

The European Union strategy for the Danube

– Preliminaries, mechanisms, positions, priorities and effects –

Authors:*

Emilian M. DOBRESCU,
Adriana GRIGORESCU

A*bstract:* The European Union Strategy for the Danube is an internal EU strategy where all river-side countries are invited to take part, complying with the three principles applied also in the case of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The three pillars proposed by the European Commission and which the Strategy centers round are: connectivity (transport, energy, telecommunication), environmental protection and water management, as well as the socio-economic development (culture, education, tourism, rural development). The European Commission proposed to launch and organize a public debate in all river-side countries, conferences, seminars and round tables. The outcome of these debates will lie in the European Commission working out and bringing up, together with the river states, a paper on the theme of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, and also a Plan of Action. This will comprise the detailed analysis of the present state and will propose a list of strategic projects. The implementation of the Plan of Action will be monitored by the European Commission and will be periodically updated, according to the economic conditions and the social trends in the region.

Keywords: strategy, connectivity, environmental protection, water management, socio-economic development, sustainable development

JEL Classification: N5; N7; Q4; R4

* Emilian M. DOBRESCU, Ph.D., Professor, Scientific Secretary of the Economic, Law and Sociology Section of the Romanian Academy, e-mail: dobrescu@acad.ro; Adriana GRIGORESCU, Ph.D., Professor, SNSPA, e-mail: adrianag@snsa.ro.

Preliminaries

The Danube – the largest river that crosses the European Union (EU) and the second Europe's one in terms of length (2,857 km) and also of flow (around 5,600 m³/sec when entering Romania) represents a real axis of Central Europe, connecting it with the Black Sea and the farthest regions of Central Asia. The Danube River crosses 10 countries: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, the Moldavian Republic and Ukraine and goes through 4 capitals: Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest and Belgrade. The Danube basin is the most „international” one in the world, crossing 19 countries and covering around 1 million square km.

The Danube region has an economic growth potential insufficiently exploited. Being declared as part of the Pan-European Transport Corridor VII the Danube represents an important navigable way, connecting, through the Rhine-Maine-Danube network system, the Constanta harbor with the industrial centers of Western Europe and Rotterdam. The enlarged basin of the Danube comprises states and regions that could benefit in the future by direct access to the Black Sea, and the importance of connecting the EU to the enlarged region of Caucasian and Central Asia was already recognized by the Black Sea Synergy.

The Danube represents one of the largest river transportation ways of Europe, having a huge potential for the increase on the volume of transported goods. Under present conditions of using the power resources there is a need for coordinated and planned activity for the management of the Danube. The Danube region includes ten countries; among them six are European Union member states and 200 million inhabitants. Among these, 75 million live in the Danube river-side regions. The history of co-operation in the Danube region is of a long time: the European Commission of the Danube, established on 30th March, 1856, with initial headquarters at Galati (Romania), was one of the first European institutions. Now, the European Commission of the Danube has its headquarters in Budapest (Hungary). Even if in the Danube region the co-operation between the river-side states has a long life many-century history, at present there is not yet a European strategy at the EU level. The European Deputies have asked the European Commission for launching this strategy till the end of 2010. Taking as an example the Strategy for Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region, the European Strategy for the Danube has to promote the inter-regional co-operation, with view to developing the transportation and power infrastructure, as well as, to stimulating the economic growth and social development.

The actual framework for regional co-operation in the Danube Basin covers fields like navigation – by the agency of the Danube Commission, environmental protection - through the International Commission for the Danube's Protection, inter-regional co-operation - through ARGE Donauländer and tourism – through the Tourism Commission of the Danube Region. On March 10th, 2009, in the European Parliament it was initiated a written declaration about “the establishment of a working group for drawing up and implementing the strategy regarding the Danube”. Among the initiators are Romanian Euro-deputies Victor Bostinaru and Daciana Sârbu¹. The draft declaration was agreed with Stavros Dimas, the European Deputy for Environment, and the paper has as the main objective placing the Danube Delta among the priorities of the European Parliament and the European Commission. The declaration has in view “the uniqueness and fragility of the Danube and the Danube Delta, eco-system sheltering rare species of plants, threatened with pollution generated by the intense action of humans, which can cause irretrievable damages, as well as the fact that “the states placed along the Danube and the Danube Delta have different status and different ways of applying the European and international law”. The PSE Euro-deputies ask the European Commission for the establishment of a working group having as its objective the working out and implementation under the environment European commissioner surveillance, a strategy regarding the Danube, focused on the environment development and protection. The initiators requested, at the same time, the European Executive, to institutionalize the dialogue with the member states for working out of integrated projects, financed by European funds and centered on the sustainable cross-border development in the Danube Delta. A request in the declaration is that “the member states and partner ones, placed alongside the Danube to cooperate, in good-faith and implement all the relevant agreements regarding the protection of the Danube, especially the Espoo, Aarhus and Bern Conventions.”

The EU strategy for the Danube Region lies in an Address and an Action Plan that will comprise all the priority objectives and the identified projects at the national level by each river-side states individually, but also the cross-border

¹ Victor Boștinăru, member of the Development Commission of the European Parliament, organized, for the first time in Brussels forum, on December 2-4, 2008, the exhibition of photography “The Danube Delta: European Heritage’, as well as the first conference at the EP on “Danube Delta: nature and sustainable development in Europe”. Daciana Sârbu, member of the Environment Commission of the European co-legislative, has among her priorities the protection of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve.

projects. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region will represent a coherent co-operation framework that will contribute, on one hand, to achieving the development goals of the EU, and, on the other hand, to promote the community values and principles in third countries of the region. The New Strategy has to point out new technologies so as the Danube become a modern river main having intelligent systems based on the newest scientific knowledge and apt to protect efficiently the environment and the existent eco-systems.

The special value of the Strategy consists in strengthening the inter-regional, cross-border, trans-national co-operation, as well as the accumulation of numerous heterogeneous initiatives and projects that were already initiated or are in the course of implementation in the Danube region. The external dimension of the Strategy offers the opportunity of a dialogue with third countries, candidates to the EU membership. The potential of the Danube region, in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy, pointed out the fact that in recent years the co-operation among the Danube adjoining zones has become stronger also in the field of education, less, however, with regard to the labor market, as well as social aspects, in general, that remain under the jurisdiction of the states or local/regional authorities.

The territorial cohesion can be defined as an expression of the balanced, coherent and harmonious development of the territory as regards the economic, social activities, endowment, accessibility and the quality of environment, the existence of fair life and labor conditions for all citizens, irrespective of where they live, by taking advantage of the peculiarity of each territory category, thus contributing to the achievement of a prosperous, sustainable Europe from the economic, social and environmental point of view. The means to achieve the territorial cohesion are both those that point directly to a territory (turning to account the territorial and regional diversity, stimulation of the territorial performance, optimal use of potential, competitiveness capacity consolidation), and the one that aim at the coherence of the sectoral policies with a territorial impact. The achievement of the territorial cohesion needs to establish a true horizontal coordination, between different sector policies, both at the community and national level, as well as of a vertical co-ordination, between different institutions, from the European to local level.

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region represents an opportunity for experiencing these valences of the territorial cohesion, both during the Strategy working out stage and the implementation one.

Co-operation mechanisms in the Danube Region

The Danube Commission and the Danube Co-operation Process represents the existing models of inter-governmental co-operation in the Danube Region. The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) is an international body established for the implementation of the Convention for the Protection of the Danube River.

The Danube Commission (DC) is an international organization consisting of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary. It has as the main attribution the insurance of the normative conditions to maintain the freedom of river navigation, with respect to the Commission regulations, the member states having to improve the navigation in the national sectors. The mechanism created for the Commission operation, as well as the lack of interest of the states led to the uninvolved of the Commission in the development of transport on the Danube. The review of the Belgrade Convention, which established the Commission, represents the only way of reviving. Following the review, the states that wish truly to promote transports on the Danube, will have the means to take, within the Danube Commission, the real measures.

The Process of the Danube Co-operation (PDC) was launched officially in Vienna, on May 27, 2002, based on a common initiative of the Governments of Romania and Austria, the European Commission and the Stability Pact for South-East Europe (SPSEE). The participants in PDC are the states from the Danube basin (Romania, Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Hungary), as well as the European Commission and the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC), the successor of SPSEE, existing also some states with a status of envoy at the Process (France, the FYROM, the Russian Federation and the United States of America). PDC represents a forum of regional co-operation, un-institutionalized, structured on several sector dimensions (economic, environmental, and cultural, sustainable development, navigation, tourism, sub-regional development), added to a political dimension that has the role to establish the direction lines of the future co-operation and to identify the priority projects that are to be achieved in the framework of the sector dimensions. Its fundamental objective consists in harmonizing and efficient turning to account different co-operation initiatives in the Danube Region, with a view to the European values and standards, taking into account that, under the conditions of EU enlargement, the Danube became, in practice, an inland river of the Union.

The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) was established in 1998, and the member states of this international body are, at the same time, the signatory parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Danube River, the legal tool for cross-border co-operation and the efficient management of the water resources: Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, the European Community. The objectives of ICPDR are the conservation of the water resources for the next generations, diminishing of the chemicals that pollute the Danube waters and the achievement of an integrated system for the control of the flood risks.

ARGE Donaulander was founded in Vienna, in 1990, by signing the Common Declaration, as an association of the Danube Region for the promotion of the economic, transport, territorial tourism, culture, science development and the environmental protection. Its members are 23 regions from 10 Danube river-side states. Its activity takes place under field themes, within several specialized committees.

From the point of view of the co-operation, an important role is played by the contribution of the European programs for territorial co-operation through the financing of some specific common programs between regions or countries placed in the Danube river-side region, addressing very important areas of intervention such as: accessibility, environment and emergencies, economic-social development. From this point of view, the programs are: the Program of Cross-border Co-operation Romania – Bulgaria, the Black Sea Common Operational Program, the South-East Program for Cross-border Co-operation Romania – Serbia, IPA Program for Cross-border Co-operation, the Common Operational Program Romania- Ukraine, Moldavia 2007-2013.

The European Parliament and the Commission standpoint

The Danube Region has a special importance for the EU, both through the large number of countries comprised in it, and also through its direct passage to the Black Sea. Together with the Rhine River and the Main Canal, the Danube connects the North Sea and Rotterdam – the biggest harbor of the European Union. The European Parliament (EP) is a partner in the process of developing and implementing the EU Strategy for the Danube region. For this aim the Intergroup for the Danube and the Forum for the Danube were established within EP.

EP has supported the creation of the EU strategy for the Danube Region as far back as the previous PE's legislature: in September 2008, the Commission for

Transport and Tourism sent a delegation in the Danube Region to promote the potential of this large European river and of the regions surrounding it. One of the main conclusions of this delegation was the establishment of an intergroup within EP focused on the Danube Region. The Danube Intergroup worked closely with the high level national representatives, having responsibilities for the Danube, with those of the European Commission and other European and international institutions, as well as with the coordinators of the priority projects for the Danube Basin Region.

At the first meeting of the EP Intergroup for the Danube, on October 22, 2009, the European deputies from four political groups (S&D, PPE, ALDE and GUE) voted Adriana Ticaeu as the president of the intergroup. Each Danube river-side member state has a representative in this intergroup. The idea of establishing this intergroup occurred in 2007, when the office of the transport and tourism Commission of the European Parliament decided the organization, in 2008, of a delegation in the Danube Region, with the scope of finding out this European river potential. The delegation took place during September 28 – October 2, 2008 and covered the Danube segments from Austria, Hungary and Romania, including the Danube Delta. One of the main conclusions of this delegation was to establish an Intergroup of EP for the promotion of the Danube.

The European Parliament has to become a significant actor of this process and, thus, at the first meeting of the Intergroup for Danube its objectives were established. The intergroup members can focus on three directions: the development strategy of the Danube region, the promotion of the Danube regions and the promotion of co-operation between the member states and the other states alongside Danube. The strategy regarding the Danube has in view the following areas: the sustainable development of the Danube Region; transport; environment protection; social development, culture and education.

In the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on January 21, 2010, the deputies asked the European Commission to draw up an Action Plan for the implementation of the projects that promote the ecological use of the Danube for navigation, the interoperability with other transportation systems (especially the development of the fast railway transport lines), preservation and improvement of water quality and the development of eco-tourism.

The inland navigation systems represent a very important point for the development of transportation in the region. We have to consider the urgent elimination of the blocking along the main river axis Rhine/Meuse/Main-Danube, since the inland navigation has dropped mainly because of the serious economic

recession. With a view to increase the degree of connectivity with the Black Sea through the road and railway transportation (on the goods road transport routes and rapid railways) the improvement of the Trans-European Network (TEN) is proposed.

The environment strategic and impact assessments, including the effects on the whole eco-system of the river, are a condition for all infrastructure projects in the field of transportation and power. To protect and increase the fish stocks from Danube, the European Commission has to prepare a comprehensive plan for the preservation and restoration of the natural populations of sturgeon of the Danube. Aiming at the diminishing the water pollution, the resolution advises the river-side states to establish hydrologic and water control stations.

The project financing will be obtained through the development of certain strong synergies between the different EU policies, such as the cohesion policy and the proximity one. A coordinated approach is needed to pursue a better absorption of all the EU funds available in the states alongside Danube. Finally, to offer a better visibility to this region, one should organize every two years an EU summit dedicated to the Danube. The ports modernization, the unifying of the Danube navigation systems, the assurance of interoperability in the region and the increase in connectivity with the Black Sea through the road and railway transportation – goods railway corridors and high speed trains – are only some of the development priorities of the transport in the region.

As a result of the initiative launched by Romania and Austria in 2008, the European Council of June 18-19, 2009 invited the European Commission to work out, till the beginning of 2011, a European Strategy for the Danube Region. The EU has to consolidate and integrate the existing co-operation programs of the region to create a European strategy for the Danube Region, taking as a model the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea. Having as an advantage the inter-regional co-operation between the countries having access to the Danube, the strategy for the Danube region should focus on some priority fields, such as the social and economic development, environment protection (especially the natural protected areas, drinking water), transportation (including the connection with the Rhine, through the Rhine-Main-Danube Canal), the sustainable tourism, scientific exchanges, as well as the cultural heritage and the language diversity in the Danube basin.

On June 19, 2009, the European Council held in Summer in Brussels requested the European Commission to prepare the Strategy for the Danube, till the end of the year 2010, having, in the first half of the year 2011, when Hungary will have

the semestrial presidency of the EU, to get the document signed by the leaders of the 6 river-side countries. Budapest, Bucharest and Vienna, expressed their will to take in the respective ceremony; maybe Budapest will be favorite because the ceremony will take place during the Hungarian presidency of the EU. "The next Strategy for the Danube will focus on transports, environment and economic development and will be worked out till the end of 2010" declared, at the beginning of July 2009, the European commissioner for regional policy Danuta Hubner, on the occasion of a conference organized in Vienna, regarding the future Strategy for the Danube. At this conference there were submitted the general priorities and the agenda of the initiative that the Danube river-side member states take part: Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary.

As in the case of the Strategy for the Baltik Sea – the first coordinated approach of the EU regarding a so called macro-region, the Strategy for the Danube will include real measures and responsibilities for putting them into practice by the river-side states. Because the funds allotted to the cross-border programs are insufficient, the European Commission co-ordinates two national programs, in Romania and Bulgaria, within a common trans-border program, meant to improve the navigation on the part of the river the two countries share, in accordance with the projects for the improvement of navigation in other zones of the river.

The Rhine-Main-Danube axis is a bridge between East and West, the North Sea and the Black Sea, that directly affect the assurance of the energy security, opening the route to Asia through the Black Sea and making thus the connection also with the Mediterranean Sea. Among all the Danube river-side states, Romania has the largest sector. For this reason, Romania supports the fastest work out of this strategy, to capitalize the potential of the multi-millennial river.

Romania's standpoint

Among the Danube river-side countries, Romania has the largest surface of the Danube Basin (about 30 percent), the longest sector of the river (1,076 km) and the Danube Delta, the second largest wet zone of Europe, a unique ecosystem of international importance, declared humanity cultural heritage by UNESCO in 1991. Regarding the Danube crossing of Romania, one can mention the following; this covers 5 regions, 13 counties where there are 25 towns and 56 cities, poles of growth, namely Bucharest, Constanta and Craiova and poles of urban development, Braila and Galati. The part of Romania that Danube crosses has 7 national parks.

The European Strategy for the Danube will have a favorable impact on the development of the Romanian Danube river-side cities. The strategy aims at the improvement of goods transportation on the Danube River between Constanta and Rotterdam, through the widening of the navigation channel, the development of the Romanian cities alongside the river through the widening of the harbor capacities, as well as the funds utilization with the view to encourage SMEs, and the creation of new jobs.

In mid August 2009, according to a legislative project, Romania announced the establishment of an inter-ministerial working group for the working out and implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube, coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - at policy level and the Ministry of Regional Development and Dwelling – at technical level. This working group with an advisory role – will have as members representatives at managerial level of the two ministries as well as from the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Public Finance, Ministry of Administration and Inner Affairs, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, Cults and National Patrimony, Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, Ministry of SMEs, Trade and Business Environment and the Department for European Affairs.

The general objective of the working group is to define Romania's contribution to the European Strategy for Danube, and to ensure a general coherent and inter-sectoral correlated vision regarding the programs and projects to be worked out within this strategy. The working group mandate is established for the period 2009-2013 and, in view of the future EU financial framework, for the period 2014-2020.

On a domestic plane, Romania's contribution to the working out of the strategy is the result of the collaboration between the following governmental institutions: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Transports, Ministry for Regional Development and Tourism, Department for European Affairs, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Ministry of Economy, Commerce and Business Environment, Ministry of Public Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Administration and Internal Affairs, Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensures the inter-institutional co-ordination for the participation in drawing up this strategy. The event took or will take place in: Germany (the opening conference of the process of public debate, Ulm, February 1-2, 2010), Hungary (the conference on the socio-economic development and the Danube summit, February 25-26, 2010, at prime minister level of the states concerning the process of Danube co-operation), Austria –

Slovakia (the conference organized in Vienna and Bratislava with focus on the connectivity area, on 20-21st of April, 2010), Romania (the conference of closing the public debate process, June 10-12, 2010, Tulcea and/or Constanza).

The objectives of Romania for drawing up the EU Strategy for the Danube Region are: the creation of a dynamic, competitive and prosperous Danube region; the establishment of certain integrated transport and environment monitoring systems based on new technologies; cleaner waters, the protection of bio-diversity, the control of cross-border pollution and the reduction of flood risks; the improvement of the management capacity, stimulation of the cultural exchanges and of “people to people” contacts.

The Romanian Danube Region can be developed in four big directions:

1. Creation of socio-economic development conditions:

- creation of fair conditions for locating new investment and the strengthening of the potential for new ones through the development of the system of utilities and qualitative services offered to businesses, through simplification, transparency and acceleration of administrative procedures and for obtaining authorizations, the creation of productivity growth conditions by using innovative products and processes;
- setting up the conditions for a flexible labor market, where the jobs offer is able to permanently adapt to the employers' requirements, by the promotion of entrepreneurial culture, information society and new services, in the context of accelerated dynamics of the economic integration into the European and international space;
- development of the social service and health sector through the improvement of the infrastructure and endowments, application of an efficient management and the increasing access to these services, especially of those living in rural and isolated zones;
- development of the education sector through the improvement of infrastructure, the increase in the quality of education services, the development of adult continuous training centers, the creation of school networks, the development of partnership between the education units and businesses, universities and public administration and the encouragement of research-innovation;
- modernization of the agricultural sector and diversification of the economic activities, other than agriculture, through the turning to account of the environmental, natural (fish, forest resources, bio-diversity, etc.)

resources, the cultural heritage (traditions and professional experience), through the social capital development and the creation of new trades;

2. The spatial development centered on facilities and accessibility to regions, by:
 - the increase in attractiveness of the regions through the development of accessibility, carrying on the enlargement and modernization of harbor, airport infrastructure, street and railway systems;
 - the creation of a multi-modal transport system; the creation of an innovative accessibility system able to ensure rapid and efficient connections with the international markets.
3. The development of a polycentric system of town networks, through the increase of urban zones that are attractive for investment, the improvement of living standards (urban infrastructure, transport and people mobility), turning to account the architectural, artistic and monumental heritage, promoting the social cohesion and inclusion through urban services.
4. Ensuring and monitoring the environment protection through the creation of new opportunities of economic sustainable growth and increase in life quality, development of natural/ambient patrimony and the promotion of environmental policies. The creation of the management and control system for the environment factors (including the elimination of the negative effects on environment in cases of natural calamities, the general improvement of the environment factors through the protection of bio-diversity, the preservation and extension of forest zones, parks and urban green spaces) will be taken into account.

All these objectives are consistent with the national and European program papers, regarding the insurance of a balanced development of the region territory, through turning to account local resources and support of local economies, with the preservation of the environment values and insurance of conditions regarding equal opportunities for the whole population. Another outcome of applying this development strategy will be the insurance of a polycentric balanced development of the region and removal of intra-regional disparities.

Romania's priorities

1. Transport

The insurance of a Danube modern transport system represents one of Romania's first priorities and a base for the economic development of the river-

side zones. It is a need for the increase in the region attractiveness through the development of accessibility, carrying on the extension and modernization of port, airport, street system and railway infrastructure, by building a multi-modal transport system. The Danube has to become a real modern main river, with an infrastructure based on new technologies and integrated transport, management, and information systems.

The gradual achievement of the projects of the European Corridor 7, which contributes to the insurance of an optimal navigation in conditions of maximum security along the entire Danube River, represents a prerequisite for the project success. Besides, the modernization of the network of river ports is added. It is required to change the operational structure of ports for their transformation into logistic centers and their integration into the multi-modal transport system. Moreover, the whole infrastructure adjacent to these ports has to be modernized.

The priorities in this field are related to: the development of existing transport terminal points and the built up of new ones, for the transport of goods/persons, as well as the modernization of related services, in the observance of the environment security and protection standards; the insurance of inter-modality through the establishment of logistic centers for the inter-modal railway-road, railway-river, railway-maritime, road-river, road-maritime, road-airway transport; the development of the connections between the terminals and urban centers with the national and international transport systems (including the achievement of belts), through the development of different ways of transport to reduce the duration of transport, maintaining and protecting environment.

It is also a necessary to increase mobility in urban zones, through the modernization of urban, public transport lines and the development of multi-modal transport, with the view of increasing the degree of comfort and security of passengers and the pollution reduction. Finally, it is needed to develop a plan of economic and financial measures to support the sector, having as fundamental objective the facilitation of modernization of inland waters transport under the Romanian flag.

2. Information society

Today, no integrated system can develop without an intelligent information system. The turning to account of information and communication technologies (ITC), and their use in the public sector (administration) and the private one (citizens, enterprises), represents a prerequisite / *sine qua non* condition for the development of a real modern main river-way.

It is needed to support the economic competitiveness and the promotion of interactions between the public sector and enterprises/citizens through the ITC potential and its applications, the development of information and telecommunication infrastructure and improvement of the access to IT services, development of “broadband” infrastructure, creation of modern information services, and support of innovative productive systems in the administrative process.

We need to stimulate the specific applications for the SMEs to support the public authorities/SMEs to implement local specific projects, including the building of tele-centres.

3. Energy

The power potential of the Danube and the neighboring region is huge. The development of energy capacities in the Danube basin, irrespective of the form of the power production (hydro, nuclear, fossil fuel, solar, other renewable power forms) has to be based on a careful analysis for working out an optimal mix from all points of view in order to protect the environment from consequences of these developments.

Among the priorities of this area one can list: the development and extension of utilities infrastructure (water distribution, sewage network, natural gas distribution) and power infrastructure (transport networks and the production capacities of electric and thermal power); the diversification of supply sources and the development of alternate transport routes; the stimulation of investment in the exploitation of natural gas resources, through the encouragement of identifying new fields and maximum use of their potential; the promotion of power production from regenerable sources (wind power stations, photo-voltaic cells, biofuels, etc.); the continuation of the program for nuclear power and the improvement of security standards; the increase in innovation capacity and technological development.

4. Environment protection

All the investment that will be done in the Danube Basin has to be intelligent systems based on the newest scientific and technologic developments and where the environment protection has a part, even from the drawing up stage of the systems (“green knowledge intelligent systems”). Bringing into life new opportunities of economic sustainable growth and improvement of life quality can be achieved through the development of the natural heritage and EU environmental policy, through the establishment of a management and control

system of environment (including the removal of negative effects on environment in cases of natural calamity, general improvement of environment through the protection of bio-diversity, preservation and expansion of forests, parks and green spaces in urban zones).

Other priorities are related to: the development and extension of utilities infrastructure (water distribution, sewage network, natural gas distribution); insurance of municipal used water purifying for all congested areas denser than 2,000 inhabitants; reduction in pollution with nitrates from agricultural sources for all vulnerable zones in Romania; removal of hazardous substances spillage in water; closure of incompliant domestic waste dumps and building up ecologic ones for all localities; reduction in soil and sea-shore erosion for the Southern part of the Romanian sea-side.

Many protected parks, included in the program "Nature 2000", including the Danube Delta – a unique and invaluable eco-system – are in the Danube proximity. These have to be further protected through permanent monitoring.

5. Business milieu

The involvement of the business milieu in the development of the projects related to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region is essential. There is a huge potential of supporting SMEs in different fields of activities connected with the sustainable development of the Danube macro-region. A very important fact is bringing to life favorable conditions for new investments and strengthening the existing ones, through the development of utilities systems and quality services offered to enterprises, through the simplification, transparency and acceleration of administrative proceedings and for providing conditions for the increase of enterprises productivity through the use of innovative products and processes.

A flexible labor market is needed, where the jobs offer is able to adapt continuously to the employers' requirements, through the promotion of entrepreneurial culture, information society and new services, under the circumstances of an accelerated dynamics of the economic activity integration into the European and international space.

The SMEs have to be supported to: increase their productivity and the reduction in power consumption; investment in innovative technologies meant to protect the natural resources and destined to the waste recycling and reusing sector; the creation, extension, modernization of business incubators and centers infrastructure (production areas for SMEs, relocation of SMEs in these business structures); development, promotion and internationalization of economic

activities; creation of quality goods and the observance of the international quality standards; procurement of modern equipment and technologies for production, services, including access to Internet.

The community legislation, the increase in standardization of the trade and entrepreneurial areas, the public-private partnerships represents some essential elements for an important economic development in the Danube Basin Region.

6. Education and research

There is a large recognition of the fact that education represents a strategic factor for sustainable development through its essential contribution to the development of the human capital. Thus, education has to be regarded as a large and comprehensive concept that approaches also inter-connected themes, regarding the environment, economic development and the insurance of social cohesion. The connection to the extended and diversified scale of themes associated to the sustainable development principles of the Danube region needs an inter- and trans-disciplinary approach, in integrated and complementary education formulas that take into account, at the same time, the specific features of national, regional and local conditions as well as the global context.

The development of the education sector has to take into account the improvement of infrastructure and endowments through: increase in education services quality, development of permanent adult training centers, building up school networks, development of partnerships between education units and business milieu, universities and public administration and support for research-innovation.

An important point is the promotion of ecological education projects and of other major initiatives in the field, within certain trans-national partnerships, co-financed from domestic and European sources. At the same time, the education at distance is an example. The whole development of the region has to rely on new, innovative technologies. That's why the research is a determinant factor for the revival of the Danube Regions. The framework created by the EU Framework Program 7 (FP7) has to be used. It has also necessary to create new networks of centers for the research of the development of efficient and intelligent systems that ensure, at the same time, the protection of environment.

7. Culture

The Danube is an important catalyst of the inter-cultural creativity and dialogue. Culture and the protection of the national heritage could be, thus, an important

area of co-operation, stimulating the exchanges between experts and the partnership initiatives. Earlier several projects in the field of real patrimony have been launched, forming a background for the actual proposals for deepening the cultural dialogue within the Danube area.

It is necessary to integrate the cultural dimension into other policies that contribute to the sustainable development of the Danube Region. It is also needed to turn to account the potential of the patrimony, as a factor increase in the quality of life in the whole Danube region.

The priority would be: the creation of certain co-operation networks (expert exchanges, common databases); preservation, protection, restauration and turning to good account of the historical and cultural heritage of the towns, especially the historical centers; deepening of co-operation in the field of contemporary creation (visual arts, music, theatre, contemporary dance, film, written culture); development of cultural and sports infrastructure for leisure time; planning, marking of tourist routes and cultural itineraries to the rehabilitated objectives; rehabilitation of the urban milieu, preservation of cultural and architectural resources in the region, including those located in urban and sub-urban zones; promotion of urban zones through local, national and international cultural events.

8. Tourism

A priority of the Romanian Danube Region is the development of tourism and turning to account of the natural and the historic-cultural heritage through the development of the specific infrastructure and intense actions of promotion. The strategy for the Danube aims at the increase in the region attractiveness through the economic development and the creation of jobs, as a result of turning to good account the cultural heritage and natural resources and the improvement of the quality of the accommodation and leisure infrastructure. Some of the identified priorities are the following:

- Rehabilitation and modernization of the tourism patrimony elements, which could result in the increase of the tourist interest in the Danube counties and their turning to account;
- Development of tourism infrastructure around the Danube and in the Danube counties, in general;
- Winning new “tour-operators” for organizing cruises to the Danube Delta and persuading the ones already operating to increase the number of calls on the Romanian shore, through the diversification of the tourist offer;

- Study of the opportunities and possibilities to introduce regular passenger cruises on the Danube, between the Danube harbors, which allows visiting the most representative and attractive sectors of Danube.

9. Rural development

The development of hydro-technical structures and those for turning to account the water along the Danube basin was connected with the economic development and also the protection of places and people. The flood protected zones have extended and under the protection of dams a stable agriculture, production centers, buildings of agricultural use and houses have been developed.

Along the years, and especially, in the last ones, the profile of the dams has been changed (also the land of their basement), and some parts of the dams have weekend because of erosion, an effect that could lead to their collapse and the flooding of the unprotected zones.

The policy centered on the Danube River embankment with the aim to reduce the flooding and to supply soil to agriculture, led, on the other hand, to the dramatic reduction of fishing. The embankment has reduced, at the same time, the level of sediments flowing into the Black Sea, changing thus the Delta's landscape and increasing the risk of shore erosion.

The NATURA 2000 areas, in some zones of the Danube Delta, overlap the fishing zones. As a consequence of the aquatic eco-systems alteration and the uncontrolled exploitation, the stocks of different species of fish diminished. Nevertheless, in recent years a slight trend of improving the state of main biotic components of the aquatic eco-systems has occurred.

The sustainable exploitation of the aquatic live resources through reasonable fishing represents a necessity for the improvement of the life quality in the fishermen communities, preservation and refreshment of fish stocks, the improvement and qualification of manpower and creation of alternative job opportunities

The modernization of the agricultural sector and the diversification of the economic activities, other than agriculture, through turning to good account the environment, natural resources (fish, forest patrimony, bio-diversity, etc.), the cultural heritage (accumulation of professional traditions and experience), through the development of the stock and the creation of new occupation, represent an important priority. And also, the support of sustainable development

of the fishing zones and the improvement of life quality in these zones, offering opportunities for alternate income to local inhabitants, the development of specific infrastructure, training people, supply of exploitation and processing equipment, as well as the encouragement to establish partnerships, are important actions of the new strategy.

10. Security, public health

The extension of the EU eastern border and implicitly the access of EU third countries to the maritime zone of the Danube, determine a higher security and border integrity risk. The strategy for the Danube has to take into account this development and to include projects related to:

- Replacement of present control system along the Danube, based on the control at the destination port, with a system that aims at specific border control for the future Schengen space, clearly established;
- Strengthening the co-operation with other institutions in enforcing law, as well as with local authorities, in the Danube river-side countries;
- Endowment with fixed and mobile detection equipment, performant communication equipment, as well as efficient naval mobility means;
- Protection of the Danube's eco-system through the implementation of an efficient concept to prevent fishing and hunting poaching, and also the voluntary or accidental pollution.
- Ensuring goods transport security, as well as of goods handled and stored in ports;
- Procurement and rehabilitation of stateroom gangways.

Conclusions

EU strategy for the Danube Region has to meet the challenges to be faced by the Danube Region: diminishing and elimination of the economic and social discrepancies between different regions of the river-side countries, the increase in the naval traffic, climate changes, cultural diversity, environment matters and bio-diversity. To this end, the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region represents a base for the dialogue between states and a means to obtain long term benefits, both at European, national and local level. The strategy has to be realistic, based on new technologies, innovation and investment, a strategy that,

one applied, will lead finally to the improvement of life quality for all the European citizens the Danube region.

Romania's priorities related to the Danube strategy will be expressed in three directions, of equal importance – connectivity, environmental protection and socio-economic development. We consider that the Strategy will have to turn to good account new technologies, so that Danube become a modern water main, which will have intelligent systems, based on the newest scientific knowledge and able to protect efficiently the existent environment and eco-systems. The special value of the Strategy will lie in the strengthening of the inter-regional, cross-border and transnational co-operation, as well as in the accumulation of numerous initiatives and heterogeneous projects, which have been already started or are being implemented in the Danube Region. The European Strategy for the Danube represents an opportunity for the balanced territorial development. Till the end of 2010, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region will be finished, becoming a model of regional development at the European level.

For a better turning to account of the macro-regions material and human resources, pertinent measures are needed, which have to be identified by actions and projects proposed within certain strategies of development worked out in an integrated manner, through the contribution of all interested parties and the efficient organization of the analysis, implementation and monitoring of the activities aimed at achieving the intended objectives: prosperity, security, clean environment, economic growth, social cohesion, access to information or partnerships for education and research.

The first step to draw up such a strategy for the Danube Region was made at the same time with the obtaining of the political consensus between the EU member states at the European Council meeting on June 18-19, 2009. On this occasion, the European Commission was invited to work out a *Strategy of the European Union for the Danube Region* till the end of 2010.

For the achievement of the connectivity and economic development objectives, we need, however, a new vision, an approach based on new technologies through which a “green”, efficient and sustainable strategy is attained. We need investment and the rehabilitation of transport infrastructure, as well as efficient solutions to the environmental challenges. At the same time, the agricultural land of the Danube Region is a good that could be better exploited and turned to account, through research, culture diversification and the implementation of innovative technologies.

In conclusion, a stable and competitive macro-economic system, the strengthening of the institutional capacity and the development of the human resources, an efficient use of the natural resources and the new technologies are necessary conditions for the support of sustainable growth in the Danube region.

Selective Bibliography

1. Aron, Robert – *L'histoire contemporaine depuis 1945*, Paris, Larousse, 1969.
2. Boulois, J. – *Droit institutionnel des Communautés Européennes, avec références au Traité sur l'Union Européenne*, ed. Quatrième, Paris, Montchrestien, 1993.
3. Campus, Eliza – *Ideea federală în perioada interbelică*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 1993.
4. Cecchini, Paolo et collab. – 1992 – *Le défi. Nouvelles données économiques de l'Europe sans frontières*, Flammarion, 1988.
5. Coudenhove, Kalergi Richar N. – *Panurope*, Vienne, Editions paneuropeennes, 1927.
6. Dobrescu, Emilian M. - *Integrarea economică*, ediția a III-a revăzută și adăugită, București, Editura Wolters Kluwer, 2010.
7. Dobrescu, Emilian M. (coordinator, coauthor) - *România și strategia Uniunii Europene pentru regiunea Dunării. Proces, implementare și priorități/Romania and the European Union strategy for the Danube region. Process, implementation and priorities*, ediție bilingvă, București, Institutul European din România, Studii de strategie și politici, 2010, nr. 3.
8. Duverger, Maurice – *Europa de la Atlantic la Delta Dunării*, București, Omega Press, 1991.
9. Feraru, V. I. – *Proiectul de uniune a statelor europene*, Institutul de arte grafice "Olimpul", București, 1935.
10. Feraru, V. I. - *Țările dunărene și proiectul Tardieu*, Iași, Editura Damaschin, 1932.
11. Herriot, Eduard – *Europe*, Paris, Les Editions Rieder, 1930.
12. Ionescu, Ghiță (edit.) – *The New Politics of European Integration*, London, Mac Millan St. Martin's Press 1972.
13. Lindberg, Leon N. – *The Political Dynamics of European Integration*, Stanford University Press, Oxford University Press, 1963.
14. Luțaș, Mihaela and Călea, Sorin – *Economie europeană*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Imprimeria Ardealului, 2005.
15. Madariaga, S. de – *Portrait de l'Europe*, Paris, Calmann-Levi, 1952.
16. Maignial, Charles – *L' Europe commencee. Les structures, les options*, Casterman, 1964.
17. Maillet, Pierre – *La politique économique dans l'Europe d'après 1993*, Paris, Presse Universitaires de France, 1992.
18. Malița, Mircea and Georgescu, Călin (coord.) – *România 2020*, București, Editura Conspress, 1998.
19. Pordea, G.A. – *Noi aspecte în evoluția procesului de integrare europeană*, București, Editura Europa Nova, 1996.

20. Postolache, Tudorel (coord.) – *Economia României – secolul al XX-lea*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 1991.
21. Robertson, A. H. – *European Institutions, Cooperation, Integration, Unification*, Third Edition, London, Stevens Sons Limited, 1973.
22. Rudescu, Corneliu – *Problema Confederației Dunărene în limita datelor economice*, București, Tipografia Gutenberg, 1932.
23. *** – *De la Essen la Cannes. Itinerariul strategiei românești de integrare europeană*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 1995.
24. *** - *L'integration europeenne et la revolution de l'Europe de l'Est*, Institut Universitaire International Luxemburg, 1991.