

## ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS IN THE DANUBE REGION

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Beginning in 1995 with Austrian accession to the European Union, the long-standing and irreversible process of gathering the Danube states about the common values of cooperation, democracy and prosperity has begun. Facing the challenges of transition, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have seen the benefits of economic and political integration in Europe. The great enlargement of the European Union in 2004 prompted the consideration of the possible rapid gathering of all the Danube basin countries in a common European family. With joint efforts of the European Union and these countries, political and economic integration has become a reality. This paper seeks to show that membership in the European Union has become a useful mechanism for effective and efficient resolution of disputes in the Danube basin. Additionally, the latter enlargements of the European Union in 2007 and 2013 have confirmed that cross-border integration of the Danube region countries is one of the priorities of the European Union's regional policy. The alignment of policies at the national, regional and European level sends a clear message that, despite the burden of the past, the calculation of enlargement leads to the resolution of bilateral issues and the ever closer connection in the Danube region. Interdependence in that political context undoubtedly leads to further linkage in the areas of infrastructure, energy, tourism, environment and security. Previous experiences of countries that have already become Member States of the European Union show how other Danube family members can take advantage of the membership perspective in overcoming current issues and disputes. In order to maintain this idea, we believe that it is justifiable to continue with the completion of the entire Danube puzzle in the common picture of the European Union.

**Key words:** European Union, Danube region, EU accession, peaceful dispute settlement, cross-border cooperation

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## **INTRODUCTIONARY REMARKS: FROM EU CONDITIONALITY TO THE TRUE DANUBE REGION PROSPERITY**

The question of the positioning of the Danube basin countries in contemporary international relations has always preoccupied researchers from different academic fields, since a complete and meaningful analysis requires equal consideration of several factors. Thus, apart from the geostrategic and economic importance of the Danube basin, it is necessary to take into account the development of the political dimension of relations between the countries it covers. As the basic and indispensable link between these countries is their European affiliation, it seems that an explanation of structural mechanisms at European Union level is of paramount importance for a comprehensive understanding of cooperation in the Danube region.

The aim of this research is to link the performance of the development of relations between the countries of the Danube region, which in turn have become EU member states, with the policies and programs of the Union itself towards such countries. The basic thesis that will be proved in this paper is that *the development of economic and political relations in the Danube basin is accelerated in proportion to the increased interest of the EU in this area as a whole*. Although this premise seems self-explanatory, we believe it is necessary to summarize the findings in a single analysis in order to form a coherent overview and make recommendations for the continued prosperity of the Danube region. This is especially important because of the different status of the countries of this macro-region in relation to the EU.

The research is organized on a number of parameters, having in mind the set goals and the nature of the research task. Regarding the timeframe, the starting point is 1995, the year in which the EU included more than one Danube country for the first time. At that time, Austria acquired the status of a full member state of the Union, and this year marks a turning point in terms of bringing the Danube states under the same roof. After 1995, the idea of enlargement to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (hereinafter: CEE countries) has become more and more important. These efforts have materialized in the next three enlargement waves (2004, 2007 and 2013), and today most of the countries of the Danube region are part of the Union. However, the story does not end with 2013, so we have the Republic of Serbia as a Danube country and a candidate country for EU membership. This means that the research will focus specifically on the burning issues facing states on the road to European integration, especially in terms of strengthening bilateral relations with their Danube neighbours.

The research spatial framework is a particularly interesting issue, since the term "Danube Region" itself has no unique meaning. In this sense, it is important to counter two basic notions of this term - on the one hand geographically determined, on the other socially constructed. The following chapter will point out these differences and explain why a socially defined concept is more fruitful for the purposes of this research.

Defining units of analysis is also of great importance. It may be emphasized that due to the nature of the research, it is necessary to consider both the *system (EU) level*, the *regional level* (Danube region) and the *state level* (whereby the countries identified as being part of the Danube region are considered). With regard to the system level, the main task is to identify the existing mechanisms within the Union intended for cross-border cooperation,

both of a general nature and of a specific purpose for the Danube region countries. Since counting instruments is not enough, each of them will be problematized in the research. The EU Enlargement Policy itself is particularly delicate in this regard, since it brings up some controversial issues in addition to the unambiguously positive aspects of the Union's engagement in the candidate countries. Particular emphasis will be placed on the content and purpose of the so-called the Copenhagen criteria, bearing in mind the prevailing discourse on „EU conditionality" towards the accession countries. However, explaining ways in which this conditionality could be used as a tool in their own hands also requires separate conclusions at the lowest analytical level - the level of countries. Therefore, the exploratory analysis will offer an overview of the past experiences of the Danube countries which are now full member states of the Union.

### **DANUBE REGION: GEOGRAPHICALLY AND SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED UNDERSTANDING**

Whenever the issue of cooperation between countries whose territory crosses the Danube is raised, terms such as the "Danube Basin", "Danube Area" or "Danube Region" are introduced into the debate. Although the geographical criterion defines each of these syntagms, in this exploratory analysis we have opted for the latter one.

The specificity of the term "Danube Region" lies in its possible double definition. Thus, apart from a strictly geographical understanding of the Danube region, there is a broader interpretation accepted by the main EU institutions. Described as an official definition at Union level, this interpretation considers the Danube region as an EU macro-region spanning 14 countries belonging to the Danube River Basin.<sup>3</sup> Although seemingly simple, such a definition offers a broader perspective for looking at relationships in the Danube basin. Therefore, determining the concept of a *macro-region* as an integral element of the cited definition is of great importance.

In an effort to define the term of a macro-region as precisely as possible, it is necessary to start with the narrowest core of the concept. There is undoubted agreement among authors who have dealt with the theoretical definition of the macro-region in terms of the breadth of the term. Thus, the macro-region is unambiguously interpreted by a broader concept than the concept of the region. In addition to the geographical proximity of the countries belonging to it, each macro-region also implies a certain level of their economic, social, cultural or political interconnection. The broader perspective of the EU's understanding of the Danube region is most striking.

By clearly identifying the 14 Member States of the Danube region, the European Commission (hereinafter: EC or the Commission) provided the initial impetus for a comprehensive analysis of the relations between these countries.<sup>4</sup> According to the EC, both the *EU Member States*, *Accession Countries* and *Neighbouring Countries* are part of the

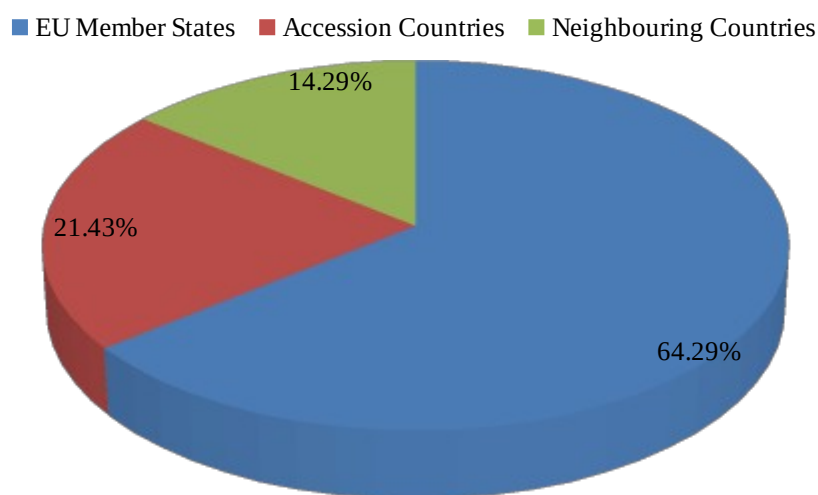
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<sup>3</sup>EU Delegation to Serbia, *Pomovnik EU*, 2018, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup>These are following countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary, Montenegro, Republic of Austria, Republic of Bulgaria, Republic of Croatia, Republic of Moldova, Republic of Slovenia, Republic of Serbia, Romania, Slovakia Republic, Ukraine. From this list, a total of nine countries enjoy full EU membership status, three have candidate status, while Moldova and Ukraine are partner countries under the auspices of the EU's Neighbourhood policy, with no membership perspective.

Danube Region. In addition, the Danube does not even flow through the territories of the four countries of this macro-region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Czech Republic and Slovenia). As surprising as it may seem at first glance, the wider (social) significance of the area justifies and welcomes this reach of the Danube region.

Chart 1 – Coverage of three classification types of Danube Region Countries



Source: authors’ review is based on the official information from the European Commission

At the heart of the macro-regional approach to the Danube region is the Union's effort to promote territorial cohesion and regional development through the coordination of cooperation between countries.<sup>5</sup> Given the equal importance of each of the countries in the Danube region, successful coordination of their cooperation cannot be achieved without a wide range of EU programs and projects. Thus, in parallel with the three groups of countries of the Danube Region, certain Union’s policy packages coexist, aimed at empowering every aspect of bilateral and regional cooperation in the field in question. The next chapter will offer a more detailed account of the structure and effects of these public policies.

## EU PLATFORM FOR STRENGTHENING CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Four waves of the EU enlargement (1995, 2004, 2007 and 2013) also marked a drastic jump in the number of Danube countries in EU membership. Thus, the Federal Republic of Germany has joined nine other countries through which the Danube flows. The consequences of such a course of events are numerous, both in the field of economic integration and in the field of promoting the political unity of the Union. The increasingly intense understanding of the Danube region as an important strategic, transport, cultural and environmental hub was materialized in 2011, with the adoption of the *EU Danube Region Strategy (EUDRS)*.<sup>6</sup> In the meantime, this act has become a key guide to the creation, promotion and implementation of

<sup>5</sup>EU Delegation to Serbia, Op.cit., *Pomovnik EU*, 2018, p. 53.

policies for the cross-border cooperation of the Danube countries. By proclaiming the linking, building and enhancement of the prosperity of the Danube region as the guiding goals, the Strategy sets out in detail necessary measures to bring them together.<sup>7</sup> However, the most comprehensive overview of the necessary measures and actors for the implementation of the integrated objectives of the Strategy was offered by the accompanying action plan.<sup>8</sup> Given the diversity of countries affected by this Union macro-regional strategy, it is most appropriate to consider programs and measures of the EU Regional policy as well as the effects of the EU Enlargement policy in order to assess successes and challenges of its implementation.

### EU Regional Policy

The development of the EU Regional policy was fueled by economic and political considerations. Designed to reduce economic and social disparities between EU Member States, this policy is quite different from national regional policies aimed at the equitable development of regions within the borders of a single country.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, EU regional policy has its own institutional framework, programs and instruments. The dynamics of its evolvent so far are reflected in a total of six phases, each phase characterized by some progress, either with an increase in funds from the Union budget or in terms of the introduction of new programs and funds.<sup>10</sup> Building on the aforementioned classification of countries of the

<sup>6</sup>Following the formal proposal of the Strategy by the Commission in 2010 to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, the adoption of this document was confirmed at the Council meeting in April of the following year. At the conclusion of the Council, the Commission was at the same time entrusted with a leading role in the strategic coordination, involvement and assistance of actors in the implementation process of the Strategy (See: Council of the European Union, *Conclusion on the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region*, Brussels, 13 of April 2011, p. 3).

<sup>7</sup>See: *Communication 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 Danube Region*, COM(2010) 715 final.

<sup>8</sup>See: *Commission Staff Working Document „Action Plan“ – Accompanying document to the Communication 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 Danube Region*, SEC(2010) 1489.

<sup>9</sup>Mirić, Ognjen, 2009, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup>In 2009, Ognjen Mirić defined the five phases of the development of EC/EU Regional policy, stopping in 2013. In his wake, the authors also add the latest phase of the development, which coincides with the duration of the Union's current Multiannual Financial Framework. The first phase began with the founding of the European Communities in 1957 and lasted until 1975. It was characterized by the absence of a coherent vision of the purpose and functioning of the EC Regional policy, since the then EC Member States were characterized by relatively balanced economic and social development. This situation is changing with the accession of the new states of Southern Europe, and so in the period 1975 - 1986 the EC itself responds to the challenges that have come with the new waves of enlargement. It was during this period that the European Regional Development Fund and the Integrated Mediterranean Programs were established. The dynamics of Regional policy development were then accelerated by efforts towards political integration of Europe. Thus, after the adoption of the Single European Act in 1986, and until 1999, significant reforms of the existing EU Regional policy took place. The most important changes during this period were to increase the funds available, to set up a Committee of the Regions and to introduce a Cohesion Fund. The fourth phase in the development of EU Regional policy (2000-2006) was marked by the preparation for the challenges posed by the Great Enlargement, which was the first time that pre-accession assistance programs for future members had taken place on the agenda. On the other hand, from 2007 to 2013, the focus was on financial assistance for the poorest Member States and regions, and

Danube region, in the following lines we will offer an overview of the most important EU Regional policy instruments for Member States, candidate countries and partner countries.

*European Structural and Investment Funds* (ESIF) are the most important channels for implementing the Union's Regional policy. They are only available to EU Member States and there are five in total.<sup>11</sup> As this research analysis focuses on the economic and political performance of cooperation in the Danube region, it is particularly important to emphasize the importance of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This fund is intended to strengthen economic and social cohesion across the Union, promoting the development of research and innovation and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Within the ERDF, the European Territorial Cooperation Program (ETC/Interreg) was developed, and the Danube Transnational Program (DTP) within the ETC. However, most projects implemented with the DTP support are funded from triple sources. In addition to ERDF funding, "Danube projects" were supported by funding from the *Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance* (IPA) and the *European Neighborhood Instrument* (ENI).<sup>12</sup> While IPA is intended to provide financial assistance to the accession countries, ENI helps cross-border cooperation with partner countries of the Union. Projects funded under the auspices of the DTP apply to all countries in the Danube Region and cover a wide variety of aspects of cross-border cooperation.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, projects financed solely through IPA/ENI mostly relate either to individual candidate countries/partner countries or to their cross-border cooperation with immediate Danube neighbours.<sup>14</sup>

Further development towards enhancing Danube cooperation through EU regional policy instruments will depend on the outlook of the Union's new Multiannual Financial

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on faster economic development, innovation and job creation. The sixth phase of the EU Regional policy development (2014-2020) is currently underway and has been marked by a new reform of European Structural and Investment Funds, focusing primarily on the development of research and innovation.

<sup>11</sup>These are the following funds: European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), Cohesion Fund (CF), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

<sup>12</sup>Three sources (ERDF, IPA, ENI) participate in the financing of projects commensurate with the number of countries in the Danube Region concerned. Thus, ERDF has the largest share (202 095 405, 00 €) in financing. This is followed by IPA II (19 829 192, 00 €), while the least funds are drawn from ENI (10 000 000, 00 €). However, DTP instruments and funds do not fully participate in project implementation, but cover 85% of financing costs. Data are downloaded from the official Interreg - DTP website:

<http://www.interreg-danube.eu/about-dtp/programme-presentation> (accessed: 14.10.2019).

<sup>13</sup>The list of such projects is long and some of the most significant are: DANUBEPARKS, NEWADA Duo (Danube Waterway Administrations, data and user orientation) and DFD (Danube Financing Dialogue). The first one started to be implemented in 2007 and it reflects the efforts to improve the protected area management system along the Danube. In the meantime, it has evolved and expanded. NEWADA Duo has been in power since 2012. Some of the goals of this project are: working together to improve the water level information system, improve the navigation and hydrographic data collection systems, improve the FIS Danube portal, and more. The last project mentioned is the EUDRS pilot project and its implementation started in 2012 in Vienna. The aim of the project is to bring together all interested organizations/companies of the Danube region who need financial support for the realization of ideas. DFD is a unique platform for promoting the match of SMEs, institutions and bodies at national and local level. By its nature, this project creates a solid basis for the constant economic development of the Danube region.

<sup>14</sup>Examples of such projects under the auspices of IPA are the following projects: "Social and economic development of the Danube region in Serbia" (IPA 2011), IPA CBC Romania - Serbia "Sustainable development of tourism along the Danube", IPA CBC Romania - Serbia "Point for Crossing the Danube by Ferry between Moldavia Noua and Golubac Localities, IPA CBC Romania - Serbia "Joint Strategy for Waste Water Management in the Danube Hydrological Basin".

Framework (MAF). In the midst of the debate on the new MAF, the Commission is the most active supporter of budget increases for certain aspects of the EU Regional policy.<sup>15</sup>

### **EU Enlargement Policy**

Drawing on the broader meaning of cross-border cooperation in the Danube macro-region, it is important that the story of socio-economic aspects of cooperation be complemented by the performance of political relations between the Danube countries. As the burning unresolved disputes in the Danube region are tingling between the Republic of Croatia and Republic of Serbia as a candidate country for EU membership, Union's Enlargement policy mechanisms seem to be the starting point for resolving all disputes.

With the exception of the general principles applicable to the acceding states, listed in Art. 2 of the Treaty on the European Union (respect for diversity, freedom, democracy, equality, human rights and the rule of law), each potential Member State must fulfill the so-called *Copenhagen criteria* before the final accession to the Union. These are: *political, economic, legal and administrative* criterion.<sup>16</sup> It can be emphasized that the political criterion is of paramount importance for the issue of political cooperation in the Danube region. Highlighting the resolution of bilateral problems and disputes and respect for the rights of minorities as necessary steps towards full membership in the Union, this Copenhagen criterion also shaped the requirements of certain negotiating chapters for the EU candidate countries. This is best illustrated by the example of the Republic of Serbia, which in 2016 was blocked by one Danube neighbour in the opening of negotiation chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights). Until July of that year, the Republic of Croatia referred to the underrepresentation of the Croatian minority in the representative body of the Republic of Serbia. Similarly, when it comes to the economic form of cross-border cooperation, the second Copenhagen criterion is that which supports regional cooperation in areas such as infrastructure, transport, environment etc.

The accession framework set out so often raises the question "How far does the EU conditionality reach?". As much as justified doubts about turning the Enlargement policy into a classic Union's tool of conditionality, the previous experiences of the CEE countries on their European path speak in favor of the effectiveness and efficiency of this mean.<sup>17</sup> The process of conditioning EU candidate countries is multifaceted and multidimensional in nature. Based on the so-called "three Rs" (reconstruction, reconciliation and reform), this

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<sup>15</sup>In the context of cross-border cooperation in the Danube region, the EC's commitment to drastically increase funding for the implementation of the LIFE program is particularly important. For this purpose, the EC has proposed € 5450 billion, almost two billion more than in the previous budget period. The Commission envisaged the largest share in the implementation of the sub-program "Nature and Biodiversity".

<sup>16</sup>The first three criteria were established at the Copenhagen European Council meeting in 1993. After two years, they were added to the administrative criterion, adopted at the Madrid European Council meeting.

<sup>17</sup>Analyzing the effects of the 2004 enlargement on CEE countries, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi concluded that the Union's strict pre-accession approach that leads to an improvement in the index of democracy, political openness and freedom, which in turn leads to a stronger regional cooperation. Moreover, the author sees the conditionality as a desirable mean for these countries not only before but also after the formal accession to the Union (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2007, pp. 8 - 16).

process also has a regional and sub-regional dimension among others.<sup>18</sup> However, in addition to the potential positive effects of further conditionality in the framework of EU Enlargement policy, it is necessary for the Union itself to overcome the problems of this approach, which have been identified so far. First and foremost, the heterogeneous observation of candidate countries by the Union should be suppressed in order to overcome the animosities among them as quickly as possible.

## **DISPUTE RESOLUTION THROUGH THE EU: PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS**

In accordance with the aim set in the abstract, the paper seeks to illustrate that membership in the European Union has become a useful mechanism for effective and efficient resolution of disputes in the Danube region. By stating this we essentially encompass two denotations. The first denotation is one of the *international law* - States have an obligation to peacefully resolve their disputes. For that reason international law offers its own dispute resolution mechanisms (i.e. negotiations, fact finding commissions, mediation, conciliation, judicial dispute resolution and arbitration). What is of the essence is that such mechanisms are relayed upon in the second denotation, which is that either the Union itself or *the idea of the Union* have become a dispute resolution mechanism.

*Within the EU* there are specific mechanisms, i.e. Court of Justice of the European Union, at the disposal of all EU Member States. Member States have a common collective interest to keep the Union operational and functioning. The alternative would be to leave the Union in instances when a particular Member State does not want to resolve its disputes. This is a worthy of note research topic by itself, but this paper focuses on the idea of the Union in the (pre)accession state - laying emphasis on what the Republic of Serbia can learn. The *calculation of accession* from Serbia's part, and *calculation of enlargement* from the new *geopolitical EU Commission*,<sup>19</sup> are important drivers for resolution of bilateral issues. In order to verify hypotheses of this paper, we shall highlight three specific bilateral disputes and bring to light questions which became apparent in the EU accession processes of the Danube region countries:

### **Hungary - Slovakia Dispute**

*Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros Dams* is a dispute originating in the twentieth century and despite the fact it was referred to International Court of Justice, it is still not resolved to the last part, it is an important indicator that, even with ongoing disputes, particular interests of both sides are so prevailing and all involved strive to continue working towards a solution. Alternatively, Hungary and Slovakia did not to let this dispute stand in the way of their mutual economic

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<sup>18</sup>The multidimensional nature of EU conditionality policy in the CEE countries was analyzed by Oton Anastasakis and Dimitar Bechev (Anastasakis and Bechev, 2003, pp. 5 - 8).

<sup>19</sup>EU Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen presentation of the team and structure of the new EU Commission. Available at: The von der Leyen Commission: for a Union that strives for more ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_19\\_5542](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_5542))



and political benefits in the Union. Their cooperation in the Višegrad group has proven to be a "success of a common Europe."<sup>20</sup>

### **Croatia - Slovenia Dispute**

The same constant of common interest is unaffected when it comes to Croatia-Slovenia border dispute as well. To begin with, the interest of the EU enlargement has softened the positions of both sides. Both Slovenia and Croatia had to make certain concessions and compromises. Slovenia has agreed to let Croatia become an EU Member State, albeit the unresolved disputes they had. Border disputes are on the top of every country's agenda for they relate to territory and sovereignty, but even those two words are not enough to stand in the way of completing the Danube puzzle. What is more, the rest of this dispute could be referred to Union's innate dispute resolution mechanism - the Court of Justice of the European Union.

### **Croatia - Serbia Dispute**

EU insisting that bilateral disputes must not be an obstacle to further enlargement. In Serbia's interest to be at the table of decision making, not on it. There is a drive to solve the dispute. EU incentive is too much to be missed. This particular neighbourhood relationship involves ethnic minorities challenges as well. This is not an uncomplicated topic anywhere, and it is especially troublesome in the context of the burden of the past of ex-Yugoslavia violent conflicts. Although this matter has not been fully solved in the Union either, where ethnic tensions arise from time to time, it is on a much more benign level than on the Balkans where the scars of war can be irritated successfully for political gain. The prospect of enlargement offers a useful solution to the situation where both Croatia and Serbia have a significant national minority of one another. Croatia and Serbia will be able to take advantage of the membership and single European space - people will be able to work, live and move freely enjoying the full spectrum of the most developed single, although not completely unified, space in the world.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Recommendations from the latest in a series of the EUDRS Annual Forum, held in June 2019, suggest that, even after eight years, this strategy is a "living document", suitable for the continued adoption of new mechanisms for improving the Danube region cooperation. Thus, the Forum has identified four priority issues and directions of action: 1) improving connectivity and mobility in the Danube region by promoting transport, tourism, digitization and mutual contacts; 2) renewing the Strategy by updating the accompanying EUDRS Action Plan, creating synergy between key actors in the Danube Region and the European

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<sup>20</sup>See, i.e. Daily News Hungary, *Slovakia Hungary continue building good relations*, Available at: <https://dailynewshungary.com/slovakia-hungary-continue-building-good-relations/>

Commission; 3) improving legal and administrative practices within the EUDRS Priority Areas, especially in terms of cooperation between public administration, academia, business and various social actors; and 4) strengthening transnational cooperation through the exchange of good practices across the Danube region.

In order to achieve these priorities effectively, it is necessary to continue to use all available instruments in the Union mechanisms. This exploratory analysis has shown how the instruments of regional and EU enlargement policy contribute to the stronger economic and political integration of the Danube region. In addition to the abundance, diversity and central points on all three groups of Danube region countries, these instruments are characterized by their interdependence and complementarity. Therefore, it is not sufficient to rely solely on the instruments of one or the other of the Union's policies which authors have analysed in this paper. On the contrary, for the successful completion of the Danube puzzle in the common European space, it is necessary to use both the funds and instruments of regional policy and EU enlargement policy. Such development will only be possible under conditions of equal commitment at both the EU and Danube region levels. Hence, the new Commission will have a difficult task in the midst of the debate on the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework (2021 - 2027), drawing even more funds from the Union budget, which would allow faster implementation of existing programs and projects of cross-border cooperation. On the other hand, it will be no easy task for the countries of the Danube Region to overcome existing disputes, drawing on the previous experiences of the Central and Eastern European countries. It is of particular importance that during this process, conditionality policy of the EU be understood as a tool in their own hands.

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