

EUSDR Priority area 1b:

To improve mobility and multimodality: road, rail and air links

MINUTES of the 29th Steering Group meeting

Tuesday, 26th March 2024; 09h00 – 16h00 (CET)

Venue: U-hotel, Miklošičeva 3, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Participants: AT, BA, CZ, HU, ME, RS, SI, UA (8) and DG REGIO, DSP**Non-participating / Excused:** BG, HR, DE, MD, RO, SK (6)**Experts:** Mr. Paolo Dileo, CEI, Mr. Pavel Chistyakov, IEC, Mr. Eduardo Medeiros, Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal, Ms. Astrid Heindel, University of Applied Sciences, Technology Centre for Energy**Chairmen:** Mr. Franc Žepič, PAC team member (Slovenia) and Ms. Špela Cimerman PAC (Slovenia)**Co-chairman:** Mr. Predrag Petrović, PAC (Serbia)**Item 1: Welcome and introductory topics**

The Chairman, Mr. Žepič, former EUSDR PA 1b Coordinator (PAC 1b) welcomed the participants and invited them to present themselves in tour de table. He explained that Slovenian PAC 1B team has changed following the Minister of Infrastructure's decision, whereas Ms Špela Cimerman was appointed on the PAC 1b position and Mr Beno Fekonja as her deputy, Mr Žepič will remain member of the PAC 1b team until his retirement.

Mr Magnusson, DG REGIO supported the added value of meeting in person. Among others, he mentioned two future events: the DG MOVE is organising Connecting Europe days in Brussels from 2-5/4/2024 and the DG REGIO is organising MRS week on 12-13/6/2024.

Item 2: Approval of the agenda of the 29th SG meeting and the minutes of the 28th SG meeting

The Agenda of the present meeting was approved by the participants. Minutes from the previous, 28th SG meeting that was held on Monday, 18th December 2023; 9.00 – 12.30 (CET) online via Zoom conference were approved.

Conclusion: The Agenda for the 29th SG meeting and the Minutes of the 28th SG meeting were approved without comments.

Item 3: Past and upcoming events

NC-PAC meeting was held from 29 to 30/1/2024 in Vienna. It focussed on the current topics, shared that are impacting the Region, like the unprovoked Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, climate change etc. The participants concluded to further discuss to find a common position in the EUSDR towards them. All key stakeholders had a very effective forum, where all the EUSDR key stakeholders met and had understanding on the different roles. The EUSDR Austrian Presidency is preparing a number of events. They decided to do a study where they have engaged a consultant to look at the cohesion policy and to assess how the macro-regional strategy can come in to this policy and what the actors from the Strategy side could have to see (main focus will be the post-2027 process in cohesion policy).

EU Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS) and Sea-Basin Strategies Days will be organised from 12 to 13/6/2024 in Brussels. It is an annual event prepared by DG Regio. This year it is a bit innovative, as

instead of MRS week there will be MRS days in the conference room called the Egg. It will be an interactive event with five workshops. A website with the agenda¹ will be published very soon.

The EUSDR Annual Forum will be held in Vienna from 20 to 21/6/2024. On the 20th June in the evening there will be a Danube party. The event is already published on the EUSDR website,² the participants can register very soon.

A workshop on Linking Transport & Space will be organised also in Vienna from 9 to 10 October 2024. Mr Žepič expressed challenges in inviting the speakers for this topic, especially from the Danube region. Participants were requested to help the organiser in finding the speakers and CZ had expressed a possibility to propose a contact.

Conclusion: The PA1b PACs are making great efforts to organise events that contribute to Danube macro-region transport issues and challenges. SG members are invited to take part at these events, as well as at major transport event organised by the European Commission, DG MOVE.

Item 4: PA1b Work programme 2024 - 2025

Mr Žepič presented the planned activities of the PA 1b project:

- For strengthening the SG capacities and performance a draft Terms of Reference (ToR) were prepared in order to tackle this issue. A questionnaire on this topic will be distributed among the SG participants with request for feedback. DSP assessed the various number participation at the SG meetings as relative. I.e., even in the case of a high number of participants, attendants are not active. Sometimes a smaller number of the SG participants was more effective. A survey for the SG members should reveal what topics should be addressed at the SG meetings and what is in the interest of the participants. On the survey results measures can be adopted. DSP is having a workshop on the EUSDR implementation for the newcomers that includes SG members and PACs (potential extension of the Unfolding EUSDR workshop series to SG members together with PACs).
- For the PA 1b cooperation with the Cohesion (ESIF / IPA / INDICI) policy and the EC centrally managed programmes. 2023 – 2028. SG members will be requested to send contact details from their National contact points (NCPs) for the Cohesion policy.
- Another item on the PAC 1b Agenda is the organisation of a ministerial meeting 2024. SG members will be contacted for the inputs on the agenda. AT ministerial participation depends on the topic. CZ said that this is a political meeting that should be followed by a declaration. CZ minister is very interested in promoting the projects. EU Commission should be present. Key PA1b projects should be chosen, to get the ministerial support. The event could be organised in the last quarter of the year.
- For the PA1b workshop / seminar 2024, topic proposals will be collected from the SG MS.
- A Road map for green Mobility in the DR, should more or less be outsourced by an external consultant.
- Publication Transport infrastructure in the Danube region (DR) – Air links – Serbian coordinator is working on it. Publications on rail and roads in the DR have been very well accepted on the European level.
- The list of the PA1b infrastructure projects was discussed on the previous day. The participants agreed that the CZ project called X4ITS is inserted on the PA1b list of the EUSDR flagship projects instead of the SUSTANCE project.

¹ <https://eustrategiesdays.regio-events.eu/> and password: **strategiesdays2024**

² <https://danube-region.eu/danube-events/13th-eusdr-annual-forum/>

CONCLUSION: A questionnaire on strengthening the SG PA1b capacities and performance will be distributed among the SG participants with request for feedback. SG member states will be requested to send contact details from their National contact points (NCPs) for the implementation of the EU Cohesion policy. SG members will be contacted for the proposals of the agenda points for the PA1b ministerial meeting. For the PA1b workshop / seminar in 2024, topic proposals will be collected from the SG MS. CZ project called X4ITS is inserted on the PA1b list of the EUSDR flagship projects instead of the Sustance project.

Item 5: ERTMS: the national implementation plans - exchange on the different approaches and challenges

Mr Sebastian Steinbrecher (AT) moderated discussion and shortly presented the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) and its implementation with challenges in AT. ERTMS is based on 3 systems: European Train Control System (ETCS), Railway Mobile Radio (GSM-R / FRMCS – RMR) and Automatic Train Operation (ATO). ERTMS main objective is to promote interoperability of trains in the EU. ERTMS Constituents are the track side equipment (eurobalises, radio block centre interface with interlocking) and on-board equipment (European vital computer, GSM R-antenna, Balises-antenna). Legal framework for ERTMS are two EU Regulations: TEN-T for its implementation and TSI CCS for the technical specification for interoperability relating to control-command and signalling subsystems. ERTMS is a horizontal priority next to ETC. ERTMS has to be deployed by 2030 on the core TEN-T network, by 2040 on the extended core network and by 2050 on the comprehensive network.

ERTMS in AUSTRIA: In most sections of the AT railways, there is a dual deployment – new radio based ERTMS and timetable to decommission the old Class B system. On the AT part of the Rhine Danube corridor ETCS is already installed. The Austrian ETCS migration is based on the National Implementation Plan (NIP) for ERTMS, which was presented to the EU in 2017 and is in line with the European Deployment Plan. The AT migration plan is divided in several phases (1st & 2nd phases are already deployed, 3rd is in progress & 4th will be deployed by 2038). According to the ETCS programme, there are approximately 3000 km of railway to be installed in three phases until 2038. Next steps and challenges - Update of National ERTMS Implementation Plan according to requirements of TSI CSS and TEN-T Regulation incl. plan for decommissioning of class-b systems. There is an enormous need for on-board ETCS equipment in the coming years (currently 38% equipped with ETCS) which is crucial for ETCS-only. There is also a need for stable technical requirements and reduction of permanent changes (e.g. baselines).

ERTMS in CZECH REPUBLIC will be covered on the core TEN-T network by 2030. The government gives companies financial support, currently there are 800 vehicles equipped and 200 vehicles still to be equipped by the system. By end of 2025, 1000 vehicles should be equipped with the ERTMS.

In **HUNGARY the ERTMS** deployment presents a challenge for the country, especially the change from 900 to 1800 MHz entails huge investments. The ETCS C safety systems are not compatible with the ETCS, which represents another huge investment. Many stations on the core TEN-T network railways lines have 60 years old safety systems. HU tries to fulfil the 2030 TEN-T core target and by 2040 extended core target. However there are many switches which need ETCS, i.e. stations with 200-300 switches. HU is working on the revision of the ERTMS NIP which should be finished by the summer 2024. Upgrade of vehicles from baseline 2 to baseline 3, should be upgraded to baseline 4 in the next 5 years.

ERTMS in SLOVENIA - since 5/1/2017 the Implementation of GSM-R & ETCS systems has been ongoing. There are 1207 km of the railway lines in total of which 740 km is electrified. The Slovenian GSM-R is built according to standards on common EU EIRENE specification. NIP of TSI in goes back to 2008.

Construction of the GSM-R network started in 2013. Investor was the SI Ministry of Infrastructure. Completion of works with permission to use GSM-R was done in December 2017. This entailed that rooming agreements were signed with the neighbouring Infrastructure managers (IM): OBB, RFI and MAV DB and CZD. Today GSM-R is deployed along the total of 1207 km of the SI railways. However it was a challenging project i.e. 244 base stations had to be installed, 112 repetitors in the tunnels,... Only cabling represented 40 % of investment and the Base stations 32 %,... The whole GSM-R network is covered, and operational from 2017 and interoperable according to the EIRENE standards.

For the ETCS deployment there are currently different safety systems across Europe. Goal of the ETCS system is only one position of the ETCS balise. In Slovenia the ETCS is deployed along the majority of the core TEN-T network. The last part that still needs to be ETCS integrated is the line towards AT between Maribor and Šentilj. In SI, the ETCS level 1 is implemented. By 2050 this level needs to be upgraded with the ETCS level 2. Consequently the ETCS/ERTMS goals are to ensure the interoperability and quality of service in freight and passenger transport. There are 52 units in passenger trains already equipped with the ETCS AngelStar Guardia OBU, and another 20 in the tendering procedure. For the freight locomotives of the national cargo carrier there are 35 new units in the public tender process. All the fleet is 100% equipped with the GSM-R equipment. Mr. Franc Klobučar concluded with the ERTMS challenges: OBU (ERTMS / ETCS), construction sites, implementation new TSI / TEN-T standards, FRMCS (5G generation of the devices), new versions, releases, extended core network... Problem is also the equipment of the exiting locomotives. SI is in the process of updating the TSI implementation plan – which will most probably be prolonged.

Conclusion: The EU member states of the SG PA1b will further endeavour to implement the ERTMS systems in line with the EU requirements. The non EU member states of the SG PA1b shall follow the deployment of the ERTMS in the EU.

Item 6: The impact of the Middle Corridor development on the Danube region (The Middle Corridor Study, WB, November 2023)

Mr. Pavel Chistyakov, IEC International (InfraEconomy Group), Paris, France presented the Impact of the Middle Corridor (MC) on the Danube region. The MC is a missing link between eastern Asia and Europe. Additional demand for this route has been on the rise, since the Russian aggression on Ukraine. MC has a latent potential in case of improving the efficiency. Smooth connection to Europe with several alternative entrances is crucial for the development of the whole Corridor and the Danube river can become an important alternative to rail and road transportation within Europe. The trade flow projections show that trade between China and Europe will slow down while trade between China and the Middle East will boost. Kazakhstan can revive the trade with Europe and ignite export to China, Uzbekistan is a true gazelle-trader but will remain six times smaller than Kazakhstan. Danube can become a main link to central Europe for the MC. If the travel time would be reduced from 55 to 25 days between Europe and China by 2030, the tonnage of freight would increase for 37 %.

UA commented that all the Euroasian corridors need to be implemented without Russia.

Conclusion: Mr. Chistyakov is invited to contact the PA1a PACs in order to present the Study findings also to the PA1a SG meeting.

Item 7.a: Completed, planned and ongoing transnational projects: The “SUSTANCE” project (update) and the “GRETA” project,

Mr. Paolo Dileo, CEI, Trieste, Italy presented the two projects. The SUSTANCE project – “Sustainable public transport solutions and innovative governance schemes for improving connectivity in Central

Europe” (<https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/greta/>) aims at solving the lack of efficient and sustainable public transport solutions in peripheral and cross-border areas of Central Europe, which have registered a substantial increase of mobility, especially at cross-border level in the last decade. It started in April 2023 and will end in March 2026 with the objective of Improving transport connections of rural and peripheral regions in the Central Europe. SUSTANCE project has been marked with the EUSDR Flagship. The project’s current state of play is analysis of Public transport accessibility along specific routes of regions and final planning of the 6 pilot actions that focus on:

1. new/enhanced train services
 - a. New direct passenger experimental train connection along the cross- border route Trieste Villa Opicina – Pivka – Šapjane – Rijeka, which will become operational in the summer 2024
 - b. Experimental extension to Sopron (HU) of the cross border train service linking Neusiedl am See (AT) to Fertőszentmiklós (HU)
 - c. Feasibility study for improving passenger rail services along the cross-border route Divačča-Buzet-Pula and intermodality improvement in Istria Region (HR)
2. ICT tools to improve mobility of passenger:
 - a. New ICTP booking service of DRT/Maas in Romagna Region (IT)
 - b. New ICT service for Maas Application (HR)
 - c. New IT tool for bike and rail in HR and neighbouring regions in SI & IT

Mr Dileo presented also the GRETA project (<https://www.cei.int/projects/greta>), offering solutions on how to decarbonise the so-called last mile of freight transport by piloting the use of zero-emission-vehicles (ZEV) like cargo bikes and re-organising urban spaces to improve their transit resilience through curb management strategies. Joint sustainable solutions in Central Europe will be implemented in the Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) of Maribor, Reggio Emilia, Verona, Poznan and Budapest and will be deployed to be financially, environmentally and socially sustainable and readily scaled up and transferred. The strategic and technological solutions will be placed in proximity to functional areas, make use of ZEV and cargo bikes, and will re-organise the urban space with the application of curb management. GRETA’s pilot actions aim to decarbonise the last mile deliveries and can be quickly deployed as pop-up measures in combination with already existent actions.

Conclusion: SG members are invited to follow up on the development of the Sustance project.

Item 7.b: Project “Danube Indeet”

Ms Astrid Heindel, University of Applied Sciences, Technology Centre for Energy, Bayern, Germany presented the Danube INDEET project with goal to facilitate the expansion and efficiency of renewable energy in the Danube region by exploring and disseminating effective sector coupling opportunities such as hydrogen and vehicle-to-grid (V2G) applications. Due to environmental factors as the daily cycle of solar radiation or the irregular nature of wind speeds, we do not have control over the production of renewable electricity, making it unpredictable, thus difficult to integrate with the steadily operated baseload power plants. Energy storage and conversion alternatives and new ecosystems utilizing fluctuating electricity, such as hydrogen production and V2G, increase the efficiency and environmental benefits of renewable energy sources. The technologies are available, but new concepts are required to connect them and create synergies. While public policies support the energy transition, municipalities and cities often need support with effective implementation. Danube Indeet will contribute to the resolution of these challenges by conducting legal and technical analyses, creating complex models based on data collected by partners, exploring economic and societal opportunities, drivers and barriers and ultimately taking up these results by proposing evidence-based policy recommendations and a strategical framework for the Danube Region.

Conclusion: Ms Heindel is invited to present project results at the SG PA1b once the Indeet project is finished.

Item 8: EP study: Regional connectivity through an adequate transport Infrastructure

Professor Eduardo Medeiros from Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal, Portugal presented his study on Regional connectivity through an adequate transport infrastructure that was made for the EP. EU Cohesion policy (ECP) ECP is still a vital policy instrument to finance transport infrastructure that improves regional accessibility, thereby contributing to supporting territorial cohesion processes. ECP contributed to the completion of the TEN-T network. However there is a need to increase transport infrastructure investment in rail (preferably high-speed) and waterways as well as sustainable public transport. A major shift towards smart, sustainable, cleaner and efficient transport infrastructure has yet to be done to reach the EU goals for greenhouse gas emissions reduction. Rural areas continue to lag behind in regional connectivity levels. A focus on improving cross-border (CB) and transnational transport connectivity should be realised. The Interreg-A programme provided an important contribution to mitigating persisting CB transport obstacles. However, this programme does not have the necessary financial means to solve all the CB transport-related obstacles by itself. In conclusion the ECP should maintain or increase its investment to continue the process of improving regional accessibility across the EU territory. At the transnational and CB level, ECP should increase its funding for the Interreg A and B programmes. By increasing support for the TEN-T network ECP should also reduce regional accessibility gaps between EU major and medium-sized cities.

Conclusion: SG member states are invited to further explore the possibilities of funding from the EU Cohesion funds into the transport infrastructure projects.

Item 9: Update on Danube Strategy Point (DSP) Activities in 2024

Ms. Katharina Lenz, DSP (Danube Strategy Point), Vienna, AT updated the members of the SG with the recent DSP developments. Within the DSP support for core stakeholders and in line with the EUSDR Governance Architecture paper, members with voting right are nominated with a mandate by EUSDR participating states National Coordinators (NCs). NCs are to inform the Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) in written about the nominations of new SG members and to keep the DSP informed within this process to maintain the contact lists. PACs update the NCs of the respective participating state and the DSP as soon as changes occur if communicated directly by the respective SG line ministries.

On 20 November 2023, the Austrian EUSDR Presidency and the Danube Strategy Point (DSP) organised a joint online working group meeting for the EUSDR National Coordinators (NCs) and Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) on the **EUSDR Governance Development**. The exchange provided a framework for an open discussion on ideas and challenges among the EUSDR core stakeholders that followed the talks of the revision of the EUSDR Governance Architecture Paper. Closer coordination and communication, together with a better understanding of the concrete roles and the relationships among the stakeholders, were considered key aspects more effective cooperation and for an improved implementation of the EUSDR. With the establishment of an EUSDR Governance Development Task Force, the Austrian EUSDR Presidency and the DSP are also incorporating the points discussed into their work programmes.

Ongoing is also an Open exchange on recent Developments in Danube Region, on the Current Topics and on Cross-thematic topics where concrete thematic cooperation is needed among Priority Areas. A collection of inputs from/exchange with colleagues and identification of urgent/currents topic(s) will be ongoing in the forthcoming months (2024). There is also collection of inputs based on the inputs collected for the Consolidated Input 2018 in the process of the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan

(2021). The online table³ overviews will also be discussed at the online 'Chat with the Presidency Format' for EUSDR core stakeholders. DSP is organising Team building for EUSDR core stakeholders & PAC/teams seminar on hybrid meetings. They are planned for Q2-Q4 2024 onsite (team building) and in hybrid (seminar) format.

Monitoring and reporting on the EUSDR implementation is scheduled for March / April 2024 covering the period 2022 – 2023 with the deadline of 19 April 2024. PAC reporting shall be realised online. Inputs provide the basis for several reports and follow-up activities, i.e.: 5th Commission report on the implementation of macro-regional strategies, EUSDR Implementation Report 2022-2023, Data for upcoming evaluations, Basis for decision-making, support for strategic coordination and for keeping an overview of the participation and achievements within the EUSDR, Enhanced grounds for more targeted stakeholder support from DSP, etc.

EUSDR Evaluation Plan 2023 – 2028 is developed and available on the EUSDR website. Process/Implementation Evaluation (2024/2025): Evaluation questions focus on the strategic dimension, governance, technical implementation and policy coordination, policy impact, funding, External evaluator: M&E Factory, Data collection from May 2024 onwards, Interim Report expected in September 2024, Draft Final Report in December 2024, Final Evaluation Report in March 2025. Policy Evaluation (2027/2028) will focus on policy impact and embedding/funding.

As regards Communication – Social media platforms are constantly updated. Videos & e-banners were produced (January 2024) to promote Flagships 2023 & relevant PAs. Social media campaign running promoting Flagships 2023 on social media channels managed by DSP (all videos uploaded on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/DanubeRegionStrategy>). Website - new service provider (2024), more exciting & user-friendly, related to the smart app, for improved content; new website launch: end of 2024. Information & brand-awareness materials is still to be elaborated & disseminated. DSP is to align communication activities more with the Austrian EUSDR PCY for more visibility.

A Capacity Building Need Assessment (CBNA) is currently ongoing in order to develop a CB framework for the EUSDR core stakeholders in respect to their roles, responsibilities and collaboration relationships. In the first phase data will be collected for a capacity building analysis using three methodological tools: exploratory interviews – conducted at the beginning of March 2024; focus groups – to be held in the first two weeks of April 2024 and questionnaires - expected to be sent to the stakeholders in April 2024. In the second phase data will be analysed for a capacity building assessment and a framework developed for improving capacity building through tailored trainings (May 2024). Based on the CBNA, five training sessions will be provided (1/year) - first training session will be organised in 2024 (Q3/Q4).

For the Danube Youth Council long term implementation, youth involvement as a horizontal priority in the 2023-2028 PAC projects. The endorsed financing concept foresees that the on-site participation of min. 1 selected DYC member in 1 SG meeting per PA per year shall be funded via the PAC budgets (travel & accomm. costs for 1 person per year). Above that: Online participation of DYC-members in SG meetings. In those cases where no budget for youth activities was foreseen at the time of the elaboration of the PAC projects, it is possible to shift budget or add additional budget! Online consultation with DRP was held on 8 March 2024 to clarify open questions – report was sent to all PACs.

3

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1fUDMrfCXVhZniPltxzXRkgWE19hGKynKgObifeAKYcU/edit?pli=1#gid=962803339>

In the fourth coming activities DSP underlined PAC reporting 14.03.-19.04.2024, the Process/Implementation Evaluation 2024/2025 (external contractor M&E), Capacity Building Need Assessment (CBNA) at the level of EUSDR core stakeholders Q1-Q2, Further targeted support by DSP to the involvement of DYC in PAs is ongoing and DYC Task Force meeting on DYON in Q2. Finally the update of the EUSDR and PA websites will be done by the end of 2024 Q4. Further details on the EUSDR events can be found on <https://danube-region.eu/communication/events/> & the EUSDR Calendar⁴ of events.

Conclusion. SG members are invited to follow up on the DSP activities.

Item 10 – AOB

Mr Žepič mentioned the E-aviation: EP report on electric aviation – a solution for short and mid-range flights. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0014_EN.html

The development of electric and hybrid aircraft means a brand new body of global rules and standards related, among other things, to certification methods, recharging, refilling, and maintenance.

Conclusion: The next SG meeting will be organised in September 2024 in Belgrade, Serbia.

Minutes drafted by:

Špela Cimerman

Place, Date

Ljubljana, 9th April 2024

Chair:

Mr Franc Žepič, PAC1b team member (Slovenia)

and

Ms Špela Cimerman PAC1b (Slovenia)

Annex:

- List of participants at the Ad Hoc Group on PA1B projects

⁴ https://danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024-04-10_EUSDR-Meetings-under-AT-EUSDR-PCY-1.xlsx

List of participants

AD HOC Working Group on PA1b Projects

List of participants: AT, BA, CZ, HU, MNE, SRB, SI, UA (8) and DG REGIO, DSP

Non-participating: BG, HR, DE, MD, RO, SK (6)

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