

Brussels, 03rd February 2011**EMBARGO: 14:00 CET**

European Commissioner Hahn announces priority area coordinators for EU Strategy for Danube Region

In order to develop the huge economic potential of the Danube river, the European Commission has end 2010 proposed an overarching Strategy for the Danube Region, which covers eight EU Member States and six other European countries. This Strategy will focus on concrete priority action areas, such as the improvement of navigability, water quality, security cooperation and the opportunities for tourism. To realise the Strategy on the ground, Commissioner for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn has today in Budapest, together with Hungarian Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi, announced which countries and regions will lead priority areas of work (see Annex 1). They will drive implementation of the Strategy by agreeing a work programme and identifying sources of finance with other countries involved and partners like non-governmental organisations. Eleven priority areas have been identified. The Strategy aims at a strong cooperation between countries, making a more optimal use of all EU funding available, without reserving new funds, setting new rules or creating new institutions.

Ahead of the announcement of the priority area coordinators, Commissioner Hahn said: *"The Strategy brings a new and ambitious dimension to cooperation in the region. I am very pleased that every Member State in the region will lead at least one area of work and that a number of the non member states will also play a proactive role. The coordinators will immediately start preparations for the implementation of the Strategy, identifying the most immediate actions to help the region flourish and fully exploit its economic potential. By focusing on the most important issues, such as mobility, energy, pollution, innovation, jobs and security, I am convinced that the Strategy will make a real contribution to building a better future for this part of Europe."*

The Danube Region reaches from Germany in the West to Ukraine in the East. It faces many challenges including untapped shipping potential, lack of road and rail connections, and uncoordinated efforts in education, research and innovation.

Cooperation within a 'macro-regional' framework' is intended to produce a more effective coordination. This approach – successfully pioneered in the Baltic Sea Region - does not imply new laws or institutions but rather strengthens links between different policies and a wide range of stakeholders.

This form of cooperation be applied to problems such as flash floods, destruction of biodiversity habitats and illegal smuggling. It can also shape new opportunities, for instance, by improving navigation on the river and interconnecting national energy markets to prevent electricity and fuel shortages.

Although the Strategy does not come with extra EU finance, a considerable amount of funding is already available to the region through a various EU programmes. The

aim is to use this available support – € 100 billion alone has been allocated from the cohesion policy (European Regional Development Fund, Cohesion Fund, European Social Fund) between 2007 and 2013 – to greater effect and show how macro-regional cooperation can help tackle local problems. After the appointment of the priority coordinators, the European Council has to approve the Strategy in June.

The Strategy contains a detailed action plan based around four pillars:

- Connecting the Danube Region (e.g. improving mobility, encouraging sustainable energy and promoting culture and tourism)
- Protecting the environment in the Danube Region (e.g. restoring water quality, managing environmental risks and preserving biodiversity)
- Building prosperity in the Danube Region (e.g. developing research capacity, education and information technologies, supporting the competitiveness of enterprises and investing in people's skills)
- Strengthening the Danube Region (e.g. stepping up institutional capacity and improving cooperation to tackle organised crime)

It also proposes a number of time-limited targets for focus efforts, including:

- develop efficient multimodal terminals at Danube river ports to connect inland waterways with rail and road transport by 2020;
- implement the Danube wide flood risk management plans - due in 2015 under the EU Floods Directive – and include significant reduction of flood risk by 2021;
- reduce nutrients to restore eco-systems of the Black Sea to 1960 levels by 2020
- bring broadband fast-speed internet access to all EU citizens in the region by 2013;
- invest 3% of GDP in Research and Development by 2020;

One of the first tasks of the Priority Area Co ordinators will be to agree and refine these targets with the countries most involved in each area of work.

To achieve the targets, the strategy lists a series of actions which will also make an important contribution to achieving the broader Europe 2020 goals for sustainable and smart growth.

The appointed Priority Area Coordinator countries are listed in the Annex.

Background:

The countries involved in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region are: Germany (Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria), Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Moldova, and Ukraine.

The Commission proposed the Strategy at the request of the European Council. It is expected to be endorsed by Member States during the Hungarian EU Presidency in the first half of 2011.

For more information:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/index_en.htm

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Annex

EU STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE REGION

Coordination of Priority Areas

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro can also be involved as appropriate.

Priority Area	Countries
1) To improve mobility and intermodality ¹	<u>Inland waterways</u> Austria Romania <u>Rail, road and air</u> Slovenia Serbia (Interest: Ukraine)
2) To encourage more sustainable energy	Hungary Czech Republic
3) To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts	Bulgaria Romania
4) To restore and maintain the quality of waters	Hungary Slovakia
5) To manage environmental risks	Hungary Romania
6) To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils	Germany (Bavaria) Croatia
7) To develop the knowledge society (research, education and ICT)	Slovakia Serbia
8) To support the competitiveness of enterprises	Germany (Baden-Württemberg) Croatia
9) To invest in people and skills	Austria Moldova
10) To step up institutional capacity and cooperation	Austria (Vienna) Slovenia
11) To work together to tackle security and organised crime	Germany Bulgaria

¹ An overall coordination for this priority area needs also to be ensured.