in some PAs than in others, depending on the topics. Quite obviously, the interest in EUSDR issues is higher when it corresponds to political interest.

The interviewees further mention that the communication of results beyond projects does not always work as well as a lack of feedback loops to ensure the effectiveness of communication to national stakeholders.

4.2.3 National level

The total number of respondents to this set of questions was very low (3) and therefore the answers are not representative.

At national level, there have been some structural and institutional changes, but overall, the impact of the EUSDR seems to be little. According to the NCs who participated in the online-survey, almost no institutional change has been perceived:

- Only one participant (out of three) stated that the EUSDR is part of the organigrams of ministries. In this case, with the decision of setting up the national EUSDR coordination mechanism and with the order of the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, an EUSDR secretariat was being established within one of the Ministry's administrative structures.
- No participant stated that new forms of cooperation or workflows were generated by the EUSDR. However, only two participants replied to this question.
- They also denied that the EUSDR is in the strategic focus for institutions/units dealing with external affairs. Instead, one NC highlighted that at their Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ambassador is in charge of all issues related to the EUSDR.

According to those three NCs who answered the question, civil society is not appropriately involved in the EUSDR implementation. Nevertheless, the National Participation Days were named as a positive example, where civil society is involved.

However, the Trio-presidencies of the EUSDR were assessed well. As further improvement for the future, a more active role of the Trio-presidencies in the coordination of the Strategy was suggested.

Few responses (1-3 responses per question) were given concerning the technical implementation of the EUSDR on the national level. Only two persons confirmed that there was a national EUSDR platform in place. One person referred to the National Coordination Mechanism for activities under the EUSDR, which was established in 2012 with a Decision of the Council of Ministers. Another participant underlined the inter-ministerial coordination subgroup for EU macro-regional strategies in his/her country.

According to two participants, the national report to the EC for the 2nd report on MRS was coordinated through the National Coordination Mechanism within the subgroup with

support from different PACs. Three respondents underlined that representatives to the EUSDR's Steering Groups are appointed by the line ministries. Only one person pointed out a main gap in technical implementation of the EUSDR in his or her country. This gap refers to the monitoring of EUSDR implementation, which is difficult since there is no exhaustive overview of projects carried out in relation to the Strategy.

The results of the interviews confirm that achievements in terms of embedding and institutional change vary strongly. Exemplary achievements related to institutional change are a service office and inter-ministerial consultation groups.

4.2.4 Workflows and processes

In order to safeguard efficient and synergetic implementation procedures, well-functioning workflows and processes among key actors are vital prerequisites. The participants of the online-survey assessed the **general workflows/processes satisfying, sufficiently transparent and rather formal** than informal. The best assessment in terms of general satisfaction and transparency was reached at PA level, followed by the EUSDR level. Lower ratings are found at national level. The degree of formalization is very high at EUSDR level, whereas at national level the workflows/processes are more informal. The **efforts that are needed** to ensure the **workflows/processes** in relation to the outcome are assessed relatively high at all levels. The following table shows the mean assessments related to workflows and processes at different levels.

Table 3. Questions on workflows and processes

Question	Mean at EUSDR level	Mean at PA level	Mean at national level
How would you generally assess the workflows/processes among the key implementers of the EUSDR? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very weak) to 6 (excellent).	3.8	4.0	3.5
In your opinion, how transparent are the workflows/processes to all involved stakeholders? Please rate on a scale from 1 (non-transparent) to 6 (very transparent).	3.8	4.0	3.7
How formalized are the workflows/processes? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very informal) to 6 (very formal).	4.4	3.8	3.7
How would you assess the efforts needed to ensure the workflows/processes in relation to the outcome? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very low effort) to 6 (very high effort).	4.1	4.1	4.1

Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 56

Examples regarding well-functioning workflows and processes are divers

Generally, the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan is perceived as a good example for a well functioning process, both on the national and EUSDR level. According to several comments in the online survey, the revision process ensures a bottom-up approach in establishing the EUSDR priorities.

On national level, three respondents pointed out an EUSDR coordination mechanism respectively inter-ministerial working group. These processes allow the inclusion and

information of more line ministries and core stakeholders in the process related to the EUSDR implementation, at national and macro-regional level. The national inter-ministerial working group regularly informs all relevant stakeholders on the achievements and steps taken by different EUSDR actors.

On PA level, nine participants gave examples of workflows and processes that work well. One person gave a more general statement concluding that decision-making and management was efficient with smooth operations. A more concrete example are stakeholder groups that formulate recommendations that are presented to the Steering Groups for decision/further consideration on a regular basis and provide additional information/feedback to the SG. Additional examples are cultural routes, cultural events and conferences that increase awareness, information, tolerance and solidarity, as well as the Danube Participation Days, which increase civil society engagement. The Danube Local Actors Platform was also mentioned as good example to exchange knowledge between interested parties, but the lack of commitment from MS was criticised. The cooperation within the pillars and informal networks were also highlighted.

More general, seminars, workshops and forums have been used for capacity building, exchange of information and cooperation. The 2 steps application for DTP applications was also highlighted as positive example for a well-functioning workflow. It allows partners to get to know each other better, saves time in case their idea is not appropriate, and allows time to prepare a good proposal.

PA governance needs improvement

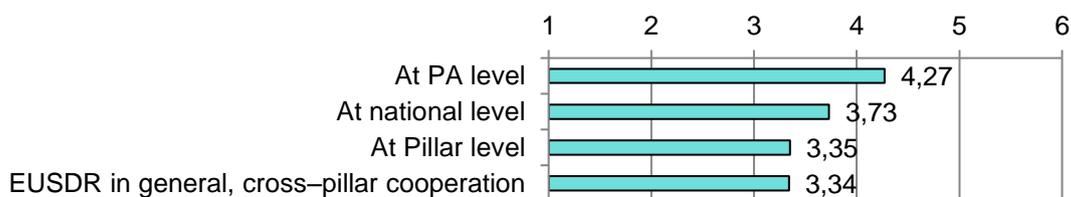
Most workflows and processes that need improvement, according to respondents, are related to PA governance and/or the financing of its coordination. Respondents suggested to improve, for example, the selection of PA coordinators with regards to skills and performance evaluation, financing PAC support projects by the financial assistance grant, refining the information flow between PAs and NC decisions, policies and initiatives. Other examples are increasing the thematic exchange between PAs, and an increase in thematic calls, ensuring clear and easy reporting, interlinking MRS and EU Mainstream programmes, or more small-scale finance projects and co-financing of DTP.

4.2.5 Cooperation structures

The results of the online-survey show that the cooperation intensity between key actors in the EUSDR is high at **PA level** and – to a smaller extent – at **national level**. At **Pillar level** and in the **EUSDR in general (cross-pillar)**, the cooperation is less intensive (see the following figure).

Figure 16. Cooperation intensity

In your perception, how intensive is the cooperation between the key actors in the EUSDR? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very low intensity) to 6 (very high intensity).



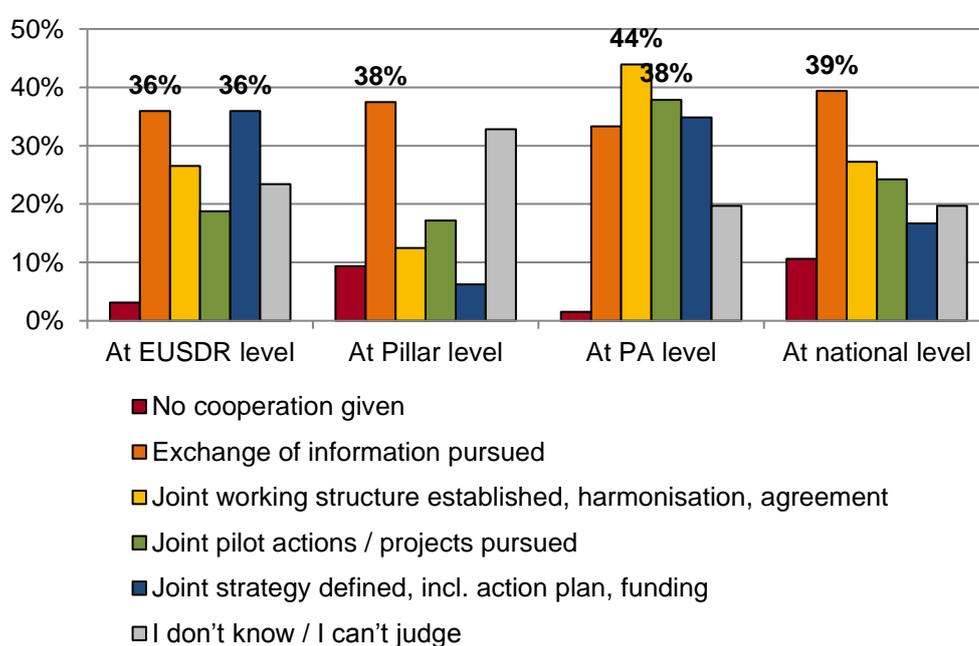
Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 70

As described in chapter 2, cooperation needs to develop over time and unfolds in different stages. It can vary from a simple exchange of information and move up on a “cooperation ladder” to arrive at joint strategies.

The following figure shows the different stages of cooperation that the survey participants indicated at different levels. It shows that at EUSDR level, **exchange of information** and **joint strategies** are predominant. At PA level, **joint working structures** and **joint pilot actions** are established. At pillar as well as on national level, cooperation is less developed and is mainly made up of **exchange of information**.

Figure 17. Cooperation structures

How would you describe the cooperation structures you are involved in? Please tick the corresponding boxes (multiple answers possible).



Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 66

Cooperation intensity raised over time

The results of the online-survey also show clearly that the cooperation intensity in the Danube Region raised over time (see the following figure). Ten years ago, several aspects of cooperation (e.g. intensity of information exchange, mutual understanding, binding rules/processes/structures, etc.) have been rather weak. Now the level of cooperation is rated higher throughout the different aspects.

Figure 18. Changes in cooperation intensity in the Danube Region over time

Please rate the level of cooperation 10 years ago and now on a scale from 1 (very weak) to 6 (very good).



Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 60

Fluctuation of staff hampers cooperation

According to survey participants and interviewees, the constant fluctuation of staff is making improvements of cooperation difficult. However, it is important to create mutual trust for close cooperation, as well as a more realistic perception of what can be achieved. Adaptability and flexibility among all involved stakeholders is key. Respondents have also suggested more cooperation between PA pillars. At national level, there is a need to improve capacity of the cooperation structure to call regular meetings and coordination of the PAs.

4.2.6 Projects and activities of strategic value

Projects and activities of strategic value are an important tool in the EUSDR for making results visible. In this context, Interact has highlighted the concept of “project chains”, which are projects that are interlinked. This linkage may be a horizontal one (linking topics within a PA or a pillar), it may link EUSDR projects with projects in other funding schemes (Cohesion policy, Horizon 2020, CEF etc.) or with national/regional projects or activities. This implies that thematic coordinators of a PA actively build, implement and monitor such linkages. It will allow a much wider outreach of the Strategy. Examples for this can be found already but are not reported or mentioned explicitly in reports.

In the perception of the survey participants, more than half the projects (activities, project bundles, project chains) do have a strategic value. On a scale from 1 (there is no project of strategic value) to 6 (all projects have a strategic value), the share of projects with strategic value was rated with 3.86 in average (n = 64).

According to interviewees, the *DREAM* project (Danube River research and management) is one of the best examples of a project involving different funding sources and different levels of governance.

Another example is the project *Danube Parks* (linking green corridors), which builds upon the results of a former project and is looking forward to future projects. According to another interviewee, project chains can be found often and everywhere, e.g. projects in the vocational sector that are co-funded by Erasmus+.

SECCo is another good example for a project chain of strategic value. The first project cycle took place from 2013 to 2014. SECCo aims at strengthening internal cohesion of the Danube Region and the social interconnectivity of the EUSDR and EUSAIR by facilitating the permeability of the borders and building social networks across the state borders – with a special focus on youth. An online platform was created where all actors of different types of CBC from the two macro-regions (twin cities, Euroregions, EGTCs, university cooperation structures, joint chambers etc.), with a special focus on Balkans can share information, build partnerships and joint projects and use the tool-kit. The main missions of the platform are to make all these structures visible and to create an interface for knowledge sharing; and to foster the representation of youth in CBC, so it will be interconnected with the AEBR's Young Leaders' Platform and the E-DEN Portal. SECCo2 is currently in its second project cycle and it is wished to be continued as SECCo 3, including physical gatherings and the creation of CBC structures in the EUSDR.

Another element for triggering changes through the EUSDR are processes put in place. Interact (2018) describes this as the “project to policy loop”, which is a process where a link between macro-regional processes and a policy change is initiated. In this context, a macro regional process can trigger a policy discussion or even change.

An example can be found in PA 1a – Navigation, where a number of projects (NEWADA and Fairway) have been developed from a Steering Group initiative over a Masterplan to national action plans (based on ministerial conclusions). The project *NEWADA* has helped to increase the efficiency of the Danube as the European Transport Corridor VII by intensifying cooperation between waterway administrations to promote inland navigation as a cost-effective and environmentally friendly mode of transport. Twelve institutions from several countries were responsible for maintaining waterways and river navigation. As a continuation, under its second phase, *NEWADA* duo was co-funded under the EU SEE Transnational Cooperation Programme. An information portal for the Danube Region was created with the aim of providing data for water levels and critical barriers, information to the captains, alert for ice, etc.

Another example is *vocational training*, which is pushed forward by all Danube Region countries. Through inputs by the EUSDR, different initiatives were developed. For instance, BiH initiated a stronger dialogue with schools that are not very practically oriented. These dialogues have led to addressing the needs for more practice orientation in many countries and contributed to the creation of projects that again influenced policy, by creating framework conditions. HU and HR even changed their laws accordingly and made vocational schools more practically oriented.

JOINTISZA is another example of a project to policy loop regrouping 5 countries. It is about the Integrated Tisza River Basin Management, which is a result from efforts both from PA and SGs. A new River Basin Management Plan will be the policy outcome, which is considered as big success for water management policy.

Other good examples of projects/ project bundles/ project chains with strategic value that were mentioned in the online survey or in interviews are the following:

- Danubius (PA 7): The Danube International Centre for Advanced Studies for River-Delta-Sea systems is a pan European R&D infrastructure. It is included in the 2016 ESFRI Roadmap. The project improves the sustainable, innovative and adaptive management of wetlands, deltas, lagoons and coastal ecosystems by studying in deep the processes influencing the evolution environmental state of the River-Delta-Sea systems and enables excellent interdisciplinary research and innovation on River-Delta-Sea systems.
- The Youth Platform (PA 9) aims at contributing to the achievement of EU 2020 targets, in particular with regard to smart and inclusive growth and the „Education and Training 2020” strategy in particular as well as to the improvement of labour markets and social inclusion in the Danube Region.
- Danube Participation Day (PA 10): a regular event at national, as well as macro-regional level with the aim to promote participatory governance in the context of the EUSDR, and to inform project promoters about the strategic dimension and opportunities within the EUSDR. The initiative contributes to several actions that aim at enhancing multi-level governance and is rooted within the PA's Steering Group as well as in the PA's Working Group and brings together the policy and the project level for better coordination.
- ART NOUVEAU project (DTP) is an initiative aimed at exploration, preservation and wide-ranging promotion of the Art Nouveau heritage in the Danube region. The project involves 10 partner organisations from 7 countries. Museums and institutes for protection of monuments will undertake scientific research of roots and forms of expression of Art Nouveau, enhance its physical conservation and ensure its preservation in a digital form. As a result, Art Nouveau values and monuments will be revered and cherished by inhabitants, tourists and future generations instead of being lost to them as relicts of the past. This project will harness the cohesive potential of the Art Nouveau cultural heritage in Danube region.
- Danube River Forum DARIF (PA 1a & PA 11): Harmonisation of politics/ joint rules on ship inspections. Direct link between macro-regional process and national policy change. Yearly joint operations are being carried out. Common fight against criminality on the Danube River. In the framework of this project, a Danube Law Enforcement Coordination Centre in Mohács (HU) was established. Furthermore, a national contact point at the Bavarian Chancellery was put in place, joint recommendations for future law enforcement cooperation were formulated and an info brochure for whole Danube was developed.
- FAIRway Danube (PA 1a): In 2014, the Transport Ministers of the Danube Region Countries adopted a master plan for harmonized waterway rehabilitation and maintenance. FAIRway Danube implements key measures to achieve this, thus taking an important step towards the full implementation of the master plan along the Danube and its navigable tributaries. Coordinated national action plans have been developed and pilot activities to implement the master plan were designed, as well as a coordinated purchase of modern equipment for hydrological services (level measurement, surveying etc.)
- Project RADAR (PA 1b): Focusing on transnational cooperation in identifying risks on road networks and define cost effective solutions to reduce risk.
- DAREnet project (PA 5): DAREnet is a network of practitioners dealing with flood resilience in the Danube River Region, supported by a continuously evolving multi-

disciplinary community of stakeholders consisting of policy makers, academics, industry and many more.

- European Standing Forum on Research Infrastructure. It was initially established as a forum, but in time evolved into a body helping the European Policy in Research infrastructure policies. They also guide the European policy decision makers. This body is constantly evolving to respond to challenges and policies.
- Danube-inco.net (PA 7): distributed useful information and implemented some sustainable strategic activities.
- Construction of Academy Moldova (PA 9): an Austrian/Moldovan cooperation project, which is now funded by enterprises in Moldova, the only example where 'private' funding was possible until now.
- DANUBESSEDIMENT: Flagship project with the technical need to do research on sediment in the Danube. This project is feeding policy with its research and helps identify project partners.
- DanuBiovalnet (PA 8) project deals with clusters in bio-economy, which will have a joint strategy as a result.
- DARLINGe (DTP): looking at regional geothermal energy resources
- WAICE project on the circular economy of wood under evaluation of TCP ADRION
- Danube Funding Coordination Network (DFCN) (PA 7)
- Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) (PA 10)
- Joint operations, fight against crime (PA 11)
- DRiM (Danube Region Information Platform for Economic Integration of Migrants) (DTP)
- AgriGo4Cities (DTP)
- Centrope
- InnoHPC (High-performance Computing for Effective Innovation in the Danube Region) (DTP)
- Knowing IPR (Fostering Innovation in the Danube Region through Knowledge Engineering and IPR Management) (DTP)
- Finance4SocialChange (DTP)
- EuroAccess Tool (online info point and search tool for EU funding)
- COME-IN project of the TCP Central Europe on open access of people with disabilities to cultural heritage (sites, museums, etc.).
- ResInfra project of the TCP Central Europe on managing and networking of large research infrastructures
- ATTRACTIVE DANUBE: Improving Capacities for Enhancing Territorial Attractiveness of the Danube Region.

Furthermore, the following activities of strategic value were mentioned:

- Fostering technology transfer
- Supporting vocational training
- Transport, environmental, water management
- Cooperation with ICPDR

- Navigability on the Danube river
- Cooperation in culture projects and also some tourism-projects
- Flood protection
- Promotion of cultural heritage as strategic orientation
- Study on transport infrastructure in the region
- Project on trafficking in human beings: prevention, violence in family and serious crimes against people.
- Bio-economy clusters
- Clear impact of the project on national policy because some stakeholders (RO) was officially looking at experience of other countries. They were openly looking for information.

Networks and key actors are crucial for the continuity of the projects. According to respondents, continuity of projects is ensured through its embedding in the EUSDR Governance and PA's SGs / Working Groups. Particularly for DTP projects, cooperation with PA coordinators in topic related groups is essential. Thematic Poles are realised as part of the DTP Capitalisation Strategy for connecting thematically-related DTP projects, involving also PACs. Access to funding and alignment of funding is also a substantial element for the capitalisation of results, as some projects are heavily dependent on public funding sources (national, EU and other instruments). Without these funding instruments, the projects would not have a continuity. However, funding sources are analysed in more detail in chapter 4.2.7.

The achievement of tangible results and good publicity/communication activities were mentioned as good success factors for continuity of a project. In some cases, continuity is guaranteed through a partnership agreement for a new association, new project development, or cooperation initiative on other projects.

Respondents have vast opinions on which projects and processes they would like to see promoted in the future in the Danube Region Countries. Topics that were named most include environment and climate change (including drought projects, water management & treatment; sustainable agriculture); digitalisation, research and innovation (e.g. on pharmaceuticals, new emerging substances, micro-plastic); tourism and culture (e.g. an art network based on current stable partnership); inclusion of vulnerable groups/re-integration (e.g. Roma); police cooperation and prosecution (e.g. human trafficking, fight against crime) and strategic transport/mobility/infrastructure. It was highlighted that decision-making should be evidence-based through monitoring and capacity building. Projects on territorial development and ones that contribute to the development of the Lower Danube Countries to enhance the cohesion process in the EU is also key for respondents. Civil society projects with participatory planning, community-building and empowerment are also essential. According to respondents, the projects should result in transnational governance structures guaranteeing long-term sustainability.

The following concrete projects/activities were named as already existing examples:

- Danube/National Participation Day
- Transdanube.Pearls
- DAREnet project

Scarcity of funding and lacking political commitment and ownership are main gaps hindering a sound implementation of the Strategy

The main gaps hindering a sound implementation are by far the current available funding framework and the lacking political commitment and ownership. Respondents expressed their concerns regarding the lack of financial resources and commitment and a missing alignment of funds. They underlined the need to reduce the gap between the Strategy and funding opportunities, as the DTP is considered as too small. However, DTP is not the only source of funding.

Additionally, the lacking political commitment and ownership of local/regional/national governments, as well as on the macro-regional level is a second major gap hindering a sound implementation of the strategy. The weak integration of the EUSDR in Cohesion Policy hinders the establishment of partnerships and a sense of unity, which is necessary for the creation of common strategic projects that are crucial for the Danube Region, including secured financing.

Furthermore, respondents criticised the lack of (national) capacity, the lack of institutionalisation of the EUSDR and the lack of coordination. Capacity issues result from the continuous fluctuation of staff, which is another factor that negatively influences the implementation of the strategy. Participants highlighted the different (national) interests and priorities, as well as differences in legislation and economic level. The differences between EU MS and Non-EU MS were also pointed out as contributing factors affecting the implementation.

Technical issues including modalities, bureaucracy (e.g. reporting, complicated ToRs), and FLC (e.g. very time-consuming, inefficiency, pre-financing) were also reported as gaps hindering a sound implementation. According to respondents, the EUSDR is missing good pilot projects. Lastly, a more general gap regarding multiculturalism (e.g. different cultures, language skills) was pointed out.

Participants recommended to identify strategic projects within narrowed areas within all PAs and to identify possible financing schemes of these projects, taking into account not only EU financing schemes, but also other funding sources such as financial institutions, EIB and World Bank. A next step would be to create a platform for seeking such possible financing schemes.

4.2.7 Funding sources

The results of the evaluation illustrate that there are already some good examples on the embedding of the EUSDR in programmes/funding sources, but there is potential for improvement.

According to the online survey, the following funding sources are addressed most in the EUSDR: ERDF (mainly via DTP), Cohesion Fund and national/regional funding sources or development cooperation sources (e.g. BACID, CEI Calls for Proposals). Additionally, it was mentioned that Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes were elaborated by aligning the thematic objectives and the investment priorities of the programme with EUSDR objectives. As the eligible area of the CBC Programme is part of the area covered by the EUSDR, it can be assumed that all projects financed by the Programme have an impact on the EUSDR.

Other funding sources like the ESF, centrally managed EU funds or private funds play a smaller role for the EUSDR according to PACs and NCs who participated in the survey. Some examples for these funds could nevertheless be identified. In relation to the ESF,

cooperation with the ESF Public Admin. & Governance Network, cooperation with the ESF Network Danube Region as well as the implementation of projects for institutional capacity building and Roma inclusion/social inclusion at local level were mentioned. Centrally managed EU funds were addressed e.g. by Horizon2020 and Europe for Citizens. The Baden-Württemberg Foundation and the Bosch Foundation were mentioned as examples of private funds that considered the EUSDR.

In some cases, explicit EUSDR-related calls have been stated, e.g. ESF BG or CBC RO-RS.

Other funding sources that were considered for the implementation of the PAs are for instance URBACT, UIA, funds provided by international organisations at national level (e.g. Austrian Development Agency ADA or the Swiss cooperation office), Internal Security Fund, or the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

As examples of cross-funded initiatives VET development, local development and the support of SMEs were named by the participants of the online-survey.

It was further stated that for the development of common projects with EU countries, new funding sources for non-EU countries are necessary and that dedicated funds need to be allocated for PA projects (at least for soft projects that the SG deems as most needed).

The following box illustrates some good examples of EUSDR consideration in Bulgaria. It shows that the EUSDR is taken into account in several strategic documents at national level, including the Partnership Agreement and some Operational Programmes. The objectives of the Strategy are also reflected in the territorial cooperation programmes, in particular INTERREG V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020 and INTERREG – IPA Bulgaria-Serbia 2014-2020.

- Human Resources OP: In 2017, a specific operation “Danube Partnerships for Jobs and Growth” was launched aiming at enhancing the welfare of human resources in the Danube region. This is done by promoting interregional and transnational cooperation between partners from different EU Member States in the areas of labour market, social inclusion, combating poverty, healthcare, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, working conditions and administrative capacity building therein. The operation aims at transfer and implementation of social innovations, best practices, partnership approaches for addressing common problems, building specific partnership skills, etc. The budget for these activities is EUR 950 353.
- OP Regions in Growth: By supporting the integrated urban development of large and medium-sized cities of the North West, North Central and North East regions, the OPRG contributes to the EUSDR with a total budget of EUR 840 million (ERDF and national co-financing) through urban regeneration, restoration of underdeveloped urban areas and measures for educational infrastructure of local importance. OPRG 2014-2020 supports the fulfilment of the objectives of PA 6 - "To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soil" and PA 7 - "To develop knowledge society through research, education and information technologies". Direct contribution to PA 3 of the Danube Strategy “To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts, which is coordinated by Bulgaria, is achieved through Priority Axis 6 of OPRG 2014-2020 "Regional tourism". Within PA 6, the support for the implementation of integrated tourism products based on the cultural heritage of national and world importance is provided.

- **OP Transport and Transport Infrastructure:** The OP and CEF support the establishment of modern infrastructure for traffic management and transport safety improvement (which involves improvement of the navigation systems and topographic measurements along the Danube River) supply of multipurpose vessels, modernisation and construction of port reception facilities for treatment of ship-generated waste and cargo residues in ports for better environmental management. Bulgaria has deployed a modern navigation management technology and systems in the Bulgarian section of the Danube River. The OP finances the purchase of multifunctional dredging equipment on the river Danube with EUR 10 million. New vessels for river exploration and waterway marking are part of projects for improvement of the navigation on the Danube River, financed by the OP and DTP/CEF. The OP and CEF are the main financial sources for the development of the railway and road infrastructure along TEN-T core network corridors.
- **OP Environment:** the OP invests in measures contributing to the EUSDR and aiming at improvement of water supply and wastewater infrastructure, preservation of biodiversity, landscape and quality of air and soils, fortification of landslide areas. Biodiversity preservation measures are envisaged to be implemented by the potential beneficiaries, including through Local Action Groups by applying the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) approach. The planned financing amounts to more than EUR 16 million and is envisaged for conservation measures for habitats and species in Natura 2000 network.
- **Strong connections remain in place between the INTERREG V-A RO/BG programme priorities and the EUSDR ones.** The common border – the Danube River – is considered as a common challenge for enhancing the economic and social cohesion of the region, increasing the competitiveness and the setting up of growth and jobs. The programme aims at supporting the implementation of the EUSDR by contributing to its 4 pillars and 8 PAs. The calls for proposals under the programme envisage additional bonus points for projects demonstrating strong relation to the implementation of the Danube strategy.
- **The IPA II CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia continues to demonstrate a high relevance and coherence to EUSDR strategic initiatives, directly contributing to 6 of the Strategy's PAs.** In order to guarantee that the Programme is linked up to the implementation of the Danube Strategy, a coordination mechanism has been established through the participation of the NC and PACs in the programme Joint Monitoring Committee. In that way they take part in the decision making process and by being directly involved in the planning and the implementation of the programme guarantee its synergy to the EUSDR.
- **OP Innovation and Competitiveness provides support for Bulgarian enterprises in the field of innovation, growth capacity, internationalization of the SMEs activities, energy and resource efficiency and a significant part of the announced procedures coincide as goals and priorities with those of the EUSDR.** These include the cluster development procedures, the creation of a favourable business environment, increasing the production and management capacity of enterprises and increasing their export potential, Sofia Tech Park, the procedures for development and implementation of innovations in the enterprises, energy and resource efficiency in enterprises. In particular procedures, the OP is giving priority in its investments to SMEs activities in the North-West Region of Bulgaria, which is the poorest EU region in the Danube area, thus contributing to the economic cohesion within the Danube area as a whole.

- The financial instruments envisaged for implementation under OP Innovation and Competitiveness and OP Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Initiative 2014-2020 also contribute to the implementation of the Strategy.

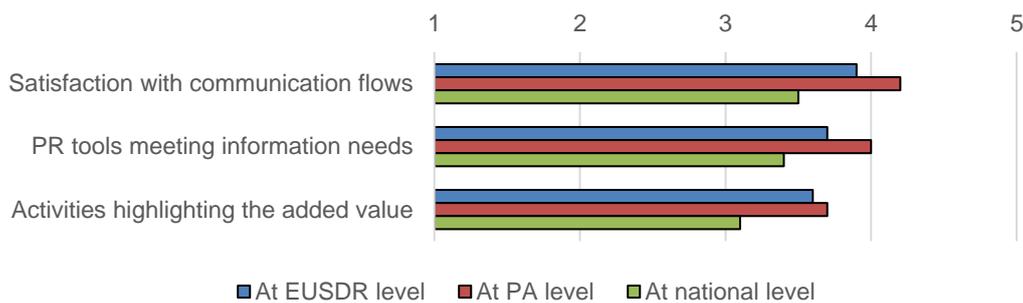
4.2.8 External communication and PR

In general, the participants of the online-survey are relatively **satisfied with the EUSDR communication flows**. This is the case mainly at PA level (mean 4.2 out of 6, with 6 being best) and at EUSDR level (mean 3.9). At national level the satisfaction rate is lower (mean 3.5 out of 6).

Overall, the **communication and PR tools meet the information needs** on the EUSDR, but only to a limited extent. Again, best results were achieved at PA level (mean 4 out of 6) and a poorer assessment can be found at national level (mean 3.4 out of 6).

The assessment on the extent of the communication and PR tools **highlighting the added value** of the EUSDR is less positive. The current communication and PR activities highlight the added value best at PA level (3.7) and EUSDR level (3.6), however, the assessment is rather low and at national level even lower (3.1).

Figure 19. Communication and PR

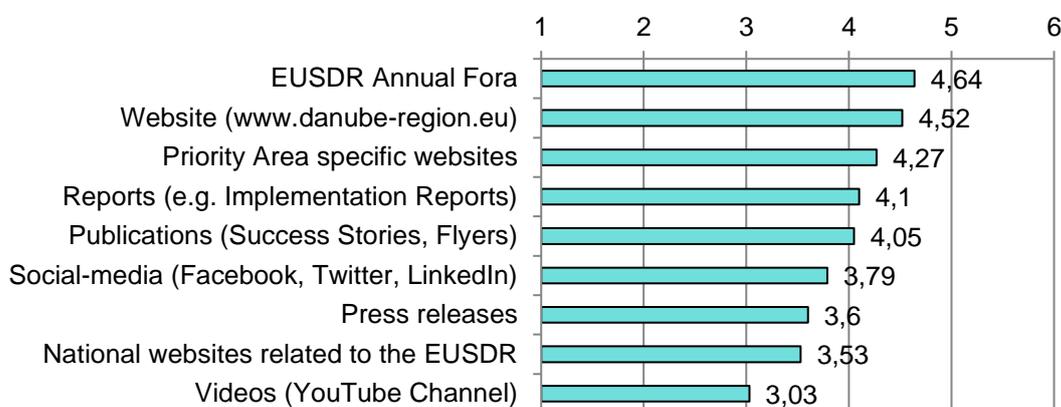


Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 52

In terms of specific communication and PR tools, the **EUSDR Annual Forum**, the **Website** (www.danube-region.eu) and the **Priority Area specific websites** achieved highest satisfaction rates (means over 4.2). The participants of the online-survey also assessed the **reports** and **publications** relatively good. On the contrary, specific **national websites** related to the EUSDR (mean 3.5) and **Videos** (mean 3.0) were assessed rather poorly (see the following figure).

Figure 20. Communication and PR tools

How helpful / informative do you find the following communication and PR tools used by the EUSDR? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very little) to 6 (very much).



Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 51

Thematic workshops and specific target group approaches deemed most informative additional tools

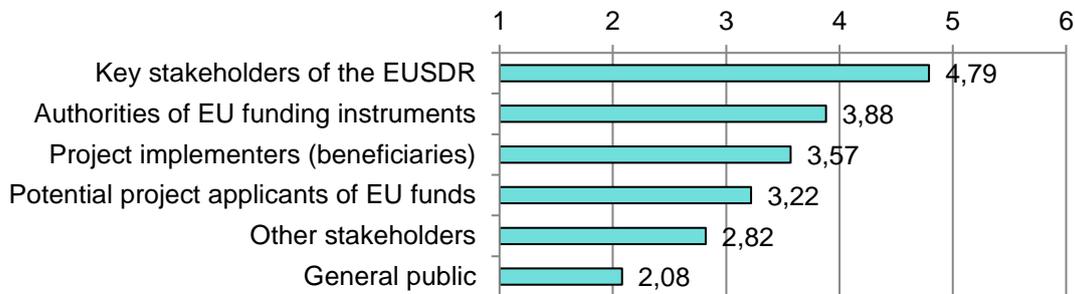
Thematic workshops and seminars and specific target group approaches (e.g. sector specific events; for private sector and population) are additional key communication and PR tools. Respondents have different opinions on what else they deem relevant for communication. They suggested to organise regional conferences with relevance to individual PAs, as well as presentations at stakeholder events. Additionally, they deem coffee table discussions/ informal brainstorming and the development of sub-working groups in PAs relevant. They also suggested a newsletter for the political level.

Regarding the visibility of the EUSDR there is still ample room for improvement

The visibility of the EUSDR varies for the different target groups. Not surprisingly, the strategy is most visible for the **key stakeholders of the EUSDR** (NCs, PACs, SG members) and least visible for the **public**. However, participants of the online survey also assessed (estimated) the visibility for **other stakeholders** (like multipliers, experts, authorities, politics, associations, interest representatives, civil society, media, academia) very low. The following figure shows the assessment of the visibility for different target groups.

Figure 21. Visibility of the EUSDR

In your opinion, how visible is the EUSDR for the different target groups? Please estimate the visibility on a scale from 1 (very little) to 6 (very much).



Source: Online-survey 2019, n = 53

EUSDR barely covered in traditional media

The EUSDR is covered rather poorly in traditional media. According to respondents, it is not attractive to traditional media due to its general broad range and too comprehensive character. Visibility is higher in case of events of special importance like the Annual Forums and large projects. Some specific information is covered in periodic journals, TV emissions, newspapers or online press releases. However, the media coverage should be improved.

This could be done through communication of successful projects, more internet based communication and the use of social media. In terms of social media, the EUSDR could e.g. draw on the experience of the DG Regio's "EU in my Region" approach. The communication activities should mainly be oriented towards the general public at local and regional level, in other words, the audience outside the EUSDR coordination/implementation mechanisms. Through these communication activities, the general public should become familiar with the added value of the Strategy (also in the daily lives) and understand how the Danube Strategy builds on and complements all other initiatives at national and EU level. This could be done by organising more but smaller local events. According to participants, there is a need for a better promotion of the benefits and role of the strategy using a business communication approach and a friendly message.

Steering Groups as the weak link in the chain

In addition, the interviewees consider the visibility beyond the strategy stakeholders to be quite limited. According to their perception, the SGs are the weak link in the chain. Several respondents see the lack of budgets and tangible outcomes as the major limiting factor to effectively address higher political ranks. From the perspective of PACs and NCs, the DSP is understood as a major support to streamline and help in communication.

Respondents indicate that there would be a need to:

- align communication strategies at PA level taking the needs of different target groups into account; meaning to establish more overarching headlines of communication, reconsider the approach of having one website per PA and expand skills and use of social media and develop new formats such as press events or fairs.

- The assessment on the quality of Annual Fora is quite controversial: it indicates that there is a need to come to an agreement on the formats used as well as the target groups addressed; several respondents would like to see more options for direct exchange and more lively room for exchange; sectoral meetings on issues, which are high on the political agenda might be attached to the Annual Fora.

4.2.9 Expectations on the role of the DSP

In the online survey, the DSP was mentioned as a general gap. It was suggested to seek for options to establish the DSP as permanent structure, or at least as structure operating for the entire programming period 2021-2027, in order to ensure the consistency of the governance mechanism of the Strategy. The DSP is the coordinating and connecting structure between the participating countries and key implementers of the Danube Strategy and it could not fulfil these functions, if a new structure is created every 2-3 years.

The expectations related to the role and tasks of the DSP are quite diverse and demanding. It is a longlist, which requires prioritisation given the available funding. Respondents have stated the following expectations. The DSP should:

- Act as communication hub for strategy actors
- At the same time being an institutional memory safeguarding continuity
- Support capacity-building for strategy stakeholders (as a consequence of frequent staff fluctuation) but also with a view to expand the outreach to the national levels; this might be done via seminars on topics which are decisive for the implementation of EUSDR (addressing national stakeholders)
- Support to Presidency has been mentioned by several respondents; we assume this is due to the fact that the incoming presidency is perceived as the moment where political attention for EUSDR peaks and the momentum should be used most effectively; as one element DSP should support the prioritisation of themes related to the EUSDR
- Lobby for the EUSDR at the European level same as it is done for other MRS
- Be a hub for monitoring and evaluation in order to feed the 'programming cycle' of the EUSDR with substantiated information but also support to policy monitoring in order to identify initiatives which deserve support and might be integrated into the strategy
- Support transnational cooperation
- Organise exchange with other MRS for NCs and PACs (cooperation with Interact would be recommended); this might be a rewarding approach – to foster exchange and learning among MRS stakeholders, to consolidate the approaches of the MRS and it might encourage the Commission to enrich the 'technical' approach to MRS highlighting specificities related to individual macro regions.

5 The way forward – Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Strategic dimension

The EUSDR survey and interview results coincide with governance research. Macro-regions have been hailed as experimental governance approaches, or soft spaces. These debates highlighted the coordinative, integrative and amendable structures and topics of macro-regions as success factors to fulfil their role in the overall EU governance framework. Yet, fuzzy governance arrangements come with their own caveats.

Major findings related to the strategic dimension:

- The major concrete achievement is the set-up of cooperation structures and partly the emergence of new cooperation patterns respectively partnerships; new partnerships induced by the strategy could become another element of EUSDR success stories (next strategic projects).
- Bringing non-MS in a sensitive geopolitical zone closer to the EU is acknowledged as one of the major assets of the EUSDR.
- Internal actors largely agree that the momentum of EUSDR has decreased, but in some PAs visible progress has been achieved.
- Building the momentum depends largely on the persons involved; there is a lack of incentives to establish stable institutional cooperation patterns and staff fluctuation is an obvious impediment to reap benefits of institutional cooperation;
- High staff fluctuation among PACs and NCs is perceived as one of the impediments to raise the political profile of the strategy paired with lacking outreach at national level – they are often perceived as single persons working rather isolated in line ministries.
- The NCs could become more active in terms of content and act as a mouthpiece for their national policies. Therefore a stronger networking with the DSP should be promoted and common working basis developed.
- When it comes to the strategic cooperation between PACs and institutions at European level, the differences in the assessment among the PACs are quite substantial; thus the aspect might require a case-by-case approach when looking for improvement options. A major aspect is that good cooperation is essentially based on good inter-personal relationships (thus cooperation culture has not fully reached the institutional level).
- EUSDR has a problem with expectation management: several internal actors see that expectations raised are too high thus causing frustration.
- To tie budgets and funding opportunities to the strategy is seen as a major point, which could raise the political interest; the major source could be programmes at European level (raising flags for MRS in programmes such as CEF, H2020, COSME); for example the new partnerships of research institutions could consider the development of MRS flagship projects for Horizon Europe¹⁹.
- There is still homework to be done related to internal communication and the communication of results to the public and the political level.
- The revision of the Action Plan has been explicitly raised as an opportunity to rekindle the political interest from the European level but it has not been echoed widely among the national stakeholders who have been interviewed; but a more frequent revision of the Action Plan could be used as lever to strengthen the governance structures of EUSDR.

¹⁹ The likely successor of H2020

- The definition of horizontal priorities (cross-cutting topics) across the established PA might help to tighten the links in the structures governing EUSDR; one of the proposed elements could be digital transition having obvious impact in many sectors (all so-called disruptive elements in technologies and policy-making in the past decades are essentially caused by ICT as enabling technology).

5.2 Governance dimension

The evaluation results indicate the need for targeted events to strengthen the governance structure. The importance paid to the annual forum is therefore not surprising. Opinions on the effectiveness of media are quite divergent: many respondents do not consider press releases, social media or video channels as the most influential means for communication – it might be required to broaden the outreach, but it might fail to attract political interest. This corresponds to results and conclusions reached in previous debates, highlighting that macro-regional cooperation is primarily a coordination platform for stakeholders working in the region and on specific fields. Evaluating the success of the EUSDR therefore needs to consider the relevance the coordination platform has for the informed stakeholders.

The accumulated knowledge (Figure 18) is a basis for further project development and policy design, which can help support the project-to-policy loop. It needs to be managed, communicated and disseminated in a structured manner.

Governance can only be effective when being linked in one way or the other to government. Despite not being successful in all priority areas, the EUSDR managed to create meaningful links with decision-making committees, for example with the TEN-T platforms.

The ESPON ACTAREA (2017) has analysed numerous examples of soft territorial coordination and cooperation in Europe. One of the main outcomes was that successful soft territorial coordination may be soft in many aspects, but should be rather firm when it comes to decision-making competences, definition of scope, timeframes and dedication of financial resources. In a broad-brush view, the EUSDR is soft in most elements and would definitely profit from firmer pathways from strategy to action in a smaller selection of intervention fields. Such fields could become a temporary focus in order to safeguard the comprehensive character of the Strategy.

Major findings related to the operational dimension:

Stakeholder involvement

- Interviewees across the board have stressed – either implicitly or explicitly – the close link between involvement and commitment. In other MRS more commitment is requested from participating MS (e.g. committing themselves in written to provide resources for staff travel thus ensuring participation).
- Respondents have brought forward very heterogeneous statements on the involvement – but the majority of respondents sees a lack of persons having actual influence on policy-making.
- In order to encourage participation in SG it might be useful to combine several meetings and to encourage decision-making.
- SG meetings could be scheduled in advance of important political meetings. PACs may identify respective political committees that are of relevance to them.

Outreach and spill-over to the national level

- The majority of respondents sees the outreach to the national level as a general weakness – taking into account also the fact that many respondents complained about the lack of motivation and pro-active approach in SGs.
- Lacking participation and pro-active attitude of SG members has been highlighted as recurring weakness: it seems that there is partly a lack of feedback loops in order to monitor the effectiveness of communication to national stakeholders.
- Still there are exceptions to the rather unfavourable assessment of the status quo: depending on the topic stronger interest in some PA has been reported – it corresponds to political interest.
- Achievements in terms of embedding EUSDR in other programmes and being a lever for institutional change vary strongly: the few reported exemplary achievements related to institutional change brought about by EUSDR are a service office and inter-ministerial consultation groups.
- Communication of results beyond projects does not always work – this would call for simple tools to detect, identify and collect promising results and targeted support in communication.

Obstacles and recommendations to alleviate these

- Lack of capacities and expertise as well as staff fluctuation of part of SG members are the major obstacle; step-by-step empowerment of SGs might be an incentive that MS invest more in strategy building and provide more capacity.
- Broader expert involvement (including also persons from academia or Civil Society Organisations) should be considered as capacity reinforcement; broader involvement might also counteract the limited effect of the strategy (which is an obvious consequence of the staff fluctuation in public institutions).

Workflows, processes, cooperation structures

- A stable institutional memory is required in order to counteract all adverse effects of staff fluctuation at MS level – this could be an important ancillary function of the DSP.
- Simplification within EUSDR structures and processes should become a deliberate objective – levers to reduce the administrative burden such as Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) should be considered.
- Stakeholder meetings happen at large intervals but are in the end the decisive venues to support momentum in dissemination and outreach to policy makers – thus facilitation and agenda-setting is crucial and might be improved.
- Ensure adequate communication flows to work on crosscutting issues, which require work across several PA and promote an integrated approach to sectoral policies.

External communication and Public Relations (PR)

- The visibility beyond the strategy stakeholders is considered to be quite limited – SGs are considered as the weak link in the chain; several respondents see the lack of budgets and tangible outcomes as the major limiting factor to effectively address higher political ranks.
- From the perspective of PACs and NCs, the DSP is understood as a major support to streamline and help in communication; at the same time good communication requires close interaction between persons working on contents and communication people.
- Respondents indicate that there would be a need to:
 - align communication strategies at PA level taking the needs of different target groups into account; meaning to establish more overarching headlines of communication, reconsider the approach of having one website per PA and expand skills and use of social media and develop new formats such as press events or fairs.
 - The assessment on the quality of Annual Fora is quite controversial: it indicates that there is a need to come to an agreement on the formats used as well as the target groups addressed; several respondents would like to see more options for direct exchange and more lively room for exchange; sectoral meetings on issues which are high on the political agenda might be attached to the Annual Fora.

Expectations related to the role of the DSP

The expectations related to the role and tasks of the DSP are quite diverse and demanding and should be re-evaluated against the available resources. The longlist presented in the interviews that requires prioritisation can be found in chapter 4.2.9. In order to avoid possible misunderstandings and/or disappointments, the DSP should take up the issues concerning its future profile as soon as possible.

Practical proposals to start

Issues which have been addressed and which might allow for remedial action in the short-term:

- Mind the use of a simpler language in internal and external communication – sophisticated and technical language is a serious impediment for newcomers in EUSDR governance but also for wider dissemination and attraction of new target groups. (*addressing all EUSDR core stakeholders*)
- Reflect on options to use simplified cost options (SCOs) for the financing of PACs in order to reduce the administrative work burden for beneficiaries and programme management. (*addressing the DTP*)
- Ensure participation of EC staff at least via video-conferencing since its role as facilitator is important! (*addressing the EC*)
- Safeguard discipline in sending documents for consultation – late delivery poses problems in federal countries due to need for internal feedback and coordination loops. (*addressing all EUSDR core stakeholders*)
- Organise meetings with stakeholders from other MRS in order to exchange. (*addressing the DSP*)

5.3 Cross-cutting and transversal issues

The interviews with stakeholders at European and national levels confirm a couple of major issues, which go across the strategic and governance dimensions.

Involvement, dedication, interest

- Staff fluctuation is a major limiting factor – it limits the strategic outreach, the options for concrete action and it is a major obstacle to anchor and stabilise institutional cooperation.
- In many cases, the persons sent to meetings lack the capacity and or mandate to take decision, which obviously creates frustration on the part of those who come to the meetings prepared and interested to see results.
- Common projects and actions are considered by a significant number of interviewees as the major success factor in terms of mobilising internal forces as well as in attracting political interest and thus reinforcing the momentum.
- In general, working more towards “political results” (e.g. ministerial meetings, mandates by ministers, etc.) would further raise the political interest. This could be highlighted more in the PAC’s DTP working programmes 2020-2022.

Expectations

- A major point is the trade-off between far reaching goals and a very limited number of policy levers – most of these levers lack effectiveness due to staff fluctuation at level of MS and SGs; expectation management seems to be a key issue – one might consider to reduce the number of issues addressed in order to develop and pin down concrete actions in a limited number of areas; thus developing a stock of success stories which might help to broaden or rekindle the interest of a wider group of stakeholders
- A second mismatch in expectations relates to the ownership of the strategy - actors at different levels complain about the lack of involvement:
 - MS see that a strong role in facilitation and coordination by the EC and related services is required
 - Actors at the European level see deficiencies in the ownership of respectively the commitment to the Strategy by the MS involved;

Budget and levers

- If equipped with resources, the stakeholders respectively institutions might expand scope and outreach – the options to do so within the current budgetary framework for coordination management of the EUSDR are perceived as quite limited in order to fund engines and promoters of the strategy – to put it short: many respondents referred to the 3 ‘Nos’ as the major limiting factor.
- Strategic levers proposed by the EC such as cooperation across programmes should help that ‘embedding the strategy’ goes beyond compliant formulations in national strategy documents towards actual coordination and alignment of priorities – but cross-programme cooperation levers and the closer link between European semester and Cohesion Policy are still unprecedented approaches and outcomes of the negotiations for post 2020 could result in quite weak levers in the end.

Finally...

Is the glass half empty or half full?

In-depth interviews tend to make people reflect, jog their memories and go through past events, meetings, elements of written communication. When being part of a strategy for such a large territory it might be worth to dedicate a couple of hours to visioning before going into the technicalities required for the revision of the Action Plan.

It might help to dedicate a bit of energy to find simple but convincing pictures for the desired future of the Danube Region. The evaluation has clearly shown that the cohesive element in EUSDR are the interpersonal relationships slowly progressing towards institutional relationships. To exchange more openly on visions and ideas might be an element to tighten the networks. There are many ways how this could be achieved in practice (e.g. the SGs present their vision for the next year at the Annual Fora), it is important, however, that constant development of visions is happening at all levels.

As one respondent has put it:

The EUSDR has a perfect model: to bring different people to the same table and to start building trust among them!

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Annex 1: List of interviewees

Type	Country	Name	Function / Title	Institution	Interviewer + date of the interview
PAC	BG	Mr Lyubomir Sirakov	PAC 3	Ministry of Tourism	Ana Turcan, 08.05.2019
PAC	MD	Ms Anna Gherganova	PAC 9, Head of Employment Policy Department	Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection	Ana Turcan, 13.05.2019
PAC	HU	Ms Dr. Zsuzsanna Kocsis-Kupper	PAC 4	EUSDR Water Quality Priority Area Management Team	Jasmin Haider, 10.05.2019
PAC	HR	Ms Nirvana Kapitan Butković	PAC 8	Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts	Jasmin Haider, 15.05.2019
PAC	DE	Mr Martin Krauss	PA 11	Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior, for Building and Transport	Jasmin Haider, 09.05.2019
NC	SK	Mr Michal Blaško	NC, Director Transnational Cooperation Programmes Department	Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic	Ana Turcan, 13.05.2019
NC	BG	Ms Dessislava Yordanova	NC	BG Permanent Representation EU	Ana Turcan, 15.05.2019
NC	SI	Ms Andreja Jerina	NC	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Ana Turcan, 15.05.2019
NC	ME	Ms Ivana Glišević Đurović	NC, deputy of Chief Negotiator – National IPA Coordinator	European Integration Office Montenegro	Ana Turcan, 15.05.2019
NC	CZ	Mrs Tina Mazzia	NC deputy	Office of the Government of the Czech Republic	Ana Turcan, 15.05.2019
NC	DE	Ms Susanne Neib	NC, Head of Unit Cross Border and Interregional Cooperation, European Strategy for the Danube Region	Baden Württemberg State Ministry	Jasmin Haider, 06.05.2019
NC	RO	Mr Radu Gorincioi	NC	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Romania	Ana Turcan, 09.05.2019

Type	Country	Name	Function / Title	Institution	Interviewer + date of the interview
EC		Mr Jean-Pierre Halkin	Head Of Unit - Competence Centre Macro-regions and Territorial Co-operation at European Commission	European Commission Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO)	Jasmin Haider, 14.05.2019
EC		Mr Roland Mayer-Frei	Policy officer – Competence Centre Macro-regions and ETC	European Commission Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy	Ana Turcan, 06.05.2019
EC		Mr Miroslav Veskovic	Scientific expert; Coordination of scientific support to macro-regional strategies, EUSDR; EUSBSR; EUSAIR; EUSALP; EU Framework Programmes on research	European Commission DG Joint Research Centre (JRC)	Ana Turcan, 03.05.2019
DTP		Mr Imre Csalagovits	Head of MA	Danube Transnational Programme	Ana Turcan, 09.05.2019
DTP		Mr Johannes Gabriel	Project Officer	Danube Transnational Programme	Ana Turcan, 15.05.2019
CBC	BG	Mr Stoyan Kanatov	Head of the Joint Secretariat; CBC BG-RS	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works	Jasmin Haider, 17.05.2019
Horizon 2020	BG	Mr Kalin Mutavchiev	NCP Horizon 2020 + “Transnational research initiatives” Department “Science” Directorate	Ministry of Education and Science	Ana Turcan, 17.05.2019
CBC	HR	Ms Ksenija Slivar	Head of Department of Programming and Evaluation Department	Ministry of Tourism Croatia + Interreg HU-HR observer	Ana Turcan, 14.05.2019

Type	Country	Name	Function / Title	Institution	Interviewer + date of the interview
CBC	BG	Mr Stefan Tenev	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works Directorate of Territorial Cooperation Management	INTERREG-IPA CBC Programmes Department CBC BG-RS Managing Authority (MA)	Ana Turcan, 15.05.2019
ESF	HR	Ms Ivana Matošin	Monitoring of implementation of projects financed from EU	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the retirement	Ana Turcan, 16.05.2019
EDRF	RO	Ms Alina Mihalache	DTP National contact point Romania + link to ERDF	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration	Ana Turcan, 16.05.2019
Multiplier	AT	Mr Stefan August Lütgenau	President of the Danube Civil Society Forum, DCSF, the civil society platform in the EUSDR	Danube Civil Society Forum	Ana Turcan, 14.05.2019
Multiplier	HU	Mr Gyula Ocskay	Secretary general	Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI)	Ana Turcan, 16.05.2019
Multiplier	RO	Mr Sebastian Bonis	Oradea Municipality	Thematic pole leader - 5a, stakeholder for PA3	Ana Turcan, 16.05.2019

Annex 2: Interview guideline

Interview Guideline Evaluation of the effectiveness, communication and stakeholder involvement of the EUSDR

Interviewer:

Interviewee (name, position, organisation):

Date and place of the interview:

Strategic dimension

Progress of the EUSDR

1. Please describe briefly 3 concrete achievements of the EUSDR at strategic level (in general / in your policy field / in your country and/or at EU level)?

E.g. changes in the political agenda/visions/strategies, integration in national policy schemes, impact on national/regional/local laws, regulations, organisational structures or planning processes, involvement of key stakeholders at strategic level etc.

2. At strategic level, how do you cooperate with line DGs and other European Institutions? (for PACs only)

3. The impetus of the Strategy is on decrease – do you agree with this statement?
If yes, what are the main reasons for the decrease (in general / in your sphere of action as PAC/NC/Programme/other / for your institution)?

Added value of the EUSDR

4. What is the added value of the EUSDR from your perspective?

5. Do you have recommendations for enhancing the added value?

Ideas for the future

6. What could be done to further increase the impact of the EUSDR (in general / in your policy field and/or in your country)?

7. Do you have recommendations on how to better involve the political level?

Governance dimension (operational level)

Stakeholder involvement at operational level

**8. Do you see the relevant stakeholders involved in the implementation of the EUSDR (at Priority Area / Steering Group / national level)?
If not, which additional stakeholders/partners should be involved, why and how?**

Steering Groups (for PACs only)

9. From your perspective, how would you appraise the functioning, communication and composition of “your” Steering Group?

10. How do outcomes of the EUSDR / SG meetings spill over, particularly to the national level?

11. Which are success factors for a strong involvement of Steering Groups in Priority Areas?

**12. Which are the main obstacles for a strong involvement of the Steering Group?
Do you have suggestions how to overcome them and empower Steering Groups?**

National level (for NCs only)

13. How would you describe the embedding of the EUSDR in your country (e.g. national committee in place, who involved, communication flows, coordination)?

14. Could you perceive institutional change related to the EUSDR (e.g. strategic focus of institutions/units, new modes of cooperation)?

15. Related to the technical implementation of the EUSDR in your country, what works well? And where do you see room for improvements?

Workflows and processes

**16. How would you generally describe the workflows and processes among the key implementers of the Strategy at EUSDR, PA and/or national level?
What works well and what needs to be improved?**

17. Do you have comments or suggestions for improvement on the EUSDR governance?

E.g. coordination, communication, decision-making

Cooperation structures

18. Cooperation needs to develop over time and unfolds in different stages. It can vary from a simple exchange of information and move up on a cooperation ladder to arrive at joint strategies. The following figure shows different stages of cooperation. At what stage of cooperation* do you see yourself? Please locate/indicate at EUSDR, PA and/or national level. (for PACS and NCs only)

Cooperation stages



- Common strategies, action plans and joint funding is on the top of the cooperation hierarchy. The effects move up from joint learning to joint acting and result in the building up of social capital.
- The next level are joint pilot actions and projects.
- Built upon this joint working structures, agreements on cooperation issues and harmonisation of working methods may arise.
- Important pre-conditions are knowledge about the context of the cooperation partners, where information exchange is most important.

*No cooperation given → Exchange of information pursued → Joint working structure established → Joint pilot actions / projects pursued → Joint strategy defined, incl. action plan, funding

EUSDR in general:

PA level:

National level:

19. Which are the main gaps hindering cooperation / a sound implementation?

20. Do you have recommendations to make cooperation structures and processes within the EUSDR more efficient?

Please think of different formats of stakeholder involvement

Project chains and project-to-policy-loops for triggering change

21. Can you point out and briefly describe one (or more) good example(s) of project bundles / project chains* in the Danube Region?

* Projects and activities of strategic value are an important tool in the EUSDR for making results visible. In this context Interact has highlighted the concept of “project chains”, that are one mechanism for developing macro-regional processes. Project chains are projects that are interlinked. This linkage may be a horizontal one (linking topics within a PA, an action or a pillar) or it may link EUSDR strategic projects with projects in other funding schemes (Cohesion policy, Horizon 2020, CEF etc.) and/or with national/regional projects or activities.

22. How were/are project chains developed?

23. Can you point out and briefly describe a good example of a project-to-policy-loop* in the Danube Region?

* Another element for triggering changes through the EUSDR are processes put in place. Interact (2018) describes this as the “project to policy loop”, which is a process where a link between macro-regional processes and a policy change is initiated. In this context, a macro regional process can trigger a policy discussion or even change.

Funding sources

24. How do you perceive the embedding of the EUSDR in programmes/funding sources?

25. What is the significance of the EUSDR for your programme? How is the EUSDR referred to or embedded? (for programme actors only)

26. Can you already estimate how the EUSDR (or other macro-regional strategies) will be referred to in your context in the next programming period (2021-2017)? What could you imagine? (for programme actors only)

External communication and PR

**27. Is the Strategy embedded in your communication – a) towards stakeholders involved in EUSDR issues, b) towards a wider audience?
If yes, how? If no, why not?**

**28. From your perspective, how helpful and informative are the events organised by the EUSDR?
Which (other) communication / PR tools used in the EUSDR context do you deem relevant?**

29. In your opinion, how visible is the EUSDR for different target groups? What would be needed to reach more people?

**30. From your point of view, how efficient are the Strategy's structures in ensuring a well-functioning communication flow in the Danube Region?
Do you have recommendations for enhancing communication related to the EUSDR (in general, related to your sphere of action, related to your role/institution)?**

Development over time, obstacles and success factors

31. How did the implementation of the EUSDR change over time (in general / from your institutional perspective)? What has improved and what has not?

32. What are the main obstacles and possible reasons that hinder/prevent progress (overall and at PA level)?

33. What will be necessary (in the next programme period) to improve the efficiency of the implementation of the EUSDR?

34. Which kind of technical/political support would be needed to improve the implementation of the EUSDR? Concrete ideas are welcome!

35. Which role could the DSP take over in this respect?

You are invited to give a concluding statement

Are there any other important issues you would like to talk about? Do you have further suggestions for improvement?

Thank you very much for your contribution!

Annex 3: Online-Survey

Online-Survey

Evaluation of the effectiveness, communication and stakeholder involvement of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

Introduction

The Danube Strategy Point (DSP Office Vienna) is conducting an “**Evaluation of the effectiveness, communication and stakeholder involvement of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)**”. The focus of the evaluation is on operational and governance related aspects, complemented by a strategic dimension. It shall primarily answer the questions: What works and how? What does not work and why?

For a comprehensive evaluation of the strategy it is particularly important to include the know-how and opinion of a broad audience including the following groups:

- Key implementers of the Strategy (NCs, PACs, Steering Group Members);
- European Commission (especially DG Regio but also DG EMPL, DG MOVE, DG HOME, etc.);
- Authorities involved in the management of funds (e.g. ESIF OPs’ Managing Authorities and JSs);
- Other stakeholders and experts (e.g. project implementers, representatives from the university sector, civil society, multipliers etc.).

We would therefore kindly like to ask you to answer this online questionnaire. Your participation will provide a significant contribution to the effectiveness of this operational evaluation and will help to improve the further implementation of the strategy.

Please take about **20 minutes** to complete the following questionnaire about the added value, the cooperation structures, the workflows and processes, the communication flows and the stakeholder involvement of the EUSDR.

Please complete the survey by **May 13th, 2019** at the latest.

The analysis of the survey is carried out by the contracted company Metis GmbH, on behalf of the Danube Strategy Point. The results will be used exclusively for the purpose of evaluating the EUSDR. **The survey is anonymous – no personal data will be collected or stored.**

If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Nicole Hauder at hauder@metis-vienna.eu.

Metis GmbH, Marxergasse 25, 1030 Vienna, Austria

Section 1 | Governance dimension – questions on the operational level for all survey participants

Added value of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

1. In your opinion, what is needed most in the Danube Region? Please choose max. 3 answers.

- Coordinated funding of projects
- Better infrastructure
- Better governance
- Better cooperation
- Better communication
- Other (please specify): _____

2. In your opinion, which are the most important factors that constitute the added value of the EUSDR? Please choose the 3 most relevant factors.

- Results in terms of projects, actions, networks and processes
- Improved policy development and better agenda setting
- Better communication, enhanced visibility, a new narrative
- More effective use of funds
- Greater integration and coordination, mutual learning
- Tackling regional inequality and promoting territorial cohesion
- Promoting multi-level governance
- Improved cooperation with non-EU and neighbouring countries
- Others (please specify): _____

3. In your opinion, how high is the added value of the EUSDR? Please rate the added value in terms of the following factors on a scale from 1 (very low) to 6 (very high).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	I don't know / I can't judge
Strengthening integration within the Danube Region and cooperation with non-EU countries in the areas of common interest and in addressing common challenges							
Improving existing cooperation mechanisms and networks and/or creating new ones							
Developing and improving access to financing for relevant projects							

Better alignment and enhanced complementarity of funding sources (project bundles / clusters / chains)							
Better communication, visibility and awareness of achievements and goals in the region							

4. Do you have comments or recommendations on possibilities for enhancing the added value of the EUSDR?

Cooperation structures

Remark: refers to the Priority Area you are mainly concerned with (if the case)

5. In your perception, how intensive is the cooperation between the key actors in the EUSDR? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very low intensity) to 6 (very high intensity).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	I don't know / I can't judge
EUSDR in general, cross-pillar cooperation							
At Pillar level							
At PA level							
At national level							

6. How would you describe the cooperation structures you are involved in? Please tick the corresponding boxes (multiple answers possible).

	No cooperation given	Exchange of information pursued	Joint working structure established, harmonisation, agreement	Joint pilot actions / projects pursued	Joint strategy defined, incl. action plan, funding	I don't know / I can't judge
At EUSDR level						
At Pillar level						
At PA level						
At national level						

7. This question aims at measuring changes in cooperation intensity in the Danube Region over time, according to your experience. Please rate the level of cooperation 10 years ago and now on a scale from 1 (very weak) to 6 (very good).

	10 YEARS AGO <i>Drop-down menu:</i> 1 2 3 4 5 6 I can't judge	NOW <i>Drop-down menu:</i> 1 2 3 4 5 6 I can't judge
Intensity of exchange of information, knowledge and experience		
Mutual understanding, openness, appreciative atmosphere		
Emphasis on common interests		
Intensity of concrete cooperation in direct areas of interest of the actors		
Degree of binding rules, processes and structures		
Commitment and motivation of the partners to further develop the cooperation		
And: Intensity of cooperation beyond the strategy (e.g. EU level, beyond EU)		

8. Do you have recommendations on possibilities for enhancing cooperation structures of the EUSDR? Or any other comments on the cooperation structures and processes?

Projects and activities

9. From your point of view, how high is the share of projects (activities, project bundles, project chains) with strategic value in your policy field? Please rate on a scale from 1 (there is no project of strategic value) to 6 (all projects have a strategic value).

- 1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 I don't know / I can't judge

10. Can you point out and briefly describe one or more good examples of projects/activities/project bundles/project chains with strategic value?

11. (How) is the continuity of the project(s) ensured (ref. “capitalisation of results”)? Please indicate approaches applied, in case you are aware of examples.

12. Which projects/activities/project bundles/project chains and processes would you personally like to see promoted in the Danube Region Countries?

13. Which are the main gaps hindering a sound implementation?

Workflows and processes

Remark: refers to the Priority Area you are mainly concerned with (if the case)

14. In order to safeguard efficient and synergetic implementation procedures, well-functioning workflows and processes among key actors are vital prerequisites. How would you generally assess the workflows/processes among the key implementers of the EUSDR? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very weak) to 6 (excellent).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	I don't know / I can't judge
At EUSDR level							
At PA level							
At national level							

15. In your opinion, how transparent are the workflows/processes to all involved stakeholders? Please rate on a scale from 1 (non-transparent) to 6 (very transparent).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	I don't know / I can't judge
At EUSDR level							
At PA level							
At national level							

16. How formalized are the workflows/processes? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very informal) to 6 (very formal).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	I don't know / I can't judge
At EUSDR level							
At PA level							
At national level							

17. How would you assess the efforts needed to ensure the workflows/processes in relation to the outcome? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very low effort) to 6 (very high effort).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	I don't know / I can't judge
At EUSDR level							
At PA level							
At national level							

18. Can you name and briefly describe one workflow/process in the EUSDR that works well? What is the benefit of this workflow/process?

19. Can you name and briefly describe one workflow/process that needs to be improved?

20. If there are relevant processes / agendas that are not covered by workflows, which are these?

21. Do you have any other comments on the workflows and processes of the EUSDR?

Communication flows

22. In general, how satisfied are you with the EUSDR communication flows? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 6 (very satisfied).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	I don't know / I can't judge
At EUSDR level							
At PA level							
At national level							

23. To what extent do the communication and PR tools meet your information needs on the EUSDR? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very little) to 6 (very much).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	I don't know / I can't judge
At EUSDR level							
At PA level							
At national level							

24. How helpful / informative do you find the following communication and PR tools used by the EUSDR? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very little) to 6 (very much).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	I don't know / I can't judge
Website (www.danube-region.eu)							
Priority Area specific websites							
Specific national websites related to the EUSDR (if applicable)							
Social-media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)							
Videos (YouTube Channel)							
Reports (e.g. EC Implementation Reports, EUSDR Implementation Reports)							
Publications (Success Stories, Flyers)							
Press releases							
EUSDR Annual Fora							

25. What else do you deem relevant / helpful / informative (e.g. thematic workshop, target-group specific approach etc.)?

--

26. In your opinion, how visible is the EUSDR for the different target groups? Please estimate the visibility on a scale from 1 (very little) to 6 (very much).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	I don't know / I can't judge
Key stakeholders of the EUSDR (NCs, PACs, SG members)							
Authorities involved in the management of EU funding instruments (Managing Authorities, Joint Secretariats, departments/agencies responsible for central managed funding tools...)							
Project implementers (beneficiaries of EU funding instruments)							

Potential project applicants of EU funding instruments							
Other stakeholders (multipliers, experts, authorities, politics, associations, interest representatives, civil society, media, academia)							
General public							

27. To what extent do you think current communication and PR activities highlight the added value of the EUSDR? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very little) to 6 (very much).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	I don't know / I can't judge
At EUSDR level							
At PA level							
At national level							

28. From your point of view, (how) is the Strategy covered in traditional media (newspaper, radio, TV...)?

29. Do you have suggestions for improvement or any other comments on the communication and PR of the EUSDR?

Stakeholder involvement at operational level

30. According to your experience, are the right (appropriate) stakeholders involved in the implementation of the EUSDR (at Priority Area / Steering Group Level)? Please rate on a scale from 1 (definite no) to 6 (definite yes).

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

31. Are there any additional stakeholders/partners who should be involved to increase the added value and/or impact of the activities? If yes, please illustrate them.

32. Do you have any suggestions for improvement regarding possible forms of stakeholder participation? Or any other comments on the stakeholder involvement of the EUSDR?

33. Are you member of a Steering Group in one of the Priority Areas?*

- Yes (including PACs) *(you will be forwarded to questions on the Steering Group)*
 No *(you will skip the section on SGs and jump to the section "General questions")*

**mandatory question*

Section 1b | Specific questions for PACs and their Steering Groups

Steering Groups

34. In your opinion, is the Steering Group you belong to composed appropriately? Please rate on a scale from 1 (definite no) to 6 (definite yes).

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

35. Do you have comments on the composition, functioning and communication within the Steering Group (e.g. decision making, transparency,...)?

36. How would you assess the involvement of the Steering Group in the PA? Please rate on a scale from 1 (very low involvement) to 6 (very large involvement).

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

37. Which are the success factors for a strong involvement of the Steering Group in the PA?

38. What are the main obstacles for the involvement of the Steering Group? Do you have ideas how to overcome them?

39. Do you have any suggestions for improvement or other comments on the Steering Group?

Strategic dimension – progress of the EUSDR

40. From your point of view, did the EUSDR trigger change in your policy field? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no change) to 6 (very high level of change).

1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

If yes, which kind of change did the EUSDR achieve/generate?

41. How do you perceive the relationship with EU and other framework strategies?

42. Did the Priority Area produce impact on national/supranational/regional laws, regulations or organisational structures? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no impact) to 6 (very high impact).

1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

If yes, please describe briefly how.

43. Did the Priority Area have an impact on national/regional/local planning processes? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no impact) to 6 (very high impact).

1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

If yes, please describe briefly how.

44. Was the EUSDR taken into account in the relevant Council formations, their preparatory bodies and/or in political documents? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no consideration) to 6 (very high consideration).

1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

If yes, please describe briefly how.

Section 2 | General questions

45. What is the added value of the macro-regional approach for your thematic area?

46. Which kind of technical/political support would be needed to improve the implementation of your Priority Area?

47. In which Priority Area(s) is the focus of your activity? (multiple answers possible)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waterways Mobility | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge Society |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rail-Road-Air Mobility | <input type="checkbox"/> Competitiveness of Enterprises |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainable Energy | <input type="checkbox"/> People & Skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Culture & Tourism | <input type="checkbox"/> Institutional Capacity & Cooperation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Water Quality | <input type="checkbox"/> Security |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Risks | <input type="checkbox"/> I am a National Coordinator |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity & Landscapes | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____ |

48. Please categorize your institution according to the following types:

- Institution / agency operating at European Union level
- National public authority and organisations established / managed by national public authorities
- Regional or local public authority and organisations established / managed by regional / local public authorities
- University, research institution
- Education and training institution, school
- Private company (SME / large enterprise)
- Consultancy, individual expert
- Non-profit organisation, NGO
- Other (please specify) _____

49. Which country are you working for?

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Austria | <input type="radio"/> Czech Republic |
| <input type="radio"/> Bosnia and Herzegovina | <input type="radio"/> Croatia |
| <input type="radio"/> Bulgaria | <input type="radio"/> Germany |

- Hungary
- Moldova
- Montenegro
- Romania
- Serbia
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Ukraine
- Not relevant / other country
(please specify)

50. What is your connection to the EUSDR?*

- I am Priority Area Coordinator (PAC)
(PACs will be forwarded to Section 3a)
- I am National Coordinator (NC) *(NCs will be forwarded to Section 3b)*
- Other *(For all others the survey ends here)*

**mandatory question*

Section 3a | Specific Questions for PACs

Strategic dimension

51. From your point of view, to what extent was the EUSDR taken into account in bilateral/international issues? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no consideration) to 6 (very high consideration).

- 1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 I don't know / I can't judge

If yes, please describe briefly how.

52. Were the following DGs / departments of the European Commission involved in the implementation of the EUSDR?

DG Regio	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, high involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
How? Please describe the format	
DG EMPL	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, high involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
How? Please describe the format	
DG MOVE	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, high involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
How? Please describe the format	
DG HOME	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, high involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
How? Please describe the format	

Other DGs	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement	<input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge	<input type="radio"/> Yes,
Which ones and how? Please specify			

53. Were the following institutions/stakeholders involved in the implementation of the EUSDR?

Which ones and how? Please specify			
EP (European Parliament)	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement	<input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge	<input type="radio"/> Yes,
How? Please describe the format			
CoR (European Committee of the Regions)	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement	<input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge	<input type="radio"/> Yes,
How? Please describe the format			
EIB (European Investment Bank)	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement	<input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge	<input type="radio"/> Yes,
How? Please describe the format			
EESC (European Economic and Social Committee)	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement	<input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge	<input type="radio"/> Yes,
How? Please describe the format			
EBRD (European Bank for)	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement	<input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge	<input type="radio"/> Yes,

Reconstruction and Development)	
How? Please describe the format	
World Bank	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, high involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
How? Please describe the format	
Minister's level	<input type="radio"/> No involvement high involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, little/moderate involvement <input type="radio"/> Yes, high involvement <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
How? Please describe the format	

54. Do you have any other comments on the strategic level of the EUSDR?

--

Attracting funding sources

55. Were the following funding sources addressed in your PA?

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly	
European Social Fund (ESF)	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly	

Cohesion Fund (CF)	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly	
Centrally managed EU funds (e.g. Horizon, Life ...)	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly	
Private funds	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly	
National / regional funding sources / development cooperation sources	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly	

56. Which other funding sources were considered for the implementation of the PA?

57. Which cross-funding / cross-funded initiatives are there to be found?

58. Were there EUSDR-related calls?

59. Do you have any further comments on funding sources?

Section 3b | Specific Questions for NCs

Strategic dimension

60. From your point of view, how and to what extent is the EUSDR taken into account in governmental agreements (coalition pacts)?

61. From your point of view, how and to what extent is the EUSDR taken into account in external affairs / cooperation strategies of your country?

62. Which steps can improve the political commitment?

63. Did the Strategy produce impact on national/supranational/regional laws, regulations or organisational structures? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no impact) to 6 (very high impact).

1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

If yes, please describe briefly how.

64. Did the Strategy have an impact on national/regional/local planning processes? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no impact) to 6 (very high impact).

1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

If yes, please describe briefly how.

65. Was the EUSDR taken into account in the relevant Council formations, their preparatory bodies and/or in political documents? Please rate on a scale from 1 (no consideration) to 6 (very high consideration).

1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

If yes, please describe briefly how.

--

66. Do you have any other comments on the strategic level of the EUSDR?

--

Technical implementation

67. Is there a national EUSDR platform in place?

--

68. How was the national report to the EC for the 2nd report on MRS compiled?

--

69. Are civil servants appointed to the EUSDR's Steering Groups throughout the line ministries in your country or employees of private companies or the academia?

--

70. Related to the EUSDR, could you perceive institutional change?

Is the EUSDR part of the organigrams of ministries?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly:	

Are there new forms of cooperation / workflows?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly:	
Is the EUSDR of strategic focus for institutions / units dealing with external affairs?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly:	

71. From your point of view, is the civil society appropriately involved in the EUSDR implementation? Please rate on a scale from 1 (definite no) to 6 (definite yes).

1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

How is civil society involved in EUSDR implementation?

72. In general, how well did the Trio-presidencies of the EUSDR work? Please rate on a scale from 1 (bad fail) to 6 (excellent).

1 2 3 4 5 6 I don't know / I can't judge

Do you have any suggestions for improvement or comments on the Trio-presidencies of the EUSDR?

73. Which are the main gaps in the technical implementation of the EUSDR in your country?

74. Which are the main gaps in the technical implementation of the EUSDR in general?

--

75. Do you have any other comments on the technical implementation of the EUSDR?

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Attracting funding sources

76. (How) did the following funding sources consider the EUSDR?

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly	
European Social Fund (ESF)	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly	
Cohesion Fund (CF)	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly	
Centrally managed EU funds (e.g. Horizon, Life ...)	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly	
Private funds	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge

If yes, please describe briefly	
National / regional funding sources / development cooperation sources	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> I don't know / I can't judge
If yes, please describe briefly	

77. Which other funding sources were considered for the implementation of the EUSDR?

--

78. Which cross-funding / cross-funded initiatives are there to be found?

--

79. Were there EUSDR-related calls?

--

80. Do you have any further comments on funding sources?

--

The survey is now finished!

81. Is there anything else you would like to tell us? Here you can enter other suggestions, requests, comments or criticism.

Thank you very much for taking your time to complete the questionnaire!

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Nicole Hauder, hauder@metis-vienna.eu

Please click on "Done" to leave the survey.