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Panel: 'Macro-regional Strategies and Macro-regions in the European Union: A New Form of EU Governance in the Making?'¹

Paper by: Johann-Jakob Wulf, ph.D. candidate (Andrássy University Budapest) johannjakobwulf@gmail.com

**"One year Danube Strategy –
a first prime test of territorial cohesion in the EU?"**

Introduction

The macro-regional strategies of the European Union (EU) mark a decisive point in the ending financial period of the 2009-2014. They therefore have a direct impact on the cohesion policies of the EU. Did the Treaty of Maastricht (1993) call for an economic and social cohesion (besides the single market and the European Economic and Monetary Union – EWWU), the Treaty of Lisbon from 2009 additionally emphasizes a third dimension of cohesion policy, a third goal in order to achieve cooperation and coherence in the Union: the territorial cohesion. This marks a new milestone in the spatial policy, since the Union can now develop new tools for its territory in order to accomplish "a harmonic and balanced regional development."²

The EU grows – not only in territorial aspects but more and more in regards to its responsibilities. With this 'widening and deepening' the question on cohesion gains more importance than some twenty years ago. This focus on cohesion and - with regard to this paper - the focus on territorial cohesion was highlighted in the treaty of Lisbon where the goal of territorial cohesion was mentioned as part of primary law for the first time: Art. 3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) calls the EU to "...promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States". This common goal falls under the shared competence between the

¹ This paper and the conference participation was made possible with the help of a scholarship by the Andrássy University Budapest (TÁMOP-Projecte Nr. 4.2.2/B-10/1-2010-0015)

² Ahner, Dirk; Fuechtner, Natascha-Miriam: Territoriale Kohäsion: EU-Politik im Dienste regionaler Potenziale. In: Informationen zur Raumentwicklung. Volume 8.2010. P. 543-552. See here P. 543. All translations by Johann-Jakob Wulf.

Union and the member states (Art. 4 Consolidated Version of the Treaty of the European Union, Clause 2c). The spatial planning of the EU therefore enters a new dimension with this new decisive target. A new instrument to achieve this explicit EU objective of territorial cohesion are the macro-regional strategies (MRS) in the Baltic- and Danube area. They are a prime test case of what territorial cohesion means in practical terms. This macro-regional approach is new, even though there are many former projects to be found when it comes to territorial and functional cooperation such as INTERREG. Additionally it is important to mention that regional aspects and the focus on the regional territories of the EU are not a novelty.³ Here the ‘widening and deepening’ aspect plays a fundamental role. The EU saw many cycles of deepening (such as the Single European Act, the Treaty of Maastricht etc.) and widening (such as the enlargement with Spain and Portugal or the big eastern enlargement 2004/2007). Since the macro-regional strategies are not a new form of enlargement, one has to focus on their deepening aspects towards the achievement of the territorial cohesion objective. It is therefore the question if this new instrument adds value to the integration of the EU. Though this question cannot be answered at such an early stage of the macro-regional strategies its already possible to draw some conclusions.

The paper at hand is twofold. The first part shortly focuses on the development of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) with regard to the common goal of territorial cohesion.⁴ I will not lay out all steps in the spatial development history of the EU and I will also not reproduce some very well researched analyses which have been produced over the last year. Since the EUSDR celebrates its first anniversary in summer 2012, I will shortly analyze some mayor obstacles and try to raise some ideas on how to overcome those shortcomings.

From ESDP to TAEU

³ See Sturm, Roland; Bauer, Michael W.: Governance und Regionen – die theoretische Debatte. In: Sturm, Roland; Dieringer, Jürgen (Hg.): Regional Governance in EU-Staaten. Opladen & Farmington Hills, MI, 2010. P. 11-34. See here P. 11.

⁴ For a EUSDR-Preparation analysis see Dieringer, Jürgen; Wulf, Johann-Jakob: The European Strategy for the Danube Region. In: The Hungarian Quarterly. Vol. LII, No. 201. Budapest, 2011. P. 37-44.

The EU did not focus on the development of its territory for quite some time but more and more emphasized its common responsibility. European spatial planning proceeds constantly in a coordinated and coherent way. The single steps from the European Spatial Development Plan (ESPD) towards the macro-regional strategies therefore added value towards the integration process, since common spatial development evokes more and more strategic cooperation in different fields and sectors.⁵ This paper does not combine all former spatial development plans of the EU. Instead I will only shortly draw a line from the ESPD to the EUSDR in order to understand some major correlations.

A first step towards a common territorial approach to face the challenges of a soon to come EU-24 was the ESPD in 1999. It is the first “document of a real common territorial approach of the EU.”⁶ But the ESPD was not a success story. Critics mention its weak conditionality. The ESPD quotes to be “...a suitable policy framework for the sectoral policies of the Community and the Member States that have spatial impacts, as well as for regional and local authorities, aimed as it is at achieving a balanced and sustainable development of the European Territory” and it “conveys a vision of the future territory of the EU. In its aims and guidelines it provides a general source of reference for actions with a spatial impact, taken by public and private decision-makers. Beyond that, it should act as a positive signal for broad public participation in the political debate on decisions at European level and their impact on cities and regions in the EU.”⁷ The most important outcome was the installation of an European observation network on territorial development and cohesion - EPSON, which collects data about the spatial development of the EU. Since the EU did not decide to focus more on the deepening aspect but rather called for new member states, the ESPD became increasingly insignificant.

The Territorial Agenda of the EU (TAEU) from May 2007 was slightly more concrete in its verbalization.⁸ Here the polycentric development of the EU is

⁵ See Ritter, Ernst-Hasso: Europäische Raumentwicklungspolitik. Inhalte, Akteure, Verfahren, Organisation. Hannover, 2009. P. 14.

⁶ Ibid. P. 93ff.

⁷ ESDP - European Spatial Development Perspective Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the European Union. Agreed at the Informal Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning in Potsdam, May 1999 Published by the European Commission. See here clause 4 and 21.
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/pdf/sum_en.pdf

⁸ See

http://www.infocooperare.ro/Files/Territorial%20Agenda%20of%20the%20European%20Union_20093195.pdf

mentioned and the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion calls for the extension of the Trans-European Networks. One major thought of the TAEU is that spatial development of the EU can't follow a master plan and some blue-prints but rather follows a life-long-learning cycle. This notion can be retrieved in the rolling action plan of the EUSDR. Furthermore the TAEU calls for a strong stakeholder involvement during the development and implementation stages of territorial projects. According to the TAEU, territorial cohesion can only be achieved "...through an intensive and continuous dialogue between all stakeholders of territorial development. This process of cooperation is what we call territorial governance."⁹ Macro-regional strategies followed this call and answered this aspect with a strong stakeholder-process. The TAEU continues to call for a multi-level governance model in order to include all actors in question from the local to the EU-level. This was the first time, the EU asks for a strong governance modus in regard to spatial development.

In October 2008 a green paper on territorial cohesion was presented. According to it : "territorial cohesion is about ensuring the harmonious development of all these places and about making sure that their citizens are able to make the most of inherent features of these territories. As such, it is a means of transforming diversity into an asset that contributes to sustainable development of the entire EU."¹⁰ The TAEU and the following green paper are therefore the "strategic frame for a political, organizational and technical cooperation of actors in the spatial development sector."¹¹ Territorial cohesion as later found in the Treaty of Lisbon emphasizes on a flexible, long-term and rather abstract governance. The Commission steers the process of the strategies but is not able to control and push the field work implementation. This procedure can be seen at the EUSDR. Thus, the EUSDR can therefore easily be deducted from the objectives of the TAEU.

Territorial cohesion features at least two dimensions of the territorial cooperation process in the EU. For one, it focuses on the strategic benefits of one

⁹ Territorial Agenda of the European Union: Towards a More Competitive and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions. Agreed on the occasion of the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion in Leipzig on 24 / 25 May 2007. See here clause 5.

http://www.infocooperare.ro/Files/Territorial%20Agenda%20of%20the%20European%20Union_20093195.pdf

¹⁰ Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion: Turning territorial diversity into strength [SEC(2008) 2550]. P. 3

<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0616:FIN:EN:PDF>

¹¹ Siehr, Angelika: Entdeckung der Raumdimension in der Europapolitik. In: Der Staat (48). Berlin, 2009. P. 75-106. See here p. 77.

region. This means that one well-functioning development plan can't be simply copied and reproduced at another spots (see also ESDP). It rather means that each region features different potential which has to be found, developed and strengthened.¹² Secondly, new modi of governance in sectors crucial to special development have to be introduced since only a good cooperation can bring success. New strategies such as the EUSDR now challenge the EU to bring these two dimensions together.

The EUSDR in its time

The EUSDR follows the new geo-political configurations in Europe and opens a new step towards a deepening process in the EU-Integration history. Most of the EUSDR members can be found on the eastern boarder of the EU which is due to the natural course of the river. Nevertheless, the focus on this part of Europe is a long-term consequence of the political changes in 1989 and the eastern enlargement of 2004/2007.¹³ Some 25 years ago such cooperation would simply not be possible due to the political status of the region.¹⁴ This region of the EU therefore asks for a stronger integration-process. Similar to the River Rhine in the early 1950'ies , the Danube can now become the symbolic river of an integrated Europe.¹⁵ Europe has more than one center such as Paris, Berlin or Brussels. Yet there is not only one center of gravity in Europe which can be found along the ‚blue banana‘ (North Italy, Switzerland, along the river Rhine towards the British Channel). Moreover, we can spot a polycentric grape-vine. Similar to grapes on a vine Europe have several urban areas. In a multi-level governance system of the EU such polycentric areas have to be developed.¹⁶ To enhance those forms of cooperation is the task of the EUSDR. It is especially important to note that this polycentric approach dissolves old political-administrative borders and forms of cooperation. The territorial cohesion focuses

¹² See Delebarre, Michel: The Lisbon Strategy and territorial Cohesion: towards a new kind of European Governance. Speech at the Conference on territorial cohesion and the Lisbon Strategy: exploiting local and regional potential. Amsterdam, 2006.

¹³ See Setzen, Florian: Der Kommissionsentwurf zur Donauraumstrategie der Europäischen Union in der Analyse. In: Stratenschulte, Eckart D.; Setzen, Florian (Ed.): Der europäische Fluss: Die Donau und ihre Regionen als Strategieraum. Berlin, 2011. P. 53-76. Here p. 56.

¹⁴ See Schymik, Carsten: Modell Makroregion. Die EU-Strategie für den Ostsee- und Donauraum. Studie der Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. Berlin, Januar 2011. P. 11.

¹⁵ See Ágh, Attila: Danube Strategy as a challenge of globalized locality (glocality): The Europeanization of a Functional Macro-Region in the Danube Valley. In: Ágh, Attila, Kaiser, Tamás; Koller Boglárka (Ed.): Europeanization of the Danube Region: The Blue Ribbon Project. Budapest, 2010. P. 13-39. Here p. 13 ff.

¹⁶ See Siehr, Angelika. P. 94.

more on the flexible multi-level governance system of the EU. Not the territorial boundaries define problems and solutions. Since the macro-regional strategies are more focused on a functional solution, they must overcome national administrative borders. This calls for a more flexible and effective activity of all actors involved.¹⁷ It also challenges the whole understanding of the nation-state and its concept of territorial boundaries: regions, cities, unions and networks are now coordinating policies which were usually tasks of the state. The national-state cannot or does not want to allocate all resources necessary to implement such strategies as the EUSDR. But if the state is only one player among many others, some new actors are involved which are completely new in the governance system. This involvement of private actors in matters of territorial importance can be named as territorial governance.

The EUSDR will show that the national-state loses its organizational power in order to allow the establishment of a hybrid form of territorial governance: the functional macro-regions. Gary Marks adverts to this dilemma for the nation-state which can also be seen in the EUSDR. The national-state faces a twofold centrifugal force. For one towards the European Commission in Brussels which coordinates the strategy. This loss of control is self-made since it was the national-states which called for such a strategy. On the other hand towards the regions, local actors and private initiatives since they are crucial for the successful implementation of the action-plan. Here the German "Länder" Bayern and Baden-Württemberg can be named as these are by far the strongest regions within the EUSDR. The EUSDR therefore shifts the traditionally allocation of power by the nation state to other actors on different levels. The nation-state finds itself in a system of contested spheres, also in the area of spatial development. This can be easily observed in the EUSDR.¹⁸

The Danube as a symbol of cooperation opens up new insights about interdependencies between neighbors. These interdependencies are due to the normal riverbed but also to the various political constellations in the area. Common challenges in areas such as environment and tourism but also within the sector of civil-society can only be approached with a strategic cooperation. Different levels within regional, national and European policies are involved to find solutions. Since this area not only competes within Europe but also with other regions in the world,

¹⁷ See Ahner. P. 547.

¹⁸ Marks, Gary: Structural Policy and Multilevel Governance in the EG. In: Carfruny, Alan; Rosenthal, Glenda (Ed.): The State of the European Community Vol.2: The Maastricht Debates and Beyond. Boulder, 1993. P. 391-410. Here p. 402.

structural changes in the form of governance are inevitable.¹⁹ To call for sectorial overlapping means to coordinate and adapt the different approaches towards the common challenges. National interests become more and more irrelevant when a common symbol such as the Danube enters the center stage. It is easier to focus on such a symbol since it also unmasks national borders as man-made. These boundaries will lose their importance in a territorial integrated EU.

The EUSDR as a macro-region – a prime test for the territorial cooperation?

If the EUSDR is a test case for the accomplishment of the territorial cohesion one has to ask for the significant features of the strategy and its distinctiveness towards its macro-regional approach. What are therefore macro-regions?

Macro-regions are characterized by the specific encouragement of the territorial cooperation and they introduce a new form of territorial governance. They are an answer towards the TAEU. As written above political, technical and organizational cooperation between stakeholders are to be increased since territorial solidarity is vital for them in order to emphasize on synergies in the region. Such usage of synergies calls for a strong and effective governance and the involvement of civil-society actors. The EUSDR is especially designed for the Danube-region and therefore part of the spatial development in the EU. The macro-region Danube-area combines several steps of development along its riverbed from the prosperous and highly developed areas in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg to the poorest regions within the EU and is therefore suitable to be a test for territorial cohesion.

Although the Commission does not provide a definition of a macro-region, some common features as pointed out by Pawel Samecki are to be mentioned: a macro-region is an „area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges“.²⁰ A macro-region therefore has several territorial and functional characteristics. First, a macro-region pools EU-member states and non-EU members. Next to the EUSDR we can find the EUSBSR – European Union Strategy for the Baltic Region. Both feature EU member, not EU members and third- states. Discussions about further macro-regions such as the upcoming Adriatic-Ionic macro-region have already been launched. Secondly, a macro-region resides between the national and the supranational level in

¹⁹ See Benz, Arthur: Politik in Mehrebenensystemen. Wiesbaden, 2009. P. 81.

²⁰ See http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/pdf/macoregional_strategies_2009.pdf

the multi-level governance system of the EU. This new form might lead to a new modus of governance. A macro-region features several functional components because a strategic cooperation on so many different topics as in the EUSDR calls for a strong functional coordination among the various directorates of the commission.

One Year EUSDR – Happy Birthday?

After giving a short review about the main steps in the common spatial development history of the EU and the basic ideas about a macro-region it is now – after the EUSDR has been in existence for one year– time to sum up the first 12 months and present the major obstacles in a nutshell.

1. One characteristic of the spatial development of the EU is the missing conditionality as there are no legal agreements made in regard to the implementation of the strategy. The EUSDR is not an EU-policy but a strategy, a common paper on a specific topic in order to achieve the EU's objectives. An informal agreement always asks for a good and thorough coordination mechanism and a strong will to communicate between the stakeholders.²¹ This can – as the EUSDR shows – produce a rather slow implementation process. This patchwork-strategy - as I call it: many actors on different levels in different positions and with different concepts about spatial development - is in accordance with the TAEU which asks not to produce blue-prints for very different regions. However this patchwork-strategy also bears the risk of uncertainty in the project process.
2. It is obvious that common problems are at hand but not common solutions. No mature governance-structure is visible and it's moreover unclear if and how this structure could function. There are also no evaluation measures, neither qualitative nor quantitative. The upcoming first annual forum in Regensburg in November 2012 will have to bring answers on how the success of the strategy can be measured.
3. There is no prioritizing in the different projects of the strategy, e.g.: Different actions how to save the environment are diametrical different towards several tourism- or Danube construction plans. It is not clear which projects are paramount and which are neglectable.

²¹ See Ritter, Ernst-Hasso. P. 17.

4. There are different asymmetries in the Danube area which have to be faced. For one, the area is *territorially highly asymmetric*. Slovenia and Bulgaria cannot be compared at any rate. Furthermore, the economic differences are very large. Rich regions in Germany and Austria are supposed to work along several economic issues together with rather poor regions in Rumania and Bulgaria. Secondly, we can spot a *stakeholder-asymmetry*. It is rather challenging to present a holistic strategy for the whole region if some countries and regions do not present any non-paper in the preparation process.²² Additionally, there are very different influences from the private and civil-society sector in the countries at hand. Mostly all stakeholders who used the online stakeholder-process were from countries in the upper Danube.²³ Thirdly we can detect a *standard-asymmetry* since not all EUSDR members are part of the *Acquis communautaire*. There is a divergence in the regulatory framework when it comes to common projects. Due to the complicated structure of the EUSDR one can also spot an *information asymmetry*. Not all actors involved in the EUSDR seem to with the same information and the same understanding of the functioning of the strategy. To overcome those asymmetries and to close the operational gaps through a coherent strategy has to be the decisive goal of the EUSDR and all parties involved.

These problems have already been visible during the first weeks after the launch of the strategy in summer 2011.²⁴ Changes and adaptations on the rolling action plan are for the first time possible at this year's Annual Forum in Regensburg in November 2012. Additionally, the first annual reports of the various Priority Area Coordinators (PAC) are open to evaluate. Therefore, the Commission must take plenty of reports from academia and stakeholders into consideration in order to modify the EUSDR.

²² Dieringer, Jürgen; Laukó, Patricia; Schneider, Gábor: Towards a European Strategy for the Danube Area. In: Ágh, Atilla, Kaiser, Tamás; Koller, Boglárka (Ed.): *Europeanization of the Danube Region: The Blue Ribbon Project*. Budapest, 2010. P. 64-91.

²³ An abridgement about the various stakeholders involved in the online preparation process see Wulf, Johann-Jakob: *Makroregion Donau. Eine Untersuchung über die Prozesse und Strukturen bei der Gestaltung und Implementierung der Europäischen Donaunraumstrategie in den sich überlagernden Verhandlungssystemen der EU sowie eine Analyse über die institutionelle Ausgestaltung der dreifachen Negation des makroregionalen Integrationskonzeptes im Donaunraum*. Andrassy Universität Budapest. Budapest, 2011.

²⁴ See Wulf, Johann-Jakob, Dieringer, Jürgen: *Agenda Setting and Institutional Design in the European Strategy for the Danube Region – From Theory to Reality*. In: Ágh, Atilla et.al: *The New Horizons of the Cohesion Policy in the European Union: The Challenge of the Danube Strategy*. Blue Ribbon Research Center. Budapest, 2011. P. 111-126.

Now, I also want to present some ideas in how to gain momentum for the second EUSDR year.

1. Cooperative measures have to be promoted at all levels. First governance evaluations clearly address, that the collaboration between the PAC, the steering committee and the different working groups (WG) are malfunctioning. The governance structure is far from a sectoral problem solving mechanism. There is no integrative approach which could solve the prioritization problem when it comes to confronting issues between the priority areas. One prime example is the governance-structure from Priority Area (PA) 10 (Institutional Capacity and Cooperation). Next to two PACs (Austria and Slovenia) and a steering committee there are four working-groups which have to be coordinated. To do so, PA 10 hired an external service provider who is paid from Austrian money. The final report from PA 10 states that the chosen structure has to be modified: „Another challenge is to motivate stakeholders to taking over responsibilities. Although the PA 10 team observes that most of the stakeholders who were thinking that participating in an EUSDR priority could provide certain funding understand more and more the objectives of the Strategy and recognize the added value of using synergies, developing common objectives and exchanging know-how and experience within the Danube Region.”²⁵ This is also due to the problem that PACs are usually responsible for their PA next to their usual work. This is an unbearable situation for the PAC and the EUSDR. In order to guarantee success, PAC must be exclusively work for the EUSDR. Moreover the agreement on two PAC for each PA seems to be more and more complicated and it could lead to blockades for the implementation of the strategy. PAC can easily find themselves in a dilemma-situation when they have to decide either in favor of their government assignments on national level or in favor of their EUSDR obligations in the intergovernmental sphere.²⁶
2. The stakeholders of the EUSDR are not informed about the actions and omissions of a PAC. There seems to be a huge gap between expectations of a PAC mandate and the reality. The annual Report of PA 9 (People and Skills) states: “The PA Coordinators cannot „implement“ the Strategy. An effective

²⁵ EUSDR Report June 2012, Priority Area 10: Institutional Capacity and Cooperation. P. 8.

²⁶ See Benz. P. 78f.

implementation of PA 9 requires action on different levels and within different policy frameworks. Ownership by a very broad stakeholder community, including local and regional authorities, national ministries, the relevant Commission's services, private sector representatives and NGOs is therefore essential."²⁷

3. The cooperation between the different PAC seems to be expandable. Even the PAC themselves see this problem even though it's up to them to change this malfunction. PA1a (Mobility Waterways) underlines this problem in their annual report. During the next EUSDR phase it's up to the PAC to "intensify the cooperation / coordination with related Priority Areas relevant for the implementation of PA1a e.g. PA1b (rail, road, air) or PAs 4, 5 & 6 (environmental pillar of the EUSDR). Among the possible measures and activities are: organization of joint events as e.g. stakeholder conferences or ad hoc thematic working groups on specific integrative topics."²⁸
4. It's important to thoroughly adapt ideas from the TA green paper. There does not seem to be a coherent and strategic problem solving mechanism and solutions for the most urgent issues are not easy at hand. Furthermore civil-society actors (according to the green paper crucial players to succeed in territorial cohesion) are more and more depressed with the current outcome of the strategy.²⁹ To keep them on board is essential for the strategies success. The different civil-society stakeholders were up front invited to present their ideas in an online procedure and during various stakeholder conferences in the first half of 2010.³⁰ But it was clearly then visible that mostly activists from the upper Danube handed in ideas and non-papers. However, for the success of the strategy it is much more important to involve stakeholders from the lower Danube part in order to respect the bottom-up structure of the EUSDR. It seems that the processes and the structure of the EUSDR are not clear to most of the affected parties. The EUSDR has obviously produced very low publicity during its developing and implementation phase. Furthermore the already mentioned stakeholder-asymmetry seems to be a huge challenge for

²⁷ EUSDR Report June 2012, Priority Area 9: People and Skills. P. 5.

²⁸ EUSDR Report June 2012, Priority Area 1a. P. 4.

²⁹ Schneider, Gábor: Assessment of the Danube Strategy from a bottom-up perspective. Does the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region meet expectations? The research is under peer review, publication is expected in the forthcoming months.

³⁰ See Wulf. P. 29.

the success of the strategy. But if territorial cooperation is to enhance the strengths of certain regions it is especially necessary to reinforce the stakeholder dialogue in infrastructural underdeveloped areas.

5. The missing involvement of the civil-society is also due to strong political ties within the Danube area. Since the work of the civil-society is often voluntary, problems occur when it comes to a decision-making. There seems to be a blockade in the acquisition and adaption of information. Fritz Scharpf calls this “the self-blockade” of a multi-level governance system since the different levels and actors involved prohibit a quick and determine decision-making.³¹ This blockade is an inherent problem of the institutional design of the EUSDR
6. There are not enough new organizations like the Danube Civil Society Forum, which underlines the bottom-up character of the EUSDR. Fritz Scharpf argues that a multi-level governance system is effective when there are just a few stakeholders involved, when there are little alternatives to discuss and when the range of decisions is low.³² This enables decision-makers to make decisions. The EUSDR faces many problems in this aspect: there are far too many actors and levels involved which was already visible during the preparation process of the strategy. Furthermore there is a huge area to cover once a decision is made. Especially the civil-society sector lacks of strong umbrella organization e.g. for youth issues.³³
7. The institutional set-up of the strategy is not detailed enough. This set-up was made by the Commission and is therefore flexible and can be changed in the upcoming Annual Forum. Competences and resources for the PAC are not clearly assigned. Some PA’s were only able to organize one working-group meeting since the start of the strategy. Some others organized up to three of these meetings. A coherent briefing on what a PAC is supposed to do and with which means has to be offered. A huge gap between competences of a PAC and the real domain of their decisions can be detected. It is hard to define milestones, objectives and leading partners. Due to this incongruous set up

³¹ Scharpf, Fritz; Reissert, Bernd; Schnabel, Fritz (Ed.): Politikverflechtung: Theorie und Empirie des kooperativen Föderalismus. Kronberg, 1976. Here P. 55.

³² *Ibid.* P. 106 f.

³³ Though the Young Citizens Danube Network tries to fulfill this part, they are not financed and therefore face strong difficulties to be visible in the implementation process of the EUSDR. See Wulf, Johann-Jakob; Gierach, Juliane: An example of the bottom-up approach of the Danube Region – The Young Citizens Danube Network. In: Ágh, Attila et.al: The New Horizons of the Cohesion Policy in the European Union: The Challenge of the Danube Strategy. Blue Ribbon Research Center. P. 214-229.

efficiency is lost and transactions costs are high. Another problem lies in the incongruence between decision-maker and person concerned. PA 10 also sees this problem and states: „The PA10 actions are particularly dealing with ‘soft measures’ such as capacity building, networks and cooperation activities or the sharing of information and know-how. Accordingly, it is challenging to define measurable indicators for each of the milestones including facts and figures“.³⁴

8. The access to money from the structural funds of the EU seems to remain challenging. In order to use the money available until 2013 the access has to be made easier for stakeholders. Furthermore, PA9 states this as a problem in their annual report: „Also the implementation of the EUs existing structural funds remains a challenging task. One of the crucial points of the EUSDR is the creation of a better access to the structural fund.“³⁵ This leads to the problem that e.g. PA9 cannot initiate specific macro-regional projects.³⁶
9. The triple negation has to be modified as it increasingly hampers the implementation. I will only shortly comment on the “no new money” and the “no new institutions” aspect.

One of the basic assumptions of the EUSDR is that the money from the structural fund should be easier accessible. Right now the PAC face shortcomings in the organization of their PA since they have very limited financial resources. Due to this condition the work of the PAC is strongly limited. All PAC have a total amount of 100.000 Euros to organize their PA (200.000 per PA). With an average of four WG there is only 25.000 Euros available for each WG. This is a huge obstacle to organize travel-reimbursements and stay-overs. Financially weak stakeholders have a hard time to organize their participation in the WG. Stakeholders from financially stronger regions such as Baden-Württemberg are able to facilitate own money for the implementation of the strategy (Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg e.g. installed special Danube Officers in order to coordinate the strategy). PA9 also reports this problem: „Current challenges within the EUSDR can be seen in

³⁴ EUSDR Report June 2012, Priority Area 10: Institutional Capacity and Cooperation. S. 7.

³⁵ EUSDR Report June 2012, Priority Area 9: People and Skills. P. 6.

³⁶ Idb. P. 10.

the area of country specific circumstances, like the fact that Slovenian officials do not currently have travel budget available.”³⁷

No new institutions means no new *European* institutions. This does not mean that organizations such as the Danube Civil Society Forum and the Council of Danube Cities and Regions cannot be set up. But since their commitment is mainly voluntary they often face organizational and financial problems which then again lead to an inefficient decision-making process. A stronger support from other levels would help to maintain the bottom-up character of the strategy.

Conclusion

The EUSDR is an apt example of the vertical and horizontal multi-level governance system of the EU and a prime test for the realization of the EU's objective of territorial cohesion. One characteristic is the high interdependency between the different levels and stakeholders which often leads to information gaps, slow decision-making processes and unclear competences within the strategy. The EU always formulated action-plans, association- and cooperation agreements for certain countries such as the Eastern-Partnership or the European Neighbourhood Policy. The new characteristic about the EUSDR is that there is one action-plan for the whole region and not many different action-plans for each country in question.

As I pointed out many question marks behind the strategy can be found in regard to the conceptual and structural set-up. The EUSDR must be more precise with its projects and prioritization. Since there is no conditionality visible, it is hard to evaluate the outcomes of the strategy.

Moreover, it is difficult to analyze on which basis each PA was given to each country and who nominated the PAC on whatever criteria. More research is necessary to answer these questions. What is visible until now is that already strong players in the strategy are able to boost the implementation more than others. The difference is mainly between the upper and the lower Danube part. Since there is no evaluation criteria it's hard to measure the success of the different regions in question.

³⁷ Priority Area 9, P. 6

The EUSDR lacks of real commitment from the different regions. Many projects are missing a leading partner since no one seems to feel responsible. The commission can't force anyone to take on certain responsibilities since this would thwart the bottom-up approach. But since much more projects are without a lead, the whole strategy is at stake. Dirk Ahner, Director General of the DG Regional Policy sums it up „Quick and visible results in the region on the defined actions are crucial for the Strategy's success“.³⁸ These results must be visible within the next year since „the starting phase will be essential for the legitimacy and acceptance of the strategy.“³⁹

The EUSDR can be regarded as a prime test in order to achieve territorial cohesion. However, many malfunctions are visible and have to be modified. The EUSDR emphasizes the polycentric approach of the TAEU and involves stakeholders from different levels. Decentralized territorial administrative bodies are suitable to test the territorial cooperation within the EU because if success is visible the test area can be expanded.⁴⁰ It will be interesting to see the Commission's first evaluation of the strategy during the November 2012 Annual Forum of the EUSDR. If the various stakeholders will lose the momentum of the strategy, if the stakeholders on supranational and national level thwart the bottom-up approach and if they will not critically analyze the shortcomings of the first year, then the EUSDR and therefore the prime test case for the territorial cohesion will fail.

³⁸ Ahner, Dirk: Moving from „word to action“. In: Interact. Territorial cooperation. Onboard with the Danube Region Strategy. Issue 01/2011. Wien, 2011. P. 1.

³⁹ See Stöckl, Walther: 3,2,1: Getting started for implementation. In: Interact. Territorial cooperation. Danube Region Strategy. Issue 03/2010. Wien, 2010.

⁴⁰ See Schymik, Carsten. P. 7.

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