

EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY AND CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION - OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIZENS IN THE LOWER DANUBE REGION

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Abstract

2018, a year of multiple significance like: the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the proclamation of the Union of Bessarabia with Romania, the 8th anniversary of adoption of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region, and the completion of ten years since Romania and Austria launched the initiative to set up a European strategy dedicated to the development of the Danube macro-region, it is necessary to highlight the opportunities that this strategy can bring, as well as the importance of cross-border cooperation between neighboring countries. The paper presents the opportunities for the Danube area and for our country as well, opportunities that can be brought by a good cross-border collaboration and respecting the principles of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region.

Key words: cross-border collaboration, Danube Region, development, European Union Strategy, opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2018 has a triple significance, first of all, the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the proclamation of the Union of Bessarabia with Romania, and the 8th anniversary of the adoption in December 2010 of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region, as well as the fact that Romania will take over the SUERD Presidency from November 2018 to October 2019.

We also can add ten years since Romania and Austria (June 2008) launched the initiative to set up a European strategy dedicated to the development of the Danube macro-region, one of the successful projects promoted by our country at the level The European Union.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Danube, the second largest river in Europe, traverses approximately 2850 km, linking the Black Forest to the Black Sea, crossing ten countries and having tributaries of four more.

Following the example of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the first such macro-regional approach, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region was based on the efforts of stakeholders in the region, allowing them to create a region where all 115 million inhabitants would enjoy security, prosperity and equal opportunities.

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region is a model of regional cooperation at European level.

More than one third of EU citizens live and work in the border regions of Europe.

Borders have a direct and indirect impact on their lives.



Figure 1. The area covered by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region stretches from the Black Forest (Germany) to the Black Sea

European territorial cooperation plays an important role in removing obstacles and fostering cross-border cooperation.

Although relatively few of them have a budget, Interreg projects have represented countless concrete achievements for citizens in different areas, including:

- border security;
- transport;
- education;
- energy;
- health;
- training or job creation;
- agriculture.

Over 2014-2020, more than € 10 billion will be invested in cooperation between regions, of which about € 6.6 billion will be directed to border regions. This should ensure maximum impact and better use of investment.

The current socio-economic context of the Danube region is the result of a multitude of factors including:

- demographic factors;
- education and training levels;
- salary and unemployment levels;
- general level of economic activity and economic structure by sectors;
- activity level and SME promotion;
- local fiscal framework;
- foreign investment, including investment in agriculture, etc.

For Romania, the consolidation of Danube cooperation remains a priority given that the potential for sustainable development of the region is considerable and we want to contribute to transforming the Danube into a backbone of the European space as part of the Rhin-Main-Danube axis.

The problems we face are numerous and the dimensions of regional cooperation are multiple:

- transport;
- energy;
- tourism;
- agriculture;
- environment.

The economic and social development of the Danube region must be sustainable and comply with the environmental acquis.

Romania supports this approach as it manages most of the Danube Delta reservation.

Climate change, the need to protect localities against natural disasters and national parks in the Danube region are extremely important aspects to be addressed in the current strategy. The projects under this strategy can be supported financially by developing strong synergies between different EU policies:

- cohesion;
- transport;
- tourism;
- agriculture;
- fishing;
- social and economic development;
- energy;
- environment;
- neighbourhood and enlargement policy.

Delta's population has a lifestyle unchanged for centuries. Discrete human implantation has allowed the survival of stunning ecosystems in the Delta.

The large water spell explains the small number of inhabitants. Fisheries are a constant human activity in the region. Renewal of reed and poppy crops is another branch of human activity. Some people have crops, others livestock husbandry.

Navigation on the Danube branches and canal transport is another concern for locals. Agriculture remains a vital sector for the Danube region, which includes 5.07 million hectares of agricultural land - tillable land, pastures, meadows and orchards, accounting for 34.5% of the total agricultural area at national level.



Figure 2. Fishing in the Danube Delta

Of the agricultural land area, over half are indigestible and drained agricultural land. As regards the use of agricultural land, the largest share is the tillable land, followed by natural meadows. The vineyards and orchards occupy insignificant areas, which are usually located in

the village hearts, on the private plots of the inhabitants.

Regarding the structure of agricultural crops, we can see the share of straw cereals, corn and flax, the other crops (oil flax, vegetables and fodder on their own farm) occupying a smaller surface area.

Cultivated melons and fodder plants. The agricultural land on the coast, the shores of the shore and the delta in free floods are occupied with pastures and small arable land, traditionally exploited by the local population, most of which are livestock breeders and small producers of cereals, vegetables and fodder.

In the development regions that comprise the counties of the Danube region, namely the:

- South-East,
- South-Muntenia,
- South-West Oltenia,

regions where agriculture, hunting and fish farming have a higher share in regional gross domestic product than the share of agriculture in Romania's gross domestic product.

Supporting the sustainable development of fisheries areas and improving the quality of life in these areas, creating opportunities for alternative income for fishermen, developing specific infrastructure, training qualified personnel, providing endowment with specific exploitation and processing equipment, and encouraging partnerships to be set up are important actions in the new Strategy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The multifunctional role of agriculture in ensuring food security, employment in rural areas, ensuring a fair standard of living for farmers and mitigating the effects of climate change is strongly emphasized.

The European Union Strategy for the Danube Region sets the foundations of the European agricultural model, characterized by viable exploitation structures close to the market, along with rural development and environmental protection.

It is desirable to create sustainable and competitive communities through the use of resource efficiency, promoting profitable initiatives and opportunities offered by the development and horizontal cross-flows on the Danube-Black Sea corridor by:

- improving the planning, development and coordination of cross-border transport systems in order to ensure better connections to the TEN-T network;
- increasing safety on inland waterways and maritime transport;
- improving the sustainable use of natural resources and heritage;
- improving the sustainable management of ecosystems in the border area;
- improving risk management in the common border area;
- encouraging cross-border integration in terms of employment and labour mobility;
- cooperation has increased the capacity and efficiency of public institutions in the context of cross-border cooperation.

The Cross-Border Cooperation Program between Romania and Bulgaria for the period 2014-2020 comprises seven counties in eight districts in Bulgaria and Romania, which are mostly composed of municipalities.

In the cross-border cooperation area, a new, flexible and improved transport system with intermodal connections is needed.

The Ecological Initiative and Sustainable Development Group is a partner in the cross-border cooperation project between Romania and Bulgaria on Priority Area 1: A Well-Connected Region, "Investigation of opportunities for reducing the TEN-T network use within the cross-border region Romania-Bulgaria through optimization of the freight and passenger transport and the development of a joint mechanism for support of the intermodal connections".

The total budget of the project is 1428765.75 euro, of which the ERDF 1214450.87 euro, the contribution from the state budget (Romania and Bulgaria) of 185739.54 euro and the own contribution of the beneficiary of 28575.32 euro.

CONCLUSIONS

The project addresses the issues of accessibility, efficiency, ecology and safety of the CBC transport system, improving the planning, development and coordination of cross-border transport systems for a better

connection to the TEN-T network. This is done by investing in a joint study, planning and adoption of strategic documents on optimizing the transport system through improved intermodal interconnections in the CBC area.

The main objective of the project is to significantly improve the planning, development and coordination of CBC transport systems for a better connection with the TEN-T network in the CBC area.

The documents elaborated within the project will be presented and handed over to all interested parties - public authorities to change transport planning and policy, transport professionals, businesses and the non-governmental sector.

Smart, faster, safer and greener intelligence transport and communications are essential conditions for economic development.

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