Summary of draft DANUBE cooperation programme (status 30 May 2014)

In December 2012, the European Commission presented its view on the territorial coverage of the new European Territorial Cooperation programmes, including the DANUBE cooperation programme comprising 14 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany – Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine - partly.

European Territorial Cooperation programmes are intended to complement other European programme strands such as “rural development” or “investment for growth and jobs” programmes which aim to investment in infrastructures, enterprises and people. Cooperation programmes are primarily designed for further territorial integration through enhanced cooperation in specific policy fields. Given its overall budget size, the cooperation programmes cannot target large-scale investment interventions and consequent major economic impact.

Geographically, the DANUBE programme area overlaps with the territory addressed by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and comprising also the Danube river basin. It is the most international river basin in the world. The area makes up one fifth of the EU’s territory and has more than 100 million inhabitants. The variety of natural environment, the socio-economic differences and cultural diversity of the various parts of the area may be perceived as major challenges but actually represent important opportunities and unexploited potential.

The area of the DANUBE Programme correlates not only to the territory of the EUSDR, adopted in 2011 but also has a considerable tradition of transnational cooperation. The aim to achieve a higher degree of territorial integration of its territories reaches back to 1996 with the CADSES Programme and 2006 with the South East Europe Programme – respectively with geographical adjustments.

To develop the cooperation programme for the 2014-2020 programming period a Programming Committee was set up in February 2013, being composed of the representatives of the participating countries. The Programming Committee held so far eight meetings in 2013 and 2014.

**Please note that up to now no final decision has been taken regarding the funding priorities the programme shall support.**

The Programming Committee discussed the mission of the programme and selected a limited number of funding priorities where transnational cooperation is expected to deliver good results (“TNC filter”) building on the experience of South East Europe 2007-2013 Transnational Programme.

In order to achieve a higher degree of territorial integration of the very heterogeneous Danube region the transnational cooperation programme will act as a policy driver and pioneer to tackle common challenges and needs in specific policy fields where transnational cooperation is expected to deliver good results through the development and practical implementation of policy frameworks, tools and services and concrete pilot investments whereby strong complementarities with the broader EU strategy for the Danube region (EUSDR) will be sought.

The success of programme implementation will depend on targeted selection of the most relevant interventions and a further increase in the efficiency of administrative procedures and a reduction of the administrative burden for the beneficiaries.

Due to its limited resource (the overall programme budget is of EUR 273.28 million, plus IPA and ENI funds) the programme will focus on policy development in a limited number of intervention areas (rather than on infrastructural investments). The participating countries in the Programming Committee agreed to focus the intervention of the programme to four funding priorities (priority axes):

* **Innovative and socially responsible Danube Region** (foster eco-innovation, knowledge transfer, cluster policy, social innovation and skilled entrepreneurship including technological and non-technological innovation aspects)
* **Environment and Culture responsible Danube Region** (preserve and manage the diversity of natural and cultural assets, maintain major ecological corridors along river systems, disaster prevention and disaster management)
* **Better connected Danube Region** (improve regional connectivity to the TEN-T network, environmentally-friendly transport systems, regional energy planning and –coordination)
* **Well governed Danube Region** (strengthen multilevel- and transnational governance in areas with major societal challenges, more effective governance of the EUSDR and complex transnational project development)

The funding priorities and fields of action of the DANUBE programme are presented in the following illustration (status end of May 2014).



Currently the proposed funding priorities and fields of action are publicly consulted via web based consultation and national stakeholder events. Partner States and the wider ETC community will get the opportunity to react on the content and provide comments. This consultation process will contribute to further develop the intervention logic of the programme based on concrete needs.

The findings should be discussed at the 9th meeting of the Programming Committee which is scheduled for the first week of July 2014 (3 and 4 July 2014).