

STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE REGION – CONTRIBUTION TO IMPROVING THE CONDITIONS OF LIFE AND WORK OF ALL CITIZENS OF THE LOWER DANUBE REGION

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Abstract. This paper aims to raise awareness about the European Commission Strategy for the Danube Region, strategy materialized in new opportunities and new potential, in particular as regards the strengthening of EU efforts to overcome economic crisis in a sustainable manner. This paper presents the main proposals and recommendations made by the European Economic and Social Committee for the Strategy in the Danube region, so that socio-economic development, competitiveness, environmental management and increased resource efficiency can be improved, and security and transport corridors, upgraded. European Parliament was established from the very beginning as a reliable partner that will always ensure the future "development strategy of the Danube region. The strategy should make it a region that truly belongs to the 21st century, secure and confident in their forces and one of the most attractive in Europe.

Key words: Danube Commission, the European strategy, the Danube Delta, sustainable development, conditions of life

Introduction

Danube Delta (3446 km²), located largely in Dobrogea, Romania, and partly in Ukraine, is the largest and best preserved of European deltas.

Delta entered into the UNESCO world heritage in 1991 and is classified as a national biosphere reserve as a national park in Romania and in international taxonomy of IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources).

Delta vegetation is represented mainly by specific vegetation that exists mostly in wetlands (reed, bulrush, sedge, mixed with dwarf willow) and covers 78% of the total. Riverside coppices occupies 6% of the delta, are forests of willow, ash, alder, poplar, which grow on river levees, that are regularly flooded, and the stitches covered by water are occupied by floating aquatic vegetation (2% of the delta). There are also forests in Letea and Caraorman Fields that consist of gray oak, ash, poplar, elm, climbing plants.

It contains more than 320 species of birds as well as 45 freshwater fish species in its numerous lakes and backwaters. This is where millions of birds from different corners of the Earth (Europe, Asia, Africa, and Mediterranean) come to roost. Major species of fish in the Danube Delta are pike and catfish.

Delta population has a way of life unchanged for centuries. Discrete human implantation has allowed amazing survival of the Delta ecosystem. Large extent of waters explains the low number of habitants.

Fishing is a constant of human activity in the region. Exploitation of reeds and rushes is another branch of human activity.

The crop is practiced some areas and others contain common land for farming.

Navigation and transport on the Danube Channel are other concerns of residents.

Danube Delta is a region of great beauty and touristic attraction and has a real scientific interest. Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation is located on the 5th place among the Earth's wetlands and no. 2 in Europe, but regarding the ecological importance is the third in the world.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Danube region has changed dramatically. Recently, there have been waves of EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007. River Basin that crosses most countries in the world is now largely an area of the European Union. There are new opportunities and new potential, in particular as regards strengthening of EU efforts to overcome economic crisis in a sustainable manner. Socio-economic development, competitiveness, environmental management and increased resource efficiency can be improved, and security and transport corridors, upgraded. Danube can open the EU to immediate neighbors, the Black Sea region, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. An EU strategy for the Danube region may contribute to the EU objectives, strengthening the EU's major policy initiatives, particularly Europe 2020 Strategy.

Danube's region development strategy is a long chain of consultation and debate that would highlight the action plan of over 800 contributions received from the 14 countries: Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Moldova, and Ukraine, countries both inside and outside European Community.

Thus, the countries of the Danube region expressed their commitment to creating a new macro-region that is considering a joint plan of action that is based on four pillars and focus on 11 priority areas.

European Parliament was established from the very beginning as a reliable partner that will always ensure the future "development strategy of the Danube region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

On 16 of September 2010 was held in Brussels the Plenary Session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) where was adopted “The European Strategy for the Danube Region” (reporting Miklos Barabas - Group III - Hungary and Mihai Manoliu - Group I - Romania, President of CNPR and Secretary General ACPR).

The notification of EESC wants to seize the opportunity given to the European civil society by the European Commission to set concrete practical proposals that would constitute a contribution to the Strategy's Action Plan for the Danube Region, currently developing. The Committee expects that future strategy should be a real contribution to improving life and working conditions of all citizens in the Danube region, which it considers a mirror of Europe.

The main proposals and the recommendations made by the Committee for European Union Strategy for the Danube Region were:

1. At the political level, the strategy planned for the Danube Region:
 - must have an open, inclusive and sensitive to social, economic and environmental, to take into account the recommendations of civil society organizations and rely on their experience;
 - given the complex and interdependent problems reached, can be effective only if it consistently follows the principle of integrated approach, rather

than sectorial point of views, and if highlights the need to achieve the objectives of key stakeholders;

- must stimulate and take account of the civil security cooperation in areas such as emergency services which work together to cope with natural disasters, the mobility of workers, businesses, etc. or to prepare emergency plans to deal with environmental accidents;
- must contribute to the fullest possible use of opportunities offered by the Treaty of Lisbon like the consistent application of the principle of participatory democracy;
- must be an appropriate tool for:
 - to contribute effectively, as a macro regional development policies, towards deepening the European integration, particularly in Europe 2020 Strategy (for smart growth, sustainable and inclusive);
 - to get the six countries in the region that are not members closer to the European Union, supporting them in their integration efforts;
- should reflect the European Union policy at a macro level and, thus, active and creative contribution and role of organized civil society;
- must contribute to the harmonization of activities already existing in the region, operating at different levels and in different fields, for their efficiency and to avoid duplication;
- its governance structure should be clear, simple and transparent and allow bottom-up approach in terms of organized civil society;
- must be implemented as a process that involves, during the course, flexibility and regular review and, where possible, additional financial resources;
- have to follow some realistic goals and establish priorities for effective implementation;
- must have visible and tangible results for society and citizens to create better living conditions and better jobs for citizens, including youth;
- must reflect the importance of social and civil dialogue;
- must recognize the importance of connections in the Danube region;
- must take into account the experiences resulting from implementation of the EU Strategy for Baltic Sea region.

2. Practical recommendations on civil society, the planned strategy action plan for the Danube Region:

- should create a network of civil society organizations in the region (Civil Society Forum in the Danube region) to facilitate, among other things, actions and projects; network members would meet every year in another country in the region;
- should contain events (meetings, festivals, visits, exhibitions, fairs, etc..) in way to strengthen the people's sense of belonging to the Danube region, building a regional consciousness and maintaining cultural diversity, with special emphasis on youth; to achieve this objective it could help also a regional and cultural publication;
- should be held annually in different locations, a "Week of the Danube", which might be an appropriate forum for discussing topical issues relating to strategy for the Danube Region and to present results;
- to ensure continued support from citizens and organized civil society in both the EU and neighboring countries which are not EU members, is required a communication strategy for effective and permanent Danube region;

- in developing programs under the Strategy for the Danube Region should pay attention to disadvantaged and marginalized groups, particularly Romani people;
- should strengthen cooperation and systematic relations between actors in the region, as well as social and civil dialogue; in this context, economic and social councils at national level can play an important role;
- Entrepreneurial Forum set up in the Danube region (Danube Business Forum), which would include social and economic actors, could be an important tool for achieving cooperation and economic, social and territorial cohesion in the region; employers organizations in the region should access and should be encouraged to participate in funding programs aimed at organizing this forum;
- should contribute to strengthening human relations by further reducing the obstacles to free movement, even eliminating them, and by applying the principles of decent work and fair remuneration;
- to implement the Strategy for the Danube region, would be valued achievements and information society services;
- should establish an international research group, which will have as its task to examine and analyze the scientific aspects of the strategy for the Danube region, its activities should be supported through a scholarship program;
- should consider how they can correlate the different years and subjects of their programs with the European Union Strategy for the Danube region;
- should support initiatives aimed at teaching languages used in the region;
- European Economic and Social Committee should establish an observer or a study group to work continuously and strategy to deal with the Danube region;
- implementation and monitoring the Strategy for the Danube region provisions and its action plan should be made by a management committee composed of representatives of civil society to submit its findings in annual reports;
- in conjunction with the adoption of the Strategy for the Danube region, the European Commission should support some pilot projects suitable for testing and start acquiring experience;
- Strategy funding towards the Danube region and the provisions of the plan of action should come from various sources: with European funds (primarily structural funds) may be taken into account countries' own funds in the region, private sources and international financial institutions. Taking into account their contribution, the Committee recommends establishing a separate fund;
- European Economic and Social Committee considers that the Strategy for the Danube region - whose adoption is scheduled for the first half of 2011, during the Hungarian presidency of the EU - can be a crucial tool for creating a dynamic, competitive and prosperous region of the Danube.

On 8th of December 2010 The European Commission has approved and published the EU Strategy for the Danube region, reflected in a Communication and Action Plan. The documents discussed and agreed at Community level and which form the core of regional cooperation on the Danube, is making concentrated efforts of riveran states, which together with the European Commission, analyzed and evaluated the real needs of the Danube region and proposed an agreed document at political and technical level.

The strategy proposes an Action Plan, which requires a strong commitment from the states and stakeholders. The Commission will produce a regular progress report.

Therefore, actions and projects will be upgraded or replaced as they are completed, making this plan a flexible one. It points out the importance of localized and integrated approach. Good connections between urban and rural infrastructure and equitable access to services and comparable living conditions, promote territorial cohesion, which is now an explicit objective of the European Union.

The consultation has identified a number of proposals on different lines of action. Commission, in partnership with Member States, regions and other stakeholders has selected those that:

- demonstrate immediate and visible benefits for the habitants;
- have an impact on the macro-region (or significant portions thereof).

Projects should, therefore, promote sustainable development and to include more regions and countries;

- are coherent and mutually reinforcing, creating suitable solutions for all parties involved
- are realistic (technically feasible and credible financing).

The main problems are grouped into four pillars. Each of them contains the priority areas, specific areas of action. They are:

- interconnection in the Danube region
 - to improve mobility and multimodality
 - inland
 - road links, rail and air
 - to encouraging more sustainable energy
 - to promote culture and tourism, direct contacts between people
- environmental protection in the Danube region
 - restoration and maintenance of water quality
 - managing environmental risks
 - biodiversity conservation, landscape and air and soil quality
- increasing prosperity in the Danube region
 - knowledge-based society through research, education and information technology
 - support the competitiveness of enterprises, including the development groups
 - investment in people and skills
- consolidation of the Danube region
 - improving institutional capacity and cooperation
 - cooperation to promote security and to resolve problems posed by organized crime and serious crime.

The work I conducted as an executive president of the “Ecological Initiative and sustainable Development Group” Foundation, I tried to put the entire population as much in touch with current reality, the act of awareness act representing a first step towards sustainable development.

Our efforts were noticed even by Mr. Philip Weller, Executive Secretary, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) who wanted to congratulate the “Ecological Initiative and sustainable Development Group” Foundation, considering our proposals very useful in the context of the European Strategy for the Danube.

International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) is active in preparing the proposed strategy for the Danube and its implementation through a participatory approach from the heads of delegations of the ICPDR and the Priority Area Coordinators recently nominated for the European strategy for the Danube. ICPDR people are militating for prosperity and sustainable development in the Danube

basin in this region. This message from the ICPDR has encouraged us and gave us hope of cooperation to meet the challenges we face in this region.

In current times, development is a clear component of the Strategy for the Danube region.

Danube region has changed dramatically. Recently, the EU has enlarged. River Basin that crosses most countries in the world is now largely an area of the European Union, so there is a need to connect people, ideas and needs in this region.

A first start of making this strategy public was the organization of the Forum "Danube – restoration or damming? Optimal solutions", in which Mr. Mihai Manoliu as co-reporter of the EESC opinion of civil society's position towards the future strategy, presented to the public the public version of the new EESC opinion on the strategy and action plan for Danube region.

CONCLUSIONS

Europe 2020 Strategy is essentially the EU's commitment towards creating jobs, sustainable and inclusive growth, that this strategy will reinforce. It has five main objectives. They are: promoting employment, improving conditions for innovation, research and development, addressing climate change and energy goals, improving education, and promoting social inclusion in particular by reducing poverty and the problems posed by aging. Strategy with its vision for the Danube region in 2020, wants to achieve these objectives. It supports sustainable growth by reducing energy consumption, increase use of renewable energy, modernizing the transport sector by optimizing and improving its environmental impact and promoting ecological tourism. It helps to remove obstacles to internal market and improve the business environment.

Consistency with EU legislation and policies are at the base of this strategy. It approaches the implementation gap and practical and organizational difficulties that lead to lack of results. It supports better implementation of EU legal obligations, in particular the single market and the environment. The purpose and the EU's strategy for biodiversity after 2010, with its projection for 2050 and 2020 target, are also consolidates a gateway to Europe and the Asian neighbors, the region is essential in supporting other EU external policies, in line with European Neighborhood Policy and regional initiatives (example: the Eastern Partnership).

By 2020, all citizens of this region should enjoy better prospects of higher education, labor employment and prosperity in areas where they live.

The strategy should make it a region that truly belongs to the 21st century, secure and confident in their forces and one of the most attractive in Europe.

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