

THE UKRAINIAN PRESIDENCY PROGRAMME OF THE EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE REGION FOR 2022

Unofficial translation

Kyiv, 2021

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Introduction

As the global economic crisis caused by the spread of COVID-19 deepens, the European Union's macro-regional strategies are becoming more important with the aim to unite the countries of one region, effectively use the existing potential and find ways to solve common problems/

To date, four EU macro-regional strategies have been approved. Each one is accompanied by an action plan that is regularly updated, considering new challenges and needs. This enables strengthening cooperation within individual territories and ensuring their sustainable development.

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) is one of the four EU macro-regional strategies. Its goal is to strengthen transnational cooperation in the region, to overcome disparities in its socio-economic development, to unite and coordinate the efforts of all participants for the implementation of joint projects.

Within the EUSDR, non-EU countries cooperate on an equal footing with EU member states in 12 priority areas, which contributes to greater cohesion of nations from the Danube macro-region and accelerates European integration processes.

In 2020, the European Commission approved an updated EUSDR Action Plan providing for more efficient use of financial instruments for regional development as well as for achievement of key European policy goals in areas such as sustainable regional development, digitalisation, migration, and demographic changes as well as the objectives of the European Green Deal and the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians.

Joint efforts of all EUSDR participating countries to implement the above-mentioned Action Plan will contribute, inter alia, to overcome the aftermaths of the coronavirus pandemic and to the economic recovery of the Danube macro-region.

Ukrainian Presidency of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Ukraine has become the first non-EU country to preside over the EUSDR starting from November 2021. During its presidency, Ukraine will focus on the topics that are the most affected by the coronavirus pandemic and on the areas where strengthening the recovery, cohesion, and rapprochement efforts are currently most important for contributing to the well-being of the Danube region population.

Given those factors, Ukraine defines “Sustainable Development of the Danube Region: Decarbonisation and Transformation of the Economy” and “Development of Human Capital and Labour Markets” as the central thematic priorities of its EUSDR presidency.



Sustainable Development of the Danube Region: Decarbonisation and Transformation of the Economy



Development of Human Capital and Labour Markets

During its presidency, Ukraine will continue the initiatives launched by the countries that previously presided the EUSDR with the aim to implement the updated Action Plan and achieve the goals set, as well as will continue to work on improving the framework for governance and coordination of the EUSDR to strengthen the role of the Strategy.

Supporting the new EU policy, the proposed thematic priorities of the Ukrainian Presidency of the EUSDR will be implemented considering the new European agenda for digital transformation and the European Green Deal.

During its EUSDR presidency, Ukraine will ensure the holding of meetings of National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators as well as the implementation of a set of tasks within the defined priorities, including a number of thematic and public events (international conferences, seminars, workshops, etc.)/

The key event of the Ukrainian Presidency of the EUSDR is the XI Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, which will be held under the slogan “Recovery. Development. Unity”. As part of the Annual Forum, a Ministerial meeting will be held on matters of sustainable development of the Danube region.



Political priorities

1. Embedding, implementation, and evaluation

Embedding the EUSDR objectives in the main EU operational programmes, national and regional programme documents is crucial for the implementation of the EUSDR Action Plan. Given that the process of embedding the EUSDR priorities will require further comprehensive coordination in 2022, Ukraine identifies it as one of the political priorities of its presidency to ensure policy coherence within the EUSDR as well as to achieve certain goals.

Embedding the priorities of all macro-regional strategies with the EU programmes for 2021-2027 will help to address territorial challenges more strategically through coordinated actions and synergy of efforts, which in turn will increase the efficiency of using EU funds and deepen dialogue between participants to this process.

This will allow achieving tangible results and will contribute to the growth of economic, social, and territorial cohesion in the Danube region in the long run.

In order to reflect the results and processes within the framework of the EUSDR as well as to carry out their analysis, it is expected to conduct policy/impact evaluation of the EUSDR.

2. Enhancing the institutional capacity of the EUSDR

The effectiveness of implementation of the priorities and achievement of the EUSDR objectives directly depends on the effective involvement of all participants in management and coordination of the EUSDR, in its implementation and effective work at the operational level.

Encouraging the participation of key stakeholders, including the National Coordinators and members of the Steering Groups of the EUSDR participating countries, and increasing the level of their communication support will facilitate the effective implementation of the EUSDR objectives and improve cross-sectoral cooperation within the framework of each priority area.



Given that the EUSDR establishes a framework for cooperation between EU member states and non-EU countries, it can also be considered as a powerful tool to strengthen integration processes and enhance cooperation with non-EU countries.

3. Strengthening the role of civil society in the implementation of the EUSDR

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The state of civil society development is an indicator of social and civic activity, motion and needs of the basic unit of democratic society, namely a citizen. Thus, civil society plays the role of an institutional link between the state and the citizen, in which public organizations execute the main functions.

Strengthening the role of civil society in the development of the Danube region and enhancing interaction with all stakeholders are crucial factors for further joint development and promotion of the EUSDR.

In this context, it is also important to focus on matters of more active involvement of young people and youth organizations in the EUSDR. Enhanced cooperation with young people, their involvement in the formation and implementation of development policies will contribute to deepen cooperation between generations, to establish liaisons with local stakeholders as well as to ensure experience sharing. All of these will lead, in the medium term, to the increasing competitiveness of the Danube Region.

Thematic priorities

Taking into account the priorities set by the EU Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024, the strategic objectives of the EUSDR, as well as the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the lives of every citizen and country as a whole, Ukraine proposes to pay attention to the following topics during the period of its presidency of the EUSDR:

1. Sustainable Development of the Danube Region: Decarbonisation and Transformation of the Economy

The Danube region, like Europe as a whole, is not sufficiently prepared for the growing intensity, frequency, and prevalence of the climate change impacts, especially given the growing greenhouse gas emissions. That is why, adaptation to climate change has become an integral part of the European Green Deal and its external dimensions.

In the period of the environmental challenges the Danube region faces, the decarbonisation of the economy, which is close to security and further development of mankind issues, is of particular importance. A successful model of transition to carbon neutrality and introduction of the principles of circularity in production are essential for maintaining the planet suitable for human life.

Furthermore, decarbonisation of the economy can be accelerated by transition to low-carbon energy through the gradual abandonment of traditional energy sources, transition to renewable energy sources and introduction of innovative hydrogen technologies.

It is also worth being noted that one of the largest sources of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions today is the transport sector. 90-95% of pollutant emissions into the atmosphere caused by road transport.

Within this priority, Ukraine proposes to draw the particular attention to the following issues:

- development of hydrogen energy and transition to low-carbon economy;
- use of digital technologies, including the use of artificial intelligence to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- introduction of the principles of circularity in production, which provide for the reduction of the environmental, carbon and material footprint, by moving to environmentally friendly technological solutions;
- increase of the share of sustainable transport modes, such as rail and inland water transport;
- development of multimodal and intermodal cargo transportation;
- expansion of the TEN-T international transport network to neighbouring countries (non-EU countries) and development of cross-border infrastructure.

2. Development of human capital and labour markets

In recent years, there have been significant disparities in the development of the labour market and the employment rate in the Danube region. The gap between the countries with the highest and lowest employment rates is expanding every year.

This has become particularly evident in contrast to the global economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This requires joint action at both national and transnational levels in order to effectively address current challenges and future changes in the region as well as to ensure growth of the employment rate and welfare of the population of the Danube region by attracting additional investment in education, development of skills and adaptation of individual competencies to the qualification requirements of the labour market and the needs of the economy.

Within this priority, Ukraine proposes to focus on the following issues:

- ensuring the quality of education and its adaptation to the needs of the labour market;
- increasing the level of digital and media literacy, knowledge of foreign languages;
- introducing a lifelong learning strategy;
- including and integrating vulnerable populations and people with disabilities into the labour market;
- increasing the employment rate, especially among young people;
- improving the labour market and supporting social innovation.

Summary

With the proposed Presidency Programme, Ukraine seeks to focus in 2022 on political and thematic priorities that entail deepening cooperation between the countries of the Danube region.

During its presidency of the EUSDR, Ukraine will pay considerable attention to the implementation of the European Green Deal, since it concerns not so much climate policy but rather the “green” concept of economy modernization and economic growth to ensure human life in harmony with the planet and its resources.

Supporting the points of the current Presidency Programme, the realisation of EUSDR Strategy 2021-2022 will serve as an effective tool to promote the cohesion of the countries of the Danube region.



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