PROGRESS IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS JUNE 2013-JUNE 2014:
FEED-BACK FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Following the submission of the Progress reports covering the period June 2013-2014, the European Commission (EUSDR team – DG REGIO) provided some informal feed-back with the aim of improving the reports which will cover the period up to June 2015.

The e-mails sent to the respective Priority Area Coordinators are compiled here below, organised per Priority Area:

PA 1A | Mobility | Waterways

Priority Area 1A "To improve mobility and intermodality of inland waterways" is coordinated by Austria and Romania

General comments:
In general we consider that the text is concise and explains in a structured way the activities of PA1A, both of the coordinators and the SG and WGs, in the relevant period. We find the report as very rich in information which is however often of very technical nature. Since these reports are meant to be public, we think it would be useful, for future reports, to include a one page executive summary in which an easy language is used, in order to make the multitude of activities and the progress of the PA easy to understand for every reader.

TA Progress Report
We would like to remind you that the report on the use of the Technical Assistance is an integral prat of the implementation report and should be sent as an Annex.

PA 1B | Mobility | Rail-Road-Air

Priority Area 1B "To improve mobility and intermodality - rail, road and air" is coordinated by Slovenia and Serbia.

General comment:

In general the text is concise and explains in a nutshell the activities of PA1B, both of the coordinators and the SG, in the relevant period.

1. 1 State of play

Under point 1.1.1 a number of relevant projects for the PA is listed. We think it is important that a short description is attached for each projects, giving the reader the possibility to understand what each project is about and also, what makes each of these projects, relevant for PA1B and the EUSDR in general.

1.2 Progress by target

Under this point of the report, short descriptions have been given of the progress made in implementation of each target. However, since the PA has very wisely prepared roadmaps, with milestones, for each target, we would advise that in the future the progress on each target is checked against the proposed roadmaps and the achievements of the milestones is analysed.

TA Progress Report

We remind you that the report on the use of the Technical Assistance is an integral part of the implementation report and should be sent as an Annex.

PA 02 | Energy

Priority Area 2 "To encourage more sustainable energy" is coordinated by Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Overall progress

- The report gives a clear overview about the important progress made in the last year within Priority Area 2. Nearly all measures of the Action Plan are advancing or were completed. Now it is important to ensure follow-up, and to focus on the translation of the results of the studies into concrete (transnational) actions within the Danube countries. In this respect, it would be important that the next progress report focuses on the impact and results of these projects.
- We value the fact that in every chapter (overall state of play, progress by targets, and roadmaps to implement the actions), the report specifies what are the improvements compared to the previous reporting period.
- Much conceptual work in relevant sectors has been done, in particular with the production of studies, reports and concepts. In the coming period focus should also be put on the permanent and active involvement of Member States and, if needed, support of political level should be developed further (as highlighted by Ambassador Orbán at the meeting with DG ENER in December 2014:e organisation of a Ministers meeting, possible use of the Annual Forum 2015, in relation to which DG REGIO proposed to include energy among the main topics)
- We also take note that cooperation within PA 2 is fruitful and very well organised. We appreciate your efforts to also include third countries. The proactive effort and commitment towards a better integrated and coordinated approach (cooperation with other Pas and also exchange with other macro-regional strategies, esp. Baltic) are a clear value added.

- What seems to be rather missing is a section on lessons learned. It would be interesting, building on section 1.1.5 and developing it further, to have more information both on the critical issues which according to the experience acquired need to be faced as well as on how to better ensure financing of all the concepts and planned measures, in particular making use of the funding period 2014-2020. The Danube programme will play a role but emphasis should also be out on other relevant future EU funding programmes such as Intelligent Energy Europe and especially to mainstream ESIF ERDF programmes, as many Danube countries might have chosen Thematic Objective 4 as one of their priorities. It should be assessed how the use of Art. 70 II and Art. 96 III d) (to spend money outside the programme area) of EU Regulation 1303/2013 can be strengthened. This would help to develop a more sustainable funding mechanism.
- Both Annexes 1 (Roadmaps) and 2 (projects) are comprehensive and explanatory.

TA Progress Report

We appreciate your report on the use of the Technical Assistance, which gives a very clear and compact overview.

PA 03 | Culture & Tourism

Priority Area 03 "To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts" is coordinated by Bulgaria and Romania.

Overall progress

1.1 State of play/1.2 Process

This part of the report is meant to describe the progress made and main achievements in terms of policy developments and implementation of the Action Plan. The activities undertaken should be related to the progress for this Priority Area in terms of substance, and not focus on the processes, which is the purpose of point 1.2. In case of the Annual Report of PA3 this chapter is rather focusing on the processes, giving no real details about any concrete progress in implementation of specific actions and/or projects of the PA. We would like to advise the PACs to start introducing, under this chapter, concrete information (if any) on the actual progress in implementation of specific actions/projects of the PA. If there are none, please do not use this chapter to describe other aspect like the governance of the PA. Also, along these lines, some of the information included in point 1.1 ("State of play"), like the PAs coordination framework and the resources, for example, should be moved to the point 1.2 ("Process").

2. Progress by target/Roadmaps

Under this chapter of the report, an analytical evaluation of the progress in reaching the targets, in terms of substance (how the actions/projects undertaken are contributing to it). As it stands now, the text only names events, which are planned to take place after the reporting period, without any mention about their contribution to the implementation of the targets. Taking into consideration all the events mentioned were not taking place during the reporting period, we understand from the report that no relevant action was undertaken by PA3 in the period June 2012-June 2013.

General comment:

In the text, important progress in work on different topics is mentioned several times, without any description in concrete terms, of the progress. Also, mention of several relevant projects is made, without naming the projects and describing their link and relevance for PA3.

TA Progress Report

We remind you that the report on the use of the Technical Assistance is an integral prat of the implementation report and should be sent as an Annex.

PA 04 | Water Quality

Priority Area 4 of the EUSDR "To restore and maintain the quality of waters" is coordinated by Hungary and Slovakia.

General comments

- The report has significantly improved in relation to previous ones. We value in particular the efforts in highlighting what was achieved, what is the macro-regional added value of the actions, and which are the lessons learnt for the future.
- However, we would encourage you to improve the structure and language, in order to make it a real instrument of information/communication, easily accessible to the interested stakeholders but also to the general public. The reports should indeed be considered a sort of "*carte de visite*" of the work and progress (also the shortcomings) of the Priority Area. In this regard, for example, the use of acronyms should be avoided, or at least accompanied by names in full the first time they are used.
- In light with the spirit of the recently adopted document on synergies between the EUSDR and the ICPDR, we would like to encourage a closer cooperation with the ICPDR also in the drafting of the annual implementation reports, prior to its submission for adoption to the other SG members.

Progress by target/Roadmaps

- The re-formatted table that you used to define the milestones and outputs is clear and explanatory.
- We would like to encourage you to continue the exercise of PA 4/ICPDR Joint Work plan started in the last SG meeting held in Bratislava on 14 October, which should improve the monitoring and reporting of the activities, and support the update of the Roadmaps for the actions in the Action Plan.

TA Progress Report:

- We remind you that the report on the use of the Technical Assistance is an integral prat of the implementation report and should be sent as an Annex.

PA 05 | Environmental Risks

Priority Area 05 of the EUSDR "To manage environmental risks" is coordinated by Hungary and Romania.

Overall progress

1.1 State of play / 1.2 Process

- The point 1.1 ("State of play") is meant to describe the progress made and main achievements in terms of policy developments and implementation of the Action Plan. Likewise, the activities undertaken should be related to the progress for this Priority Area in terms of substance, and not to focus on the processes. In this regard, please note that a big part of the information included in this point, namely the meetings of the Steering Groups, for example, should be moved to the point 1.2 ("Process").
- We would like to encourage you to concentrate on the added value of the work of this Priority Area: follow-up of the Action Plan, linkages with other Priority Areas, alignment of funding.
- Regarding some of the critical aspects, such as the (lack of) funding, we would appreciate it if you further develop possible actions to improve the situation. In this regard, references should be made to the Structural and Cohesion Funds available via the Operational Programmes at national level, as well as to national/private funds.
- Concerning the "Process", and along the lines of the recently adopted document on synergies and cooperation between the EUSDR and the ICPDR, we would welcome a better use of all possible opportunities to advance in the implementation of the Action Plan, including through the ICPDR instances (and others, as appropriate).

2. Progress by target/Roadmaps

Again, we miss an analytical evaluation of the progress in reaching the targets, in terms of substance (how the actions/projects undertaken are contributing to it). A description of this actions/projects contributing to the implementation of the objectives should be included.

General comments

- We would encourage you to improve the structure and language of the document, in order to make it a real instrument of information/communication, easily accessible to the interested stakeholders but also to the general public. The reports should indeed be considered a sort of "carte de visite" of the work and progress (also the shortcomings) of a given Priority Area.
- In light with the spirit of the document on synergies and cooperation mentioned above, we would like to see closer cooperation with the ICPDR also in the drafting of the annual implementation reports, prior to its submission for adoption to the other SG members.
- As regards your request under point 1.2.3 (page 12), please note that the list of National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators is regularly updated in the EUSDR website: http://danube-region.eu/contact/contact-pacs-ncps. It is our understanding that the list of Steering Group members is the responsibility of the Priority Area Coordinators. We can however anticipate that the future Danube Strategy Point will be able to provide further support in this challenging task.

PA 06 | Biodiversity, landscapes, quality of air and soils

Priority Area 06 "To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils" is coordinated by the Land Bavaria (Germany) and Croatia.

General comment:

We appreciate the very clear structure and language of this and previous reports of PA 6. So far, the reports are one of the main instruments of information/communication of the EUSDR. In our view, they should be considered as a sort of "carte de visite" of the work and progress (also the shortcomings) of a given Priority Area.

Overall progress:

- We value and very much appreciate that for every item, you evaluate the progress made since the last reporting period, and that you make suggestions on the potential for improvement.
- We take good note of the steps towards the creation of a PA 6 Stakeholder Network, and we will closely follow the innovations this could bring in terms of governance of this Priority Area.
- The fruitful cooperation with the ICPDR is also well acknowledged, especially in the light of the recent exchanges how to improve the synergies between the EUSDR and the ICPDR.
- We also value your active involvement in the horizontal exchange and cooperation between the different Priority Areas, especially but not only in relation to the support and funding of projects.
- Finally, we encourage you to proceed in the analysis of PA 6 targets and actions in relation to global and EU biodiversity conservation objectives. For the next report, we also recommend to explicitly indicate the contribution to the implementation of the General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 "Living well, within the limits of our planet" (7th Environment Action Programme), adopted in January 2014, which is the main guiding document for the EU environmental policy until 2020 (more information: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/newprg/).

Progress by target/Roadmaps:

Both Annexes 1 (Roadmaps) and 2 (projects) are comprehensive and explanatory. We do not have further remarks.

TA Progress Report:

We remind you that the report on the use of the Technical Assistance is an integral prat of the implementation report and should be sent as an Annex.

PA 07 | Knowledge Society

Priority Area 07 "To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)" is coordinated by Slovakia and Serbia

- The report shows that PA7 has been very active in the reporting period and its role in the EUSDR is very well understood by the PACs. Indeed, it contains a great deal of information, and this is much appreciated. At the same time, it should be taken into account that the progress report is not only meant for information between the PACs and the Commission but it has a wide role of informing all potentially interested stakeholders (for this reason it is published on the web), therefore the clear structure is an important asset of reports (at times, it is not immediate for the non-expert reader to fully understand "what is what").
- Promoting the activities related to PA7 targets and actions during the period 07/2013-07/2014 clearly resulted in evolving interest of stakeholders and increased the number of common projects/proposals. Your engagement both in terms of facilitating this process and communicating/networking is very much appreciated. The very positive developments related to the Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund (DRIFF) project and to the Danube-INCO.NET project, as well as to the other numerous concrete projects described in the report, are particularly valuable.
- As indicated in the report, some of the EUSDR countries are not sufficiently involved in the work of the Steering Group and/or not recognising the PA 7 targets at their national level, narrowing that way funding opportunities. Special attention should be paid to this matter in the future.
- When explaining progress by target, focus is mainly on the work of the PA7 Working Groups established in 2013. However, the information provided on the WG on Research and Innovation and WG on Information and Communication Technologies could be further complemented in order to better explain how these working groups are contributing to the PA7 targets. Furthermore, much information on procedural aspects (events, in particular at pages 11-12) is provided, which could be supplemented with information on the impact of projects, where this is already available.
- The Roadmap and TA Report provided are complete and explanatory.
- We finally thank you for the Report on TA.

PA 08 | Competitiveness

Priority Area 08 "To support the competitiveness of enterprises" is coordinated by the Land Baden-Württemberg (Germany) and Croatia

General comments

- The report shows that the PA was very active in the reporting period and its role in the EUSDR is well understood by the PACs. At the same time, it should be taken into account that the progress report is not only meant for information between the PACs and the Commission but it has a wide role of informing all potentially interested stakeholders (for this reason it is published on the web).
- We note that there is no specific section on "lessons learned", while such a section is indeed important in a progress report. Some of the statements contained in the Report, such as for example "acceptance of the strategy", would qualify for this section.

Overall progress

- The idea to organize SG meetings in non-EU member countries is very much welcomed as more active participation can be expected from the host non-EU country.
- We appreciate the pro-active attitude of the PACs to cooperate with other PAs in the 3rd pillar. Please try to maximise the opportunities in this cooperation. The involvement of other relevant Commission Services is very important for the future as well.
- As the socio economic assessment will be finalized until the next report please provide a comprehensive description of the project together with its findings and suggestions, as well as its future role/usage.
- As regards the pilot projects mentioned at the end of the first page, a short description of their content, state of play and partners would be useful. Alternatively, a link could be made to the description of projects at pages 4-5, while also improving the overall structure of the report.
- Section 1.3 on funding should be more specific on funding sources other than technical assistance.

Progress by target/Roadmaps

- The description on the progresses by the working groups is comprehensive, although it refers more to the activities carried out than to the progress made towards achieving the targets. We would also suggest following a similar structure and detailed description for each working group. The description could contain: (1) Institution and contact details of the WG leader; (2) a short description of the WG`s work; (3) the most important projects, events in the WG; (4) future outlook.
- As mentioned, an evaluation of the progress in reaching the targets, in terms of substance (mention explicitly how the actions/projects undertaken are contributing to it), appears to be missing.
- Annex II, on the discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of the Danube Strategy by the Steering Group is very much welcomed. It gives a good state of play of the situation. It would however be important to work on some suggestions how to address the challenges, which were identified.

TA Progress Report:

We remind you that the report on the use of the Technical Assistance is an integral part of the implementation report and should be sent as an Annex.

PA 09 | People & Skills

Priority Area 09 of the EUSDR "To invest in people and skills" is coordinated by Austria and Moldova.

Overall progress

- The report gives a clear overview about the progress made in the last year within Priority Area 9 and shows that cooperation in PA9 is fruitful and well organised. The on-going stock-taking process shows that many projects are already happening. The work on improving visibility of the work (by events, the new brochure and strong communication work) is much appreciated.
- We would recommend further enriching the "overall progress" section of the report with summary information on ongoing specific projects and – where this is possible – results/achievements related

to these projects (we are however well aware that measuring the impact of projects in the area of PA 9 is a huge challenge. This could also be referred to in the lessons learned section).

- It is certainly useful to further develop the strategic overall framework for all actions in PA 9, also in cooperation with PA 7 and PA 8 to come up with solutions for common challenges in the framework of Pillar 3 of the EUSDR.
- Concrete projects and activities (cooperation with PA 8, organisation of joint meetings of pillar III) are a clear value added. We encourage you to continue this cross-sectoral approach and further explore the possibilities of creating synergies with other PAs.
- As regards funding, we appreciate the efforts in linking the EUSDR with the future ESIF Ops and in promoting the use of the transnational component of the ESF. Seminars on available funding sources are a clear added value, it is however recommendable to follow up on specific projects financed by such sources.

Progress by target/Roadmaps

The organisation of work areas depending on the main targets and the stronger involvement of the line ministries is a clear added value. The reference to the status and initial results of common projects is appreciated and it is recommended op follow up on this in the next progress report.

We finally thank you for the Report on TA.

PA 10 | Institutional capacity and cooperation

Priority Area 10 "To step up institutional capacity and cooperation" is coordinated by the City of Vienna (Austria) and Slovenia

- We thank you very much for the valuable and comprehensive report on the work done in the PA. We appreciate the richness of the information contained therein.
- The report is generally well structured. The field of activity of PA 10 is challenging, due to its cross-cutting nature. This makes at times difficult to distinguish the results of PA10 activities from general considerations on the functioning of the EUSDR. In this context, we would recommend to improve how the activities of PA 10 are presented.
- Progress Reports of PACs are published and as such fulfil not only a function of informing the officials dealing with EUSDR of the activity of PA 10, who are generally well knowledgeable on these topics, but also the general public. In this regard, the future reports would benefit from the use of simpler and clearer messages, focusing primarily on the activity carried out in the period of reference and their result. For example, chapter 1.1, section "next steps and challenges" contains an assessment of the results of the survey, which although being in itself of high value, could form part of a separate section in order to make the whole chapter easier to read.
  The section on "lessons learned" is rather general and could be further developed so to provide information on lessons learned from all the activities carried out in the period of reference (positive or negative).
- As regards the links to other PAs, while noting that these links are very successful in relation to certain PAs, it is recommended to extend them to all PAs.

- Section 1.3 "funding" contains information which is mostly already given in other sections. What appears to be missing is information on the available funding for capacity building at national/regional level , which is one of the focus of PA 10.
- Regarding the governance of the PA, we would also welcome in the next report an assessment of the recent reorganization in the work of the PA, namely the change from working groups to platforms, including information on the impact of this change in terms of effectiveness of the PA.

PA 11 | Security

Priority Area 11 of the EUSDR "To work together to tackle security and organised crime" is coordinated by Germany and Bulgaria.

- As regards PA 11, comments on the (generally outstanding and complete) 2014 Progress Report were made at the SG meeting held in Sofia on 28th November and already discussed with the PACs on that occasion. This message is sent to you in the process of the horizontal exercise concerning all 2014 Progress Reports.
- The observations made related to a more detailed structure (using table of contents and sub-heading where appropriate); streamlining information featuring both in section 1 (overall progress) and 1.2 (process); providing information on the status of the projects and, if available, their impact; giving more visibility to the "lessons learned" section. As mentioned, the Commission finds the report generally of high quality and value.
- We remind you that the report on the use of the Technical Assistance is an integral part of the implementation report and should be sent as an Annex.

Brussels, 30 January 2014