EU strategy for the Danube region (EUSDR)

Contribution of the Czech Republic

Czech Republic and the Danube macro-region

The Danube macro-region is from the geographical point of view characterized by the Danube and its tributaries. Being one of the most important European rivers, Danube is the unifying pattern of this macro-region. This region can be perceived as an excellent example of the famous EU slogan “united in diversity”.

There are countless differences among the countries, regions and cities in the Danube river basin and sub-basins but in this diversity resides the strength and potential of the macro-region. We have to work together to turn this diversity into an asset. This richness, however, cannot be fully exploited if this region lags behind the rest of Europe when the most important preconditions for the socio-economic development are concerned. Therefore the Czech Republic sees the EUSDR as an overarching framework for efficient and closer cooperation which will help us to tackle common problems, drawbacks and bottlenecks which hinder the socio-economic advancement.

From the historical, cultural and geographical points of view, the Czech Republic is an integral part of the Danube Region. We share common history and values. Over centuries we developed close ties among regions and peoples in the area. The fall of Iron Curtain and the European integration only strengthened and intensified these relations.

The Czech Republic is committed to improve these ties and to make the best out of the integration potential. We therefore welcome the upcoming strategy for the Danube Region. We are looking forward to future cooperation during the preparation of the Strategy.

When defining the national position the Czech Republic was guided among other things by the Commission´s concept note “Macro-regional strategies in the European Union” (September 2009). The contribution was also broadly discussed with all relevant stakeholders interested in the concept of macro-regional strategies and the EUSDR.

General principles of the EUSDR from the point of view of the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic in general welcomes the macro-regional strategies as one of the concepts, which can help overcome the specific problems of a defined and limited macro-region and encourage further cross-border cooperation among the regions and also Member States.

From our point of view the 3 No´s principle is crucial. The region must learn to use existing financial, institutional and legislative instruments better and more efficiently,
because this is the most important precondition for the Strategy to become a true framework for a more profound and closer cooperation. The Strategy must focus on tackling of the real and precisely defined and identified problems. The projects included in the framework of the Strategy must address the challenges and propose suitable and sustainable solutions in a relatively short time. Without this focused and result-oriented approach the Strategy risks to become another example of an ambitious document without concrete and real impact on the socio-economic situation of the region concerned.

We consider this Strategy in the first place to be an excellent opportunity to improve the efficiency of the existing EU instruments and financial mechanisms in the Danube macro-region. The Strategy must become a truly European instrument to overcome negative legacy and impacts of the divided Europe and to proceed with integration so that we reap the full potential of the common market.

**Involvement of third countries**

EUSDR is primarily an internal EU initiative, however as problems of a macro-region overpass the boundaries of the EU, non-member states are invited to participate in the implementation of the Strategy in specific relevant projects. The conditions for their involvement must be clearly set. There must be clear division as regards governance and strategic issues, which should be EU-exclusive, and implementation, which should be inclusive, i.e. embrace non-Member States.

The Danube Region covers six non-EU states. The territorial scope has therefore to be applied flexibly, in proportion with the target, both in the EU’s internal relations and with respect to the EU and non-EU member states of the region.

This challenge of choosing the right balance, relationships and synergies between the EUSDR and other EU policies with external outreach, will have to be further clarified during the preparatory process. In this context, the Czech Republic fully shares the opinion that the EUSDR should not substitute or change policies, which are led in other contexts (EU Stabilisation and Association Process/enlargement, Eastern Partnership/European Neighbourhood Policy, etc.).

The Czech Republic shares the view that more work must be done on synergies between “internal” EU-funding instruments (Structural Funds, JASPERS, ...) and “external” EU instruments (ENPI, IPA, ...); e.g. moving on towards a better coordinated funding for EU Territorial Cooperation programmes.

On the other hand, the Czech Republic would be very much in favour of using EUSDR as supplementary instrument for fostering EU integration/enlargement process in the South Eastern Europe and boosting co-operation on relevant issues between Danube countries and neighbouring countries.

Finally, the Czech Republic considers as very important to involve other relevant partners, international organisations and stakeholders who are active in a “broader” Danube Region in order to seek more synergies among various forms of regional cooperation and avoid unnecessary duplication of their efforts and projects.
Governance

We expect that the governance of the EUSDR will be rather similar to the already existing EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). We agree that the Commission should be the main coordinator and play a leading role in monitoring and evaluation of the EUSDR. Nevertheless the strategy must be regularly reviewed by the member states as it is in the EUSBSR.

We presume the Action Plan to follow the publication of the Commission’s Communication announcing the launch of the EUSDR. The Action Plan shall be based on the results of the public consultation and reflect the concrete proposals of the contributions of the Member States.

Content of the EUSDR

According to the results of the consultation with relevant Czech stakeholders three pillars of the EUSDR, as proposed by the Commission were confirmed as appropriate. They shall form the bases of the Strategy. Brief description of each one from the point of view of the Czech Republic follows.

Connectivity

The location of the Danube region and orientation of many countries of this region to transportation of goods means that developed and well functioning transport infrastructure is one of the most important issues for economic development of this region. The main challenges with regard to the future transport development are removing of bottlenecks and elimination of missing infrastructure links. When these will be overcome, better interconnection between west-east and north-south will be established.

Imbalance exists in the use of various transport modes and infrastructure in the Danube region and the transport system is showing signs of inefficiency. To tackle these problems, special attention has to be paid to the modernization of road and railway networks and to construction of inter-modal freight terminals which combine various modes of transport.

The Danube is the unifying pattern of this macro-region and one of the most important inland waterways in Europe. Therefore its high potential must be fully developed by promoting interconnection of inland waterways of this region and encourage their environmentally sustainable use.

The Strategy must concentrate on the energy security as it is one of the most important preconditions for smooth and sustainable economic development. In this regard the projects improving existing infrastructure and energy efficiency are of high importance.
**Protection of Environment and Risk Prevention**

The natural capital presents a strong basis for the long term sustainable development of the region and thus must be protected and preserved. As regards environment and water resource treatment, the Strategy could facilitate further implementation of the Convention on Cooperation for Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River. It could also improve the work of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube and the implementation of similar initiatives.

We should explore the Strategy’s potential when it comes to land use and protection, soil erosion and biodiversity. The reduction of flood risks including revitalization of water flows and elimination of water obstacles on the Danube itself but also on its sub-basins shall be a top priority for the Strategy. Special attention has to be paid to the prevention of water pollution, which is a serious problem in the Danube basin and to pollution monitoring networks.

Urban planning and construction activities (e.g. in the area of effusion of flood protection canals, areas of water accumulation, water reservoir protection zones etc.) show potential to be explored in the context of the Strategy.

The Strategy should focus on the protection, sustainability and improvement of favorable conditions of important nature locations, namely protected areas, Natura 2000 sites, composition elements of Territorial System of Ecological Stability, Important Landscape Features and nature parks.

Attention has to be paid to the improvement of emergency management systems (e.g. for the area of natural disasters) and necessary coordination with neighbouring regions. Support for the operation and further development of the integrated rescue system and cross-border cooperation in this area will lead to an improvement in the quality of life of people in the whole region.

**Socio-Economic and Cultural Integration**

**Transnational research and scientific cooperation**

The research and scientific cooperation and also cooperation in education are crucial for the socio-economic development of the Danube macro-region. Support of excellence is a precondition for higher competitiveness of our macro-region in the global framework. Therefore it is indispensable to further develop the potential of the Danube macro-region in this respect. Several initiatives already exist but it is indispensable to further encourage cooperation and promote projects in this area in the framework of the Danube strategy.

**Promoting innovation in practice**

Coordinated smart investment in research can lay down a strong base for the future competitiveness of enterprises and businesses in the Danube region. Thus we consider as crucial to promote innovation and especially develop interactions between academia and the private and public sectors. We need strong cooperation
between stakeholders and a coordinated approach to develop sustainable technologies that will allow the Danube macro-region to move forward to the knowledge based economy.

**Trans-national cluster policies**

We have to support the trans-national cluster projects in the field of collective research and development. They offer a fertile combination of entrepreneurial dynamism, intensive linkages with top level knowledge institutions and increased synergies with innovative actors.

In Central Europe already exist initiatives such as Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation in the field of Cluster development of the V4 countries. We are prepared to take advantage of other opportunities related to the development of cooperation between clusters at international level and of other tools of support and we would welcome such initiative in the framework of the Danube strategy. If we want to raise the competitiveness of the Danube region, particular attention has to be paid to development of these clusters.

**SMEs**

In the changing global economic environment, which is characterized by constant structural changes and increasing competitive pressures, the importance of the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) further increased. SMEs are a key driver for economic growth, innovation and competitiveness. SMEs play a crucial role in creating job opportunities and are generally a factor of social stability and economic development. The SMEs in the Danube region face challenges as SMEs in other EU countries, i.e. the lack of capital to start up or develop a business, administrative burden, low innovation capacity, poor export activities, lack of human resources, low share of public procurement. Their limited resources also lower the possibility of their access to information, particularly on new technologies and potential markets. It is therefore necessary to support initiatives to boost the economic development of small and medium-sized enterprises, adapt to their needs and thus contribute to exploit their potential. Because of the above mentioned facts, particular attention has to be paid to the improvement of the business environment in order to support the SMEs.

**Cooperation of public administrations**

EUSDR could serve as a means of facilitating cooperation between the different levels of public administration and institutions. Common challenges can best be addressed by concerted efforts based on shared experience, best practices and know-how.

**Health care**

Health care is another area where the Strategy can play a positive role. A strengthened cooperation in health care through specific projects can contribute to the improvement of the health care systems in the macro-region.
Regional diversity

The high potential for the socio-economic development of the Danube region lies in tourism, cultural heritage and culture itself, because these can serve as an engine for economic development. Culture and tourism are important drivers of regional as well as urban attractiveness and competitiveness. Danube and other natural sights are very attractive for tourists but when developing tourism we must at the same time emphasize its sustainability. That is to develop tourism which meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. Its economic objectives (such as financial profit, creating new jobs etc.) go hand in hand with reduction of undesirable impacts on the natural, historic, cultural or social environment. Development of tourist facilities and improvement of infrastructure (e.g. cycling tracks) can significantly contribute to the raising of attractiveness of the Danube region.

EUSDR has also the potential to improve rural development by support for community life and traditional rural crafts and trades. Major and traditional cultural events and small local cultural events which are essential for preserving of regional identity can be promoted.

In the Danube region several tourist organizations promote the region as an attractive tourist destination (for example Danube Tourist Commission). So we have to build on these initiatives and coordinate our actions in this field to make the Danube region one of the leading destinations for vacation and recreation in Europe and promote not only the Danube itself but also the regions alongside the river and its tributaries.
Possible priority areas and proposals for specific projects
(or existing projects to be included in the EUSDR)

CONNECTIVITY PILLAR

- priority area TEN-T projects
  - No. 22 (Dresden-Prague-Wien-Budapest-Sofia-Athens)
  - No. 23 (Gdansk-Warsaw-Brno/Bratislava-Wien)
  - No. 25 (Motorway axis Gdansk-Brno/Bratislava-Wien)

- priority area inland waterways
  - Danube-Oder-Elbe canal
    The idea of an inland waterway connection between the Danube, Oder and Elbe rivers has been discussed since many years ago. The aim of this project is to make waterway inland transport more competitive, especially in relation to road freight transport and to increase the share of inland waterway transport on the transport market. This is fully in line with the goal of the EU policy to make transport within Europe more sustainable. This water corridor would create a North-South and East-West connection through adding the missing link into the European waterway net, which is part of the TEN-T network. This project can be compared to the already existing Rhine-Main-Danube link in Germany or to the currently prepared Seine – Scheldt project.

  Currently, exploratory talks are being held with Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Poland with a view to prepare a common feasibility study of this project. Such a study should especially analyze environmental impact of the water corridor, its economic effectiveness, technical and water management related questions.

- priority area inter-modal transport
  - D1 motorway modernization
    D1 is a part of the IV. Trans-European Multimodal Corridor. Its aim is to broaden the motorway, in order to improve its transport capacity and to have three traffic lines in both directions.

  - Inter-modal freight terminal in Přerov, Ostrava-Mošnov, Brno, Lovosice
    The preparatory works for these terminals have already begun, the terminals will interconnect the existing and planned infrastructures.

  - ERTMS corridor E (Dresden-Prague-Wien/Bratislava-Budapest)
    The project of the ERTMS corridor E (Dresden-Prague-Wien/Bratislava-Budapest) was launched in 2005. The aim of this project is to strengthen the competitiveness of the rail transport. The letter of intent on the development of this corridor was signed in 2007. An application for the co-financing of this project by the EU fund is to be approved by the European Commission. The ERTMS corridor shall be set up in 2015,
with the exception of Germany, where the corridor shall be set up in 2020.

- **Baltic – Adriatic corridor**
  This corridor begins in Gdansk/Gdynie as an important intermodal junction point for Baltic sea area, and continues further through Warszawa – Katowice – Ostrava – Přerov (Otrokovice) – Brno – Wien – Graz – Klagenfurt – Udine – Terst/Venezia – Bologna/Ravenna, with an adjacent route Katowice – Žilina – Bratislava – Wien. This includes reconstruction of the Brno railway junction and modernization of the railway line No. 300 Brno – Přerov.

- **CETC-ROUTE 65 (Central European Transport Corridor)**
  Is an international regional initiative, which was founded in 2004 and currently includes 11 European regions from 6 countries (Sweden, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia). The initiative’s aim is, in line with general transport priorities of the Czech Republic, to develop a system of multi-modal infrastructure and economic links, which would allow for a more sustainable growth of the regions and an increase of their competitiveness.

- **Danube-Moldau Railway**
  The Danube-Moldau Railway project pertains to the upgrading and modernization of the rail line Munich-Regensburg-Pilsen and Prague. A preliminary feasibility study (SUDOP, 2004) has been prepared and discussed with the Bavarian partners.

  The route of the transport corridor has already been defined, estimations of the traffic demand and economic effectiveness of this project were also determined. The total infrastructure cost is estimated at 780 million Euros for the German side and 685 million Euros for the Czech side. Altogether, the estimated price amounts 1.47 billion Euros. The expected demand for freight transport is estimated at 2.7 million tonnes, which would ultimately reduce the traffic load on the D5 motorway and road I/26. The travel time between Prague and Munich would be reduced to approximately to 3 hours.

  This project is to be thoroughly discussed with German counterparts at the government level before it starts.

- **VIA MONTANA**
  Via Montana is an international project prepared by various partners within the Central Europe Program. Project has now 12 members from 6 countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy).

  The project is focused on improving and solving transport capacities in mountainous and border areas of the Carpathians and the northern Alps on the basis of joint cooperation in order to develop economic, tourist and social potential of the territory. The specific mountainous areas in Central Europe, lying between Alps and Carpathians, consist of many
smaller mountain chains and they have very hard conditions for transnational cooperation. This status quo must be changed. Otherwise the region will form an isolated island within the EU territory.

The existing transport network deepens the isolation of the particular parts of the area. Main objectives of the project are indication of resemblances and problems of the territory; raising regional awareness for the possibilities and advantages of the transnational cooperation; articulation of common targets of this cooperation; initiation of the co-ordination mechanisms for the cooperative implementation of these targets (the political platform).

- modernization of regional and international airports (Planá near České Budějovice, Přerov, Brno – Tuřany, Pardubice) and inclusion of regional airports in the network of regional airports

  • priority area high-speed rail network
    - projects aiming at development of high speed rail network in all countries and regions in the Danube region (e.g. high speed rail Dresden – Ústí nad Labem – Prague)

  • priority area public transport
    - Public Passenger Transport
      *Analyses of the Structure, Potential Bavarian Forest/Bohemian Forest 2020 – project in cooperation with Lower Bavaria.*
    - SoNoRa
      *Analyses trans-European transport network (including the countries of Danube river basin).*
    - Use of telematics for the enhancement of traffic fluency on the most traffic-burdened roadways in South Moravia
      *The project will enhance traffic fluency on major roadways connecting South Moravia with other regions.*
    - Interconnection of the Integrated Transport System of the South Moravian Region with similar systems in adjacent states (e.g. bus or railway connection with Laa)

  • priority area modernization of road network
    - completion of the D8 motorway in order to complete the interconnection of Dresden – Prague – Brno – Wien – Bratislava
    - northwest connection of the Vysocina Region
      *It concerns the important road axis of the supraregional importance connecting the Pardubice Region, Vysocina Region, South Bohemian Region and Lower Austria with the link to the Danube Region through the road system in Lower Austria in the area of town Krems. The project*
could focus on modernization of the whole road system to the 2nd class roads system and on construction of the by-pass roads around the inhabited areas suffering from the high transit transport intensity – Jemnice, Jaroměřice nad Rokytnou, Velké Meziříčí.

- upgrading of the l/38 road
  It is the direct connection of the Vysocina Region to Vienna (construction of the by-pass roads – for example Kámen, Olšíny, Hladov, Rančířov – Vílanec Relaying, Jihlava – Moravské Budějovice Relaying).

- modernization of: R46 (Vyškov – Olomouc), l/53 road (Pohořelice – Znojmo)

- construction of: R 35 (Mohelnice – Hradec Králové), R55 (Olomouc–Přerov – Hulín – Otrokovice – Moravský Písek – Hodonín –Břeclav), l/44 road (Mohelnice – Mikulovice, including construction of Červenohorské sedlo tunel), R7 (Prague – Chomutov and further to Chemnitz)

- completion of design preparation and start of construction of: R43 (Troubsko – Kuřim – Sebranice – Moravská Třebová), R52 (Pohořelice – Mikulov – state border)

- improvement of the traffic capacity in Brno city and its surroundings – planning and design preparation of the south-west (Troubsko – Modřice – Chrlice) and south-east (Chrlice – Holubice) tangent roads, fast completion of semi-finished parts and starting of the building of additional constructions on the large city ring road of Brno

• priority area modernization of railway infrastructure

- modernization of the transport corridor of the conventional railway transport of the international importance C-E 61 Děčín – Nymburk – Kolín – Havlíčkův Brod – Brno with direct link to Vienna (defined by the Territorial Development Policy of the Czech Republic)

- railway 240 Jihlava – Brno: electrification, improvement of the railway speed, curves alignment, enlarging to the two tracks railways

- railway 241 Okřišky – Znojmo: electrification; in Znojmo exists the direct connection to the Vienna City Transport Line

- railway 225 Havlíčkův Brod – Jihlava – České Budějovice – Linz (improvement of the railway speed)

- railway 227 Kostelec u Jihlavy – Slavonice – Fratres – Schwarzenau (direct connection in Schwarzenau to the Franz Joseph Railway to Vienna)
- modernization of the railway Brno-Přerov

- priority area energy infrastructure and energy security

  - GAZELLE

    Gazelle is a project of a gas pipeline with the capacity of 30 billion cubic meters per year, connecting natural gas from the Nord Stream pipeline to the Czech Republic and Bavaria. The project should increase security of natural gas supplies in the macro-region by enhancing gas distribution networks interconnection between the Czech Republic and Germany, in line with June 2009 European Council Conclusions.

  - Modernization of the oil pipeline Druzhba

    With the view to the modernization of the Druzhba pipeline, Czech Republic supports further work on and enhancement of the analytical study by the EC "Variable uses of oil" presented at the expert meeting of representatives of the V4 countries in February 2010. The scope of the work should include also the issue of new/alternative oil transit routes.
PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENT AND RISK PREVENTION PILLAR

• priority area flood prevention
  
  o Thaya watershed initiatives
  Investment measures leading to the lowering of flood risks in the flooding areas and to the improvement of water courses channels in urban areas and to the strengthening of the accumulative possibilities in the watershed shall be top priority.

  The Vysocina Region in cooperation with the municipalities situated in the Dyje (Thaya) watershed – that means in the international Danube watershed is preparing numerous projects aiming at flood prevention mainly in the urban areas of the watershed. These will also improve the situation in the neighbouring South Bohemia Region and also Austrian regions as well.

  o LABEL
  The LABEL project focuses on flood risk management in Central Europe. Under the leadership of the Saxon State Ministry of Interior 20 partners work together. Project started in 2008 and will last till 2012. It focuses on the implementation of European Directive 2007/60/EU on flood risk management. Its principal objectives are to cover the harmonization of national strategies and to coordinate flood risk managements. Povodi Labe, state organization will test (within the project LABEL) national approaches towards mapping and flood risk planning on the Jizera River, international approach on the Elbe River. New experiences of this project can serve as a model for similar initiatives under the EUSDR.

  o Morava river flood risk prevention
  Olomouc region has approved three projects aiming at reduction of flood risks on the Morava River.

• priority area protection of water resources
  
  o Drawing-off and cleaning of the communal waste-waters and securing of the drinking water supplies
  The number of inhabitants connected to the canalization system and the sewage clarification plants is progressively growing, however still a majority of the municipalities do not have their sewage clarification plant. From the total number of 704 municipalities of the Vysocina Region approximately only one fourth is provided with the sewage clarification system. The main reason is fragmented residential structure of the Region with the majority of small villages.

  At present the municipalities of the Vysocina Region situated in the Thaya watershed, and thus in the international Danube watershed, have prepared more than 100 projects related to the water draw-off systems, sewage clarification systems and drinking water supplies. The realization of these projects will ensure the draw-off and cleaning of the sewage
waters in particular municipalities. By that way there will be improved
not only the environment itself but also, and especially, the surface water
quality in the Thaya and the Danube watersheds. Some of these projects
deal with the water supply ensuring of the particular municipalities.

- Construction of sewage treatment plants and drainage in the catchment
  area of the Nové Mlýny water reservoir and the river basin belonging to
  the project Clean Svratka River Basin (over the Brno Dam)
SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION PILLAR

• priority area support for scientific excellence
  
  o CEEPUS (Central European Exchange Program for University Studies)
    
    *It is an exchange program for academics. The countries involved in this program are: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Czech Republic, Austria.*

  o EUREKA program
    
    *All the countries (except Montenegro) participating on the EUSDR are involved in this program which is focused on the support for the applied research – encouraging cooperation among the private companies and research institutions.*

• priority area improving the business environment
  
  o projects promoting the cross-border businesses and cooperation
  
  o projects leading to creation of transnational clusters

• priority area health care
  
  o Healthacross
    
    *This project can serve as an excellent example of good practice in the field of healthcare system. Healthacross was coordinated by the South Bohemia Region.*

  o Tackling antimicrobial resistance
    
    *Presently, only few countries in the Danube Region have implemented active epidemiological surveillance and/or specific prevention and control strategies. Macro-regional projects focused on implementation and/or strengthening of the national surveillance (and reporting) systems for antimicrobial resistance (and infectious diseases) should be a high priority for upcoming years. Collaboration and exchange of best practices is the key to tackle the antimicrobial resistance as well as healthcare-associated infections.*

• priority area tourism and culture
  
  o Provincial exhibition 2013 “Hop, Salt and Cyberspace”
    
    *This exhibition is being prepared by the South Bohemia Region in cooperation with Upper Austria and can serve as an excellent example of the regional cooperation and also be of inspiration for other cross-border projects in this domain.*

  o Labská cycle track
    
    *Completed Labská cycle track will be very important part of supraregional network of cycle tracks in Europe. In Germany this cycle track became very attractive for tourists and therefore contributes*
significantly to the development of the regions concerned. Future interconnection of Labská cycle track with Prague-Vienna and cycle track alongside the Moravia river will considerably improve the network of cycle tracks not only on the national but European level.

- Amber Trail
- Moravian cycle track
- Extension of the Bata Canal for recreational cruise to the confluence of Morava and Dyje (Thaya) rivers