



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

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## **Driving the EU's Danube Strategy Forward**

*Check Against Delivery*  
*Seul le texte prononcé fait foi*  
*Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, Bucharest  
**28 October 2013**

Prime Minister, Ministers, Colleagues and friends

It is a great honour for me to welcome you to the second Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in Bucharest in this spectacular venue.

I would like to thank Romania for hosting and co-organising this conference and also for its hospitality. As one of the initiators of the Danube Strategy, Romania has played a very prominent role and is very actively involved as Coordinator in 3 Priority Areas. We are very grateful for your dedication and count on your continued support and commitment.

There are 800 of us gathered here in Bucharest to celebrate the success of our young macro-region. I would like in particular to welcome the representatives here today from those members of the region who are not, or not yet, EU members. Your participation is essential to this project, and we are glad to have you working with us.

I said we are celebrating a success. Our report published earlier this year showed that the Strategy IS already bringing results. 400 projects have already been channelled through the Priority Area Co-ordinators, worth 49 billion euro

Take Priority Area 11 "Security" - which has successfully translated the conclusions of their ministerial conference on police cooperation along the Danube into concrete action! The newly established cooperation platform Danube River Forum will contribute to reducing crime by enforcing police cooperation along the river. Exchange of information is key to fighting crime successfully, in particular when it comes to cooperation between different national authorities. Co-operating cross-border under the Danube strategy is making a real difference.

And the Danube Strategy achievements are not just about helping people in this region. The Danube strategy can also contribute more broadly to the success of the European Union itself. Take energy as just one example: To achieve our low-carbon economy goals, Europe needs to develop a low-carbon, sustainable economy. That means making the most of our renewable energy potential, and boosting energy efficiency. And this region is showing the way with the Danube Smart Grid concept, the Danube Region Geothermal and Biomass initiatives and the Danube Region Energy Efficiency Concept for Public Buildings. All macro-regional initiatives, all contributions to Europe-wide success.

I will be honest: we are achieving more, and more quickly, than I personally dared to hope. BUT that is not a reason to be complacent.

I think you all know that the navigability of the river allied to protection of the environment, is very close to my heart. Again this year, a lack of waterway maintenance led to a de-facto standstill on the river. As a consequence, logistics chains were interrupted, and there were heavy financial losses for companies involved. And this in a field where nearly all Danube Transport Ministers signed a Declaration on effective waterway infrastructure maintenance only last year.

Clearly, we need to ensure that the agreed objectives are followed up and are translated into action. But more than this, as our working relationships mature, we need to develop better leadership. The Commission is there, will continue to be there, to facilitate and provide strategic coordination. But this has always been a bottom-up initiative, and we need to see more ownership by the region itself with more effective ways to take decisions and to act effectively together.

I. As Europe looks beyond the crisis, the Danube region should, and I believe it will, reinforce efforts to improve its competitiveness, to invest in innovation and skills and reduce administrative burdens. The Commission can help, by supporting the mainstreaming of Danube objectives in the current programming for the next financial period. Member States must take into account the Danube Strategy as they plan the next generation of regional policy programmes. We have already seen some good examples in Partnership Agreements. Now we need to ensure that the Operational Programmes for 2014-20 take the Danube Strategy fully on board.

AND looking further ahead, it is for the regions and states of the Danube to reflect together on what is needed in the longer term. The European Structural and Investment Funds will provide financing, but to ensure their most effective use, you need to coordinate your planning and your investments. The structures are there to begin this process, but as our evaluation of the Macro regional strategies this summer suggested, there are questions still to answer about how these pioneering initiatives should ultimately be led.

I do not have all the answers for you here today. We have proposed a review, and we will be asking you to contribute to a reflection process on these governance issues in the run up to the 2014 Forum in June.

What I do know, is that the heart of the issue is commitment. Commitment means active participation, following up the agreed targets and translating common strategic objectives into action. It means the active involvement of all members of the strategy, and of all parts of their governments.

Above all it means travelling as drivers not as passengers. The Commission can help you maintain the vehicle – but you have to be at the front of the bus steering. This means of course the Priority Area Coordinators and the National Contact Points, who are doing excellent work. But it means that their political leaders, too, need to stay fully engaged in deciding the way forward.

The Danube Strategy has made an excellent start. But it will not continue to deliver if it goes on autopilot, or if it is assumed that the European Commission will do all the heavy lifting.

This Forum is an opportunity to think about the future. Get involved, not only in the plenary sessions, but in the workshops, and the side events! We need to hear your views and we need every single person here, playing their part in building on the successes we have already achieved.