

**EUSDR Priority area 1b:**

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

## MINUTES of the 28<sup>th</sup> STEERING GROUP meeting

Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023; 9.00 – 12.30 (CET)

Venue: online (tool Zoom)

**Participants:** AT, BG, CZ, DE, HU, SRB, SI, UA (8) and DG REGIO, DG MOVE, DSP, DRP

**Non-participating / Excused:** BA, MD, ME, RO, SK, UA (6)

**Chairman:** Mr. Franc Žepič, PAC (Slovenia)

**Co-chairman:** Mr. Jovko Jačimović, PAC (Serbia)

### Item 1: Welcome, Introductory words and Tour de Table

The Chairman, Mr. Žepič, EUSDR PA 1b Coordinator welcomed the participants of the 28th SG meeting. In his introductory words he focused on the fact that participation on the 27<sup>th</sup> SG that was held in person in Ljubljana was very poor, while contrary the topics presented and discussed (e.g. transport poverty, linking space and transport) were very interesting and important for the EU transport policy, however very much also for enhanced transport, connectivity and mobility in the Danube macro-region.

Then he invited participants to present themselves in tour de table.

### Item 2: Approval of the agenda of the 28<sup>th</sup> SG meeting and the minutes of the 27<sup>th</sup> SG meeting

The Chairman presented the agenda and summarised the minutes of the previous 27th SG meeting which was interesting in terms of content but poor in attendance according to him. The participants had no objections to the adoption of the minutes, however no quorum was reached.

*Conclusion: The Agenda for the 28<sup>th</sup> meeting and the Minutes of the 27<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved without comments.*

### Item 3: Past and upcoming events – information

Majority of the past events were presented by Mr. Rovšnik (MFEA, SI) representing the former Slovenian presidency to EUSDR (November 2022 – October 2023). Meeting participants were briefly informed of the following events related (also) to the macro-region strategies:

- a) NCs / PACs meeting, Portorož, Slovenia (18-19 September 2023)  
The NC/PAC meeting was held in September 2023, and was the main preparation for the Annual forum in the following month. It reflected a fruitful discussion on the PAs and on the consultation process on the empowerment of the governance in EUSDR and improvement of EUSDR stakeholder involvement, the later was taken over also by the AT presidency.
- b) MRS week, Izola, Slovenia (19-22 September 2023)  
Within the Mediterranean and EU MRS week in September 2023 on the Slovenian coast a discussion on the circular economy was held, including with the Interact program workshop assessing the impact of MRS.
- c) 12th EUSDR Annual Forum, Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia (24-25 October)  
The 12th EUSDR annual forum was the most important event of the SI Presidency, organised in October 2023. It was the first fully live forum after the pandemic, attracting approximately 400 participants with 10 panels and 6 side events organised. The forum had a diverse and rich programme, with a high level attendance. The ministerial level endorsed a Joint Statement emphasizing a strong role of the EUSDR support in the enlargement process, and other key topics of the SI Presidency priorities including the panel on transport that addressed large infrastructure

projects and their impact on better connectivity and sustainable modes of transport in the Danube region. There was also a strong emphasis on the role of youth.

- d) Joint event EUSPA-PA1a-PA1b on Linking Space and Transport (planned in Vienna, June 2024)  
For the upcoming events the Chairman (Mr. Žepič) mentioned that a Joint event organised by the EU Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA), EUSDR PA1a and PA1b is planned in Vienna, probably in June 2024. The aim is to bring closer to the Danube region transport stakeholders the space technologies that contribute to improved, sustainable and safe transport. Preparations for the event have already started. The venue is fixed, while the date is still under consideration.
- e) Connecting Europe Days 2024; 2-5 April 2024, Brussels:  
The Chairman then said that the main EU transport event in 2024 i.e. the Connecting Europe Days ([https://transport.ec.europa.eu/connectingeuropedays\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/connectingeuropedays_en)) will be organised by DG MOVE from 2 – 5 April 2024 in Brussels. Topics related to the future of rail freight, modal shift modal shift and green freight in the European railway network, boosting rail freight and passenger traffic, connecting the TEN-T network and urban mobility, connecting Europe by air, data driven mobility and the role of artificial Intelligence, future of infrastructure funding and financing are only a few subjects to be discussed. The last day will be dedicated to the European Transport Corridors (ETC), out of which the ETC meeting on Western Balkans – Eastern Mediterranean is expected to be an interested and valuable event.

*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 event organised by the European Commission, DG MOVE.*

#### **Item 4: Macro-regional Strategies: Update from the European Commission**

Mr. Johan Magnusson, DG REGIO, The European Commission presented the update from the EC (DG REGIO). Among other interesting information he focused on the EU MRS week to be held from 12 to 13 June 2024 (lunch to lunch) at the conference centre called the Egg, a venue located centrally in Brussels. Instead of a panel form, the event is to be more interactive by a number of workshops planned. The MRS conference will be followed by a high level group and the trio Presidency meeting on 15 June 2024. The EC is to issue also the Biannual report on the implementation of the four EU MRS that should be ready in December 2024. In case of EUSDR, the EC is welcoming the input from the EUSDR stakeholders by spring 2024. EC has already started the reflection process on cohesion policy post-2027 which will continue in the coming year.

*Conclusion: SG members are invited to regularly follow the European Commission activities related to the MRS.*

#### **Item 5: EUSDR Presidency – presentation of the AT programme**

Mr. Roland Arbter, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management, Austria presented the programme of the AT presidency to the EUSDR. Austria took over the EUSDR presidency from Slovenia at the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum in the end of October 2023. The AT Presidency will last 14 months with the core task to ensure the continuity of the EUSDR working structures. It will be politically quite challenging year (EU & AT elections, reporting MRS period). The first NC/PAC meeting is planned on 29-30 January 2024 in Vienna, and the 13th Annual forum 20-21 June 2024 also in Vienna. AT presidency will build upon the achievements of the SI Presidency, further developing the EUSDR governance mechanisms and stimulating the EUSDR related thematic events and cross priority areas. A discussion on the future perspectives of cooperation in the Danube Region will be launched as an input into the post-2027 debate about relevant EU frameworks or cooperation. The Presidency Slogan is “Shaping transformation and creating opportunities: A prosperous, resilient and secure Danube Region.” Thematic priorities are thus stability, security, a clear European perspective, innovation, skills and business opportunities and enhancing ecosystem water and green transition management. Cross-

cutting themes remain youth, civil society and regional and local stakeholders. Governance objectives as focussed at strengthening political commitment and EUSDR ownership. The AT Presidency calls to PACs to contribute in terms of substance to the programme of the Annual forum, after which a PAC seminar will be organised in September, followed by another NC/PAC meeting in the end of 2024.

*Conclusion: SG members are invited to attend the 13<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual forum to be held in Vienna.*

#### **Item 6: Update on Danube Strategy Point (DSP) Activities in 2023**

Ms. Katharina Lenz presented the DSP support frame (EUSDR stakeholders, embedding/funding, monitoring/evaluation, communication, capacity building and youth). The two RoPs, for NCs and PACs, were updated under the SI EUSDR Presidency, so was the EUSDR Governance Architecture Paper. They are available on the EUSDR website (<https://danube-region.eu/about/key-documents/>). Governance Development Task Force that is treating topics relevant to all the stakeholders was also established. DSP offers also capacity building and support for the core stakeholders. Embedding / Funding post-2027 process will be discussed in an Interact Working Group (cross MRS) under the AT EUSDR Presidency in cooperation with DG REGIO. Monitoring the outcomes of the embedding process, DSP will use the various embedding tools in the programming to the implementation phase. In monitoring and evaluation process, PAC reporting (covering the period 2022-2023) online is expected in April 2024. The EUSDR evaluation plan 2023-2028 was published on the EUSDR website (<https://danube-region.eu/about/key-documents/>). PACs (in coordination with their SGs) will also receive a questionnaire for the Process/Implementation Evaluation 2024/2025 in early summer 2024. In the Danube Strategy Flagships there are 28 Flagships (9 new in 2023 and 19 updated) available on the EUSDR website (<https://danube-region.eu/projects-and-funding/eusdr-strategic-projects/>). Communication – a video for PA 1b was produced in the autumn 2023 and will be finalised in January 2024. EUSDR Website: new service provider is to be selected in early 2024 and new and more user friendly website should be launched by the end of 2024. DSP will work on the capacity building needs assessment in the early 2024, when questionnaires will be circulated to NCs, SGs and PACs. Six (6) sessions will be organised on the basis of the needs identified in the questionnaires. NYC involvement in the PA should be beneficial to both sides. It is already possible to finance NYC member participation in one (1) SG meeting per PA per year. The establishment of Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON) is an open process that will continue during the AT EUSDR Presidency.

*Conclusion: SG members are invited to think and propose flagship projects.*

#### **Item 7: Update on DRP calls 2023 and 2024**

Ms. Johannes Gabriel, DRP (Danube Region Programme) presented the ongoing funding opportunities – 2nd call for proposals of SMF is opened 2/11/2023 - 29/3/2024 as a one-step procedure. Estimated starting date of the projects is January / February 2025. Duration of the projects cannot exceed 36 months. DRP covers the entire territory of Ukraine (UA) but the UA partners cannot be the lead partners (LP) in the 2nd call. SMF relevant for the PA 1b is a tool for kick-starting development of the strategic projects and large-scale initiatives for the EUSDR – to be later financed by another financing instrument. All SMF projects have to be in line with the EUSDR Action Plan (AP) and must clearly address at least one Priority Area (PA). The overall available budget is 3,6M€. Maximum budget per PA is 300,000 € Interreg Funds. Co-financing rate is 20%. Projects with compulsory outputs (state of play report, main project work plan and report on funding possibilities) can apply for 50.000 €. Projects with additional optional output (additional preparatory activities) can apply for up to 100.000€. The SMF call for proposals is organised in one-step procedure, where the applicants submit an application package with a fully developed Application Form (AF). The duration of projects cannot exceed 12 months. The estimating starting date of the projects is May 2024. PACs are assessing the relevance of the proposal with the two questions: (1) relevance of the project theme to the EUSDR AP and PA, (2) concrete challenges to be tackled are clearly described and relevant to the PA and PA. Timeframe of the assessment will consider the number of the SMF projects submitted as well as the internal

procedures of the PAs. The Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat (MA/JS) is assessing the rest of the assessment questions. MA/JS will organise webinars for interested LA explaining the rules of the scheme. PACs can organise thematic webinars as well, where MA/ JS can contribute. Strong coordination between PACs and MA/JS is necessary. PACs are kindly requested to provide a schedule for their planned events. Contact for applicants in PA1b EUSDR is Mr Horst Schindler and Mr Johannes Gabriel in general.

*Conclusion: SG members are invited to use SMF opportunity for projects.*

### **Item 8: The EU transport policy: Greening Freight Transport Package**

The Chairman welcomed Ms. Maria Koidu, DG MOVE, The European Commission who joined the meeting via video.

Ms Koidu, presented the Greening Freight Package delivering on the European Green Deal with three objectives: (1) Sustainable mobility (shift to zero emission – emission mobility) with 90% reduction in transport emissions, all transport modes are more sustainable and rights incentives are provided for sustainable choices. (2) Smart mobility (seamless, safe and efficient connectivity) with seamless multimodal transport, digitalisation and paperless freight transport. (3) Resilient mobility (a more resilient single European transport area, for inclusive connectivity) with deepening and enforcing the internal market, making our systems crisis proof, building safety, affordability and accessibility. The Greening of Freight Communication was adopted in July 2023. It focusses on improving sustainability and operational efficiency of the European freight transport – both at the modal and the system level. It is not a stand – alone package as it builds on initiatives already existent (Fit for 55, Efficient and Green Mobility Package, ...) and the ones still to come. It is also the Chapeau Communication that joins:

- a) Rail Capacity Regulation brings additional capacity thanks to better management processes. Operations can request and receive capacity at any time based on the market needs. Transparency and certainty for operators about capacity supports investments. Coordination between IMs supports new cross-border freight and passenger services, including night trains. Less disruptions due to infrastructure works (maintenance, renewal, and upgrade). Regular performance review and powerful IT tools support improvements and service quality. However the pure non-road transport has a limited reach as the terminals and the ports are only in certain places and in order to reach the final clients one always needs that road leg, Consequently it is the multi modal transport that is only competing with the road transport
- b) Weights and Dimensions Directive in the road sector has three different aims. (1) two types of decarbonisation measures with making Zero emission vehicles (ZEV) more attractive - allowing higher weights and longer lengths by removing barriers to ZEV uptake + grant more payload. It supports intermodal transport (4t / 30 cm height for containers and semi-trailers as the later are a very important entry market in the sense that operators entering the intermodal market often do not want to invest in containers). (2) the harmonisation part of the Directive brings a European Modular System between allowing member states (MS) in case both MS allow either modular system or heavier weight then they can cross borders for the 44-t HDV until 2035. Loaded lengths of vehicle transporters are also harmonised as well as procedures and requirements for indivisible loads. (3) since - It stipulates minimum level of controls and minimum deployment of automated detection systems. MS also encourage to use Intelligent Access policy.
- c) CountEmissionEU Directive is a brand new initiative with a harmonised framework for calculating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of transport services. It works on a binding opt-in principle (only those that calculate and disclose GHG emissions data of transport services). The new methodology is based on EN ISO 14083 as the method for calculating GHG emissions of transport services. It has rules on harmonised metrics for GHG emissions data disclosed on the market. It established a Verification of GHG emissions data and calculation processes for large companies (MSEs exempted). It stipulates the use of certified 3rd party calculation tools. The input data treatment: priority for primary data and defaults values databases will be managed by the



- European Environmental Agency. It also has rules on communication and transparency. This is a new methodology that applies in multimodal door-to-door transport chain.
- d) Amendment of the Combined Transport Directive was adopted in November 2023 for the third time. The aim is reducing the externalities (costs are based on km) of the transport sector. It is not a regulative Directive as it does not obliges the industry to use it. The scope is extended to all intermodal operation in the EU, including national operations to ensure economies of scale. The new definition is based on external cost savings. The “combined transport” operations that save 40% of external costs are eligible for dedicated support. It provides a regulatory support at the EU level with new exemption from driving bans. On the support measure side, the existing measures remain untouched. Obligation on terminals to publish information about available services and facilities. Information that is important for the shippers before they are starting the operation. Target for MS to reduce combined transport price by 10% in 7,5 years and obligation to establish a national policy framework to achieve this target. It will be up to MS which measures to use in order to achieve this target. They will have to publish their national plans and inform the Commission. There will be a central gateway for information to all MS measures and regular market reports, provided by the Commission. The review clause is also part of the Directive. Competition rules will continue to apply for intermodal transport.
  - e) The four proposals are now with the co-legislators. Legislative process will be lengthened due to the EP elections as there will be no trilogue. Adoption is not expected before 2025. Proper implementation of the proposed measures is planned for 2028.

*Conclusion: SG members are invited to get familiar with the presented dossiers.*

#### **Item 9: Automotive Law (basic overview of EU law, protection of competition, self-driving cars, intellectual property / data protection and cybersecurity**

Ms. Burzyková from the Danube Youth Council (DYC) presented Self driving cars that she studied at the Summer ELSA law school on automotive law. For the on-road vehicles there are six levels of automation: (0) - no automation, driver has complete control of the vehicle and the system does not interfere with driving (eg. Traditional cars); (1) - Driver assistance, where the driver is control of the vehicle, but the system can change the speed and direction of steering of the vehicle (eg. the lane keeping system); (2) - partial automation - the driver must be able to correct the vehicle if corrections are required, but no longer has control of the vehicle’s speed and steering (eg. Parking assistance or the Tesla autopilot features). For the first three levels of automation (0-1-2) the driver must not be distracted. At the level (3) - conditional automation – the system has control of some vehicle functions (speed, steering and monitoring), (4) - high automation, the system has complete control of the vehicle and the human presence is no longer necessary but its applications are limited to specific conditions-, (5) - full automation – person on board is equal to cargo (there are currently no guided systems on this level). The centre of automotive law is to find a rational balance between the positive and negative impacts and between primary accident cost avoidance (measures taken to prevent/minimize the occurrence of an accident, they are implemented before an accident occurs, aiming to reduce the likelihood of injuries, damages or other negative consequences) and secondary accident cost avoidance (actions taken after an accident occurred, aiming to mitigate the impact of the accident including related medical expenses, property damage legal liabilities, ...). The cost of accidents is well defined in a book about their legal and economic analysis by Guido Calabres who is trying to find the balance between the positive and negative impacts of accidents. He says that there is a certain point at which the worth of accidents outweighs the cost of the accidents. We cannot prohibit all accident prone activities, because it would cost the society more than the accident prevention. Also safety has several layers (unpredictable unsafety, accepted unsafety, potential

enhancement of safety through self-responsibility and a reasonable safety. In case of accident with regard to the self-driving cars with different level of automation, the human error will not be so prominent in the future. Currently most of liability in car accidents lies on the driver (with the human error being the most prominent cause of the accident). In the EU a compulsory insurance is paid to the victims. We have also the producer's liability, who has the product liability, however these are minimum legal standards with the burden remaining mainly on the driver. In the contexts of self-driving cars, putting the liability on the driver would not be such a great idea, as /is not driving the car. On the other hand, putting liability on the producer, would also not be desirable. The dilemma is probable should be solved in shifting the legal perspective from liability of fault to an automatic compensation. The future of compensations should be in a fund that compensates the liability and would reasonably spread the cost and would help to solve the liability dilemma.

*Conclusion: Ms Burzyková is invited to contribute to the PA1b also in future and she is welcome to present other legal initiatives.*

#### **Item 10: Look ahead: PA1b in the next 6-year period and Work programme 2024**

The Chairman presented the new 6-year subsidy contract that support coordination activities of PA coordinators and informed participants of the tasks to be carried out by PA1b in the next 6-year period. The presentation was similar as the one at 27<sup>th</sup> SG meeting. The Chairman started by saying that in the past 12 years PA 1b had ups and downs. Until corona virus pandemic the meetings were always held in person. During the pandemic the meetings shifted to the online mode. After the pandemic the 27<sup>th</sup> meeting was poor in personal participation. After the current online meeting, Mr. Žepič hopes that the next 29<sup>th</sup> meeting will be held in person. Co-ordination of the PA 1b should also improve in the near future (lack of staffing, election in Slovenia and Serbia and other issues hindered work in 2023). Mr Žepič presented the project of the subsidy contract on the PA1b support of the EUSDR governance. The 6-year project is composed of 5 work packages and number of activities, among others:

- Coordination within PA1b and cooperation among EUSDR Pas (e.g. PA1a, PA2, PA11),
- Facilitating planned, ongoing and future projects, including Interreg transport related projects,
- Factsheet report on funding opportunities for projects (EUSDR PA1b transport projects),
- To Facilitate the Embedding of the EUSDR into EU-funded Programmes PA1b shall start cooperation with Cohesion Policy Programmes ESIF/IPA/NDICI Programme Authorities and also explore and exploit the funding opportunities of the EC centrally managed programmes.
- A Roadmap for green mobility in the Danube region should be drafted. A Publication on the Transport infrastructure in the Danube Region – Air links is the only missing one, since publication on road and rail links were carried out in past. The tender has been prepared by the Serbian PAC and is only awaiting confirmation from superiors.
- PA1b has prepared the long list of projects back in 2012. The List of PA1b projects needs regular updating or even better a completely new list should be prepared in 2024. PA1b flagship projects (<https://danube-region.eu/projects-and-funding/eusdr-strategic-projects/>) need input by the SG members in order to make update for flagship projects 2025.

Work programme for 2024: at least three (1 online and 2 in person) SG meetings should be organised, Danube Region Transport days conference and/or workshop/seminar. Action Plan for strengthening SG capacities and performance should be elaborated. List of programme authorities with contacts should be made. A ministerial meeting is foreseen in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2024. However the Chairman stressed that the meeting can only be organized with the substantial support of the SG members. In the discussion HU, CZ and DE agreed that the SG meeting of PA1b should go back to personal meetings. CZ suggested to merge SG meetings with other events force to the budget restriction. UA would have logistical and budget restraints to join in person, a hybrid meeting would be possible for their attendance.

*Conclusion: SG members are asked to contribute to the implementation of the 6-year EUSDR PA1b programme activities and work programme 2024. Initial tasks are: a) each SG member will prepare the list of 3 to 5 projects with added value for the macro-region to be put on common list and b) SG members will inform PACs of their national MA (name, address and contact).*

**Item 11: Any other business (AOB): Planning 29th PA1b SG meeting**

The Chairman, Mr Žepič proposed that the next SG meeting should be organised in person in Belgrade next year most probably March or late April 2024. The date will of course depend on PAC Serbia, co-coordinator of PA1b.

There were no other comments.

The Chairman thanked all for participation for taking part at the meeting.

The meeting, that started at 9.00 and was closed at 12.35 (CET).

Place, Date  
Ljubljana, 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Chairman:  
Mr Franc Žepič, for PAC1b (Slovenia)

**Annex:**

- List of participants at 28<sup>th</sup> PA1b SG

## List of participants

### 28<sup>th</sup> PA1b SG Meeting

**List of participants: AT, BG, CZ, DE, HU, SRB, SI, UA (8) and DG REGIO, DG MOVE, DSP, DRP**  
Non-participating: BA, CZ, MD, ME, RO, SK (6)

#### Participants:

1. Mr. Roland Arbter, [roland.arbter@bml.gv.at](mailto:roland.arbter@bml.gv.at), Austria
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