

Position Paper of Priority Area 7 "To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)" (PA7) of the EU Strategy of the Danube Region (EUSDR) on Promoting Research and Innovation for the Danube Region in the upcoming EU-funding period after 2020 (particularly FP9)

This position is the result of the discussion of the PA7 Steering Group members and observers, members of the Danube Funding Coordination Network and Danube INCO.NET project (FP7) held on 26 and 27 June 2017 in Bratislava, Slovakia.

13 years after the 1st major enlargement of the European Union in 2004 many member states are still experiencing difficulties in participating in high-level research cooperation in Europe and in receiving funding from the current EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation "Horizon 2020". There is a research and innovation divide within Europe and it cuts right through the Danube Region. Since the establishment of the EUSDR, PA 7 members have worked closely together in order to analyse the situation, create new networks and opportunities for regional collaboration (like the Danube Funding Coordination Network) and discuss measures for improvement. A major aim of PA7 is to support the development of research capacities to overcome this divide between up- and downstream countries. To this aim a coordinated use of available funding at all levels is essential as well as increased cross-border cooperation in the Danube Region. The EUSDR provides a valuable platform for know-how-exchange and –transfer as well as for concrete joint activities and interlinking national, bilateral and multilateral funding instruments. Only a comprehensive approach addressing different levels and instruments of funding will be able to deliver a significant development of research and innovation in the Danube Region in the coming years. But the experience with the implementation of the EUSDR so far shows that it is not sufficient to only better integrate existing funding sources. Additional EU-funding is needed to significantly push research and innovation activities in the Danube Region but also within other Macroregional Strategies. Therefore, the members of the PA 7 steering group call on the European Commission to take into close consideration the following aspects when drafting FP 9 and other relevant funding instruments:

1. **National funding** for research and innovation in each of the Danube Region countries is the corner-stone for development in this area. Yet, in a context of economic difficulties, budgetary restraints and other pressing issues, many countries are facing difficulties to meet the expectations. Encouraging and facilitating national funding for research and innovation must therefore become a priority in the context of the EU's economic and financial policies.
2. **European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)** and are playing an outstanding role for the economic development of many member states just as **Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA)** funds are for enlargement countries - and they must continue to do so. Cutting ESIF and IPA funds or decreasing the level of EU-funding should not be an option - even if the "Brexit" is putting additional pressure on the upcoming EU-budget. Nonetheless, effectiveness and efficiency of structural funds can still be improved in many member states and the use of structural funds for research and innovation purposes should be intensified. There is still a strong need for harmonised rules and conditions of structural funds and the R&I framework programme. This would significantly increase the combined use of both funding sources and allow a better integration of capacity building and research excellency.
3. The Interreg-B-programme "**Danube Transnational Programme**" (DTP) is an essential funding source for research and innovation projects in the Danube Region. As its geographical mandate coincides with the EUSDR it is an indispensable instrument for the implementation of EUSDR-related activities and therefore should be continued in the next programme period.
4. On a more general level, **Macro-regional Strategies (MRS)** are politically well established platforms and dedicated to building transnational partnerships and making European policy goals more visible and understandable. Hence they can play a crucial role in the process of building a cohesive and competitive European Research Area (ERA). MRS have already generated many high quality bottom-up projects initiated by the research and innovation community. However, their impact and added value remain limited. Certain challenges still need to be overcome, among them the lack of resources, ownership, and responsibility for the implementation of joint activities as well as the still weak coordination of relevant existing funding sources (matching of national and European funding).

MRS are currently limited in their ability to unfold their full potential because they are not sufficiently embedded into the EU policy framework and into corresponding

funding programmes. Alignment of programmes and instruments and consequently a deeper integration of MRS into EU policies is necessary and would contribute considerably to improve the impact of MRS.

Therefore PA7 steering group members call for a reasonable integration, where appropriate, of the macroregional aspect into FP9. The pan-European and excellence-based character of FP9 must not be questioned, yet in certain funding schemes of FP 9 a macro-regional perspective is needed and can bring added value. MRS platforms as partnerships for research and innovation cooperation could be effectively used to discuss and propose instruments like ERANET, article 185, Coordination & support actions, etc. for their target regions.

5. Under Horizon 2020 the programme area “**Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation**” has enabled many valuable initiatives. Still, the programme area should be continued under FP9 and further developed. Also, an evaluation of its impact and accessibility should lead to valuable improvements in the upcoming framework programme. With respect to the Danube Region, measures and instruments are needed to meet regional challenges which are relevant in transnational cooperation for all countries of the region. Cooperation between EU Member States and Associated Countries/Candidate Countries has to be supported in a way that disparity between the upstream and the downstream countries can be mitigated.
6. Finally an **increased co-ordination** of developed regional, macro-regional and cohesion approaches and activities seems necessary. There are overlapping affiliations of countries (e.g. they belong to the Danube Strategy, the Adriatic Ionian Strategy, the Western-Balkan and the Widening set of countries at the same time) and a plethora of actors involved, that sometimes make it difficult for the STI policy level and even more the research organization and researchers level to identify the most appropriate and promising ways of engagement and participation.