



Bulgarian Contribution towards the Development of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

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Introduction

This document outlines the Bulgarian standpoint in the process of development of the European Union's Strategy for the Danube Region. This new initiative coordinated by the European Commission, combines the efforts of regions and countries within the Danube drainage basin aiming at the acceleration of processes of economic and social cohesion, enhancement and expansion of territorial cooperation while effectively implementing the principles of the European cohesion policy at macro-regional level. Bulgaria believes that partnership among member-states, applicant countries and potential applicant countries taking part in the Strategy, is a key factor for the successful and purposeful achievement of priorities for increased competitiveness, innovation development, energy efficiency and territorial cohesion.

Bulgaria fully supports the process of drafting of a joint Danube area development strategy in the context of European regional policy and expresses its will to take active part in it. The Danube region must be seen also as a natural connection between the Baltic Sea region, Black Sea region, Adriatic and Alpine regions.

The Strategy for the Danube Region is a process that will provide for reduction of social and economic differences between countries and regions and will ensure competitive development of regional and local communities, establishment of sustainable partnerships, exchange of know-how, good innovation practices and multicultural dialogue.

This first draft of the Bulgarian standpoint in the process of drafting of the European Strategy for the Danube Region outlines the understanding of the context, target framework and priorities that are of utmost importance for the development of the macro-region's potential, including its Bulgarian part. This document is grounded on the proposals and standpoints of Bulgarian institutions at national, regional and local levels, as well as of the social and economic partners and other interested stakeholders whose representatives took part in the inter-ministerial working group. The standpoint so expressed is a consensus and reflects the initial results of discussions, consultations and events held at European and national level for development of the strategy.

General Approach

There is no standard definition for macro-region. Therefore, this standpoint is based on the definition given in the European Commission's paper "Macro Regional Strategies in the EU" (2009, p.1), defining the macro-region as "an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges."

The Danube area (the Danube drainage basin) includes 14 countries: - 8 EU member-states, i.e. Austria, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Check Republic (Danube river does not flow through the last two countries, but they make part of its drainage basin); 4 countries that are in process of accession, i.e. Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro; 4 countries making part of the Neighborhood policy, i.e. Moldova, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. Since there is no exact criteria based on which it would be possible to set exactly which countries and regions make part of the Danube macro-region, Bulgaria assumes that all countries that are subjectively associated with it, make part of the region.

The second longest river in Europe is a symbol of integrated Europe – its river valley includes an EU-founder country (such as Germany), as well as countries (such as Bulgaria and Romania) that are among the newest members of the European family. The big variety in the macro-region is a huge challenge to the development of a common strategy, but is also an important step towards implementation of a unified approach towards a common solution of problems. Together, all countries making part of the river basin must outline and work for the economic prosperity, labor markets development, research and development partnerships. The implementation of European values and standard of living in all Danube region countries requires a coordinated approach. Concrete goals are to be set where the key ones are good governance and achievement of competitiveness and economic growth by unlocking the potential for development.

The strategy will be successful only if realistic and only if it offers solutions to important issues of common interest that will add to the prosperity and development of all participating countries and regions. The strategy have to be based on the potential for development of the macro-region and through integrated approach, wide partnership and territorial cooperation, it shall positively impact the development process of the whole area. Despite the fact that a wide approach is recommended, there must be a positive impact and added value to all actions included in the strategy. All actions included in the strategy must encourage the establishment of partnership networks ensure compliance and successful integration of EU policies. The partnership and enlargement of cooperation among Danube area regions is a factor for increased efficiency of investment for development of the macro-region and achievement of "higher added value" also of the resources from European funds that will be granted under various operating programs during the current and future program periods.

The territorial scope of the strategy shall be more flexible so as to ensure its efficiency. Within this context, the areas of influence over the development processes are more

important than the administrative borders. Bulgaria supports the territorial scope of the strategy as set out during the meetings and events held.

The macro-regional strategy shall not rely on additional EU funding and on specific regulatory impact framework although the competitive access to special financial instrument could result in better added value at European level. The lack of a new European mechanism or legislation or agreement for avoidance of any overlapping of the role and functions of intuitions already established will rather allow all partners to focus on the important issues such as how the existing resources, legislation and institutional structures can work more efficiently for the benefit of the region. The relations and interaction between the Danube Strategy and other European policies are to be clarified in the process of planning which will envisage that the strategy will not replace or change any policies existing in another context (such as the EU policy for stability and association, the enlargement, the Eastern Partnership, the European Good Neighbor Relations Policy, etc.). It is of utmost importance to establish efficient interaction between various instruments and mechanisms applied within the EU and those that member states have at national level in view of reaching a synergic effect from their common efforts.

Specific Approach towards Bulgarian Participation

The whole territory of Bulgaria is under the influence of the Danube river as a transport, water and energy potential and is included in the Danube area. This influence is specifically highlighted with respect to the implementation of major infrastructural projects relating to the European transport corridors 4, 7, 9 and 10, as well as projects related to the protection of quality of waters in the water-collection basin of the river. The areas adjacent to the river include also the two cross-border cooperation regions, i.e. Bulgaria – Romania and Bulgaria – Serbia.

Formulation of the national standpoint of Bulgaria in the course of drafting of the Danube strategy is based on the European experience with the setting of the EU strategy for development of the Baltic Sea region as well as the experience of other Danubian countries and regions in the area of transnational and interregional cooperation.

The contribution of Bulgarian partners takes into consideration the Commission's concept on the EU macro-regional Strategies (September 2009) and more specifically, the respective actions, scope and limitations described in the closing chapter.

When developing the Bulgarian contribution towards the strategy, the stakeholders in the process applied the bottom-up approach that allows for actual inclusion of municipalities, regional and district structures and non-governmental agents in the planning through the establishment of a database of project proposals and their prioritization as well as ranking of national priorities when identifying the large-scale infrastructural projects based on interinstitutional, interregional and transnational inclusion:

- National, regional and local strategic and planning documents, as well as acting programs for funding, key sectoral strategies that set the importance of potential of Bulgarian regions with regard to the macro-region development have been analyzed;

- Bulgarian experience with regard to the strategic planning of sustainable integrated regional and local development as well as the implementation of EU-funded operational programs have been taken into account;
- Conclusions of the analysis and evaluation are the starting point for setting the priorities, measures and concrete actions under the strategy;
- Database of project proposals that are under consideration and will be presented to interested parties in the process of drafting of the strategy for development of the macro-region was established;
- Larger infrastructural projects in the Lower Danube region considered by Bulgaria of major importance for the development of the Danube macro-region and its “opening” not only to Europe, but also globally, have been identified.

Main principles:

In this paper the following main principles have been adopted:

- The Danube strategy is not a one-off act but a process of strategic planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of actions aiming to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of Danube region in line with the traditions and living standard of the population in the macro-region;
- The strategy is integral; it includes various areas of action and focuses on key priorities which are of strategic importance for the future development of the macro-region as a whole;
- Formulation of the strategy is based on social and inter-institutional dialogue aiming to include representatives of all interested parties in abundance by the EU horizontal policies principle.

Priority Areas:

Priority areas for the development of the strategy have been outlined based on the three “pillars” proposed by the Commission, namely:

- ***connectivity*** – planning of initiatives for improvement of accessibility, transport connections and communications along and towards Danube and efficient use of energy resources;
- ***environment*** – conducting a policy containing measures for improvement of the quality of water, biodiversity, prevention and risk management;
- ***„unlocking the potential”*** – complex of interventions in various social and economic areas with a highlight on the economic development and increase of competitiveness of regions, education, culture, tourism so as to guarantee the cohesion and multicultural and ethnical dialogue while preserving the specific regional identity and cultural heritage.

Participation of Bulgaria, Bulgarian regions and municipalities in the preparation and implementation of the Strategy for Development of the Danube Area envisages the achievement of tangible results based on partnership approach, establishment of efficient cooperation networks, higher added value of separate actions, compliance with and support for the EU policies.

Main Conclusions and Recommendations in the Process of Public Consultations

Based on the analysis made during the formulation of Bulgarian standpoint in accordance with the priorities set by the European Commission with regard to the development of the Danube area, the following main conclusions and recommendations have been made:

- Development of Paneuropean transport corridor No. 7 through the elimination of narrow sections along Danube River, development and modernization of port infrastructure, encouragement of intermodal freight and development of the river information system;
- The implementation of an integrated approach with respect to the development and modernization of the transportation network of the Danube region taking into account the priorities of the Paneuropean transport network. Specific requirement to Bulgaria is to build Danube Bridge 2, which shall be in line with the adequate development of roads, railways, internal water ways, port logistical and servicing infrastructure in Bulgaria and Romania;
- Priority development of the transport infrastructure along to corridor 4 (road and railway) – from the Vidin bridge through Sofia to Thessaloniki as part of the destination from Central Europe to Aegean Sea.
- Danube River as a water resource is a key advantage and strategic potential for future development of the Danube macro-region;
- Updated studies for the establishment of hydro-technical and hydropower facilities in Bulgarian-Romanian section in coordination with Romania while taking into consideration the complexity of environmental issues of the river, the river banks and river basin;
- Using the Danube River as a factor for the revival of Danube river area, overcoming the negative trends in economy, demography and establishment of Danube settlements, municipalities and regions;
- Large-scale exposure and socialization of the rich cultural heritage and establishment of the Danubian cultural corridor with clearly defined European content and importance. Development of specific tourist product and tourist marketing of Danube River and Danube river area based on the particular natural and cultural landscape and historical specifics. Tourism must play the role of catalyst and financial instrument for the protection and presentation of the cultural and historical heritage of the region;
- Development of Danube settlements in organic unity and harmony with the river.. The implementation of a new approach in spatial planning is required, which is to improve the quality of the architectural environment and to create a specific outlook and local colour of the Bulgarian Danube settlements;
- Protection of river water and its biodiversity;
- Development of territorial cooperation with Danubian countries.

Conclusions and recommendations received in the process of public consultations are a basis for formulation of a common vision, goals, priorities and scope of interventions provided for in the Danube strategy.

The vision shall reflect the general understanding about the Danube area as a territory with preserved nature and cultural and historical heritage and modern, developed and integrated infrastructure with high connectivity, attractive and secure region with

sustainable interregional partnerships ensuring social and economic cohesion and multicultural dialogue having a major role in the implementation of the European sectoral policies.

The appropriate goals of the strategy, shared by the Bulgarian partners, shall provide for innovative strategic platform for:

- Development and enlargement of partnership and territorial cooperation of regions from the Danube drainage basin, including Bulgarian ones, and enhancement of the economic and social cohesion within the EU;
- Using the potential of Danube river as an important advantage with regard to the development of the Danube region and making it a factor in the economic growth, increase of regional competitiveness and establishment of new long-term work opportunities;
- Achievement of better results and higher efficiency of the policy for sustainable development of Danube coastal regions and municipalities;
- Achievement of synergy within the macro-region in the implementation of projects with supranational importance in the area of transport, environment, economic development based on scientific research, new technologies and innovations;
- The establishment of a strategic platform for the implementation of projects with higher added value within EU based on public-private partnerships;
- Facilitate and ensure transparency of the process of identification, justification, funding and implementation of projects of common interest in priority areas on local level and within the macro-region;
- Establishment of administrative capacity and exchange of good experiences and practices connected with the strategy implementation;
- Increasing the living standard of Danube regions and counteracting depopulation trends.

The main areas of cooperation between Danubian countries, regions and cities and the Commission, as well as the priorities for development of the strategic framework of the Danube strategy in the consolidated vision of Bulgarian partners.

The national standpoint sets the following priorities in the areas of cooperation of the Danube strategy for which a complex of measures for implementation at the local, regional, national, cross-border and transnational levels have been identified:

Cooperation Area: “Connectivity”

Priority: Development of Transport Infrastructure

This priority includes complex of measures relating to the development and modernization of the railway, road and port infrastructure, bridges and ferryboat connections of the Danube, waterways and navigation systems as well as the functional connections securing logistics (intermodal terminals), sustainable mobility and transport safety and security.

Participation of Bulgaria and Bulgarian regions in the Danube Strategy is a challenge relating to their actual opening for economic, social, cultural cooperation and partnership

with the other EU regions. Important role for the achievement of this goal is the development and modernization of transport infrastructure which will improve the connectivity and accessibility of Bulgarian regions within the Danube macro-region and EU. The first priority area in this context is the development and modernization of the infrastructure of European transport corridors № 4, 7, 9 and 10 which is in direct relation with the servicing of internal transport connections and integration of Bulgarian regions in the Danube area. The second priority area is the improvement of internal regional connections which envisages mainly rehabilitation and modernization of the road infrastructure of regional importance, including II and III-class roads.

Considering the geographic location of Bulgarian regions in the Lower Danube section, the long-term interests of Bulgaria are connected with the establishment and modernization of transport infrastructure providing for combined freight, including transits from the Black Sea region, Near East and Asia to Central and Northern Europe. Bulgaria has modern specifically-equipped Black Sea ports and traditionally developed ports along Danube River with established railway connections, which is a good initial basis for participation in schemes for combined transportation of freight entering or leaving the Danube macro-region and EU in general. The establishment of the railway tunnel under the Bosphorus as well as the railway connection between Bulgaria and Turkey which is currently under modernization so as to reach the speed of 160 km/h give a new prospective to the intermodal transport in a broader sense while ensuring the integration of Danube macro-region with the fast-developing markets of goods and raw materials coming from the East. Important projects Bulgaria is to implement so as to become one of the “Eastern Doors” of the Danube macro-region and EU respectively, are the modernization of port terminals and establishment of modern intermodal terminals and logistic centers, as well as the improvement of road and railway connections thereto. Not the least, it is very important to introduce modern traffic management and monitoring systems securing continuous transfer of information about the location of freight.

For many years now the only Danube river transport connections between the Romanian and Bulgarian border regions were the Russe – Giurgevo bridge and the road and railway ferryboat connection at Vidin – Kalafat. In this context it could be assumed that the European transport corridor No 4 to a large extent was hindered from intense development in the section from Sofia to Vidin. Only in the past few years the construction of a second bridge over Danube – close to Vidin - Kalafat has started and new ferryboat connections between Oriahovo – Beket, Silistra – Kalarash, Russe – Giurgevo were established. The improvement of communications in the Bulgarian – Romanian border area ensures favorable conditions for improvement of economic and social cooperation and more efficient use of the existing internal resource and potential for development of cross-border cooperation. A significant part of the lower course of the Danube river flows through the region is a unique resource and potential with respect to its development. The opportunities for better transport communications will provide for increased flexibility of the labor market in the region and increase of the number of mixed-capital small and medium-sized enterprises. Of major importance for the enhanced process of cooperation is the establishment and commissioning of new transportation networks connecting the economic and administrative centers along Danube river.

The priority projects for the development of the infrastructure along TEN-t axes up to 2010 on the territory of Bulgaria have a key significance with respect to the integration of the European transport network, securing of the free flow of the European citizens and the functioning of an internal market of the EU

- Priority Project 7: Modernization of the railway line Vidin – Sofia – Kulata
- Priority Project 18: Improvement of navigation along Danube River.
- Priority Project 22: Construction of Struma motorway.

Priority: Energy Networks

Provides for a set of initiatives and measures aiming at regional integration through joint transnational energy initiatives including the establishment of cross-border electrical paths; development of missing links in the electrical power system/weak areas, modernization, establishment of unified regulatory framework, security systems, financial models, establishment of photovoltaic electrical power plants for renewable power sources as well as implementation of energy efficiency measures.

Benefits (added value) for the Danube area countries and regions:

Expected benefits for the Danube area countries and regions include as follows:

- Improvement of transport connectivity and access of regions from the Danube macro-region; ;
- Enlargement of the economic and cultural cooperation within the macro-region;
- Joint decision making on issues of common interest including business ones such as provision of global access to both the territory of the macro-region and other EU regions (for instance, the Baltic Sea – Black Sea transport connections), EU – Near East (Asia);
- Conducting joint policy with regard to the intermodal cargo and development of environmentally friendly forms of transportation.
- Diversification of supplies of natural gas and increased energy independence of the macro-region through the establishment of new and connecting the operating networks for transit of natural gas;
- Increase in the share of electrical energy produced by WPPs based on the specific potential of the macro-region;
- Decrease of the share of electrical energy produced by a Thermo-electric power plant on the basis of the burning of fossil fuels
- Establishment and functioning of common energy market in the Danube macro-region including the establishment of new and modernization of existing inter-system connections of the electrical transfer networks of different countries.

Key activities/projects that are important for Bulgaria:

- Coordination of the national transport policies and investment in infrastructure;
- Implementation of modern logistical solutions for intermodal transport cargo along Danube river;
- Development of information systems, networks and initiatives relating to the development of river information systems including Danube river traffic management;

- Improvement of the internal and international transport connections, which have significance for the macro-region
- Use of the mechanisms of public-private partnerships for development of new transport ways along Danube River between Bulgaria and Romania such as new ferryboat connections, third bridge, etc.
- Ensuring quality and easy-to-access transport;
- Modernization of ports in accordance with the project of the National Program for Development of Ports of Public Transportation through 2015 and the Strategy for Development of the Transport Infrastructure of the Republic of Bulgaria through 2015. ;
- Improvement of navigation in the Bulgarian-Romanian section of the river;
- Improvement of capacity of the public sector and expansion of cooperation with the private sector with regard to the design, construction, maintenance and management of transport projects;
- Organization of public transport of passengers along Danube River;
 - Modernization of the regional transport infrastructure and more specifically, feasibility study and analysis of the condition of the road infrastructure of Danube municipalities – completion of the construction works and repair of the Danube panoramic road;
- Development and establishment of infrastructure for alternative public transportation means and recreational transport (such as bicycle alleys);
- Increased gasification of the residential and industrial sector in the Bulgarian part of the Danube macro-region so as to limit the use of fossil fuels;
- Establishment of infrastructure for transit transportation of natural gas through the territory of Bulgaria for other countries within the macro-region;
- Increased energy efficiency and decreased expenses for electrical energy at the residential and industrial sectors.

Cooperation Area: “Environment and Prevention of Risk”

Priority: Protection of Danube River – Decreasing Water Pollution

This priority area shows the measures relating to integrated planning and management of the river zone with a number of interventions on the infrastructure and environment protection technologies such as treatment plants, waste management, sewerage, soil treatment, water treatment, drinking water supply, and shows the need of investment, modernization, establishment of sufficient capacity and implementation of training measures, supply with technical equipment for efficient river waters pollution control, environmental management systems for ports in the Bulgarian section of Danube river (ECOPORT8), integrated water management, waste treatment and management infrastructure, as well as number of projects relating to the use of Danube water for irrigation purposes.

As a result of the implementation of Art. 13 (3) of the EU Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC, Bulgaria took part in the drafting of the Danube River Basin Management Plan containing important measures for the whole basin and setting the framework for more detailed plans at sub-basin and/or national level. The International Committee for

Protection of Danube River¹ was used as a platform uniting the multilateral political interests within the basin and helped for the development of the Plan. Very important for ensuring the ecological sustainability of the Danube River Basin will be the implementation of projects provided for in the Plan as well as the General Program of Proposed Measures thereto.

Priority: Environmental Protection and Preservation of the Natural and Biological Diversity

This priority area shows the importance of environmental protection, biodiversity and ecological balance of the whole Danube area. The interventions envisaged are in line with the general understanding of all Danube partners for protection of environment and natural resources along Danube river coast and sustainable development of the region where the urban and economic interventions will not be affecting the ecological status.

This priority envisages a set of measures including restoration of humid zones and protection of biodiversity along Danube river coast in view of the ecological balance; mapping and setting the environmental protection status of natural habitats and species, limitation of the negative impact of invasive species and restoration of natural habitats through planting of local species, supportive and restorative measures in the protected zones as well as development and implementation of transnational strategies for protection of the natural variety of Danube river and sustainable management of natural resources. There is a need to implement large-scale public awareness campaigns for improvement, popularization and encouragement of prevention culture and protection of environment among the society.

Priority: Risk Prevention

The definition of this priority relates not only to modern risk management concepts where prevention and monitoring are the main component, but also to the analysis made after the floods in 2006-2007, showing the need of coordinated actions and basic infrastructure ensuring quality monitoring and minimization of risks or damages respectively, in crisis situations, natural disasters and accidents.

The assessment of risk of floods at the flood warning areas of Danube river is intended for the interested parties and aims at the implementation of forestation activities, construction of hydro protection facilities, dam walls accumulating high waters, and enhancement of the Bulgarian Danube riverfront. In addition, cleaning and enhancement of riverbeds in the Danube region is needed from time to time. There is a need to establish a joint early warning and flood prevention system including simulation models of damages caused at critical places along Danube coastline and to develop a joint action plan in case of floods within the territory of more than one Danubian city, municipality or country. The scope of this priority includes either “soft measures” aiming at the improvement of systems for monitoring and control and readiness of the region for unified actions or protection infrastructure components and basic infrastructure for integrated operational management and prevention of crisis, natural disasters and accidents. The goal of these envisaged

¹ <http://www.icpdr.org/>

measures is on one hand to increase the security in the region and limit the consequences from any possible crisis, and on the other hand – to support the protection of the ecological status and natural resources in the region as set out in the foregoing priority.

Priority: Promoting the Principles of Sustainable Development

This priority reflects the overall European sustainable development concept; the principles of Goeteborg and Kyoto Protocol adapted to local policies, and envisages a set of measures relating to the increased role of education for the promotion of sustainable development principles. It includes measures for promotion of energy diversification and use of renewable energy sources as well as policies relating to their implementation; establishment of hydro and wind electrical power plants, use of bio fuels, implementation of energy efficiency measures, measures for increase of capacity and qualification, also through the study of potential of transnational strategies, exchange of know-how and good practices. The establishment of a unified system for monitoring of the sustainable development in the macro-region in relation to common policy of the EU with respect to the counteracting climate changes and preservation of the biological diversity

Benefits (added value) for the countries and regions within Danube area:

As regards the priorities in this area of cooperation, the expected benefits for the countries and regions from the Danube area include as follows:

- Implementation of joint approaches and mechanisms for environmental management in the costal areas of Danube river, also through the development of joint plans;
- Establishment of a joint system for monitoring of the cleanness of air, waters and soils in costal areas;
- Sustainable management of water resources within the Danube river basin;
- Protection of the extraordinary biodiversity of Danube macro-region as a natural resource of Europe;
- Establishment of joint system for prevention of natural and technological risks, including early warning systems;
- Joint strategy for counteracting climate changes and measures on how to limit the negative influence over the macro-region;
- Further research, encouragement of investment for the production and use of “green energy”.

Key activities / projects that are important to Bulgaria:

Implementation of the program consisting of measures for protection and improvement of the status of waters as part of the Plan for Management of River Basins in the Danube basin management region:

- Design and construction of the infrastructure for collection and treatment of waste waters from populated areas with over 10 000 persons and gradual preparation for establishment of CWWTP in populated areas with 2000 - 10 000 persons in the Danube basin management region;
- Assessment of the risk of floods, preparation of maps of the regions with risk of floods in the Danube basin management region; To that aim the mapping methods applicable throughout the Danube river basin as developed within the framework of FLOODRISK

project may be applied to map such regions and assess the vulnerability in case of floods,.

- Increased control and ensuring the environmentally friendly use of sites for extraction of inert materials in the Danube basin management region;
- Establishment of systems and networks for qualitative and quantitative monitoring and control of waters, providing data for the efficient management of water resources.

Development of new and update of existing plans for management of protected areas along the Danube river valley and implementation of activities provided for therein;

Establishment of the network of protected zones according to Natura 2000 and gradual preparation of plans for management of protected zones along the Danube river valley;

Implementation of activities regarding endangered animals and plants populating the Danube river valley; Implementation of projects for restoration of humid zones along the Danube valley; Improvement of the systems for management of waste disposals and rehabilitation of the damaged areas and the natural landscapes.

Cooperation Area: “Social and Economic Development, Human Capital and Intercultural Dialogue”

Priority: Transnational Research Initiatives and Support of Innovations

This priority includes number of measures aiming at the enhancement of the transnational research and scientific exchange, establishment and development of research centers and programs, projects for support of cooperation between universities, professional schools, etc. within the European context as well as improvement of interaction between educational institutions and research and innovation centers, establishment of partnership networks and stimulation of the public-private partnerships while taking into account the heterogeneous nature, needs and potential of all levels within the Danube region.

Priority: Stimulation of Trade and Investment

Considering the fact that the north-west region (NWR) and the north-central region (NCR) of Bulgaria are the most economically and socially retarded ones within the EU, in order to overcome these differences within the context of macro-economic framework of Danube area, it is of utmost importance to have initiatives supporting entrepreneurship, increased capacity for efficient financial and investment policy at the local level, initiatives stimulating business cooperation and development of the small and medium-sized businesses as well as infrastructure measures to secure territorial positioning and logistical support for the business such as the establishment of industrial and technological parks and transport and logistical exhibition centers.

Priority: Human Resources Development

The national standpoint follows the understanding that human resource is key capital for the development of community and more specifically, of an economy based on knowledge, and therefore sharing the idea that investments in people are investments in future harmonic and sustainable development, this priority sets the need of number of initiatives aiming to improve the quality of education in line with the labor market demand, create

opportunities for better qualification and create conditions for development of applied research and development in view of transfer of knowledge and know-how. Therefore this priority identifies multidisciplinary projects for the creation and development of educational and qualification centers, R&D bases as well as projects for marketing of the labor market and student mobility. In this context the development of human resources within Danube macro-region is based on partnership and transfer of knowledge and good practices.

Priority: Effective Use of the Touristic Potential

The implementation of this priority is integrated not only because it provides for unification of the tourism development potential in the whole Danube region, development of joint touristic products and promotional policy, but also because it affects to the same degree and also complements the implementation of all the above-mentioned priorities from infrastructure development, through the economy and ecology to human resources. Characteristics of the territory described hereabove give a general overview of different natural resources, cultural and historical heritage in the Bulgarian part of the Danube area. They are the precondition for development of cultural and eco tourism as well as the development and promotion of a specific Danube tourist product and destination. Therefore, this priority allows for integrated projects with interregional, cross-border and transnational prospective aiming at the establishment of joint Danube tourist strategy, development of a joint tourist market and set of projects for the development of Danube tourist products in the field of cultural, wine, rural and cruise tourism.

Priority: Encouragement of Intercultural Dialogue

Putting this as a separate priority area reflects the national standpoint that the promotion of intercultural dialogue is the way to tolerant mutual understanding that allows the European community to be united within its diversity. Reduced to a pragmatic level, the partnership projects allowing for increased knowledge and understanding of specifics of each culture, religious or ethnic community guarantee not only integration while keeping their cultural identity, but also the successful implementation of all other priorities.

This priority includes number of projects related to intercultural exchange, innovative cultural networks, establishment and transfer of cultural products and their promotion, increase of interpersonal skills in intercultural environment, organization of joint cultural events. These projects are based on the understanding that the cultural diversity is one of the advantages of the Danube region.

Participation of Bulgarian regions in the EU Strategy for Danube will mobilize their potential for establishment of partnerships with other regions from the river basin and provide for joint resolution of problems of joint interest, will support the development of specific river valley regional industrial clusters based on the river's potential, will provide for the exchange of experience and good practices in key areas of economic and social development. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for Bulgaria to implement projects that will have direct impact on the improvement of business environment such as the establishment of business and information centers, establishment of information system with basic social and economic indicators at regional level that will support the activities and development of a dialogue, establish a network for cooperation between universities in

the macro-region aiming at the development of innovations and streamline the research in key areas which will eventually ensure better competitiveness and prosperity of the regional economy. Similar measures will radically change the conditions for development of the macro-region in terms of human resources, educational and business environment, set the basis for implementation of innovations in all development areas and support the partnership with more economically advanced regions. Not the least, these measures will provide for the establishment of the so called “Danube identity” among local communities which is a precondition for more beneficial participation in the European integration processes.

Benefits (added value) for the countries and regions in the Danube area:

- Development of innovations and activities which will ensure the competitiveness of the Danube region in the long term; Establishment of Danube research area;
- Better level of awareness and setting the region’s image through new tourist products highlighting the specifics of the region;
- Acceleration of the process of economic and social approximation of regions through the development of sustainable partnerships among them;
- Enlargement of cultural cooperation areas among the regions;
- Maintaining an information resource with social and economic indicators that will be multiplied throughout the whole Danube region;
- Encouraging the development of a „low-carbon economy” and implementation of “green” technologies in the business so as to create alternative employment in the region and fulfill the EU goals in the areas of energy and climate;
- Improved opportunities for education, additional qualification and life-long studies in the region where the highlight will be on the protection and development of natural and cultural heritage of the Danube region;

Key activities / projects which are important for Bulgaria:

- To explore the opportunities and coordinate with other interested parties from the Danube region the establishment of international college and research institute in Vidin for the transfer of knowledge, technologies and development of sciences relating to the use of the Danube river potential (economy, transport, ecology, tourism, agriculture) for preparation of professionals that will find employment in the Danube regions;
- Establishment of International Information and Cooperation Center in Russe to become a place of contact for the local and regional authorities, exchange of experience, collection, processing and provision of information about the Danube macro-region;
- Development and promotion of a regional tourist product presenting the cultural diversity of Bulgarian and Romanian regions.

Cooperation Area “Management”

This horizontal priority allows for the improvement of institutional capacity and management mechanisms and procedures as well as their harmonization at supranational level with a view to the implementation of large-scale projects of mutual interest. The measures identified within this priority are related to the improvement of administrative capacity, optimization of management practices, international administration-level cooperation and attraction of the nongovernmental sector as a guarantee for the civil

society's involvement in the implementation of policies. Considering the nature and specific goals of Danube Strategy, it also includes projects aiming to increase the role of regional and local community, strengthen the partnership networks of towns and regions and increase the synergy between the "internal" European financial tools (such as Structural Funds, JASPERS, etc.) as well as "external" tools (such as ENPI, IPA) with a view to the improved coordination between funds and implementation of the European territorial cooperation programs.

Strengthening the capacity and internal potential at regional and local level is a milestone which will encourage the implementation of more active and adequate actions regarding the participation in the Danube Strategy. Other important elements are: the straightforward regulation and distribution of responsibilities depending on the competence and authorities at central, regional and local level, including the executive power's territorial units; information flow at all levels; enhancement of partnership approach and ability of institutions to support each other depending on the nature of work; stimulation of the exchange of good practices and experience between interested stakeholders.

This priority also aims to support initiatives providing for general training regarding the efficiency of public policies (strategic planning, proactive policies, assessment, financial engineering, financial schemes, management, ...) also in the field of big infrastructural investment projects as well as specific activities such as the implementation of an integrated and overall approach to Danube Region and its influence over the regional development. In this relation the interaction with interregional organizations, such as the Danube Countries working group, the European Regions Assembly, the International Association for Danube Research, the European Regions Institute, etc., is a source of substantial added value regarding the successful integration of good governance models and practices within the Bulgarian context.

Financial Resource for Strategy Implementation

Since at this point the Strategy does not provide for the establishment of a separate financial mechanism, it will consolidate the resources available within the active financial mechanisms thus allowing for increased efficiency of their implementation for the achievement of the common goal set out in the Strategy.

Conclusion

The Danube region should be considered a historical territorial community of European nations and cultures, and a region having huge economic and human development potential. Under the current conditions of global and regional challenges, it is necessary to promote economic, social and territorial cohesion and to consolidate solidarity and friendly relations between the counties and regions in the Danube space with the active role of the European Union Member-States and the cooperation of the European Commission. The Bulgarian contribution to the process of development and implementation of the EU strategy for the Danube Region will be further elaborated and enlarged in the course of time, taking into account the purposes and principles of the EU cohesion policy and the experience of all Danube partners on national, regional and local levels.