



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear President,

The Commission thanks the German Bundesrat for having examined the Communication from the Commission on the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region {SEC(2010) 1489} and for its detailed and constructive opinion thereon. The Commission welcomes the Bundesrat's overall positive assessment of the Strategy for the Danube Region {COM(2010) 715}, and apologises for the undue delay in responding to your opinion.

The Bundesrat's agreement with some of the core principles of the Strategy, such as the integrated approach, linking policy areas and involving interested stakeholders from all levels as well as civil society and international institutions is particularly welcomed.

The Commission also highly appreciates the strong engagement of the German Länder Bavaria and Baden Württemberg, and especially welcomes their coordination roles for the three Priority Areas "To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils", "To support the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development" and "To work together to promote security and tackle organised and serious crime". As mentioned in the Bundesrat's opinion, the Strategy is foremost a Strategy of the Danube States and regions to support their efforts to promote a future-oriented and sustainable development of the wider Danube area. The implementation of the Strategy and its success will thus depend on the engagement of countries and regions.

The Commission welcomes the Bundesrat's appraisal of the Strategy's principle to better coordinate existing funds, strengthen existing institutions and make best use of existing legislation. To make the Strategy's implementation a success it is thus crucial that existing programmes are aligned to the priorities of the Strategy, to enable proposed projects to be financed through existing national, regional and EU programmes.

The Bundesrat's opinion also refers to the targets mentioned in the Communication, especially to the target to "remove existing navigability bottlenecks" on the river. The Commission believes that inland waterway transport needs to be promoted as an important element of the logistic chains and that a variety of measures aiming at its improvement and its greater modal integration need to be undertaken to develop it further as a modern and attractive mode of transport. In relation to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the Commission believes that setting targets is useful to focus and prioritise efforts. The

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Commission would like to emphasise that the targets given in the Communication are however only indicative and non-exclusive examples. They should be further discussed and developed by all parties concerned, including key stakeholders and relevant economic, social and environmental partners, and the Commission is pleased that this process is already underway. Revised or additional targets should be confirmed by the High Level Group and finalised as soon as possible.

As mentioned in the Bundesrat's opinion, all targets need to respect existing EU legislation (such as the Habitats Directive, the Water Framework Directive and the EIA/SEA Directives) and agreements (especially the "Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube River Basin"). Furthermore, and in line with the recommendations of the "European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance" and the "Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability", any target leading to changes in the river would require a case-by-case decision on adequate fairway width and depth.

As you know, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region was endorsed by the General Affairs Council on 13 April 2011 and by the European Council on 24 April 2011. The Commission would like to thank Germany for its support for the Strategy on this occasion.

The Commission is happy to see implementation has already started at full speed in the Region. Steering Groups in all Priority Areas are set up and have met for the first time. Furthermore, events organised in the Region, such as those in Ingolstadt on 7-8 June and in Stuttgart on 11 July contribute to the broad inclusion of all relevant stakeholders.

I look forward to developing our policy dialogue further in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*