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**The Impact of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region
on the Administrative Capacity**

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Abstract: At the initiative of Romania and Austria at the end of 2010, the European Union has finalized the strategy for the Danube Region, a regional development model at European level. Danube strategy is a national strategy of the EU to which they are invited to attend also the third countries of the riverside. It will be implemented starting with the first half of 2011 and it will be structured along three primary axes: connectivity, environmental protection and socio-economic development, patterned after the EU Strategy for Baltic Sea region. The main challenge for Romania has been and it should be its keeping among the main promoters of the initiative of creating and implementing a Strategy and the achievement, according to the Action Plan, of as many priority projects on all three axes aiming at also developing the administrative capacity and better governance.

Keywords: Danube basin; macro-regional strategy; cooperation; sustainable development

1 Macro-Danube Region and the EU Strategy

The regional Policy European Union (EU) is focused on eliminating the economic and social disparities between Member States and the 271 regions thereof, for achieving sustainable development and international competitiveness. The economic and social cohesion is the primary means by which development differences can be eliminated.

The new provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon, the scope of economic and social cohesion concept is extended to the territorial component, so that for the future, and the regional specifics and characteristics are taken into account for budgetary programming and establishing strategic priorities at community level. Starting from this concept it was developed a new vision of regional cooperation, based on identifying and establishing geographical connections between regions, it has been called macro-regional strategy.

During December 2008-June 2009, Romania and Austria have promoted, at the EU Member States level and third countries in the Danube Basin, the idea of a new regional cooperation project, as a EU Strategy for the Danube region, according to the Strategy Model at the Baltic Sea Region. The European Commission was invited by the European Council on 18-19 June 2009 to develop by the end of 2010 an "EU Strategy for the Danube Region" which was done and made public, with the associated Action Plan. The three areas (pillars) proposed by the European Commission which the strategy is focused on

are: connectivity (transport, energy, telecommunications), environmental protection and water management, socio-economic development (culture, education, tourism, rural development).

The necessity of a strategy is emphasized by the regional characteristics. The Danube - the largest river that runs through the EU and second largest river of Europe, both in length (2857 km) as well as debt (about 5600 m³/sec when enters in Romania) is a true axis of Central Europe, which connects the Black Sea and the farther areas of Central Asia (Stanciu, 2002, p. 9). Danube crosses 10 countries: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine and 4 capital capitals: Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest and Belgrade, and the Bucharest is in the next neighbourhood. Its basin is the most "international" river of the world, containing the territories of 19 countries and measures approximately 1 million km².

Among the Danube regions, Romania has the largest area in the Danube Basin (approximately 30%), the sector of the longest river (1076 km) and the Danube Delta, the second largest wetland in Europe, a unique ecosystem, of International Importance, declared by UNESCO in 1991 the cultural heritage of humanity.

As regards the course of the Danube in Romania, we must mention that: it crosses five regions, 13 counties in which there are 25 municipalities and 56 cities, growth poles, namely Bucharest, Constanta and Craiova or urban growth poles that is Braila and Galati. There are also seven national parks in the region crossed by the Danube in Romania.

Danube region has an economic growth potential unexploited. Being declared part of the Pan-European Transport Corridor VII of the EU, the Danube is a significant waterway, which connects through the network Rhine-Main-Danube between Constanta port, industrial centres of Western Europe, and the port of Rotterdam. The wider Danube Basin include countries and regions that could benefit in the near future of a direct access to the Black Sea and the importance of connecting EU with the wider region of Caucaz and Central Asia was highlighted by the Black Sea Synergy.

Romania hosted in 9 to 11 June 2010, the final article of the Conference on EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

The conference, held in Constanta, concluded the events with consultation dedicated to the public on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, organized by the countries of the riverside during 2010:

- Germany (Conference of opening the public consultation process, Ulm, 1-2 February 2010);
- Hungary (Conference on the theme of social and economic development and the Danube Summit, Budapest, 25-26 February 2010);
- Austria - Slovakia (Conference organized in Vienna and Bratislava focusing on the connectivity domain, 20-21 April 2010);
- Bulgaria (Seminar dedicated to the administrative capacity and good governance, Ruse, 10-11 May 2010).

2 Cooperation Instruments Existing in the Danube Region

The idea of a new regional cooperation project, as an EU Strategy for the Danube region, has not appeared on an arid land. More than two centuries ago, at Galati it was born the first international organization in the area, the European Danube Commission, which the powers of that era dedicated it to free shipping on the Danube and the economic interests in the region (Stanciu, 2002, p. 10). Its Successor, the Danube Commission (DC) is an international organization currently composed of

Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary, whose primary task is ensuring the legal requirements to maintain freedom of the river navigation. Under Commission rules, Member States should improve the navigation of the national sectors.

In fact, the mechanisms that have been created for the functioning of the Commission, and the lack of interest of states, led to the lack of involvement in the development of transport on the Danube Commission. Its regulations worth the recommendation and, accordingly, there is an integrated transport development project on the Danube. Review of the Belgrade Convention, which was created by the Commission, the only means by which its activity could be revived. Following the review, states that really want to promote transport on the Danube, may have the means to take in the Danube Commission, concrete measures.

Danube Cooperation Process (DCP) was officially launched in Vienna on 27 May 2002, based on a joint initiative of the Governments of Romania and Austria, the European Commission and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SP SEE). SCP participants are countries in the Danube basin (Romania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Hungary), plus the European Commission and the Regional Cooperation Council (CFR), furthers the Stability Pact there are also a few states with observer status in the process (France, FYROM, Russian Federation and the United States of America).

DCP is a forum of regional cooperation, non-institutionalized, structured on several sectoral dimensions (economic and sustainable development, environmental, cultural, navigation, tourism, sub-regional cooperation), subsumed under a political dimension which is intended to provide guidelines for future cooperation and to identify priority projects that are to be achieved within the sectoral dimensions. Its primary objective is to efficiently harmonize and valorise the various initiatives of cooperation in the Danube region, in light of European values and standards, given that, in the context of EU enlargement, the Danube has virtually become a river inside the Union.

International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) was created in 1998 and the Member States of the international body are, at the same time, parties to the Danube River Protection Convention, the legal instrument for cross-border cooperation and effective management of water resources: Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and the European Community. The ICPDR objectives are the conservation of Danube's water resources for future generations, reducing the chemicals that pollute Danube waters and the achievement of an integrated control system for flood risk.

Danube Commission and the Danube Cooperation Process represent the intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms existing in the Danube area. The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) is an international body established to implement the Danube River Protection Convention.

ARGE Donauländer was founded in Vienna in 1990, by signing the Joint Declaration, as an association of the Danubian regions, to promote economic, transport, regional development, tourism, culture, science and environmental protection. The members are from 23 regions in 10 countries along the Danube.

In terms of cooperation an important role has the contribution of the European territorial cooperation programs by funding specific common projects between regions or countries in areas crossed by the

Danube, and it targets key areas of intervention, such as: accessibility, environment and emergency situations, socio-economic development. These programs are:

- Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Programme;
- Joint Operational Programme "Black Sea";
- South East Europe Transnational Cooperation Programme;
- IPA CBC Programme Romania-Serbia;
- Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013.

The best way to highlight the potential of the Danube region could be the combination of the current forms of institutional cooperation and the partnerships between local communities.

3 Perspectives opened by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

The objectives that need to be pursued by Romania through participation in the development and implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region are:

- Dynamic, competitive, and prosperous Danube region;
- Creating an integrated transport systems and environmental protection monitoring based on new technologies;
- Cleaner waters, protecting bio-diversity, combating cross-border pollution and reduce flood risk;
- Improvement of administrative capacity, fostering cultural exchanges and contacts "people to people".

A priority in the Romanian Danube region is considered to be the development of tourism and fructification of the natural heritage, but also the historical cultural heritage by developing specific and intensive advertising campaigns. The regional strategy must determine the increase of the attractiveness of the region through economic development and creating new jobs, following the recovery of cultural heritage, natural resources and improve the infrastructure quality of accommodation and leisure. For that there can be considered the following actions:

- Rehabilitation and upgrading the heritage tourism elements that could lead to increase of the tourist interest for the counties along the Danube and their value;
- Development of tourism infrastructure in the counties along the Danube and the Danube counties in general;
- Attracting new "tour operators" for organizing cruises to the Danube Delta and the conviction of those who already operate to increase the number of stopovers on the Romanian bank by diversifying a range of touristic offers;
- Studying the appropriateness and possibilities of reintroduction of regular passenger flights on the Danube, between the Danube ports, in order to allow viewing the most representative and attractive sectors of the Danube.

Modernizing agriculture and diversifying the economic activities other than agriculture, by making use of environmental and natural resources (wealth, fisheries, forestry, biodiversity etc), cultural heritage (traditions and gained professional experience) by building social capital and creating new specialties, also represent important directions of action.

In order to achieve the objectives of economic development and connectivity, we need a new vision, an approach based on new technologies that provide a "green", efficient, and sustainable strategy. It takes investments and rehabilitation of transport infrastructure and efficient solutions to environmental

challenges. At the same time, agricultural land of the Danube Basin is an asset that could be better exploited, especially in the context of the foreshadow agro-alimentary crisis, through research, crop diversification and implementation of innovative technologies.

An important dimension of the Romanian contribution in the development and implementation process of the Strategy is the position of public county and local administrations, which need to be aware of this opportunity and involved in accessing the decentralized services of ministries. Several of the counties bordering the Danube in Southern Romania, are among the least economically developed and therefore the involvement of local authorities in this region could contribute to increased competitiveness and socio-economic revitalization of localities with growth potential.

Achieving some ambitious objectives such as the completion of the canal Bucharest - Danube, two new bridges, the Bechet - Oreahovo and Calarasi - Silistra, between Romania and Bulgaria, building a new hydro-power complex on the Danube and ensuring navigability of the lower Prut and new bridges over the river, cannot be achieved without a simultaneous and continuous modernization of the national, regional and local public administration.

In fact, the strategy must improve the public sector management by *strengthening an effective administrative capacity*. It is necessary for investments to improve policy making and decision making processes in the public management domain, to develop a modern civil service system, flexible and responsive and improve standards of quality and efficiency in delivering public services. To this purpose the actions must pursue, prevalently, those administrative areas where there may be the biggest impact in terms of stimulating the development of socio-economic and business environment and the fight against the Romanian economy deficiencies.

Also, a significant component of Romania's contribution is represented by the contributions of population, civil society organizations, requiring them to engage in the community dialogue, to ensure good governance.

On a careful examination, it appears that the expansion of the EU eastern border, and thus access to third EU countries to the Danube Maritime area, causes a high risk to the security and integrity of the Community's borders.

Danube Strategy must take account these developments and undertake projects such as:

- Replace the current control system on the Danube, based on inspection at the port of destination, with a system that considers the establishment of border control points of entry/exit from/in the future Schengen Area, clearly defined;
- Strengthen cooperation between law enforcement institutions and local authorities, in the Danube riparian countries;
- Acquisition of control structures with fixed and mobile detection equipment, high communication equipments, and efficient means of naval mobility;
- Danube ecosystem protection by implementing a prevention concept of poaching fish and wildlife, stock of wood, and intentional or accidental pollution;
- Ensuring the security of shipments of goods and the goods handled or stored in ports.

All investments that are to be made in the Danube basin must be intelligent systems, based on the latest scientific and technological development, where the environment protection is included from the starting point of the design stage („green knowledge intelligent systems”).

In conclusion, in a stable macro-economic and competitive system, enforcing the institutional capacity and developing the human resource, an efficient use of natural resources and new technologies are necessary conditions to support sustainable growth in the area which should contribute to the development and implementation of EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

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