

VIII Meeting of the Steering Group 27-28 November 2014, Sofia

MINUTES

Participants:

The Steering Group members of the following countries were present: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Romania and the Slovak Republic.

The following institutions were represented: European Commission, EUROPOL, Regional Cooperation Council, Hanns Seidel Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Foundation; Representatives from PA 1a (EUSDR), represented by viadonau and PA “Crime” (EUSBSR) Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, and Ukraine did not send representatives.

Under the Bulgarian Chairmanship, the VIII meeting of the PA 11 Steering Group was aimed to focus at progress in the project implementation. Special emphasis was put on the horizontal cooperation.

1. Opening of the meeting

Ms. Snezhina Marinova, Priority Area Coordinator from the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior - the main focus of the VIII Steering Group is the progress of the implementation of on-going and pipeline projects. Last year marked a period of accumulated interest in the development of projects within PA 11, 35 project proposals are included in the Register of Project proposals kept by the Coordination Bureau. PA 11 submitted 3 project proposals under the TAF-DRP and 4 – under the START. The initiative of countries that send project proposals for the first time is seen as a promising sign. Strengthening of the cooperation with the two foundations – Hanns Seidel and Konrad Adenauer was outlined. Linking the different PAs within the Danube Strategy is a key challenge at macro-regional level. Driven by the ambition to continually improve our work, during today's meeting the activities foreseen in PA 11 agenda for 2015 will be outlined.

Ms. Martina Niehaus, representative of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) congratulated the new PAC from Bulgaria and expressed satisfaction from the joint work in PA 11. Ms. Niehaus emphasized on the importance of the project implementation within PA 11.

Ms. Milena Thaller, representative of the Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior, for Building and Transport (StMI) joined the congratulations to the new PAC from Bulgaria. Emphasize was put on the traditionally good cooperation between PA 11 and the EC; the broad participation of the EUSDR countries and the respective institutions and organizations was also noted.

2. Key-Note Speech

Mr. Marco Onida (Coordinator of the EUSDR team in DG Regio, EC) pointed out the good work done by PA 11. He presented updated information on the current EUSDR issues. Regarding the governance of the EUSDR - following the III EUSDR Annual Forum and the adopted Ministerial Statement, a decision was taken to set up a coordination/implementation body, called Danube Strategy Point (DSP). This new element of the governance of the Strategy will be hosted by the Permanent Representation of Baden-Württemberg in Brussels. The DSP will be in charge

of a number of tasks, in particular facilitation of implementation of the Strategy, the monitoring, the assessment and the communication among others. During the period 2015-2016 the EC will finance the DSP, after 2017 the financing will be provided by the Danube Transnational Program (TDP).

The Technical Assistance Grant (being the essential financial source for the PACs works) will be renewed for 2015/2016; less funds will be available (max. 120 000 Euro per PA). START call for project proposals was great success; currently more funds are provided to select more projects (incl. moving funds from TAF to START). The TDP (first programme with geographical scope overlapping exactly the territory of the Strategy) is to become “the financial arm” of the EUSDR as regards support to the PACs;

The scope of the IV Annual Forum will be on projects (which corresponds with the focus of today meeting).

The brief feedback on the PA 11 III Progress Report is very positive (detailed information was passed to the PACs).

The cooperation between Priority Area 11 and DG for Regional and Urban Policy will continue to be fruitful and constructive.

3. On-going activities within PA 11 - current state of play of the project implementation and forthcoming activities

3.1 DARIF (flagship project within PA 11)

In presenting the current state of play of the DARIF project implementation, Hungary informed that the project is already over its midterm; by the end of November 2014 three joint operations were already carried out (in April, July and November 2014) and were coordinated from the temporary coordination centre in Mohács with the involvement of liaison officer in 10 EUSDR countries (responsible for gathering and exchanging information and coordinating the operations). The countries prepared their own National Plans (within the framework of the Operational Plan) based on needs, demands, risk analyses, available resources and chosen objectives. Various checks (involving search in certain data basis) were conducted during the operations (highest number in July operation due to the tourist season). The results of the operations were evaluated by the coordinators and by the training expert group. The joint operations are perceived as successful and useful by the participants.

After the successful performance of the 2nd and the 3rd joint operation, next steps planned - concern the 2nd technical workshop is to be held at the end of January 2015. The final conference will take place in April 2015.

Europol pointed that the DARIF project is highly valued because of its operational relevant aspects. Europol observes an increasing number of understanding of the importance of information exchange at international level; more checks were done in Europol data bases; the experts get aware how they can use these important tools; the possibilities for further improvement are seen related to the standard operating tool SIENA to be extended in the coordination centre in Mohács for the purposes of future operations. The actual data sets exchanged during the 3 operations could be rechecked from the strategic aspects.

Romania pointed their strong involvement in DARIF project; The Black Sea Cooperation Forum (Bourgas) could be a source for further ideas and actions for follow-up.

Hungary informed that they would like to continue the project by creating permanent Coordination centre in Mohács, organizing more joint operations, etc.; the follow-up is related to the recommendations in the final conference of the project.

3.2 Cooperation Southeast Danube Region

The Bavarian project was launched in January 2014. The project is grounded on the work of the WG South East for Combating Drug Trafficking for mutual exchange of information and experience in the fight against drug trafficking and the coordinated joint actions on the South Eastern route. The traditional meeting of the Working Group was held in September 2014 in Austria with strong presence of the representatives from EUSDR countries. During the workshop the problems and possibilities for international cooperation in the field of combatting drug smuggling were discussed.

The next steps planned are related to a trans-border exercise for control delivery of drugs planned to take place in May 2015. It will involve Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Austria, the Czech Republic and Germany. The exercise would be presented to the press and would be followed by debriefing in Hungary. The second conference of the project will be organized in the Czech Republic in the autumn 2015.

3.3 Cooperation in the area of booby-trap explosive systems and disposal of discarded ammunition

The Czech Republic informed that two meetings with the consultants (Metis Vienna consultation company) were held (July and October 2014). During the first meeting with the consultants it was agreed that the project budget and the project documentation would be developed. Initial ideas for funding were discussed. The second meeting was held together with the other project partners (the Slovak Republic and Hungary) and was focused on identifying the suitable funds. The content of the project was discussed and it was divided into 2 independent parts – the first is targeted to improvised explosive systems and the second one – at ammunition. Both areas will be implemented independently in duration of 4 years. Three financial programs are identified as suitable for financing the project - the Danube Transnational Program, Union Civil Protection Mechanism and Internal Security Fund.

Next steps planned - approval of the project at national level in each of the partner countries and the observance of the deadlines of the calls under the identified financial instruments.

3.4 Combating corruption in cooperation with Danube region states

The Moldovian project proposal was approved for financing under the TAF-DRP instrument. The project is considered to contribute to key objective “Promoting the Rule of Law” by promoting cooperation in the anti-corruption field developing the instruments for prevention and counteraction of corruption in the countries from the Danube Region, in compliance with the EU policy. Bulgaria and Romania are project partners, further partners are also considered.

Moldova informed about two meetings with the consultants (Metis Vienna consultation company) dedicated on elaborating Activity plan and discussing the essential elements of the project proposal, as well as the funding scheme and the possible work packages. Essential element of the consultancy process was the understanding of main elements to set up an EU project and the Guidelines on EU grant management. The main financial sources identified were the Danube Transnational Program; ENI - Cross-Border “Romania-Republic of Moldova” 2014-2020, ENI CBC Black Sea Basin Programme 2014-2020; Eastern Partnership Integrated Border Management and HORIZON 2020.

Next steps planned - searching for appropriate project partners constitutes one of the central pre-conditions for a funding from the “Danube Transnational Programme 2014 - 2020”. The work programme and the related budget need to be elaborated collectively from the involved partners till the end of 2014 and in the first months of 2015.

3.4 Strengthening the naval transport protection capacities of Romanian Gendarmerie

The Romanian project is considered to contribute to PA 11 objectives by enhancing the operational protection capacity for the naval transport of hazardous products on the Danube river. The security of the naval transports of hazardous products represents a serious issue and it must be considered a priority for the EUSDR. It is very important for all key players in the area to cooperate together in order to ensure the security of the hazardous transports and to prevent radiological accidents, accidental marine pollution or terrorist attacks. The possible financial sources identified by the consultant (Metis Vienna consultation company) are ETC Danube programme, ETC Bulgaria-Romania Programme, ERDF Romania, Internal Security Fund - Police (ISF-Police) and Nuclear Safety Co-operation Instrument (NSCI).

Next steps planned – Romania will approach possible international partners (Ukraine, Bulgaria, Serbia). The consultancy process is terminating at the end of 2014.

3.5 e-ID Symposium (action within key objective 3 - Security required for individual movements in the world wide web)

The security required for individual movements in the world wide web (e-ID) set the pattern for defining the conditions which will ensure the ID security in the cyber area on a sustainable basis. At the initiative of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, the EUSDR countries will be invited to exchange experience and best practices regarding ID security in the worldwide web. There are on-going expert talks between experts from the BMI and the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior on the conditions needed to be defined in order to ensure the security in the cyber area and as a necessary base for combatting Internet crimes and thefts.

Next steps planned - The e-ID symposium is planned to be held in 2015.

3.6 Workshop/Tutorial: Best-Practice on Border-/Customs controls on the Danube

The involvement of the customs authorities is one of the aims within PA 11 in order to achieve better horizontal cooperation. The aim of such cooperation will be to achieve coordinated controls accompanied by better security along the Danube. At the initiative of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior several meetings with the respective competent authorities were held.

Next steps planned – The Federal Ministry of Interior will continue the preparation of the event to be organized in 2015.

4. Planned projects and activities

4.1 Danube Property Crime Project – DPCP

Bavaria presented the new project proposal Danube Property Crime Project – DPCP (Combatting domestic burglary). The project is foreseen to start in February 2015 and to finish in February 2016. The project leader is the Munich Police Headquarters of the Bavarian Police; partners will be Hanns Seidel Foundation, Europol, Bulgaria, Serbia and Austria.

The aim is the creation of a network for combating crime against property, the development of a joint situation report, the revelation of the perpetrators’ travel routes and the stolen goods’ distribution channels, the improvement of information exchange and, building on this, conducting joint investigations and destroying identified structures of organized criminal groups.

Next steps planned – a kick-off meeting is foreseen in the winter-spring of 2015. Two expert

workshops are foreseen during the summer 2015 and the spring of 2016.

The project proposal will be submitted for approval by the Steering Group; The Coordination Bureau will launch the electronic procedure.

4.2 Setting up a network of centres for law enforcement cooperation. Networking between existing centres and those proposed under EUSDR

The aim of the Romanian project is to provide horizontal cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of the participating countries through the electronic exchange of data by computer application, but also by other means under mutual agreement.

The project proposal ran the electronic approval procedure. Summarized feedback with the results was provided.

The presentation generated lively debates about the financial plan of the project (the recommendation is to specify precisely the costs and the estimated budget and to provide a financing plan); the need for involving the EUSDR countries (the recommendation is to have confirmed concrete project partners from at least two EUSDR countries). Regarding the project content remarks were made to further consider the fragmentation of the Danube river and the IT system required for the project. In general, the Steering Group would like to support Romania in the efforts to intensify the cooperation between its national authorities and international partners in order to enhance the exchange of information along the Danube River.

Next steps planned – Romania will consider the comments and remarks made by the Steering Group and will submit to the Coordination Bureau revised project proposal. The dialogue will continue. Bulgaria expressed willingness to organize III Round table on discussing the possibilities for further border cooperation following the previous two Round tables (April 2012 and May 2013).

4.3 Comprehensive and Integrated Approach in Prevention and Fight against Organized Crime in the Danube Region

Following the “call” for projects on the organized crime, announced by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation during the VII Steering Group meeting (July 2014, Bucharest), Romania took the leading role to develop project proposal dealing with the organized crime. The project aims at encouraging the cooperation between law enforcement agencies responsible for policy development, coordination of the implementation, impact assessment in fighting against organized crimes and possible development of innovative tools regarding the active fight against crime. Five events are planned within the framework of the project (kick-off conference, three international workshops and closing conference). The aim of the workshops is to facilitate detailed expert discussions on applicable fight against organized crimes policies in the mentioned fields; the participants will exchange know-how and identify impact assessments of the actual policies implementation. In addition a Manual on best practices, different approaches, differences regarding the law systems, methods of action, useful information regarding the new challenges will be developed by experts from "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Police Academy.

The majority of the EUSDR countries expressed their interest in participating in the project.

Next steps planned - The project is to be submitted for approval by the Steering Group. The Coordination Bureau will distribute the relevant information and documents among the members.

4.4 Round table on possibilities for cooperation on visa and consular issues between the Danube countries

Considering the opportunities to enhance the cooperation within the key objective “Security required for individual movements in the world wide web (e-ID)” of PA 11, at the initiative of the Bulgarian Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs, the EUSDR countries will be invited to exchange experience and best practices in visa and consular issues during an event to be held in Sofia in the first half of 2015.

The Bulgarian MFA presented the idea for a Round table addressing two main topics - the consular support and assistance and the visa issues. Representatives of all the EUSDR countries will be invited for participation and as lecturers. The main idea is to exchange best practices and to discuss on the opportunities to enhance the cooperation in this matter between the Danube countries.

Next steps planned – The Bulgarian MFA will send the invitations to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in the EUSDR countries to nominate their representatives.

5. Possibilities for horizontal cooperation within EUSDR

The “horizontal cooperation” between the different PAs within the EUSDR is strongly recommended by the EC. PA 1a “To improve mobility and multimodality: inland waterways” is a traditional partner in PA 11 work.

viadonau presented the joint activities carried out till November 2014. Four meetings were held (incl. in the framework of the DARIF project) dedicated mainly on the border police/check activities. The proposed cooperation in short term between PA1a and PA11 concern the following: carrying out a survey among shipping companies / vessel operators at border crossings; development of a practical Manual on border control procedures and elaboration of recommendations on improved control proceedings along the Danube.

Next steps planned – viadonau will send the questionnaires and the draft manual to the Coordination Bureau to be distributed among the respective border police authorities in the EUSDR countries.

6. Enriching and strengthening the cooperation at macro-regional level

The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) is the first macro-regional strategy in Europe. It aims at reinforcing cooperation within this large region in order to face several challenges by working together as well as promoting a more balanced development in the area. The Strategy promotes flagship projects and contributing projects funded in the Baltic Sea Region. These projects have a macro-regional impact and start from joint initiatives involving partnership from different countries.

PA “Crime” presented the so called “Baltic Sea Task Force” (BSTF) aimed at supporting the participating countries, their governments and law enforcement authorities in delivering a coordinated overview and initiation of activities to meet both the operational and political needs in preventing and combating organised crime in Baltic Sea region.

Next steps planned – both PAs will continue to explore the possibilities for joint activities and cooperation on topics of mutual interest. Possible linking with the Baltic Sea Strategy is seen as an opportunity to exchange good practices and ideas of mutual interest.

7. Brief summary on the on-going activities

7.1 START projects

Financing of activities and projects within PA 11 is regarded as an issue of crucial importance, efforts are continuing in identifying opportunities for the new programme period 2014-2020 for the purpose of addressing common challenges and to benefit from strengthened cooperation in the Region. The Coordination Bureau informed the participants that based on the assessment provided by the EUSDR member states and in view with the key objectives within PA 11, 4 project proposals were submitted by the PACs during the first call.

Next steps planned – the implementation body will take the final decision about the projects which will receive financing. The Coordination Bureau will inform the Steering Group about the outcomes of the procedure.

8. Brief review on the PA 11 calendar for 2015

8.1 IX Steering Group meeting

Ms. Martina Niehaus announced that the next Steering Group meeting to be chaired by Germany will take place in the beginning of July 2015 in Berlin.

Next steps planned – The PACs will set up the date and the Coordination Bureau will inform the Steering Group.

8.2 Introduction of the IV EUSDR Annual Forum in PA 11 agenda for 2015

Bulgaria briefly summarized PA 11 participation in the previous three EUSDR Annual Forums, emphasizing on the lessons learnt. The main idea is to improve PA 11 participation in the forthcoming IV EUSDR Annual Forum.

Mr. Ralf Rosanowski (Baden-Württemberg) introduced the IV EUSDR Annual Forum to take place in Ulm (Baden-Württemberg) on 29-30 October 2015. The proposal made was to adopt the cybercrime as PA 11 theme for the IV EUSDR Annual Forum.

In addition, the Chair announced that Bulgaria is considering the possibility to hold the X Steering Group meeting as a side event during the Forum.

Next steps planned – The Coordination Bureau will launch a procedure for approval of PA 11 theme for in the IV EUSDR Annual Forum.

9. Wrap-up

Bulgaria as a Chair pointed out that the practical-oriented approach in the four thematic areas of cooperation will remain fundamental priority. The meeting helped the participants to exchange information on the current progress of the on-going projects within PA 11 and elucidated the way ahead for the planned ones. Steering Group meetings should continue to have strongly practical focus and emphasize on concrete achievements and results.

Appreciation was expressed for the countries that participate more actively in the Steering Group meetings and are actively committed in the everyday work within PA 11. The participants were unanimous that the project implementation within PA 11 remains of crucial importance.