

Evaluation Plan for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

Version 1.0 | January 2019





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1. Introduction

The present evaluation plan has been developed following the discussions of the revision of the Action Plan under the Bulgarian presidency and in the light of this year's PACs and NC's reports to the Commission. The evaluation plan of the EUSDR has been drafted by the Danube Strategy Point (DSP). Following its adoption, it will be conducted by the DSP together with the Commission, interested internal and external partners (see annex 1 for a detailed description). The evaluation plan (or relevant parts of it) as well as the outcomes of the evaluations may be published on the EUSDR website in consultation with the NCs.

The evaluation plan sets out the evaluation strategy for the entire implementation period of the DSP, taking into account the lessons learnt from the EU Strategy for the Danube Region's (henceforth to be referred to as "EUSDR" or "the Strategy") implementation since 2010, the respective reports from the Commission about the EUSDR and the implementation of macro-regional strategies, as well as ongoing efforts for strengthening the monitoring of the strategy. Progress of the implementation exercise will be reported to the National Coordinators (NCs), the Priority Area Coordinators (PACs), and the Commission.

The planned evaluations are set out in the present paper. New evaluation needs might occur during the lifetime of the DSP and shall be subject of a decision on the EUSDR's National Coordinators. Therefore, the evaluation plan shall be regularly reviewed and be adapted according to the needs of the key implementers of the EUSDR.

2. Evaluation activities

2.1. Objectives

The EUSDR was proposed by the Commission in 2010 and subsequently adopted by the Council and endorsed by the European Council in April and June 2011 respectively. The evaluation activities aim at enhancing the governance of the Strategy and provide an evidence-base for both macro-regional processes and workflows, as well as the needs for transnational governance in the macro-region. It thereby aims at improving the effectiveness and the impact of the Strategy, strengthening the stakeholder's involvement, enhance the communication flows and reinforce the Strategy's capacity to bring about change in the macro-region. The evaluation plan intends to ensure that the evaluations provide an appropriate input to the ongoing revision of the Strategy's Action Plan, as well as lay the ground for future revisions in accordance with the needs of PACs, NCs, the Commission, and other stakeholders. Moreover, the evaluation(s) should enhance the accountability of the Strategy by providing a neutral input from external experts.

2.2. Types of Evaluations

Considering the discussions in the NC group of 25 May 2018, the joint PAC/NC meeting on 26 June 2018, and respectively, the timeline of the revision of the EUSDR Action plan, two steps are proposed. If the timeline of the Action Plan revision is to be changed, the evaluation will be conducted in an integrated manner.

Q1-Q2 2019	– A governance/operational evaluation assessing the efficiency and the effectiveness of the Strategy, considering the discussion of the governance of macro-regional strategies started by the Commission in 2014 ¹ ;
Q1-Q2 2021	– An impact/policy evaluation, considering a newly established monitoring system by the end of 2019, as well as the territorial monitoring of the Danube macro-region

In view of the three ‘NOs’ of the Strategy, a pure input-output approach should be avoided. Within a realist approach, i.e. a focus on the Strategy’s actual and potential key implementers and other actors, the first step of the evaluation may deliver rather qualitative data, whereas a newly established monitoring and reporting of the Strategy could lead to a more quantitative approach in the second step.

3. Coordination and Implementation

The Danube Strategy Point, in close cooperation with the Commission and interested parties such as PACs, NCs, as well as other bodies involved in the evaluation of the EUSDR, is entrusted to coordinate the evaluation process. A steering group could be set up, consisting of the following group: (to ensure that the group remains operational, the number of participants should however be restricted; NCs should decide on the concrete number):

- the European Commission (DG Regio/D1 and DG JRC);
- the trio-presidency (NCs);
- One PAC per pillar representing the entire pillar;
- thematic experts in the field of the evaluation of MRS (e.g. from ESPON, or representatives from other MRS);
- representatives from DTP programme bodies.

This steering group (SG DANUVAL) will fulfil the following functions:

- decide upon the terms of reference of the evaluation process;
- representing the Strategy’s stakeholders and allowing their participation in the implementation of the evaluation plan;
- providing expertise to support the implementation of such a plan, e.g. by providing input on the evaluation process and on the terms of reference for the selection of evaluation experts; facilitating whenever possible access to information, data and/or data sources useful for the evaluations; reviewing the evaluations reports; proposing and monitoring of follow-up measures based on evaluation findings.

Different stakeholders may be invited as guests to the SG, depending on their respective expertise and relating to

¹ COM(2014) 284 final



- the EUSDR Action Plan revision;
- the internal and external communication of the Danube region/EUSDR;
- capacity building activities;
- the upcoming EUSDR monitoring.

Such representatives could be the Strategy's key implementers (if not regularly participating in the SG) or administrative staff from bodies relevant for specific policies, external experts, social partners, or other bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination. This could be particularly relevant for the above-mentioned second phase of the EUSDR's evaluation, which should be grounded in a new monitoring concept. The communication flows shall be ensured by the DSP staff, of whom one key task will be to ensure the smooth interaction between existing knowledge about the macro-regional scale and operational interrelations, territorial monitoring, and the revision of the action plan. This interaction requires a sound coordination in terms of both time and content, whereby an innovative combination of a top-down and a bottom-up process leads to a virtuous circle of the Strategy's implementation (and – hopefully – related spill-over effects).

3.1. Synergy with other strategies and initiatives, and operational programmes

Synergies shall be sought with the other three MRS, as well as sea-basin strategies. Particular attention shall be paid to the interfaces of cooperation and investment, as well as policy makers and bilateral, international, and regional initiatives. The synergies with other MRS are of particular importance with regards to embedding MRS and aligning funding sources with them.

3.2. Source of evaluation expertise

The evaluation is to be carried out within a mixed framework of internal and external expertise. The external experts are functionally independent from the key implementers of the EUSDR. The structure of the DSP foresees a dedicated evaluation officer, whose task is to coordinate evaluation matters with the Commission and the key implementers of the Strategy, as well as to draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluations to be conducted. One main aspect of the proposed evaluation is to consider *existing* expertise, be it from the key documents published by the EU institutions, academia, consultants, programmes, or the key implementers of the Strategy. This is also in order to ensure the cost-efficiency of the evaluation exercise. Both the use of internal and external expertise could bring about the expected results. The help of experts is needed in particular to assess a complex environment of the EUSDR governance, and its relationship to the existing governance of the EU.

3.3. Data collection and monitoring system for the first step of the evaluation

In the framework of a proposed two-step evaluation, considering the availability of existing data, setting up a monitoring system is of paramount importance. In order to conduct an in-depth evaluation, a more comprehensive monitoring of the EUSDR is needed. However, there is a lot of data at hand which could be subject of the first step of the evaluation, the governance evaluation. All EUSDR key implementers and stakeholders are invited to provide relevant studies and reports to the DSP as soon as possible.

The source of information for the first evaluation will be

- The Danube Region’s OP’s mid-term evaluation reports (chapters on MRS), in order to assess the degree of embedding of the EUSDR;
- existing reports from the PACs and NCs, such as reports to DTP, to the EC, or to DSP;
- academic literature (especially those from the EUSDR context);
- interviews with key implementers of the Strategy, with a specific focus on the EUSDR governance;
- reviews of law and funding;
- evidence-base provided by the DG JRC and ESPON EGTC (or similar projects);
- studies on the EUSDR, with a specific focus on the following (non-exhaustive):

Year	Author	Title
2014-2015	ZEW/IAW/WIIW	Socio-Economic Assessment of the Danube Region: State of the Region, Challenges and Strategy Development
2015	European Parliament	New role of macro-regions in European Territorial Cooperation
2016	Interact	Embedding macro-regional strategies
2017	Interact	Added value of macro-regional strategies
2017	Interact	Making the Most of Macro-regions (especially chapter 2 on Monitoring and Evaluation)
2017	EC	Macro-regional strategies and their links with cohesion policy
2018	Interact/HA Capacity	How do macro-regional strategies deliver: workflows, processes and approaches

An additional source of data could be the evaluations of projects of strategic relevance/relevance for the governance of the EUSDR could be taken into consideration.

3.4. Data collection and monitoring system for the second step of the evaluation

One basis for the second evaluation will be the newly established monitoring system in accordance with the NCs and PACs, as well as the Commission. The DSP will play a facilitating role and take into account the needs of the PACs and NCs. Moreover, the DSP will play a role of operational coordination and supervising the correct flow of information.

The evaluation experts will be in charge of the methodological and quality aspects. They will support the evaluation capacity building process, e.g. by organising peer reviewing, specific training among the projects, elaborating guidance, aggregating the findings of the evaluation, providing meta-evaluation and making in-depth analyses when necessary.

Experts that will be contracted for evaluations will be asked to propose appropriate methodologies for data collection and analysis such as case studies, desk research, interviews, etc.

The following official documents are i.a. to be taken duly into consideration for the evaluation exercise (non-exhaustive list):

Document Number	Institution	Title
11225/2/09 REV 2	European Council	Presidency Conclusions
SEC(2010) 1491	EC	Impact Assessment Summary
COM(2010) 715	EC	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
SEC(2010) 1489 final	EC	ACTION PLAN - European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
ST 8388 2011	Council	Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
EUCO 23/1/11 REV 1	European Council	Conclusions
COM(2013) 181 final	EC	Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
COM(2013) 468 final	EC	Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies
SWD(2013) 233 final	EC	Commission staff working document - Accompanying the document "Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies"
COM(2014) 284 final	EC	Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies

COM(2016) 805 final	EC	Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies
SWD(2016) 443	EC	Commission staff working document - Accompanying the 'Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies'
ST 8461/17	Council	Conclusions on the Implementation of EU Macro-regional Strategies
COM/2019/21 final	EC	Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies
SWD/2019/6 final	EC	Commission staff working document Accompanying the document report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies

Documents published by the European Parliament and its Research Service, the Committee of the Regions, and European Economic and Social Committee should also be considered, whenever appropriate. This also applies to statements of ministers adopted outside the Council, but in an EUSDR framework.

The aim of ensuring the quality and optimising evaluation efforts and costs, synergy among existing evaluations, studies, territorial monitoring as well as the ongoing revision and future revisions of the Action Plan shall be ensured.

3.5. Involvement of stakeholders

The involvement of stakeholders will be ensured by the EC's consultation procedure, and in line with the partnership principle. Especially in the second step – the impact/policy evaluation –, different stakeholders and experts could be involved to ensure the transparency and the quality of the process. Moreover, the above mentioned Steering Group DANUVAL will be as representative as possible.

3.6. Human resources

The head of DSP and one staff member are going to coordinate the process. Additional staff members, especially the pillar officers, will be involved to liaise with the PAs. The communication officer will ensure the communication of the outcomes and respective capacity building measures will be coordinated with the capacity building officer. Key stakeholders of the EUSDR (NCs, PACs) are kindly asked to cooperate in this regard within the framework of their time resources.

4. Planned evaluations

The specific timeframe and the novelty of macro-regional strategies make it necessary to analyse, in a first step, the operational capacity of the EUSDR by focussing on the efficiency and effectiveness of the EUSDR’s governance system, considering and deepening the bi-annual communications of the EC and the discussion started on the Governance of MRS. The aim is to enhance the accountability of the Strategy, to highlight its added value and thereby to contribute to the Action Plan revision of the EUSDR. It will be done so that its results can still be considered in the ongoing revision of the EUSDR Action Plan. If the Action Plan is to be revised by June 2019, the first governance/operational evaluation will be conducted in spring 2019 (Q1-Q2) and be based also upon existing data resources, reports and studies. It should go hand in hand with the EC’s consultation procedure and the development of a new monitoring. Once this monitoring – i.e. the renewed reporting – is established a policy/impact evaluation will be conducted, which may also provide input to another potential new Action Plan. This newly established EUSDR policy evaluation could then be made available in 2021. Should the NCs decide to revise the Action Plan only by December 2019, a single evaluation considering both operational and impact aspects is deemed sufficient.

Both steps will be done as theory-based evaluations. The method and data available will be specified for each evaluation question separately. The DSP, in cooperation with the SG DANUVAL will specify relevant data in the Terms of Reference. The final proposal shall be made in the offer by the service providers.

The Operational Evaluation will focus primarily on the EUSDR’s governance, following the discussion started by the Commission.² It shall primary answer the questions: What works and how? What does not and why?

Indicative list Examples of guiding questions for the operational/governance evaluation (the final set of questions is to be proposed by the experts)

Operational Evaluation	PACs and their SGs	NCs
Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How were the European institutions involved in the activities? To what extent was the EUSDR considered in bilateral/international formats? How was the minister’s level involved in the Strategy (e.g. stakeholder conferences etc.)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is /was the EUSDR part of any governmental agreements (coalition pacts)? Is the EUSDR considered in external affairs/cooperation strategies of your country? What has been done to maintain the political commitment?

² COM(2014) 284 final

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was the EUSDR considered in Council presidencies? • Has your country taken over any EUSDR presidency?
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the PA produce impact on national/supranational/regional law? If yes, how? • How were line DGs involved in the implementation? • Which kind of change the EUSDR engender in your policy field? • How was the Strategy considered in the relevant Council formations and their preparatory bodies? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was the EUSDR considered in Council formations and respective Working Groups? • Did the Strategy have an impact on national/regional/local planning processes? • Did the Strategy affect national or regional law?
Technical implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which additional stakeholders would be needed? • How were project chains developed and how was the continuity of projects ensured? • How has the SG transmitted the processes decided? • Which are the main gaps hampering a sound implementation? • Which funding sources were considered for the implementation of the PA (in addition to the DTP) PAC projects? • How would you describe the participation of third countries in the Danube Region? • Have the Strategy's structures been efficient in ensuring a well-functioning communication flow in the whole Danube Region? • Have the EUSDR's communication measures reached the awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a national/state level EUSDR platform in place? • How was the national report to the EC compiled? • Are civil servants appointed to the EUSDR's SGs throughout the line ministries? • Is the EUSDR part of the organigrams of ministries? • How was civil society involved into the EUSDR implementation? • How is the EUSDR considered/presented on the local/regional/municipal level? • Which are the main gaps in the implementation? • How was the Strategy communicated in the media?

	degree as proposed in the Communication Strategy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the tri-presidencies of the EUSDR work? • Which are the main implementation gaps?
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which funding sources were identified and which forms of cooperation sought? • Which cross-funding initiatives are there to be found? • How were the mainstream OPs addressed? • How were centrally managed EU funds addressed? • How were private funds considered? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was the EUSDR embedded into the OPs? • How did national/regional funding sources/development cooperation sources consider the EUSDR? • Were there EUSDR-related calls?

For the second phase, the questions should emerge from the operational/governance evaluation. Such questions could i.a. be the following (indicative, non-exhaustive) related to Priority Areas:

- Have the Priority Areas reached their set targets or are they on a good way to do so?
- What is the impact of the EUSDR in the measured change?
- What other relevant factors have contributed to the measured change?
- What continued interventions would be needed for the Strategy?
- Which role is the Strategy going to play in the Partnership Agreements?
- How has the Strategy contributed to wider policy objectives (such as those of Europe2020 and the sustainable development goals)?
- How well has the result orientation functioned in reaching the aimed results?
- Have the Strategy's structures been efficient in ensuring a well-functioning communication flow in the whole Danube region?
- Were the measures chosen in the Communication Strategy appropriate for the target groups, considering their information sources?
- Have the EUSDR's communication measures reached the relevant target groups efficiently?
- Does the Communication strategy need to be updated based on the evaluation findings?
- How well has the new Action Plan functioned?

Broken down to a more detailed level, this would lead to a set of questions similar to what is depicted below:

Policy evaluation	PACs and their SGs	NCs
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<p>Politics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of change in the Danube Region has been generated and how has the EUSDR reacted or contributed to it? • Are there news (coordinative) mechanisms which emerged in the EUSDR context or which were even initiated in the EUSDR context? • Which major projects have been implemented? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the EUSDR changed the mind-set and political discourse? • Which narratives have been successful in promoting the EUSDR on the political level?
<p>Policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the EUSDR considered in the programming of the 2020+ period? • Which is the progress towards the targets? Which milestones have been reached? • What is the contribution to the EU2020 targets od SDGs? • How were successful capitalisation processes started/completed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have SG Members contributed to implementing the PAs targets and milestones? • How were the actions of the EUSDR considered on the level of the ESIF OPS' specific objectives and investment priorities? • How did instruments outside the framework of cohesion policy consider the EUSDR? • Which is the role of the EUSDR in the upcoming Partnership Agreements?
<p>Technical implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a sound monitoring in place? • Are the targets and milestones realistic and appropriate for the Strategy? What needs to be modified • Have the SGs been consolidated? • How do the SG Members transmit the decisions in their Danube countries? • How was a communication strategy implemented? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are SG Members appointed to every PA? • Is there a national/ state level platform for MRS in place? • Does the Strategy comply with the principles of participation, transparency, and multi-level governance?

Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the alignment of funding worked for centrally managed tools – is there a cooperation of Danube countries? • How are centrally managed EU funds going to be addressed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent is the EUSDR reflected on the level of specific objectives of the ESIF OPs?
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4.1. Timing

Year	Reporting/Development	Evaluation
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCs/PACs to EC for MRS COM • PACs to DTP/EC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualization of the Evaluation
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PACs to DTP • New Action Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q1-Q2 Conducting Governance/Operational Evaluation • Q1-Q2 Development of a New Monitoring
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PACs to DTP • NCs/PACs to EC for MRS COM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Monitoring in place
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PACs to DTP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q1-Q2 Conducting Policy/Impact Evaluation

For a more detailed timing/visualization of the proposal, please see annexes 2.



5. Annexes

Annex 1 Project Plan as submitted to Danube Transnational Programme

Annex 2 Sketch of the proposed timeline(s)