



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Impact Assessment Board

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Opinion

Title

Impact Assessment accompanying the proposal for an EU Strategy for the Danube Region

(draft version of 16 June 2010)

(A) Context

In its conclusions of 19 June 2009 the European Council invited the Commission to present an EU strategy for the Danube Region. This request follows the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region developed under the coordination of the European Commission in 2008/2009 and currently being implemented. The Council conclusions specifically underlined the importance of sustainable development which should be pursued using an integrated approach. This impact assessment explores the ways for implementing and developing the strategy for the Danube Region at EU level.

(B) Overall assessment

While the level of the analysis in the impact assessment report is in general proportionate to the objective of the initiative (better governance and coordination of regional cooperation), the report needs further work on several important points. It should better substantiate the implementation and coordination problems that have been identified, and discuss in more detail different interests and priorities of the Danube Region countries. The report also needs to provide more detail on the functioning of the coordination mechanism by specifying the role of the Commission and that of the participating countries and inter-governmental bodies. The administrative costs of the coordination mechanism should be discussed and assessed. Finally, the report should present a more comprehensive comparison of options.

(C) Main recommendations for improvements

(1) Substantiate and illustrate the problems the strategy aims to address by providing examples and explaining the different interests and priorities of the Danube Region countries. The problem definition should be further strengthened by providing concrete examples of current hurdles related to the implementation, coordination and funding of the policies agreed at intergovernmental or EU levels. It should explain further why certain issues of socio-economic development (e.g. innovation, human capital, single market) are considered to be specific to the

Danube region and therefore, on top of the existing general EU policies, merit specific action targeted at this region. The report should also clarify the geographical coverage of the strategy and discuss how the interests and priorities in the main policy areas – such as mobility, accessibility, energy, environment, risk management, socio-economic issues – vary among the (groups of) countries.

(2) Explain better the operational aspects of the proposed coordination mechanism.

While presenting the options, the report should explain more clearly how the coordination of the Strategy will take place in practice – how the brokering role of the Commission works, how the division of labour will change among the existing inter-governmental bodies (such as International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, the Danube Commission, the Danube Cooperation Process) and what the role and contribution of the non-EU countries will be. It should describe how the experiences from the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region have informed the design of the Danube Strategy. The report should also explain more clearly how the proposed wider approach (i.e. including in the Strategy a broader range of topics than strictly the river-related ones) would facilitate resolution of issues 'otherwise blocked in stand-off'.

(3) Assess the administrative costs of the coordination mechanism. The report should discuss and evaluate the administrative costs which the management of the Strategy will bring for the Commission (e.g. coordination of the Strategy, managing the work of the High Level Group, facilitating negotiations, reporting and monitoring, organising stakeholder forums) and for the Member States/existing inter-governmental bodies (e.g. data collection, coordination of the Priority Areas).

(4) Develop more comprehensive options and improve their comparison. The report should not only present and assess the policy options and geographical options separately, but also possible combinations of them. The results should be presented in a summary table making it possible to compare all the options in relation to the baseline (the latter should always score '0').

Some more technical comments have been transmitted directly to the author DG and are expected to be incorporated in the final version of the impact assessment report.

(D) Procedure and presentation

The report should respect better the format of the IA report as set out in the Impact Assessment Guidelines: (i) the subsidiarity analysis should be expanded and presented in a separate section, (ii) the description of economic, social and environmental impacts should be moved from Section 9 'Conclusion' to Section 6 'Analysis of impacts', (iii) the information about the cooperation framework of the Baltic Sea Strategy and the Action Plan should be moved from Section 9 to Section 5 'Policy options'. A map of the Danube Region should be added.

(E) IAB scrutiny process

Reference number	2010/REGIO/008
External expertise used	No
Date of IAB meeting	Written procedure