ANALYSIS ON CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE DANUBE STRATEGY

Is Central Europe Restorable under the Framework of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region?

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1. Abstract

At the end of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (ESDR or Danube Strategy) was adopted. According to the Hungarian standpoint the most significant outcome of the Strategy will be the reconstruction of Central Europe. The aim of the paper is to analyze the relevance of the statement. First, historic concepts of Central Europe and regional initiatives are examined to clarify to which Central Europe refers and find out the main hindrances of the cooperation within the region. Then the ESDR is dealt with by highlighting the importance of the river, the antecedents of the Strategy, as well as, its innovative measures. Afterwards, the potentials and the obstacles will are compared to each other.

Based on the researches, although many concepts and examples exist in the literature aiming at a Central European cooperation, none of them proved to be effective in terms of economic or political enforcement of the Region. By examining the content and the structure of the ESDR, it has some common elements with the previous concepts, regarding its territorial coverage or its economic aims. However, it is consisted of several novel measures to eliminate the failure of the Strategy. Both the Strategy and the Region have many potentials as well as disadvantages, therefore each issue requires harmonization and alignment with each other and with other policies.

The expectations emphasizing that the Danube Strategy will reconstruct Central Europe are based on the correlation between the Danube Region and Central Europe. Additionally, it is proven that the notion of Central Europe is flexible enough to adapt the actual needs. Even though Central Europe has never existed as such, it is possible to build it up by the Strategy through the enforcement of cooperation among the peoples and exploiting the potentials of the Region.
2. Introduction and Methodology

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EU Strategy for the Danube Region, from now on ESDR or Danube Strategy or Strategy) is based on a special historical cohabitation of a mixture of various peoples in Central Eastern Europe. The idea of regional collaboration got new impetus since the transition period but in the meantime had to face new challenges. In the first half of 2011, under the first Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU), the ESDR became a special symbol of Central European cooperation.

Since the second Orbán-government and its conservative counterparts got into power in the neighbouring countries the concept of Central Europe got a special emphasis. Among others, Minister of Foreign Affairs János Martonyi underlined several times that the most important aim of the Danube Strategy lays in its capability to restore Central Europe. Similarly, Deputy State Secretary for European Affairs Bálint Ódor confirmed that he expected from the Strategy the reinforced cooperation among Central European countries. Last but not least the appointment of Mrs Etelka Pataky Barsiné as the Government Commissioner responsible for the Danube Strategy and her commitment was also a significant indicator of the intentions of Hungary as far as the importance of the Strategy is concerned.

Therefore it is no surprise the ESDR was a high priority for the Hungarian Presidency. As it was indicated by a statement of János Martonyi “(t)he Danube Region Strategy is a symbol of Central Europe, being a symbol of what we dreamed about”.¹ There is no doubt that this dream lasts for a long time and now it seems there is a great chance to make it come true. However, there are many challenges with which we need to deal and it is not sure that the success of the Danube Strategy will guarantee the restoration of Central Europe.

The aim of this paper is to answer the question whether Central Europe is restorable under the framework of the ESDR. In order to achieve this aim, first, different concepts of Central Europe will be examined. Especially those will be studied which had not only identified the region but aimed at any kind of cooperation among the countries of the region. Secondly, the short history and the most important features of the EDRS will be

presented in order to understand its innovative measures and its background. Then the pros and cons will be highlighted which can enhance or hinder the implementation and the success of the Strategy. Finally, the conclusion will be drawn concerning the relation between the ESDR and the hypothetically enhanced Central Europe.

As a result, the paper aims at providing an analytical overview on the regional cooperation initiatives in Central Europe and the content of the Danube Strategy. In the meantime the description contains an exhaustive comparison of various notions as well as the capacities and the hindrances of the Strategy. Moreover, the ESDR can only be analysed in a multidisciplinary way since it has many economic, societal, cultural, environmental, energetic, etc. aspects. The paper does not aim to present each of them but only the main factors which have a greater role in the realization of regional cooperation. Nevertheless, many other aspects cannot be ignored.

Since the topic of the Danube Strategy is very fresh and up-to-date my researches are based mainly on scientific articles, reports, data, and materials of the European Commission, etc. Additionally, the most important outcomes of many lectures and conferences related to the topic are incorporated to the descriptive parts of the paper. Concerning the notion of Central Europe, the literature is much broader and richer; therefore only the most relevant concepts from the point of view of the Strategy are studied and presented by the paper. Even though there are several concepts and definitions for this notion the aim of the essay is solely to compare appropriate ones and draw possibly the conclusion. Moreover, we have to be aware of the fact that there is a lack of actual scientific analysis concerning the symbolic content of Central Europe of the Orbán-cabinet. Since it is not the aim of the study to analyze it, its most important manifestations will only be mentioned.

As it will be introduced in the next chapter the concepts of Central Europe or the Danube Region (from now on, the Danube Region or the Region) have various interpretations. They are often used as synonyms even though the two regions do not exactly overlap each other. The scope of Central Europe differs greatly in the literature; additionally it is not well-defined even in the communications of the Hungarian government. The most accepted term referring for this region in scientific literature is Central Eastern Europe. However, this can be dubitative also since generally it does not include countries of the Western and Eastern Balkans or Ukraine and Moldova. So the
expression of Danube Region will be used referring to the members of the Strategy to eliminate any kind of confusion or misunderstanding. Nevertheless, having examined the literature relating to the Danube Strategy, Central Europe is the most convenient term referring to the countries belonging to the Danube Region. Even though this implies some contradictions, it can be found in the literature of Central Europe as well. Therefore, based on the definition of Hanák who suggested that Central Eastern Europe (the countries of the former Soviet bloc with the exception of Russia) with Germany and Austria constitute Central Europe, the term apart from the hypothetical part of the paper will be used as well.
3. Concepts on Central Europe

As a theoretical background to the paper this section deals with the concepts aiming to identify the territorial scope of Central Europe and to establish cooperation among these states.

There are some important issues that have to be highlighted before analyzing the various models. First of all, even it is not admitted, most of them are based on the fact that the Habsburg Empire was a vivid economic unity having been integrated as well as comprehensive. As an economic entity, it worked better than the successor nation-states created mainly in the beginning of the 20th century. Moreover, according to Hanák, the process of political and cultural interaction of certain national identities could have begun only within the framework of the Dual Monarchy (Hanák, 2005: 158.). Today there is no doubt that the “Vielvölkerstaat” proved to be more viable than a dozen of nation-states without any intention for closer cooperation; being aware of the fact that Central Europe is the region where the French pattern hexagon is simply unimaginable.

As it was stated by Wolgang Mantl, Central Europe is the symbol of liberal high life, and a special cultural idea (Busek, 1992: 52-54.). Even though no common language of Central Europe exists, it must be accentuated that its literature is not only unique but also typical. It is about common fate and common failures which cannot be easily understood by the other parts of Europe. Beside history, culture is a significant issue playing a crucial role in the region.

Magris highlights that the multicultural and supranational character proved to be another merit of the Monarchy (Magris, 2005: 94.). The special supranationalism was reinforced by the high number of the Jewish community living in the Habsburg Empire, in Germany and in the Polish territories. Some experts claim that the Jewish people ensured the supranational character of these regions and their disappearance after World War II (WWII) weakened the phenomenon of Central Europe as such (Kiš, 2005: 109.).

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2 The German expression of Vielvölkerstaat stands for the multinational state: one sovereign state comprising two or more nations.
3 Although Slavic languages are spoken by the majority of the peoples in the region, German had also importance.
Further on, the unique heterogeneity which can be regarded as an advantageous and a disadvantageous aptitude of the region resulted in the reconciliation of various religions at a very early stage. Much before than it was achieved in the Western parts of Europe (Gergely, 2003: 11.).

Remaining at the common cultural elements of a heterogenic Central Europe, the role of the Danube Schwabians has to be spelled out as well. Due to the scarcity of lands and other resources, coming from the spring of the Danube River in the hope of finding new home they settled down all along the flow of the river mainly in the historical territories of the Kingdom of Hungary: in the Buda hills, around Satu Mare, in the Banat, in Batschka, in Voivodina, and in some parts of Croatia. Their common traditions and togetherness revealed another common symbol of the region.

Thirdly, it has to be underlined that the evolution of the concept of Central Europe was not straightforward. As Claudio Magris has stated Central Europe has various meanings in terms of history, politics, and literature (Magris, 2005: 92.). The territory among the powers of Western and Eastern Europe was named frequently as ‘Younger Europe’ or ‘Europe In-Between’. These territories were always significant because of their vacuum or tamponing role. Yet most concepts have some common points, such as the recognition of the detachment of these territories from other parts of Europe. This appears at various levels, for instance, the evolution of the parliamentary models in opposition to the absolute and despotic monarchies surrounding the region.

Fourthly, most concepts of Central Europe represented various political interests which wanted to influence the angle of its development. They represented one’s national or political interests. That is why each of them has to be examined with prudence.

3.1. The Territorial Scope of Central Europe

Resulting from the above mentioned issues, the definition of the territorial scope of Central Europe is also hard and there is no common understanding on it. Looking back to history, at the beginning the entire territory of the Habsburg Empire (Heilig-Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation) was regarded as Central Europe including the Benelux countries in the studies of Friedrich List and Carl Renner. Then Friedrich Naumann and his adherents, Alfred Hettner and Seydlitz, described Central Europe as
Germany and the area attracted by the country; the well-known notion of “Mitteleuropa” was created by them.

Opposed to this, Hungarian theorists and politicians, such as Jenő Cholnoky or Pál Teleki perceived Central Europe as territories covered by the historical Hungarian Kingdom. Michel Lhéritier, then Iván T. Berend and György Báňki described the phenomenon differently: they argued that Central Europe referred to the area between Germany and Russia, and between the Baltic and the Black Sea. Similarly, Jenő Szűcs following Péter Gunst asserted that the Baltic region, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Croatia belonged to Central Europe (Lendvai, 2005: 25.). However, the most common notion of the territory between the Baltic, the Adriatic and the Black Sea was Eastern or Central Eastern Europe. It was Milan Kundera who emphasized the existence of Central Europe and its detachment from the Eastern parts of Europe. Some suggest that Central Europe consisted of cities which gave its uniqueness and attractiveness compared to the Western parts of Europe. Especially Vienna and Budapest were the main centers of this world by the end of the 19th century. They were cultural and innovative metropolises built up by many peoples, cultures, etc. (Busek, 1992: 37).

In the 80s György Konrád and Václav Havel identified Central Europe with the territories of the former Habsburg Empire. During the last days of the communist regime Ferenc Glatz has spelled out that Central Europe consisted of the members of the Soviet Bloc with the exception of the Soviet Union. Renate Riemeck stated almost the same but she stressed the involvement of German speaking countries as well. Similarly, Péter Hanák wrote about a Central Europe which covers Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the countries previously defined as Central Eastern Europeans. Many debates took place aiming at the definition of the scope of Central Europe; even though the views are far from being entirely harmonized.

Nowadays, by applying a strong theoretic simplification the EU-12 countries, with the exception of Malta and Cyprus, are meant by Central European or Central Eastern European countries based on their common experiences rooted in the communist era and their common interests and objectives regarding the Euro-Atlantic integration. Nevertheless, the notion is composed of smaller regions, such as Baltic countries, Central Europe, and Southeast Europe.
Additionally, some other issues have to be taken into consideration. Firstly, the role of Germany in Central Europe is always dubious. Many fear from its overwhelming influence (Busek, 1992: 38.); however, German influence is important and advantageous part of Central European culture. Today it is out of question that Central European cooperation cannot exist without Germany due to economic reasons and it is also proven that Germany’s former approach towards Mitteleuropa changed.

Secondly, Italy cannot be let alone. In Northern parts of Italy the importance of Central Europe is well defined; there are research- and cultural centers dealing with this issue. Italy is involved in much collaboration relating to the region.

Thirdly, Austria’s role is worth examining. For many centuries Austrian emperors led most of the territories under analysis. However, after 1918 the country turned a cold shoulder to her Eastern neighbours. The redefinition of her interests and ties in the region were restarted only in the transition period.

Then Poland has to be taken into consideration. She is one of the most important countries in the region in terms of population, economy, internal market, and territory. Being a connector between the Baltic States and Central Europe, Russia and Germany; Poland has distinct ideas on the region than her neighbours. Generally she prefers to broaden Central Europe in Eastwards. Nevertheless, her Eastern neighbours, such as Ukraine and Belorussia can be seen hardly as Central European countries.

In the meantime, Romania and Bulgaria prefers being mentioned as components of Central Europe. It is better than being Eastern, Southeast European or Eastern Balkan; unless their interests suggest so. In comparison, countries in the Balkans generally do not consider themselves as Central Europeans; with the exception of Croatia and Slovenia due to their historical and economic development.

All in all, based on the geographical, cultural, historical, and ethnical aspects the borders of Central Europe cannot be clearly marked. Therefore other elements are needed to be identified such as the efforts to create cooperation in the region concerned.

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4 This is underlined by two reasons: first, the interest of the country to create good relations with its Eastern neighbours against Russia; second, to preserve the interests of the Polish minorities living in these countries.
3.2. Concepts for Central Europe

Regional cooperation or unification of the area lying between Western and Eastern Europe is not a recent idea. During the 19th century many concepts were already elaborated; these efforts were boosted after World War I (WWI). After the long existence of a multinational empire the disintegration of the territory had destructive effects on the development of the region. The idea of collaboration was inspired by external factors too, such as the political or economic aspirations of the neighbouring powers.

It must be highlighted that many of these concepts were built on the Danube. As it will be introduced in the next chapter the river as a shared geographic phenomenon had huge importance and symbolic force in the region which is famous for its heterogeneity. As Erhard Busek points out, the Danube symbolizes the fate of the region (Busek, 1992: 30.).

According to Ignác Romsics the concepts of regional cooperation are divided into four groups. Firstly, during the 19th century federal reconfiguration of the Habsburg Empire was suggested by recognizing the necessity of political reforms to secure its maintenance. The federation would have consisted of several equal parts. Not only Hungarian politicians were in favor of the idea but also the representatives of the minorities living in the Empire. Differences appeared concerning the principles on which the units would have been separated. Miklós Wesselényi suggested creating 5 units based on the historical-political traditions (Austria, Bohemia-Moravia, Galicia, Hungary, and Lombardy). Romania, Moldavia and even a Bulgarian–Serb–Bosnian state could have joined the federation.

Based on the political conception of the Dual Monarchy Karl Renner suggested the same system with eight equal parts ruled by semi-autonomous separate governments. The central government would have been charged only with foreign affairs, defense, finances, social and juridical assistance. However, his idea envisioned organizing the different units in line with geographical and natural divisions. Within them, nationalities would have had the right to organize themselves and have enjoyed all the liberties. Therefore the main emphasis was not on the principle of nationality since Renner
claimed that nations were unities of autonomous persons without land (Weibel, 2004: 215.).

Similarly, in 1848-49 the Croat Ognjeslav Ostrozinski and the Czech Frantisek Palacky envisioned a federation of seven or eight units; whereas their concept was based on the ethnical/national principle. They would have accepted the leadership of the Habsburgs aiming at the elimination of both the German and the Russian threat. The federative idea of Aurel Popovici was more detailed: he suggested to form 15 divisions within the Monarchy based on the ethnical and linguistic composition of the population. Even the Austrian social-democrats suggested a federation of equal nationalities who were to have had autonomous communities. All these approaches reflected on national principles.

It was Lajos Kossuth who published the concept of the Danube Federation in 1862. Interestingly he did not include Austria in the federative state but the Lower Danube countries, such as Hungary, Transylvania (independently), Romania, and a Southern Slavic country composed of the Croats, Serbs, and the Bosnians. He aimed at the reconciliation of the peoples of Central Europe based on the principles of liberty, equality, justice, and solidarity. This concept was followed by Oszkár Jászi also before the end of World War I. Jászi put forward the idea of a United States of the Danube Countries by involving Poland among the members beside Austria, Bohemia, Hungary, and Illyria as the alliance of the Southern Slavs. These concepts were based on a liberal political approach and mainly economic interests. All in all, by the end of WWI many concepts were born in order to reform the Habsburg Empire; however, they proved to be overdue. By the end of the war the Western powers promised more than Hungarian and Austrian politicians; so the latter’s offers were not adequate for the representatives of minorities anymore.

Secondly, during World War I the initial success of the central powers inspired new thoughts, namely the Mitteleuropa concept which could have been mainly realized under German leadership. The already mentioned Friedrich List aimed to create customs union between Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; but including possibly France, the Benelux and the Scandinavian countries. Again, the economic surplus of the probable cooperation was highlighted although List envisioned the existence of Central Europe under German-Hungarian guidance (Magris, 2005: 96.).
Constantin Frantzé adopted this idea by elaborating his views on the alliance of the Danube peoples from Germany to the delta of the river. The elaboration of the Mitteleuropa concept is related to Friedrich Naumann who supported the idea of customs union within the region but explicitly subordinating it to German interests. He declared the federation as the sole form of the modern state; which was to solve the problems of the minorities as well. Within a Central European federation Germany would be the economic and cultural engine of the alliance. Nevertheless, due to the defeat of the Central powers the concept of Mitteleuropa fell into oblivion after WWI.

In the meantime, several pan-Slavic ideas were born, aiming at the union of Slavic territories under the protective wings of Russia. They underlined the cultural community of Slavic people; however, economic considerations were also important. In 1916 the debates of Saint Petersburg were about the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire and the establishment of a possible alliance among Poland, Czechoslovakia, Serbia, and Russia. In order to bridge over the geographical distances Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria could have joined the alliance but not as equal partners. At that time this proposal was rejected; however, the Soviet Union had the chance to effectuate her expansionist aims after World War II by compelling Central Europe to adopt the semi-Asian culture (Romsics, 1999: 10.). The idea of the Yugoslav unification appeared, as well; Jovan Cvijic, Serb geographer insisted on the alliance of Croats and Serbs during the war. In the meantime, there were Western thinkers who supported the same idea. For instance Louis Léger, expert of Slavic peoples declared that only pan-Slavism could eliminate pan-Germanism.

Finally, after 1918, various ideas were sketched out by politicians of the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. A few thinkers or politicians recognized the weaknesses and the dangers of the small statehood in Central Europe such as blind nationalism, huge minorities, weak and small states. Therefore they aimed at creating regional cooperation; however, any kind of association was impossible between the victorious and defeated countries. In 1917 Masaryk proposed the alliance of Polish, Czechoslovaks, and Southern Slavs which could have been enlarged by Hungary, Italy, or Romania. But after the peace treaties he changed his views and became satisfied with the situation; moreover, he thought that Germany surrounded with small independent states would not be able to threaten the peace of the continent.
In the interwar period Oskar Halecki spelled out the chronologic and geographical problems of Central Europe. His solution would have been a Czech – Polish – Hungarian alliance based on the Jagiellon tradition. Elemér Hantos presented the federation of small states where both the economic unity and peoples’ autonomy were solved. He also emphasized the importance of the Danube as an important means of any kind of cargo (Németh, 2010: 40.). What is more, he spelled out the two indispensable components of effective regional cooperation: cultural and economic collaboration.

Between the two World Wars the economic crisis worsened the situation of Central Europe. In 1932 an international conference was held in Budapest aiming at the cooperation of six successor states of the Habsburg Empire. The idea was based on the Tardieu Plan envisioning the regional alliance of these states by recognizing and exploiting mutual benefits (Molnár, 2010: 46.). The efforts had no chance to be realized because of the German disagreement; later Hitler effectuated economic cooperation within the region. The Führer concluded bilateral economic treaties with each country therefore the members did not enjoy equal opportunities but they became subordinated to Germany. This was similar to the concept of Mitteleuropa, although he had clearly different intentions.

All in all, there were many excellent ideas in order to create a federation in the region however, generally the owners of these concepts were far from being decision-makers or having any influence on the process of decision-making.

After World War II most Central European countries found themselves under Soviet rule, consequently, any regional cooperation was unimaginable without the “protection and support” of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the idea of Central Europe became more popular in the 70-80s among Hungarian, Czech and Polish intellectuals, especially after the publication of Kundera’s famous book on “The Stolen West or the Tragedy of Central Europe”. The idea at that time was the differentiation of the societies and countries concerned from the Soviet ones; therefore it had significant symbolic force.

3.3. Regional Cooperation Initiatives after the Transition

Nevertheless, the realization of any effective regional cooperation could have taken place only after the transitions. The democratically elected governments were in favor
of an idea to establish independent regional cooperation. Nevertheless, the revival of nationalism, the Balkan wars, and the concurrence towards the Euro-Atlantic integration hindered the creation of any efficient regional collaboration. Many of such organizations were established with more, but generally with less success. Some of the most important ones are dealt with in order to highlight the major difficulties.

Although the Visegrád4, established as Visegrád3 by Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, was hanged on after the birth of Slovakia; up to date it proved to be the most successful and attractive cooperation frame in the region. Looking back to the past 20 years of the V4’s existence, it can be stated that the cooperation which aimed at the facilitation of the integration of the countries to the EU and NATO, remained an efficient forum of the four states even after their accession. The size of the countries concerned with the exception of Poland would not let them to represent regional interests among EU Member States while their common and harmonized voice results in significant benefits. Although some experts suggest that the Visegrád4 is getting to be “burnt out” it has to be mentioned that it attracts other countries in the region such as Austria, Slovenia, Ukraine and Romania. What is more, even Germany pays attention to the cooperation and takes part often at the meeting of the Visegrád Plus.5

The Regional Partnerships was established in 2001 aiming at the redefinition of Austria’s role within the region. It functions as an informal working forum for regional cooperation among six countries: Austria, Slovenia and the Visegrád4 countries are taking part in the initiative so it is frequently called as V4+2. Its main goal was the reinforcement and consolidation of regional networks. Nowadays, after the 2004 enlargement of the EU, it became a platform for defining common interests within the EU and the Common Foreign and Security Policy.6 Therefore its profile is broadened by a security cooperation, as well, as having a strong commitment to neighbouring regions especially, Ukraine and the Western Balkans. However, without any fixed action plans it remains weak.

As far as the Central European Initiative is concerned it is based on mainly Italy’s initiation. It proved to be attractive since it was founded by the Quadragonaia, namely by Italy, Austria, Hungary, and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1989;

5 See http://www.visegradgroup.eu/ (12.03.2011.)
6 See www.regionalpartnerships.gov.au/ (12.03.2011.)
and nowadays it is consisted of 18 members including countries from the Western Balkans, Eastern and Central Europe. Among its main goals, the aim of avoiding new division lines in Europe can be mentioned as well as the purpose of bringing its member countries closer to each other and to the EU. Its indisputable merit is having many fields of cooperation and reinforcing the interaction between general ideas and operational support. However, the fields of cooperation are still limited and it supports generally simple projects or one-time events which lack longstanding and deeper impacts.

Moving on, the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA) was established to answer the external requirements of regional free trade area prior to the accession of the Viseégrád4 to the European Common Market. Nonetheless, the initiative proved to be quite successful. At the beginning it was established as the economic component of the V4, nowadays it is composed of Germany, Poland, Austria, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, and Greece. This is a positive instance for an efficient long-term project with clear economic outcomes (Lopandic, 2001: 2.). It is worth mentioning that while general free trade agreements are restrained for the trade of industrial products; in case of CEFTA even the trade of agricultural goods is handled.

In case of South Eastern Europe other regional initiatives exist as well. The Southeast European Cooperation Process (SEECP) was established in 1996 on Bulgarian initiative as the successor of the Balkan cooperation. Nevertheless, it remained a “declaration oriented initiative” (Lopandic, 2001: 3.) by holding summits and adopting declarations without deeper impacts.

Moving on, the Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI) was created in the same year as the SEECP, but on American initiative as the continuation of the process launched by the Dayton accords. Compared to the SEECP it was more attractive due to its pragmatic and narrowly specified approach even though in financial terms it

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7 Among the members of the Central European Initiative there are nine EU Member States and nine non-Member States: Italy, Slovenia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus. See: [http://www.ceinet.org/content/member-states](http://www.ceinet.org/content/member-states) (20.10.2011.)


depended on the US. In 2009 its members created the *Regional Cooperation Council* which serves currently as advisory and coordination body, however, greater projects cannot be realized due to the lack of resources.\(^\text{10}\)

Further on, the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation* has to be mentioned as an initiative restricted to non-political areas. Its point of interest is given by the fact that it was encouraged by Turkey and Russia. It consists of a large and diverse institutional cooperation framework, therefore, it is quite vital on projects level but on implementation level is weak.\(^\text{11}\)

Moving to a bit eastwards, there are some ideas in that region as well but with almost the same or even less success. *GUAM* (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) connects four Eastern European countries.\(^\text{12}\) Nonetheless, it proves that in case of the absence of political will the scope of cooperation remains limited (Strázay, 2010: 138.).

On the whole, it can be stated that all the above mentioned cooperation reflects on the readiness of the countries of the regions to establish an effective regional cooperation. In contrast it is hindered by many factors. First of all, there is usually a lack of definite action plan; secondly, there are only one-time events without long-term effects; thirdly, regional initiatives suffer from limited areas of cooperation. Further on, the development of such initiatives is hindered by the lack of political will from upper-level decision-makers of the members. What is more, regional collaboration is often subordinated to relations with Western countries. Last but not least the heterogeneity of culture, religion, languages, geography, and political system are also the main hindrances of closer and efficient cooperation. As it was indicated, even the self-definition of the countries can be an obstacle.

As a final point to this section it is important to note that since the 18\(^{\text{th}}\) and 19\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries various concepts and efforts existed to build up Central Europe as such,

\(^\text{10}\) Nowadays SECI consists of 13 members (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Greece, and Turkey) and several observers. Since Slovenia and Croatia were not among the founders of the initiative they did not show any interest because they defined themselves Central than Southeaster Europe countries. Once Hungary joined the initiative these two did not object to their admission any more.

\(^\text{11}\) Members of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation are as follows: Russia, Turkey, Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine. See: [http://www.bsec-organization.org/Pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.bsec-organization.org/Pages/homepage.aspx) (2011.03.13.)

\(^\text{12}\) See [http://www.guam-organization.org/en/node](http://www.guam-organization.org/en/node) (13.03.2011.)
mainly by envisioning the federation/association of the countries concerned. Most of them represented political and national interests with the aim to enforce the Region in terms of economy. In the meantime, being aware of the multitude of peoples living in the region without clear ethnic border, the issue of autonomy of various ethnic groups was also addressed. However, due to various reasons none of them could have been realized or proved to be viable.

What is more, the fact the many countries in the region do not have clear self-definition concerning its belonging complicates the situation. They have multi-layered identities depending on the current interests, for instance, Hungary is generally defined as a Central European state, however, when its position in the integration of the Western Balkans is in question Hungary prefers being “the gate of the Balkans”

Since the transition the idea of Central European cooperation revived even though the collaborations which were formed lack several important components. Nevertheless, there are promising ideas. So the idea that János Martonyi has suggested has still relevance. According to him the Central European cooperation has altering forms therefore it does not have clear borders and easily defined territory (Martonyi, 2005: 303.). So the scope of Central Europe can be altered and even broadened if it is needed.

As it was stated by Ferenc L. Lendvai, geographical territories and regions are becoming separated due to the agreement of the people (Lendvai, 1997).

Nowadays the notion of Central Europe is getting to be important and popular for Central and Eastern European countries. There are some common interests; however, the images are often differing.

Additionally, Central Europe can be hardly separated from the Danube. According to Erhard Busek, the Danube is the symbol of Central Europe’s fate (Busek, 1992: 30.). This point gives the relevance of the approach taken by the Hungarian government after the elections in 2010. The Orbán-administration, as well as its counterparts in the region, mainly within the V4, did many efforts to spell out the importance of the Central European cooperation. Firstly, János Martonyi became the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Beside his expertise in law, he regularly deals with issues relating to Central Europe. He has many publications in the field and always confirms his belief in the region. Secondly, the Hungarian government together with the Visegrád countries emphasized
that 2011 was the year of Central Europe, primarily due to the consecutive presidencies of the EU Council held by Hungary and Poland. Thirdly, it was not only in the communication of the Orbán-cabinet but also many experts suggest that Central European countries will be soon the growth engine of Europe. Fourthly, one important priority issue of the Hungarian Presidency was the adoption of the Danube Strategy. As it was introduced before, the members of the Hungarian government expected the Strategy to reconstruct Central Europe. Now the ESDR has the chance to prove if Central Europe is (re)constructible and if yes, how.
4. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region has several novel and innovative measures compared to the previous policies or strategies of the Union. Additionally, the Danube, around which the initiative is centered, and the antecedents of the Strategy, are worth closer examination as well. Therefore this chapter introduces the importance of the river, the precedents, and the birth of the ESDR. Last but not least, its content will be briefly presented.

4.1. The Danube and Its Significance

The fact that the ESDR is centered on the Danube River draws the attention to the significance of water at the first glance. Nowadays it is becoming a common currency that water is frequently referred to as the “blue gold”. In many parts of the world, water scarcity and water pollution turn into significant problems. Additionally, researchers suggest that water can be regarded as a many-sided phenomenon bearing with various important aspects. For instance, water is considered to function as (1) a way of life; (2) a source of inspiration; (3) a source of cooperation; and (4) a source of power (Kley – Reijerkerk, 2009: 125-126). Therefore, apart from the objective characters of the River Danube, its importance has to be examined from these aspects as well.

There are many well-known facts about the Danube which need to be compiled here in order to demonstrate the importance of the Strategy. First of all, in Europe the Danube is the second longest river after the Volga. However, its significance doubles that of the Russian river. The catchment area of the Danube covers approximately 800,000 km² where the number of inhabitants is between 80-100 million people. The river and the basin’s surroundings are usually divided into 3 main parts: the Upper Danube Region (from the spring till Devin Gate at the Austrian – Slovakian border), the Central Danube Region and the Lower Danube Region (from the Iron Gate in Romania till the embouchure).

The Danube is the most international river in the world since there are 19 countries which have direct or indirect contact to it. The largest territories of the catchment area are shared by Romania (28.43%), Hungary (11.39%), Serbia (11.19%), and Austria (9.88%). Besides, there are countries having minor and peripheral share of the
catchment (Domokos, 2010: 4.). Its importance in the field of navigation became clear quite early: after the river Rhine it was the Danube that induced international navigation conferences during the 19th century; in the 20th century touristic and environmental issues were put on the table related to the river. Nevertheless, it is much more than a passive geographic phenomenon; it bears recreational, emotional, esthetical, functional (Török – Lendvai, 2011: 34.), and symbolical denotations as well.

The Danube has had three main different functions being a bridge, border and street. It was argued by Zoltán Gál that it is important to take into consideration the historical role of the river when its future is at stake. The Danube was one of the most important ways of transport in the middle ages. It had significance due to trade, military and cultural aspects. Therefore it was not a sole geographic notion but arterial road and clashing point of various ecological, political and economic conflicts (Gál, 2003: 90.). Consequently, it functioned as a border by separating cultural, ethnical and geographical units. On the other hand, thanks to the bridges and corridors it contributed to the development of certain areas by transferring novelties, innovations and achievements creating economic, trade or cultural centers. Last but not least, as a street it facilitated peaceful trade and sales relations, brought closer different peoples and products.

Even though the scarcity of Danube bridges has been recently alleviated, the river remains a dividing force rather than a connecting one. Taking the example of the Lower Danube where the river is the border between Romania and Bulgaria, the length of that part is about 609 km\textsuperscript{13} whereas only the second bridge has been recently inaugurated.

Opposing to this, the situation of cities having ports along the Danube bank is different: the river had important role in transferring cultural and trade products. Therefore the river was the innovation channel of the closed continental territory of the Danube Region (Gál, 2001: 91.). Towards the East the river had an integrative role as well.

Conversely, the fact that the river flows from the West to the East was responsible for the delay of the Region. Access to the Black Sea was limited while the center of trade shifted to the Atlantic Ocean from the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. This resulted in the peripheral status of Danube Region in the world economy. Access to the Black Sea was achieved only in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century; similarly, the Atlantic Ocean was reached out only in 1992 by the

\textsuperscript{13} See: \url{http://www.inco.hu/inco-4/innova/cikk2h.htm} (29.10.2011.)
construction of the Rhine – Main – Danube Canal. Whereas, the opportunities induced by having connected the Atlantic Sea and the Black Sea are not exploited yet. In this field there is more space for the ESDR.

Prior to World War I, the Danube was basically internal water of the Habsburg Empire and later the Dual Monarchy, during the 20th century it became more and more international. Potentials offered by the river were not exploited in the interwar period due to the existing hostility among the successor states. The situation was changed by the German penetration following the Great Crisis since the Danube became the main channel of the economic and political endeavors of the Third Reich (Gál, 2003: 93.). After the Anschluss a significant part of the river became German internal water since the Third Reich abolished its international character. In opposition, under the Cold War period most riparian countries became the members of the Eastern Bloc. The potentials of the river were exploited intensively – generally without any environmental concerns.

Nowadays the capacities of the river are far from being exploited. For instance, in case of the Rhine 90% of cargo is transported by the river and only the remaining 10% on the roads or other means. In comparison, in case of the Danube only 20% of the cargo is transported on the river and 80% is by other means. Additionally, inland navigation is in great crisis; it lacks both human and financial resources. What is more, its function extremely depends from the waterway conditions.

In some parts of the track there are mostly bad conditions: Straubing-Vilshofen; Vienna-Bratislava; Gabcikovo-Budapest. Because of these parts of the track the transport costs can grow about 300% when water is low; as a result, the Danube is not as attractive for transport companies as the Rhine.

Nevertheless, the significance of the river is demonstrated by those networks and organizations which deal with general or special issues in the region. Some of them have already long history and noteworthy achievements. Therefore their merits need to be briefly spelled out since all of them prove that both on international and regional scale the river is proved to be a catalyst for cooperation. Starting up by technical frames of cooperation whose existence is a necessity, successes achieved in these fields can spill over to other fields as well, by facilitating the common understanding and the peace among the participants.
After having various conventions regarding the navigation of the Danube, the International Danube Commission was created in 1948 in Belgrade. For the first time, only the riparian states became the members of the intergovernmental organization – including the Soviet Union. The Commission is responsible for defining the principles of the navigation corresponding to the interests of the members. Beside its noteworthy tradition and reconciliatory role, the Commission is frequently criticized because of its incapability to reform the Belgrade Convention.

During the Cold War we cannot mention many cooperation initiatives relating to the Region. Nevertheless, it is probable that the détente process had certain role in the founding of the Danube Tourist Commission in 1972. It is a tourist marketing association where Danube countries are represented by their national tourist organization. The idea of creating a uniform corporate identity for the Danube Region and presenting it as an attractive tourist destination and cultural area was already born at that time. In the meantime it has many associated initiatives and projects relating to the shipping, ales, cycling, and hiking as well.

Within the framework of the UN there were some initiatives in the field of environment, it was only after the transition that environment protection came into the fore. In this relation the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) has to be highlighted. In 1994 eleven countries signed the Danube River Protection Convention which established the international organization charged with the elaboration and implementation of the integrated river basin management. The ICPDR has certain merits; among them involving experts from the industry and agriculture, and representatives from environmental and consumer organizations, as well as the local and national authorities, into the development of the river basin management have to be highlighted.

In the field of transport the Corridor VII Steering Committee has to be stressed. The joint work is based on the agreement of the members and the Memorandum of Understanding concluded in 1994 in Crete. Its main focus lies on the Danube as an

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14 In 1856 the great powers established the European Commission of the Danube which was re-launched after WWI as the International Danube Commission. Interestingly, among the members not only riparian states but the most important powers of those times were also represented.
15 See [http://www.danubecommission.org/](http://www.danubecommission.org/) (22.01.2011.)
inland waterway to develop the main and ancillary infrastructures regarding the Corridor VII and the relating ports.\textsuperscript{18}

Regarding researches, the academia, and culture the Vienna-based Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM) has to be pointed out. As early as 1953 the predecessor of the Institute was established. As an Austrian scientific institution, it was dedicated specifically to conduct researches on the Danube Region. Additionally, it provides scholarships to researchers working in the field, and tries to enforce the perception of the Region in the literature.\textsuperscript{19}

Beside international level, regional, communal, and scientific networks already exist in the Danube Region. On regional level the Working Community of the Danube Regions (ARGE Donauländer) can be highlighted. In 1990 the signatories aimed at the promotion of cooperation among the members for the development of the Danube area. It is composed of working groups acting on various fields, such as the culture and science; youth and sports; environment protection; transport and navigation; rural development; and economy and tourism.\textsuperscript{20} It is composed of regional level actors, basically counties and regions. It works in close cooperation with the above mentioned organizations so as to maximize the gains of the Region.

On the other hand, it cannot be forgotten that the Rectors from the universities of Ulm, Linz, Vienna, and Budapest established the Danube Rectors’ Conference (DRC) at a meeting in Vienna in 1983. Since then, the number of countries and institutions involved in its activities has grown considerably. The DRC has served as a forum for the articulation and initiation of a number of joint research projects. Additionally, it has articulated many other priority issues in the field recently. Generally collaborating with IDM it takes important steps to address the youth and the scientific community of the Danube Region.\textsuperscript{21}

There are many active organizations and institutes related to the Danube and to the Region; however, each of them cannot be introduced. In the meantime, almost all the above mentioned ones will have considerable role in the implementation of the Strategy.

\textsuperscript{18} See \url{http://www.corridor7.org/meetings/steering-committee-of-the-pan-european-transport-corridor-vii/} (19.01.2011.)
\textsuperscript{19} See \url{http://www.idm.at/en/about_idm/} (20.01.2011.)
\textsuperscript{20} See \url{http://www.argedonau.at/neu/portal.html} (20.01.2011.)
Their experiences and proposals will be handled prudently in order to achieve the main aims.

4.2. Antecedents of the Strategy

During the socialist era intensive cooperation existed in the fields of economy and trade among the Danube countries under ‘Soviet patronage’ and leadership. After the change of regimes in 1989-90 these countries stood for enhanced and deepened relations with the institutions of the Euro-Atlantic integration. This was supported by various means of the European Union (at that time European Community).

As a matter of fact the transnational cooperation in spatial development was the antecedent of the macro regional strategies which was financed by the EU in the 1990s in Central Eastern Europe. The CADSES (Central, Adriatic, Danubian and South-Eastern European Space) programme’s aim was the development of trans-European cooperation, whereas facilitation cross-border and trans-regional cooperation too. CADSES wanted to achieve higher territorial and economic integration within the cooperation area, promoting more balanced and harmonious development of the European space. Nevertheless, the existing inequalities regarding economic development, territorial size and competencies of the members hindered the ‘éclat’ of the initiative (Gál, 2003: 106.). The last wave of the EU-enlargement resulted in different situation by engaging most of the countries concerned in the Community.

The concept of the macro region is quite new in the EU jargon, whereas it exists in political geography for more than 70 year. The lobby of the later Baltic Sea Strategy started to use it; then it was applied during the elaboration of the ESDR too. Since then it became recognized by the Cohesion Policy and becomes more significant by getting special role during the planning of the next Multiannual Financial Framework period. Based on the definition of the European Commission a macro region is “an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges (...) geographic, cultural, economic or other” (European Commission, 2009: 1.).

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23 The budget of the European Union is planned for several years, at the moment for seven years by an interinstitutional agreement of the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament. The Treaty of Lisbon consist the legally binding states of the Multiannual Financial Framework. The next period will start in 2014 whose negotiations are in process.
Additionally, the concept of the functional macro region (FMR) was developed to cope with, beside common regional challenges, problems posed by the parallel processes of globalization and localization, competitiveness and democracy deficit.

The Baltic Sea Strategy was adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2009. Since then its merits were demonstrated; first of all, the integrative approach of differing policies; secondly, the constant dialogue among its members. In line with the statement of the Commission the basis of the Strategy is the recognition of the fact that, whereas the member countries are different from each other, in many fields they lean on common resources therefore they are interdependent and dependent from the use of these resources (Dieringer – Laukó – Schneider, 2010b: 64-66.).

Owing to the initial success of the Baltic Strategy, the European Parliament recognized the relevance of macro regional approach in its Position in 2010. By adapting the already existing projects to the novel framework of the Strategy and reinforcing integrated approach of launched policies, not only negative effects are eliminated but common efforts result in mutually beneficial outcomes. So within a functional macro region different kind of policies cooperates more closely in their cross-sectoral connections and produce synergies (Ágh, 2010: 16.).

Prior to the birth of the FMR, the policies of the Union were characterized by holistic approach; supporting territorial and cross-border cooperation by the instruments of Regional or Cohesion Policy can be regarded as the antecedents of FMR. Functional macro regional initiatives enable the merge of extensive community policies and regional initiatives on the one hand (Dieringer – Laukó – Schneider, 2010a: 2.); on the other hand, they facilitate the greater involvement of civil society into the decision-making processes directly relating to their region.

As a result, in the post-2013 period Cohesion Policy will draw more attention to functional macro regions due to the initial success of the Baltic and the Danube Strategy. Additionally it was also suggested to secure a separate budgetary line

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25 Nevertheless, the attention has to be drawn to the fact that in case of the Baltic Strategy less than 3 years, and regarding the Danube Strategy, less than 6 month passed since their adoption. Therefore far-reaching conclusions cannot be drawn even though there are already numerous lessons learnt. Their effects and merits can only be examined by looking back after that a longer period has passed. What is
especially for macro region within the new budgetary framework (Kaiser, 2010: 54.).

The aim of this measure would be to facilitate the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy; moreover, to deepen the integration.

Attila Ágh has drawn the attention to the fact that functional macro region can be regarded as a special type of multilevel governance structures (Ágh, 2010: 19.). Anna Molnár claims that they are new and enhanced forms of these new governance structures (Molnár, 2010: 126.). Their overarching aim is preventing the unnecessary proliferation of bureaucracy, reinforcing transparency, decreasing the democracy deficit of the EU and involving the society. Therefore on the basis of socio-economic networks and multilevel partnerships, complex governance structures are supposed to be created.

In case of the Baltic Strategy this process worked well since in that region the culture of a well-established institutional background exists for a long time in opposition to the Danube Region. Despite this advantageous factor lower level actors were missing from the consultations (Pálmai, 2010: 101.).

Additionally, the EU cannot play global role without regionalization and Europeanization of its neighbourhood (Ágh, 2010: 14.). Up to date various policies were launched with this aim. Even though experts do not agree on the outcomes of these policies or strategies it is proven that in regard to foreign policy there is a convergence of the votes of neighbouring countries and EU Member States in the UN. However, generalization should be avoided since Macedonia does not vote differently than the EU does while in case of Serbia the Russian influence cannot be neglected. All in all, the ESDR will facilitate forming common approaches and opinions among its members. This results in more harmonized relations on the one hand; on the other hand, stronger voice towards the global partners.

4.3. The Birth of the Strategy

As far as the birth of the EDSR is concerned, first, it should be noted that since the 2004 and 2007 enlargement the European Union became a Danube based integration
As Erhard Busek spelled out the European integration started with the aim to bridge over the river Rhine. Today, the Danube has to overbridge different nations, countries, cultures, hostilities, etc. The question is how the countries along the Danube can exploit this opportunity and fulfill their obligation.

Presumably the representatives of the countries concerned aimed at finding an answer to this question in Budapest in 2006. They confirmed their readiness to harmonize the region’s development plans and territorial policies.

Prior to this meeting, the Small Danube Cooperation has to be mentioned. In 2001 Germany, Austria, and Hungary founded the Andrássy Gyula German Language University in Budapest, too. The University celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2011; in the year when the Danube Strategy was launched. Besides, it has many activities to raise awareness in the field of regional thinking and cooperation; training intellectuals for politics, administration, international organizations, and companies aiming at the reinforced cooperation of German speaking countries as well as Central and Eastern Europe. Additionally, in the framework of the Strategy it will launch the Danube Research Institute aiming at researching and studying the past and the present of the region and its future improvement opportunities.

Then the elaboration of the Danube Strategy, the Ulm process got impetus in 2008 by two remarkable events: firstly, Peter Straub President of the Council of Baden Württemberg proposed the establishment of the Commission of the Danube Regions within the framework of the Council of Regions. Secondly, the EU support for the Danube Region was initiated by Austria and Romania which was endorsed by the EU Commissioner responsible for Regional Policy, Danuta Hübner. The adoption of the Ulm declaration in the same year has to be spelled out as well.

Since new Member States suffer from a lot of common problems, such as fragmented markets, high energy prices, economic and environmental vulnerability,

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27 Nevertheless we should bear in mind how the Danube is ignored for example in the field of transport: as it was highlighted before the proportion of the cargo transported on the river comparing the Danube and the Rhine differs greatly.
interdependency, bad connectivity in the field of energy, poor transport infrastructure, high debts, and jobless growth, the 2008 Ulm Declaration\(^{29}\) had recognized that the future development of the Danube area depends on the successful cooperation of the cities and regions connected to the river.

The conclusion of the 2009 Ulm Conference drew the attention of the EU institutions to the urgent necessity of handling the issue. Consequently, in the same year the European Council called upon the European Commission to elaborate on a strategy for the Danube Region. So the Commission asked for the opinion of the countries aiming to take part in the initiative. Even though the German plans were about a smaller group of participants in the Strategy, Hungary emphasized the involvement of a broader group of countries. Apart from environmental concerns, since water pollution does not recognize borders, the possible incorporation of the relevant aspects of Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies were also significant for Hungary. Given the fact that the non-Member States indicated their well-established interest in taking part in the Strategy the latter idea was accepted.

After having defined the priorities of the collaboration, the elaboration of national thesis papers and the stakeholders’ conferences took place during 2009 and 2010. Then the European Commission published its Communication and Action Plan on EDSR and in the first half of 2011, it was the task of the Hungarian Presidency to sell it to the European Council – whose endorsement was acquired at the EU summit in June 2011.

Even though the launch and the implementation of the Strategy was not the task of the Hungarian Presidency, significant efforts were taken during the first half of 2011. Meetings on coordination and financial questions were held and other measures secured the successful launch of the ESDR.

4.4. Brief Introduction of the Strategy

First of all, among the 14 members of the Strategy six are not EU-Member States; they are candidate countries or countries aspiring for accession (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and

\(^{29}\) See: http://www.danubestrategy.eu/uploads/media/Schlusserklaerung_Donaukonferenz_Ulm_2008_01.pdf (20.03.2011.)
Herzegovina, and Montenegro), and neighbouring countries (Ukraine and Moldova). The Danube Strategy is consisted of four pillars aiming to strengthen the region and build up a strong macro region. These pillars cover many fields on which there are already some active organizations or projects. Since the Strategy wants to become an umbrella of all the existing and future projects and organizations functioning in the Danube Region it does not want to substitute all of them but to work with them and facilitate their job.

The four pillars are the following: 1) Connectivity: connecting the regions along the Danube with each other and linking them up with other regions; 2) Environment: reinforcing the protection of environment; 3) Prosperity: generating welfare in the macro region; 4) Enforcement: strengthening the Danube region. These pillars consist of eleven priorities (Priority Area, PA) which are lead jointly by two co-coordinator countries in order to harmonize differing point of views and exploiting all possible opportunities; and several flag ship initiatives so as to ensure the efficient, coordinated and trans-boundary implementation of the Strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar 1: Connectivity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A: To improve mobility and intermodality – Inland waterways</td>
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<tr>
<td>1B: To improve mobility and intermodality – rail, road and air</td>
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<tr>
<td>2: To encourage more sustainable energy</td>
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<td>3: To promote culture, tourism and people-to-people contacts</td>
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<th>Pillar 2: Environment</th>
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<td>4: To restore and maintain the quality of waters</td>
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<td>5: To manage environmental risks</td>
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<td>6: To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils</td>
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<th>Pillar 3: Prosperity</th>
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<tr>
<td>7: To develop the knowledge society (research,</td>
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See Map 1 and 2 manifesting the territorial coverage of the ESDR on p.72.
Table A: The construction of the ESDR (source: European Commission)

Consequently, the way how the ESDR is constructed is very similar to the Baltic Sea Strategy which consists of four pillars, several priorities and various flagship initiatives as well. But the institution of co-leadership is an innovation aiming to put more emphasis on harmonization, maintaining dialogue and involving non-Member States to the implementation. The participation of countries beyond the borders of the European Union is also a novelty of the Danube Strategy since the members of the Baltic Strategy are solely Member States. They intended to cooperate more closely with Russia; however, they did not succeed due to various reasons. The contribution of candidate or neighbouring countries is slightly different from that of Russia: their size, their political weight, their aspirations for membership status and their relations with the EU leaves more space for fruitful collaboration.

Besides, despite the similarities of the two strategies their focus is quite similar but still different. The resemblance is that both of them consider the water, on which the initiatives are centered, as a source of cooperation. Organizations and projects focusing on the river or the sea are facilitating the communication, the assembly and the collaboration of their members. This is undoubtedly a crucial issue. In opposition, it is necessary to understand the fact that the sea and the river offers altered advantages and poses different challenges; moreover, the geographical position of the participating countries is unalike as well. What is more, most of the Danube countries are landlocked so it is solely the river which represents the way out to the sea.

Last but not least, according to the European Commission, the Strategy is aimed to rely on two more principles which are the cross-sectoral approach and the establishment of clear objectives and targets. Additionally, the European Commission is supposed to define the criteria and the content of a “Danube label”. The label was proposed to guarantee the positive discrimination of those projects which would contribute to the realization of the Danube Strategy. However, up to now the Commission could not agree on a Danube label, although there is a real need to provide some advantage to the Danube Strategy projects being aware of the fact that there are no additional financial means for the implementation.

All in all, it has to be noticed that the basis of the Danube Strategy is significant. Generally, water, beside its many functions, can be regarded as a source of cooperation. Additionally, the Danube River has always had an important role in the Region. Even though the concept of macro regions exists for a long time; its significance has been recently recognized also by the EU. The ESDR has many novelties; yet compared to its predecessor, the Baltic Sea Strategy; which can guarantee its success.
5. The Potential of the Strategy and the Region

As it was introduced before, the main aim of the Danube Strategy is to exploit the existing but, up to now, untapped capacities both of the Region and the new approach. Therefore, the factors which can contribute to the success of the ESDR have to be analyzed. The Strategy is composed of various measures that represent added value for both the Region and the whole Union.

During the examination we have to bear in mind that in the beginning of the 21st century it became clear that the enlarged EU has to cope with several new challenges which require new approaches and new answers. There are complex problems so there is a need to answer them in a common and harmonized way. Before all, the Strategy has very clear objectives to cope with them.

5.1. Multispeed Integration

New circumstances such as globalization, localization, improvement of European integration and regionalization provided new challenges, however, new opportunities as well for the Member States. As De Neve notes, the European integration today resembles an onion which is “a visualization of governance in Europe segmented not only by policy areas and levels of government – as has been the conventional wisdom – but also by subgroups of Europeans states” (De Neve, 2007: 504.). The reason of this phenomenon is quite complex: enlargement procedures, opt-outs from various common policies, the failure of the Constitutional Treaty, and democracy deficit can be also mentioned.

The advancement of the European integration brought about the requirement of differentiated integration. The flexibility clause was finally codified by the Treaty of Amsterdam, concluded in 1997, hand in hand with those elements whose aim was an enhanced and stronger European identity. The “Big Bang enlargement” resulted in a much more diverse Union which created the prerequisite to acknowledge the multi-speed or á la Carte Europe while territorial sub-groups emerged. So the need to foster bottom up processes and cooperation appeared at the levels of individuals (Koller,

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32 The literature generally refers under the term of “Big Band enlargement” to the accession of ten countries to Union in 2004.
The purpose of the multi-speed integration is to enable certain countries facing common problems to cope with them efficiently. With the exception of Germany and Austria, the participants of the ESDR are new Member States, candidate or neighbouring countries. The intensification of the integration is of utmost importance especially for new Member States where, firstly the “enlargement fatigue” is not perceivable yet and, secondly, it is a common currency that only a strong community has a chance to act as a global leader.

As it was argued by many experts and politicians “a stronger Danube Region would result in a stronger Europe” (Reinhart, 2010: 18.). As a result, the Danube Strategy is an opportunity for Central European countries which are usually tired from France, Germany, and the UK when they try to stitch up EU-decision making. Although most regional initiatives were not really successful, the Visegrád4 recently proved to be more determined in the field of energy security and related issues. However, the V4 is quite narrow and many neighbouring countries indicated their interest in being involved. So Visegrád Plus was opened up for Romania, Ukraine and the other countries of the region. Nevertheless, the Danube Strategy can take over this role and can provide the frame not only for a regional political platform but an efficient regional cooperation.

As it was stated by Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski, the financial and economic crisis was originated in the EU-15; due to the incapability to reinforce the integration and the system that Central Europe had to adopt after the fall of communism. Now it is the responsibility of these countries to secure the further development of the Euro-Atlantic integration and to represent in this framework their own interests.

5.2. New Strategic Approach

One of the possible outcomes of the above mentioned multispeed integration is the concept of functional macro region which has been already introduced. Many EU experts claims that the ESDR as a new type of community initiatives is supposed to win over. In the framework of FMR informal levels of decision-making and policy-making work, therefore it applies mainly soft law. There are no obligatory measures, no strict rules which could limit the maneuvering opportunities opposing to common sense.

Moreover, actions in the field of soft law are more easily executed on international level; in the meantime these measures can permeate to the field of hard law as well.

Additionally the Danube Strategy is an intersection for EU policies including Cohesion Policy, Neighbourhood Policy, Enlargement Policy, etc. (Molnár, 2010: 112-113.) By harmonizing and aligning these policies many unnecessary and destructive collisions can be eliminated. However, the ESDR cannot be the alternative of these policies, rather an additional mean for their effective implementation (Dieringer – Laukó – Schneider, 2010b: 72).

The scope of macro regional approach is much broader than the scope of regional approach applied in Cohesion Policy, additionally it is more flexible. Consequently, it is able to take over more creativity coming from regional actors and makes this initiative more favorable. On the other hand, flexibility reveals in other aspects as well. The Action Plan of the ESDR will be reviewed, amended, and updated biannually and adjusted to the new experiences and needs. So the priorities remain but the goals and the means can be modified in order to reach the optimal results.

By examining the aims of the Strategy it is ostensibly the Europe 202034 re-suited specifically to the Danube Region. That’s why it was supported by the European Commission and other Member States since it was clear the ESDR would be a specific means to meet the goals of Europe 2020 in this region. The already cited phrase emphasizing that a stronger Danube Region results in a stronger Europe reflects on the same issue.

Further on, the enforced political support provided by the Danube Strategy to existing and future programmes in the Region, and the extra attention coming from other parts of Europe can result in changing the semi-peripheral position of the region.

By rearranging the existing, however, not exploited EU funds, the Danube Strategy will not lack financial resources; most of the funding will come mainly from the European Territorial Cooperation Programmes. It must be highlighted that within the 2007-13 Multiannual Financial Framework there are still €4.3 billion for these cooperation

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34 The Europe 2020 is the growth strategy of the European Union adopted in 2010. It is the successor of the Lisbon Strategy whose aims were hardly achieved.
programmes (De Martin, 2011: 2.). However, certain countries use only 20-40% of their EU support while the rest of money remains at the European Commission unused. So the money is secured whereas the absorption has to be resolved. Moreover, the European Investment Bank (EIB) has already indicated interest in financing well-elaborated and comprehensive projects envisioning trans-national benefits. The EIB Danube Contact Point is being set up in Budapest where representatives of the ESDR member countries will provide assistance in a rotating system.

In the meantime, ESDR represents an important opportunity for the countries waiting for accession to get to know the procedures and functioning of EU policies. Candidate and neighbouring countries were involved into the preparation processes from the beginnings. In February 2011 it was confirmed that even non-Member States can take the leadership of the priority areas hand in hand with Member States. There is no doubt that these measures enforce their commitment towards the Strategy and meeting the criteria of the EU accession. Moreover, their adjustment to EU-procedures is facilitated in this way. On the other hand, these countries really hope that their participation in the implementation of the Strategy will bring them closer to the integration. The involvement of Croatia and Serbia so far is without precedent (Dieringer – Wulf, 2011: 43.) which indicates their strong commitment and interest in the success of the Strategy.

The EU has already offered clear integration perspective for the Western Balkans. A novelty is that in case of the Western Balkans the standard set of the accession criteria has been extended and regional cooperation has been added. While in the previous enlargements regional cooperation was important and very desirable factor, it was never included in the obligatory requirements for the EU membership. The EU has attached greater importance to the regional cooperation in the Western Balkans and promoted and assessed in the course of the countries’ progress towards the Community. Such a prerequisite is understandable taking into consideration the proximity and historical ties of these countries, additionally their small territorial coverage, population, and economic resources. However, due to lack of experience and poor resources they are incapable to fulfill the criterion. Nevertheless, the Danube Strategy is able to bridge over this obstacle and bring Western Balkans countries closer to the EU.

Another merit of the structure of the Strategy is the idea of co-leadership of the tasks. The goal of the measure is launching continuous dialogue and possible reconciliation
between countries lacking well-balanced relations. The co-leadership of Priority Area 4 and 5 led jointly by Hungary-Slovakia and Hungary-Romania is the best example for these reconciliatory efforts.

5.3. Multilevel Governance (MLG)

The theory of multilevel governance appeared in the beginning of the 1990s when the European Union aimed at incorporating a regional dimension into policy making by ensuring a counterbalance to the centralizing tendencies which appeared in the Single European Act and later on in the Maastricht Treaty (Sweeney, 2005: 170.). The implementation of regional development projects required the establishment of partnerships consisting of multiple actors, from the Commission itself to local actors, including national, sub-national authorities and stakeholders. The transnational character was also emphasized.

Nowadays, due to the last wave of enlargement and the new problems of the Community regional, state, and supranational actors need to share control over various activities that concern them. Additionally, transnational linkages between actors are more beneficial for each of them. In line with the principle of subsidiary within the framework of multilevel governance each issue has to be settled at the lowest level possible.

Further on, such parallel processes as globalization and localization\(^\text{35}\) enforced the above described necessity of MLGs. According to experts, democratic deficit, competitiveness problems, unnecessary centralization of power will be handled by this new mean (Ágh, 2010: 20.). This is why one of the most important aims of the Danube Strategy is to enforce the bottom-up approach and build on multilevel partnerships. This is one key component to exploit the potential of the Region (Kaiser, 2010: 45.). Active participation of local and regional actors or authorities will facilitate the success of the Strategy since local leaders are more reliable and trustworthy for the citizens than national politicians. What is more, this approach can ease the enforcement of regional ownership of the Strategy: if citizens are sure that they are familiar with the aims of the ESDR their commitment is much stronger.

\(^{35}\) By using the term of localization two parallel processes are referred to: involvement of lower level actors to the solutions of those problems which affect them directly.
Last but not least, the means of European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) cannot be let alone. In the Danube Region the success of the Strategy and EGTC are closely linked. EGTC provides legal status for cooperation realized by municipalities and regions from at least two member states. However, it is important to note that this means is unavailable for non-Member States so in this regard these countries are handicapped.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight that opportunities provided by EGTCs are mainly exploited by actors based in the Danube Region. So it is no surprise that throughout Europe many EGTCs are related to the Danube. Exchanges of best practices related to EGTCs, elimination of bottlenecks at the borders and development of competitive regions are among the priorities of the ESDR (Szabó, 2011: 16-17.). Even though this legal means is quite new the number of cross-border cooperation realized within this framework is increasing continuously. It seems that the Danube Strategy provides a new impetus for them.

5.4. Economic Opportunities

Since the ESDR has important economic profile the examination of the region’s economic opportunities cannot be ignored. Although there are significant differences among the countries concerned in the fields of economic development and competitiveness; many factors suggest that the Danube area and/or Central Europe can become the growth engine of Europe in the next years. As it was highlighted before, this approach is part of the communications and the image of the Hungarian government on Central Europe.

Nevertheless, many facts can evidence that this is not only a vision but a well-established statement. First of all, it is proven that the least developed territories of the EU have shown huge and quick growth in the last decade. Experts argue that the

36 During the Hungarian Presidency of the European Council even a conference was held under the title of “Conference on EGTC and Multi-level Governance” in April 2011. See: http://www.cor.europa.eu/cor_cms/ui/ViewDocument.aspx?contentid=1a16467a-a654-49d9-8bc1-e4af1a209585 (16.10.2011.)
38 See Table 1 on p.73.
Region has the biggest unexploited potentials within the EU (Ágh, 2010: 16.). Therefore a prudent and comprehensive strategy can reinforce this development.

Secondly, there are certain scholars who have doubts about the existence of skilled labour force in the region (Ágh, 2010: 19.). Even though people above the age of 50 are not well-educated as far as the young generation is concerned the new MSs have high educational standards and the level of graduated people is continuously increasing.39

Thirdly, based on the European Commission’s data the proportion of youth is higher in EU-12 than in EU-15.40 It is true that the phenomenon of ageing society permeating to the Region too; however, at this moment the elimination of the migration of the youth is important both for the Region and for the target countries. So the augmentation of the employment rate is essential from this point of view to release this untapped potential.41

Fourthly, the innovation potential of the Region has to be also mentioned. High level scientific and technological (S&T) bilateral cooperation exist traditionally between Germany and Hungary, Germany and Austria, and Austria and Hungary. Recently the number of S&T cooperation increased significantly between Hungary and Romania. Fruitful multilateral collaboration was initiated by various EU projects focusing on the West Balkans, Southeast and Eastern Europe mainly under Austrian or German guidance.

Since Austria and Germany want to become “innovation leader” in the Region they have additional national research programme funds complementary to the EU research programme funds (Buchbauer, 2011: 3.).42 In the meantime they are shifting from bilateral to multilateral research and technological development cooperation with these countries. Priority Area 7, the establishment of the knowledge based society smoothly corresponds to these tendencies. Austria has already indicated the readiness to take the leadership in the establishment of the Danube Research Area which would be mainly supported by EU, German and Austrian money.

39 See Table 2 on p.73.
40 See Table 3 on p.74.
41 See Table 4 on p.74.
42 See Table 5 on p.75.
Several actions prove that the European Union itself acknowledges the innovation potential of the Danube Region: the European Institute of Innovation and Technology had been recently established in Budapest; then under French guidance Romania, Hungary, and the Czech Republic started to build up the biggest laser research centers in Europe under the Extreme Light Infrastructure project. The process can be enhanced by the realization of the Danube Research Area from 2014 which is mentioned by the Action Plan of the Strategy. Its most important effect could be the elimination of the “brain drain” phenomenon from which the Eastern part of the Region suffers appreciably.

Research by Ervin Kiss suggests that the identification of ignored business opportunities, trade relations and capital demand can facilitate the enforcement of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The establishment of an enterprise friendly environment is essential for the competitiveness of these SMEs. The aims of the recently founded Danube Chambers of Commerce Association are clearly represent this goal: providing information, assistance and paying attention to the ideas of SMEs in order to improve competitiveness in line with the requirement Europe 2020. In the light of these goals many project ideas have been already formed whose implementation have significant role in the success of the Danube Strategy by guaranteeing the active participation and commitment of lower level actors (Kiss, 2010; 49-52.)

Relating to the competitiveness of SMEs, the Szeged Plus initiative has to be mentioned as a Hungarian project aiming at providing information and facilitating involvement of economic actors and industry chambers of third countries into the EU projects. Based on the success of the Szeged Process launched after the Balkan wars aiming at democratization of the region the initiative has many supporters and promising success factor.

Additionally, Baden Württemberg has recently adopted a strategy on its role in Priority Area 8 concerning the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development. The aim of Baden Württemberg is to help German enterprises to get more involved in the Danube Region; whereas, they have to face several difficulties, such as the lack of capital or the red tape of bureaucracy and administration. As a result, the leadership of the German Bundesland decided to establish pre-financing funds for enterprises and an assistant service that can help to overcome the administrative obstacles. What is more,
they set up interdepartmental working group since each ministry is involved in the implementation of the Strategy and each of them has strong interests in its success.\footnote{Interdepartmental working group has been established in Hungary as well coordinated by the governmental commissioner charged with the ESDR whereas in other countries only one minister is charged with the Danube Strategy but the whole government is not involved to the implementation.}

Beside Germany, Austria has great interests in the region since in absolute terms she is the biggest investor in Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Serbia. Therefore Austrian concerns about the economic future of the region are well-based which can enforce the economic side of the Strategy.

Further on, untapped potentials of the Danube Region can be enforced by the development of the existing infrastructure. Under the pillar of connectivity it is one of the main goals of the Strategy. It is a common currency that North-South and East-West connectivity of Central and Eastern Europe is far from being complete. EU projects and policies, such as TEN-T,\footnote{The Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) relating to the goals of the Common Market aims at the development of transport all over Europe. It is financed by various EU programmes and funds, such as TEN-T, Cohesion Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, and European Investment Bank. See: \url{http://ec.europa.eu/transport/infrastructure/index_en.htm} (25.11.2011.)} lacked priority status including effective coordination in the last decades. So they were often neglected even though the transport is prerequisite for any kind of development. Nevertheless, the Danube Strategy gives a new impetus to them. The revision of TEN-T Guidelines has been recently announced. There were various expectations to put more emphasis on these axes especially from the perspective of multimodal transport solutions. According to the list of pre-identified projects the Strasbourg – Danube Corridor, Hamburg – Lefkosa axis will be prioritized in terms of railways, inland and multimodal ports concerning the whole Danube Region.\footnote{See: \url{http://ec.europa.eu/transport/infrastructure/connecting/doc/revision/list-of-projects-cef.pdf} (28.10.2011.)}

Last but not least, it should not be forgotten that until the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy most of the Region was included in the Habsburg Empire. Even though it had several disadvantages it was an efficient economic community. Its sole problem was the peripheral status in the world economy due to the bottlenecks of the Danube’s navigability and other problems in the field of the infrastructure. In contrast to the past, the significant development of transport infrastructure and multimodality can result in an enormous advantage for the region if it became the mediator of the trade with the Far-East benefitting from cost and time efficiency (Fleischer, 2010: 15.). Moreover,
adopting the concept of “river adapted ships” there is an opportunity to launch a new industry specialized for the needs of the Danube River and Region. This measure is able to bolster innovation in the field of ship industry, navigation, port development, as well as a sector related to R&D&I.

5.5. The Principle of ‘3 YES’s

The Hungarian Presidency did huge efforts to make the Strategy adopted. However, the principle of ‘3 NO’s had a pessimistic tone. Therefore during the pre-implementation phase of the Strategy the Governmental Commissioner charged with the ESDR Mrs Etelka Pataky Barsiné announced the principle of ‘3 YES’s which sounded more promising. This step indicated an important shift in conceptual perception. Accordingly the member countries said yes to better realignment of financial resources; yes to better coordination; and yes to creative ideas.46

It was highlighted several times by Mrs Barsiné as well that international financial institutions are ready to help in the realization of project ideas relating to the Strategy. As a result, it is of utmost importance to have attractive, comprehensive and well-developed project proposals to get their support. Trans-border elements, macro regional character, extra benefits for not only the Region but for the whole continent can assure the support of these institutions.

5.6. Human Security

Even though the issue of human security is not expressly highlighted in the Action Plan of the Danube Strategy, it encompasses important elements of it. The issue of human security can be examined from two different approaches which are the state-centric and people-centric approach. The previous refers to the importance of the national interest while the latter highlights the interests of the individuals. The European Union usually refers to the latter since the European Security Strategy47 understands human security in broader terms.

In case of studying human security, the employment of ‘region’ as an analytical category is appropriate and useful because, on the one hand, there are clear links

between local, national and regional levels of analysis of security, and on the other hand, as recent developments in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have shown, transnational threats and ‘problems without passport’, such as illegal migration, organized crime, environmental threats, energy dependency, and dependency of income from transit rights is an equal destabilizing factor, which has a regional impact.

As a result, the ESDR clearly focuses on the key components of human security. These appear in the field of economy (threat of poverty), health (threat of injury and diseases), environment (threat of pollution, environmental degradation), and community security (threat of integration cultures) which have high importance especially for these countries. Even though not all of the countries are affected by these threats the Strategy enables them to make common efforts in certain fields to eliminate them.

The Danube Strategy provides framework to the closer cooperation in the field of cross-border crime prevention among countries within and beyond the Schengen area. For instance, Austria, Hungary, and Serbia agreed to set up the Danube Law Enforcement Coordination Centre so as to enforce border control regarding the navigation.48

5.7. Overcoming Historical Dividedness

As it was mentioned, before due to the 2004 and 2007 enlargement processes the European Union had become more diverse than ever before. Diversity is relevant also in case of the new Member States. However, they have much in common. Prior to the 20th century there existed such states which covered the territory of many members of the Strategy.

Additionally, the presence of Schwabian people along the Danube originated in Bayern or Württemberg, settled down in the historical territory of Hungary and her Eastern neighbours, represents another symbol of a common history and customs of the countries of the Region.

Besides, there are numerous elements that can be mentioned as the common heritage of the Danube Region whether they are considered to be advantageous or disadvantageous. Just to highlight the most important ones the Habsburg Monarchy, national-ethnical

48 See: www.kormany.hu/download/e/0a/50000/közöss%20nyilatkozat.doc (20.11.2011.)
problems after World War I, dissolution of the economic unity, being ruled by neighbouring powers, weakness of independent states, etc.

George Schöpflin highlights that due to the experiences coming from World War II and its aftermaths peoples from Central Europe interpret the world differently from their Western or Eastern neighbours (Schöpflin, 2005: 148.).

This was worsened by the outcomes of power politics under the Cold War: solidarity among the satellite states of the Soviet Union evolved in a paradoxical way due to the common reflexes, mutual isolation, and interdependence within the bloc’s deformed economic-political system. Even though it differed from one state to the other and from one society to the other, the notion of Central Europe as special European entity existed only among the higher culture of the intellectuals (Gál, 2003: 104.). Nevertheless, it existed as it was already argued. Unfortunately, the significance of the notion was weakened after the fall of communism and restoration of national sovereignty. As it was highlighted before, apart from some initiatives regional cooperation lost its popularity in the competition for the Euro-Atlantic integration. In spite of this generally ignored historical relations (Ágh, 2010: 16.) cannot be lost or ignored since they can benefit each party.

Researches by Péter Hanák has suggested that just before the transition that it would be essential for the peoples’ of the Region to find the appropriate balance between the levels of integration and sovereignty (Hanák, 2005: 55.). At the turn of the millennium, based on the experiences of the 1990s, Zoltán Gál has argued that the modernization of the Region could be possible by establishing territory based structures beyond the logic of nation states (Gál, 2003: 88.).

That fact that the deepening of the integration is centered on the Danube is very similar to the beginning of the European integration when the Rhine was in the focus. The initiative which aimed at bridging over differences and clashes among various – at least two – nations proved to be successful which can be used efficiently in case of the Danube Region too. Since history is a common and determining factor in Central Europe, various historical wounds can only be restored by the above mentioned territory or region based structures. The Danube as a connecting link over historical dividedness has the opportunity to launch a reconciliatory process especially if the participants have
significant benefits from it. Continuous dialogue among the countries of the Danube Strategy can lead to an effective way of reconciliation, getting to know and accepting each other.

Further on, it should be underlined that the territorial scope of the ESDR covers roughly the territory of the former Habsburg Empire or the Dual Monarchy. Opposed to the irredentist approaches, this is reasonable since the Empire was an efficient and well-functioning economic entity in the 19th century, as it is mentioned above. So there is no doubt that the countries of the Danube Region are forced to cooperate, otherwise they cannot exploit their untapped potentials.

5.8. Identity

At this point the issue of identity has to be taken into consideration. As it was mentioned before, the Danube has significance for the Region’s inhabitants although it is differing from one state to the other. Therefore it can be declared that the Danube is a territorial reference point (Koller, 2010a: 178.).

Based on the multiple or multi-layered identity models there is an opportunity to evolve a Danube identity. Since there are various levels of identity forming forces, such as the family, the community, regional community, and the nation, a Danube identity as a collective territorial identity could be formed. The individual’s collective identification can be imagined as a complex network which demonstrates the dynamic co-existence of individual’s collective attachment, and additionally the time dimension (Koller 2010b: 7.). As a result, a Danube identity could be established as an additional one not substituting any other. Up to date there is no existing macro regional identity nor in Central Europe, nor in the Western Balkans or anywhere else.49 It is a consequence of various reasons such as external dominances, ethnical clashes, and nationalism. Therefore there is a need to build up prudently such an identity to reinforce the regional consciousness.

49 The identity of minorities has sometimes regional components: Hungarians living in Romania or in Serbia declares themselves Hungarians of Transylvania or Voivodina. Similarly, Austrian communities in Northern Italy declare themselves rather Austrians of South Tirol than simple Austrians.
However, the initiative can only be successful with the involvement and commitment of the citizens since this new type of identity has to be embraced by them. According to Koller there are various ways to facilitate this kind of engagement. In the meantime, soft programmes, network and capacity building can enhance trans-regional cooperation as well. First of all, the young generation has to be reached out: through mobility and exchange programmes, special scholarships, informative education, festivals opportunity would be provided them to get to know each other, each others’ cultures, languages, way of thinking, costumes; to destroy preconceptions; and to build up positive stereotypes. For instance, the *Young Citizens Danube Network* is a promising initiative organized by the youth; meetings, workshops, conferences for the young generation of the Danube Region provide opportunities to exchange ideas, knowledge, experiences, opinions, and views.\(^{50}\)

Secondly, this can be enhanced by the prudent use of the media (Koller, 2010a: 183.). Thirdly, there is no need to reinvent totally the Danube identity, whereas it can be built by leaning on existing myths, histories and images relating to the river. As it was presented before, the river is an important source of inspiration. The water as such has an account in each nation’s history. Fourthly, more emphasis is needed on tourism within the Region and into the Region. Cultural heritage, cultural programmes and values should also be highlighted and propagated since culture has a strong socializing role.

Up to now, apart from the V4, regional initiatives did not rely on the importance of cultures or the mixture of cultures in the Region. Hungary has many initiatives in this field whose aim is to bring closer the people and get to know the culture of other peoples. Since the culture is perceived as the spirit of the EU, it is frequently argued that important experiences of the Danube Region are useful for the whole Union (Reinhart, 2010: 27.).

Moreover, the Danube identity makes sense when the European identity is becoming less popular. The definition of the Region and its values could launch a branding process too. A Danube brand would become an empirical notion that is easily approvable by everybody. This would result in the reinforced “ownership of the

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\(^{50}\)See [http://www.youngdanubians.eu/](http://www.youngdanubians.eu/) (01.11.2011.)
Danube” (Molnár, 2010: 116.) since benefits of this notion would encourage everybody to act for it. History cannot be changed whereas the opportunity to change or shape existing stereotypes is relevant in this case. The already existing “Danube Day” could unify the people living along the Danube and could give an additional holiday to them.

By these efforts the Danube Region as such could be defined, as well, as its link to Central Europe, though the definition should be flexible. The merit of the Danube identity compared to the Central European one is that it is neutral and lacks any discomfort rooting in the history.

Last but not least, the role of Budapest could be re-positioned (Szarka, 2010: 39.). Although this idea manifests nostalgia towards the former Dual Monarchy, from the Hungarian point of view it can be understood. The Hungarian capital has the chance to regain its significance in the field of shipping, trade, and tourism as well as in the field of culture. It could become the “Queen of the Danube”: a cultural centre connecting peoples sharing common historic roots and traditions; and a strong identity forming factor.

All in all, these factors prove that the idea of the Danube Strategy is well-based by building on the untapped potentials of the Region. Choosing the economic and cultural aspects of cooperation other fields will also be affected. Therefore the Region as such will be enhanced in compliance with the expectations of the members of the Strategy.
6. Hindrances and Possible Pitfalls

The previous section highlighted the most significant potentials of the Danube Region and the Strategy that can ensure the success of the initiative. Opposing to them hindrances and possible pitfalls have to be dealt with since these factors can seriously obstacle the implementation of the Strategy. Without this part the analysis would remain unbalanced pointing out only the positive aspects of the ESDR.

6.1. Socio-economic Disparities

Based on the arguments of the previous chapters the Danube Region has key socio-economic capacities; however, it has to face serious problems too. Therefore all these issues need to be handled with particular prudence. First of all, there is a socio-economic drop side by side the course of the river. In the ESDR Europe’s richest and poorest regions also take part. Baden Württemberg has obviously different problems and goals than the Romanian riparian counties have.

Although recently, mainly before the crisis, these regions had witnessed huge domestic development, there are two additional problems: firstly, the share from growth of the counties or regions and the surrounding area of the capital is disproportionate. While capital cities and their surrounding were mainly the targets of investments so they could benefit more from other developmental projects peripheral status of certain regions was not in the focus of the policies (Kiss, 2011: 47.). Therefore gaps among regions have even aggravated.

Despite the significant innovation potential in the Danube Region its expansion has to face several obstacles. The lack of sufficient amount of capital, the phenomenon of brain drain, low salaries, and inadequate infrastructure hinder seriously the development in these fields too. Austria and Germany have clearly different aims in the field of R&D investment than the other countries. For instance, the previous two aim at increasing the proportion of research and technology investment to 3.5-4% of the GDP; the other countries’ goal is reaching 1.8% of the GDP share of such investments by 2020.51

51 See Table 6 on p.75.
Secondly, despite of the quick growth rate of certain regions their vulnerability became apparent during and after the economic crisis. This is proven by data on their performance in 2009.\textsuperscript{52} One of the main reasons of their vulnerability is the phenomenon of jobless growth: while the GDP had grown in EU-10 by 40\% in the last decade the employment rate did not increase. On the other hand, these countries could not find their place in the global economy after the transition. They were expelled to a semi-periphery of the world economy where they found themselves for a long time from the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. The system, that they had to adopt following the socialist planned economy, failed recently in Western countries too; nevertheless, it resulted in structural economic problems of the Region. Additionally, these countries, as many other European countries, suffer from problems deriving from lack of competitiveness or sustainability regarding their economy.

Thirdly, Austria and Germany have strong interests in the Danube Region that they want to reinforce. Undoubtedly, it implies disadvantages for the rest of the countries, such as economic or financial dependency from the two major investors. Dependence on these countries especially for export oriented countries such as Hungary involves harsh risks; consumption drop leads huge income drop-out without significant domestic market.

As far as the society is concerned the picture is quite similar. Despite the good performance in the field of education there are huge differences between the Upper and the Lower Danube regions regarding the capacities of the civil sphere. For instance, during the consultation period of the ESDR, proposals of the civil society addressing the European Commission arrived exclusively from Germany till Hungary. None of the circa 80 proposals arrived from Lower Danube countries (Dieringer – Laukó – Schneider, 2010b: 71.). As a result, it must be highlighted that, opposing to the Baltic See Strategy, in case of the ESDR we have to face the lack of the society’s capacities (Ágh, 2010: 28.).

Besides, there is a common and heavy heritage of the post-communist countries: “The state pretends to pay us. We pretend to work” (Miłosz, 2005: 28.). Up to date this statement is still relevant apart from some exceptions. Nevertheless, it draws the

\textsuperscript{52} Compare Table 7 and 8 on p.76.
attention to one of the biggest problems of the Region: most of the people is not used to hard work. Namely, under the communist era if they worked more they did not get more salaries; consequently, working hard worth nothing. This example is shown to their children and grandchildren; bottling up the chance of further development in these countries. Compared to America where individuals are mobile and full of entrepreneurship, the Region has major drawback since most of the people is looking for help from the state. Nevertheless, capitalism does not work in this way and it is clear that that type of socialist economy failed to work efficiently.

Societies also have other difficulties in the Region: there are growing and shrinking areas next to each other. The future of certain regions is threatened by low birth rates and migration losses. On the other hand, there are certain regions where an ethnical shift is perceivable; especially in the Eastern part of Hungary or Slovakia settlements lose the well-educated population and only the poor, uneducated and unemployed people stay there; the Roma minority is overrepresented among them.

Examining the relation of the civil society and the Danube Strategy, the opinion of the experts differs. On the one side, they state that reaching out the society was successful; while the other side complains of the surface involvement (Török – Lendvai, 2011: 35.). In the Hungarian case Budapest and municipalities along the Danube established the Danube Alliance; whereas the capital’s contribution was overwhelming while other municipalities did not play a prominent role (Pálmai, 2010: 104.).

As a result, the bottom-up approach needs to be improved since the ESDR can easily lose its legitimacy if the civil sphere’s involvement remains negligible. Intergovernmental dialogue and conferences are of utmost importance; however, one aim of the Strategy as it was presented above the enforcement of multilevel governance and the involvement of the society instead of forming new clubs of government representatives (Strázay, 2010: 141.).

But even governments have difficulties although they want to take part in the Strategy. After having launched the ESDR it become clear that some countries have difficulties in getting to the meetings of the Priority Areas. It means that they have to prioritize among the fields covered by the Strategy and there are certain areas where they are not able to give forth to their voice. This represents the risk that only rich or richer states can afford
to visit most meetings and accept decisions concerning other countries too. In certain fields, such as environment, transport or energy the issue can be crucial.

6.2. Differences among Priorities

Even though there is a great commitment in most countries taking part in the ESDR differences among political, economic or other priorities are expected to appear. Therefore the coherence of the Strategy can be endangered since the ESDR does not impose any obligation to any of the members. Each country is free to say no and ignore certain measures. As a result, huge differences can appear among the standpoints. For instance, Hungary and Slovakia represents different ideas about the shared part of the river: while Slovakia wants to use more hydropower, Hungary has no plans about such utilization of the river since she wants to preserve the state of the Danube as it is. Presumably this will hinder the improvement of the issue. So the Strategy can be successful only in those fields where the interests of the parties are similar.

On the other hand, we have to be aware of the phenomenon of “materialist Lower-Danube and post-materialist Upper Danube” (Dieringer – Wulf, 2011: 42-43.). This had already appeared in the non-papers of the countries which were handed in during the first half of 2010. While regions or countries at the upper or middle sections of the river proposed cooperation aiming at trans-border economic, cultural, scientific or education cooperation, reinforcement of SMEs, innovation and S&T collaboration; the sole priority of Lower Danube countries was the improvement of infrastructure.

Certain experts suggest that the problems of supporting purely national programmes can appear as well instead of trans-regional ones. For instance, common consensus on territorial cohesion is presumably alien to these countries or regions due to the different socio-economic development and spatial systems (Dieringer – Laukó – Schneider, 2010: 77.).

Further on, as it was mentioned before, interdepartmental working groups have been established only in Germany, Austria and Hungary while in other countries only one minister is charged with the implementation of the Strategy whereas the whole government is not involved to the process. This can be detrimental regarding the
commitment of these states. Additionally, after the launch of the Steering Groups\textsuperscript{53} it turned out that many of them are not aware of the competencies and tasks that they have. Some of them lack proper instructions, determination or commitment which hinders the efficient work. Moreover, in case of deficiency of rules of procedure and clear objectives the goals of the Strategy will be hardly accomplished. This is a consequence of the composition of the Steering Groups and the mandate of the delegates: they arrive from different fields with different backgrounds and positions in the hierarchy. State secretaries, as well, as desk officers or researchers of certain fields can be found among them.

6.3. Difficulties of Non-EU Member States

As it was already mentioned the participation of non-EU Member States is of utmost importance since both Enlargement Policy and Neighbourhood Policy are covered by the Danube Strategy. Western Balkan countries are involved in the Mediterranean Strategy while Ukraine and Moldova are concerned by Eastern Partnership. However, some of these countries are convinced that their successful contribution to the Strategy will imply their future membership. On the other hand, there are countries which handle the ESDR as another new strategy where they should take part without any efficient consequences. In case of the first group, if their involvement does not result in gaining the candidate or membership status the whole EU will lose its credibility and alienate them. The latter side could be convinced by the success of the Strategy and their commitment towards the Union could be guaranteed.

Nevertheless, these countries have certain difficulties, especially in terms of finances. It was already spelled out that they cannot afford to be present at each meeting of each priority area. Moreover, these countries benefit from different financial funds then the Member States do which complicates their situation and the harmonization of various activities or project ideas. In addition, countries along the Lower Danube often lack not only financial but human resources. For instance, small Bulgarian villages along the Danube cannot afford to employ project manager in order to make bids for EU funds; as a result, their absorption capacities develop uneasily.

\textsuperscript{53} The Steering Group is the main decision making forum of each Priority Area composed of the delegates of the participant countries.
Further on, they have other obstacles too. For instance, the previously mentioned legal entity provided by the EGTCs is not eligible for non-Member States. As a result, not only macro regional but simple cross-border initiatives are hindered.

6.4. Differing Competencies and Capacities of the Regions

It is worth examining the participants of the ESDR too. It is always emphasized that 14 countries take part in it; however, the main focus is on the lower level actors, namely on the regions. In fact, the whole territory of Germany is not involved in the Strategy only the two “Bundesländer”: Bayern and Baden Württemberg. This is the same in case of Ukraine: only those counties are affected which lie along the river and in the Subcarpathian region. In case of the other countries beside the governments, counties and regions are encouraged to act on their own.

Nevertheless, attention has to be paid to the problem of overdue regionalization in the Danube Region (Forman, 2011: 85). The power and capacities of a German “Land” clearly differs from the manoeuvring opportunities of a Romanian or Ukrainian county. Therefore intergovernmental meetings cannot be ignored while the regions have to reinforce their involvement.

On the sidelines the representations of the regions concerned in Brussels can be pointed out too. Those regions have undeniable advantage in influencing the Commission, lobbying, and networking (Pálmai, 2010: 99.). Nevertheless, due to various political and financial reasons far from all the regions can afford to have such an office in the capital of Europe.54

6.5. Overlapping or Multiplied Networks

Anybody who deals with the Danube or with the Region itself realizes that there are many multiplied or overlapping networks. Apart from the previously introduced ones, each sector such as tourism, environment protection, etc. has numerous organizations, networks or platforms among which there are only tiny differences. Just after the launch

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54 The opening of Voivodina’s representation was anticipated by a long and incomprehensible debate; economic interests were underplayed due to the fears of the central Serbian power concerning the secessionist efforts of the formally and constitutionally autonomous province. See http://kitekinto.hu/karpat-medence/2011/10/13/keser_szajizzel_a_vajdasag_brusszel_irodajanak_megnyitasa_utan (20.10.2011.)
of the Strategy some coordinators started to collect the existing projects which could get the Danube label. Just in the field of energy the Hungarian coordinator collected approximately 130 projects which have transnational profile and are under realization in the participating countries.

The aim of ESDR is to coordinate the existing projects by providing an umbrella, the label, political, and possibly economic support to them. However, it will be a huge challenge to select the most important ones. Apparently each of these projects cannot receive the Danube label, otherwise the whole initiative would be devaluated. Further on, the same problem appears if the initiatives of the citizens will be accepted without any preconditions.

On the other hand, synergies and overlaps with other EU strategies have to be dealt with carefully. The ESDR has certain common with the Black Sea Synergy, the Baltic Sea Strategy and the European Neighbourhood Policy as well. Moreover, certain Western Balkan countries belong to the Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation. At the beginning it was not clear at all that the Danube Strategy does not want to replace the others; therefore the hostility of Poland who has had strong interest with these initiatives was understandable. However, in the future it is necessary to preserve and emphasize the synergies among them and not to compete or replace each other.

6.6. Heterogeneity and Differing Historical Approaches

The heterogeneity of the Region regarding religions (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim, etc.), cultures, alphabets (Cyrillic, Latin), and languages (approximately 20 different languages) is mainly regarded as an advantageous factor; however, its disadvantageous effects cannot be ignored. Self-definition of the countries as Central (Eastern) European is not sufficient regarding this issue. Generally it mirrors the interests of politicians and not the self-perception of the societies. Compared to the Baltic Sea Region the Danube Region had to face even wars in the recent decades. The way how these different peoples perceive their existence and neighbourhood still results in, at least, diplomatic or political clashes. Moreover, in certain countries conflicts among the majority and minority is still persistent.
The multiculturalism which was vivid until the beginning of the 20th century, apart from the economic unity, was undoubtedly a merit of the Habsburg Empire or the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This phenomenon entirely disappeared after World War I due to various factors such as revival of nationalism, the “Kleinstaaterei”\(^55\), the permeation of the Soviet Union, etc.

Therefore it is necessary to develop an articulated and common self-definition for these countries to emphasize their detachment from other parts of Europe and their common values and interests. The already introduced Danube identity is supposed to be based on these principles, although it has several hindrances.

Firstly, in the Region the lingua franca became the English while the German could not preserve its dominance. Nevertheless, this means that countries do not speak the language of their neighbours and for interactions they use the English. It can be alarming since without the knowledge of our counterparts’ language it is harder to understand their point of views, and their perceptions. As a result, cooperation among them is hindered.

Secondly, history has determining role in the Danube Region. This is proven by many authors while each of them spells out another aspect of the phenomenon. According to Czeslaw Milosz, historical imagination is fed by the memories and the fear that their nations’ existence is being continuously threatened (Milosz, 2005: 76.). János Martonyi underlines that the certain countries in the neighbourhood of Hungary could hardly pass by its own Trianon\(^56\) syndrome (Martonyi, 2005:134.). Trianon must be explained, demystified and overcome.

Therefore neighbouring and regional cooperation is limited since existing diplomatic and political disputes have influence on their outcomes.\(^57\) Tolerance in relation with

\(^55\) The German expression of Kleinstaaterei stands for the phenomenon of small statehood.

\(^56\) Among the treaties which were concluded after the closure of WWI, the Treaty of Trianon, signed on 4th July 1920, redefined and reduced the borders of Hungary and benefited the successor states, namely Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and Romania. Hungarian experts claim that the Trianon syndrome afflicts not only Hungary due to her great losses but her neighbours as well, which countries are not able to handle the significant gains and the issue of the Hungarian minorities living on their territories.

\(^57\) For instance the issue of Serbian restitution law whose first adopted version implied the collective guiltiness of the Hungarian, German and Croatian minorities resulted in the shift of the Hungarian support to the Serbian membership aspirations. Finally the parties agreed on changing the text of the law. See: http://kitekinto.hu/karpat-
national or ethnic minorities is still not well-developed which often results in disputes among the countries concerned. Multiculturalism simply does not work when certain nations feel themselves threatened by the cultural heritage and traditions of their neighbours or national minorities.

Additionally, peoples in Central Europe perceive themselves as the victims of the history. Many of them commemorate to the defeats while in Western parts of Europe the victories are celebrated. According to Árpád Hornyák, the reason of this way of thinking is the aim of these peoples to draw legitimacy from the defeats and prove that the reason of their miserable fate was external.

As a matter of fact it is obvious that the region was always a chessboard of greater powers aiming at separating the existing spaces rather than enhancing multinational or multicultural cooperation. Previously hegemonic efforts of great powers influenced the Region; while in the 20th century the principle of “divide et impera!” was predominant. The fear of national clashes appeared just after the change of regime, therefore the Western world was dubious concerning the future of the Region. Nonetheless, Hungary and her neighbours, with the exception of Yugoslavia, were able to prove that regional cooperation was more important for them than bilateral disagreements. Moreover, their main aim was the Euro-Atlantic integration instead of improving mutual collaboration among themselves. On the other hand, the peoples of the former Yugoslavia suffered a lot from ethnical conflicts. This means that nowadays effective regional cooperation became more significant for them, especially, because it is an additional criterion of their accession.

Thirdly, since that time most of the countries joined the Euro-Atlantic integration. Competition among them to get advantageous position from the Community almost disappeared. Prior to the crisis extreme nationalism weakened significantly. Whereas regional cooperation in many fields, such as the simple example of education shows, is still ignored or at least subordinated by many countries to the relations with Western
countries. After the crisis it became clear that this attitude makes no sense, nevertheless, it is difficult to change this perception. Distrust is still predominant among the countries concerned.

Then certain scholars draw the attention to the lack of value and identity based programmes (Török – Lendvai, 2005: 35.). Yet in case of the failure of endeavoring common values the above introduced Danube identity remains a vision since it will not provide any surplus for citizens.

On the other hand, although the Strategy aims at spelling out the similarities existing in the heterogeneous Region, without conscious identity building initiative a Danube identity will reach only a certain layer of the intellectuals or people living directly in the neighbourhood of the river. This has already been proven by a survey realized in the beginning of the 2000s. It focused on the degree of awareness of the Danube among the people living in the Carpathian Basin. According to the results, people living in coastwise settlements have direct link to the river and they consciously exploit the opportunities provided by the stream. However, in case of settlements without direct contact to the river the stream remains a sole geographic phenomenon (Hajdú, 2003: 154.).

The Danube has huge catchment basin which explains the participation in the ESDR those countries which are not situated directly along the river. Nevertheless, it will be more difficult to clarify the importance of a Danube identity to those people who do not have link with the river or benefits from it. Therefore an identity should be composed of different elements as well to be capable to gain popularity. The example of the Danube Day shows that it did not get much attention although it was celebrated in all the countries lying along the river.

6.7. The Principle of ‘3 NO’s

As it was previously pointed out, generally the principle of the ‘3 NO’s contributed significantly to the success and the adoption of the Strategy. The members said no to the establishment of new institutions; no to new financial means; and no to new kind of legislation. Although the Hungarian Presidency announced the principle of ‘3 YES’s, financial questions remained worrying because of the discrepancy of financial funds and
their eligibility for the members of the Strategy. As it was highlighted before, the EU Member States, candidate countries, and neighbouring countries receive EU support from different funds which can eliminate the realization of those projects among them.

6.8. Macro Region versus Macro Region; or Macro Regions versus European Union

During the elaboration process, it was not clear that all the Member States will support the ESDR. Most of them got to know the details during the Hungarian Presidency that highlighted the advantages of the Strategy being beneficial for the entire EU: a stronger Danube Region would result in a stronger Europe. However, the main argument was the principle of ‘3 NO’s; and especially the fact that there would be no more extra money for the Strategy.

Since then new macro regional initiatives appeared, such as the Adriatic-Ionian or the North Sea macro region. Therefore the competition among these strategies is expected to result in detrimental effects. It is able to deepen the differences among countries belonging to different macro regions. Additionally, it is able to threaten the fragile unity of the Union especially if the EU institutions are not able to guarantee the coherence or the convergence.

There is also a fear that after the Hungarian Presidency the ESDR will disappear from the table of the EU leaders since both the Polish and Danish Presidency are concerned about the Baltic Sea Strategy. This is why their Hungarian counterpart did a lot of work during the pre-implementation phase; nevertheless, we still cannot feel ourselves comfortable about the future of the Strategy.

Furthermore, the Danube labeling is not elaborated up to now; consequently, projects do not receive yet that additional support from the European Commission which was promised before.\(^{58}\) Last but not least it also has to be mentioned that the idea of a Danube Intergroup\(^ {59}\) in the European Parliament has also failed since those countries

\(^{58}\) The example of the South Eastern Europe initiative shows that Italy and those countries which do not take part in the ESDR before the selection of supportable tenders prohibited the labelling of “Danube projects”.

\(^{59}\) Intergroups “are informal bodies of MEPs with membership from different political groups from within the European Parliament. While intergroups are not considered organs of the European Parliament,
who were not involved in the project were against the initiative which would have not benefit them.

To sum up, this chapter accentuated that during the execution of the Strategy several obstacles have to be addressed. Comparing them to the advantages introduced in the previous chapter, it becomes clear that each factor that is regarded as a capacity of the Region or the Strategy can turn into an obstacle without prudence. This is why harmonization among the different fields and among various level actors is necessary, so to say, inevitable.

officially recognised intergroups are resourced by the Parliament with meeting space and translation facilities.” See: http://archive.corporateeurope.org/crosspartygroups.pdf (22.10.2011.)
7. Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to answer the question whether Central Europe is restorable under the framework of the ESDR. The importance of the research is reasoned by the fact that the notion of Central Europe gets more importance in the eyes of politicians both from the Region itself and the EU. Moreover, the EU Strategy of the Danube Region has been recently adopted; although possible outcomes cannot be clearly foreseen therefore at this stage, many voice concerns about its pertinence.

Firstly, as a hypothetical background, various concepts of Central Europe were examined. Especially those ideas were under investigation which aimed at the cooperation of the countries concerned by a common federation or recently, a regional organization. Neither the agreed definition nor the clear territorial scope of Central Europe exists in the literature. On the other hand, they have certain similarities.

Further on, distinct concepts on Central Europe can be divided based on four main approaches, such as the reorganization of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, Mitteleuropa, pan-Slavic ideas, and ideas of the successor states. Besides, the role of the Danube in such regional cooperation had been recognized quite early. Due to various reasons, none of them were materialized, even though many regional cooperation initiatives have been recently established with similar aims. Up to date, we can hardly mention an example of effective cooperation among them which were realized, although many have had certain successes, but only in limited fields. The main hindrances of a regional collaboration are almost the same in each case.

The composition of the ESDR reflects on two previous concepts: namely on the former Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy and the Mitteleuropa. The former is reasonable since the territorial coverage of the Strategy overlaps most of the territories covered by the Monarchy in the end of the 19th century. On the other hand, the promoting role of Austria and Hungary also reminds to the historical partnership of the two nations. The latter concept is enforced by manifestation of the German motivations and interests, especially, vis-à-vis the economy. In the post-WWII period the German approach of Mitteleuropa changed significantly. Nonetheless, Germany needs market and an enforced hinterland which is generally formed by Central Europe.
Comparing the Strategy to the Danubian Federation sketched out by Kossuth or Jászi, in this case the Eastern and Southern neighbourhood of Hungary, as well as Austria, is much more involved than they sketched it out before. As a result, the Danube Region in this framework is more expanded than Central Europe is generally understood. Nevertheless, this fact does not eliminate us from remaining at the importance of the subject of the investigation. The famous phrase of Todorová relating to the definition of the Balkans should be applied for the Region too who said that “in the ambiguous relation between geography and politics within the concept of geopolitics, the latter seems to have the upper hand. ‘Europe’ ends where politicians want it to end, and scholars should be at least aware of this…”(Todorová, 1995: 139). So if present interests of politicians require, the notion of Central Europe is flexible enough to form it in conformity to their interests.

The notion has recently come into prominence due to various reasons, such as the processes of globalization and localization; economic and financial crisis; and hanging up the European integration. Countries in the Region seem to be ready to take into their hands the control of their own fate being tired of waiting always for the external actors to do so. The expectations emphasizing that the Danube Strategy will reconstruct Central Europe are based on the correlation between the Danube Region and Central Europe, as well, as on certain capacities of the Region.

As far as this purpose is concerned, the Danube Strategy seems a good means to realize it. Centered on the river which has had always significance in the development of the Region the overarching aim of the ESDR is to strengthen the Danube Region. The recognition of the necessity rests on many facts, such as the untapped potentials of the Region; the new challenges posed by the 21st century at international, European and national level; the interdependence of the countries concerned; and the novel opportunities for deeper integration within the EU. During the elaboration of the Strategy new institutional and organizational approaches were applied, such as the concept of functional macro region, bottom-up approach, shared responsibility and the principle of 3 ‘NO’s. As a result, the Strategy is not only well-based but comprehensive and well-structured.

As far as the structure and the thematic content of the ESDR is concerned, although the Strategy is quite integrative and lies on 4 main pillars, its most important idea, from my
point of view, is the enforcement of the economy of the Region, beside the development of regional cooperation. So it is very similar to the previous concepts. Opposing to them, however, it has a valuable merit bearing the strong political commitment of the participants than any cooperation had it ever before.

On the other hand, the capacities of the Region and the Strategy had to be examined so as to find out whether the Strategy is viable at all. Apart from the systematic framework the endowments, on which the ESDR is built, play crucial role in the success. Both the Strategy and the Region have several merits which are able to guarantee the main aim, namely the development the Region. Building on the opportunity of the multispeed integration the concept of the functional macro region enables the countries to harmonize their perspectives about their own future. By synchronizing the priorities, as well as various policies, a common understanding of the countries will be enhanced. Additionally, the involvement of countries beyond the borders of the EU represents the commitment of the Union to Europeanize its neighbourhood. In the meantime, actors from lower levels are made to take part in the initiative so as to facilitate their dedication towards the Strategy.

Various economic opportunities exist in the Region regarding the economic growth, skilled labor force, higher proportion of the youth, and innovation potential. Similarly, the idleness of the River Danube in the field of cargo transport, along with the opportunities provided in case of the Region’s economic unification, is also noteworthy. Nonetheless, ideas of regional cooperation in the last 20 years also aimed at building on these capacities and opportunities. In opposition, the ESDR aims at handling the historical dividedness of the Region building on the common heritage in the field of history, literature, and ethnical heterogeneity. By applying the concept of territory based structures and forming a regional identity, it is possible to achieve these ambitious goals. The formulation of a Danube brand is of utmost importance to guarantee the ownership of the initiative and to neutralize the persistent, mainly ethnical conflicts. Therefore the evolution of a Danube identity has key role in this process. The example of Danube Schwabians or the Jews of Central Europe confirms that even in this particularly heterogeneous region it is possible to have connecting links.

Besides, by stressing the importance of scientific and cultural uniqueness of Central Europe and moving forward in these directions, in case of regional cooperation we
apply soft law instead of hard law. It does not violate the interests of the others, and even cooperation from this field can spill over to other fields by bearing the sufficient dedication of the members, as the example of the European integration manifests.

Although there are numerous capacities guaranteeing the success of the ESDR, in the meantime the obstacles should not be forgotten. Briefly, during the implementation of the Strategy each capacity can turn into an obstacle without farsightedness. Therefore, each issue is required to be harmonized and aligned with the various level actors and policies. Given that the Region has to face serious problems, such as socio-economic disparities, semi-peripheral position, vulnerability, and interdependency. Moreover, taking into account the number of the member countries and regions, existing or possible differences among political or economic priorities; they are also able to hinder the realization of Strategy. Additionally, difficulties of non-Member States are expected in financial, institutional, and political fields, as well. As it has already become apparent, the existence and parallel functioning of overlapping or multiplied network can hamper both the harmonizing efforts and the clear objectives of the Strategy. Last but not least, up to date the heterogenic endowment of the Region has resulted in serious clashes and conflicts. Therefore, the lack of prudence, especially in this field, can bring about the failure of all the previously introduced aims.

Even though the tradition of effective regional cooperation does not really exist in the Region, the Danube Strategy is able to facilitate its empowerment. The Danube got an important role. On the one hand, in many cases, water as such is perceived as a source of cooperation. On the other hand, the role of the river is very similar to that of the River Rhine at the beginning of the European integration. As a result, it is very feasible that the Danube Strategy will be successful and the Danube Region will be reinforced. At this stage, the lessons learnt from the previous cooperation initiatives can be also accommodated.

However, the question, if Central Europe is restorable, is still open. Based on the previously introduced researches, Central Europe as such has never existed. It occurred only in theories and was popular among certain circles of the intelligentsia. This is why even the success of the Danube Strategy will not guarantee the restoration of Central Europe. Opposing to this, the ESDR is able to construct or to build up Central Europe.
But the issue has to be handled carefully. Although Central Europe and the Danube Region are usually used applied as synonyms, the Danube Region, the countries taking part in the Strategy, covers most but not each country of Central Europe suggested by the literature. Poland, which is generally called the most important power of Central Europe, is participating in the Baltic Sea Strategy but not in the Danube Strategy. Opposing to this, she has strong interests in the Neighbourhood and Enlargement Policies covered by the ESDR. These cannot be contested.

At this point it is worth turning back to certain experts who claimed that Central Europe does not have to be limited to strictly defined borders; nonetheless, each region is separated due to the determination of the people. Many experts like Martonyi and Busek, argue that Central Europe is a phenomenon, in which we have to believe, for which we have to act, that we have to realize. This can be proven by various arguments, such as the interdependency of peoples living here, their own creativity, common history and experiences, etc.

Therefore, from my point of view the name does not matter, although the notion of the Danube is more neutral than of Central Europe. The most important issue is at the moment that there is a chance to enhance the Region and enforce the cooperation among the many nations living there. So it is possible to agree with the visions of several Hungarian politicians and officials: about which we have always dreamt, now we can realize it. In the meantime all the above examined issues and findings of the research have to be taken into account prudently.
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**Contribution of Conferences to the ESDR**


**Electronic resources:**

[http://www.arbeiterkammer.at/](http://www.arbeiterkammer.at/)
[http://www.argedonau.at/neu/portal.html](http://www.argedonau.at/neu/portal.html)
[http://www.bsec-organization.org/Pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.bsec-organization.org/Pages/homepage.aspx)
[http://www.euractiv.hu/](http://www.euractiv.hu/)
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[http://www.secinet.info/](http://www.secinet.info/)
[http://www.swr.de/](http://www.swr.de/)
[http://www.visegradgroup.eu/](http://www.visegradgroup.eu/)
9. Annexes

Map 1: Geographic coverage of the ESDR (European Commission)

Map 2: Member countries and regions of the ESDR (European Commission)
Table 1: GDP per capita in the Danube Region (GDP – Euro/capita, 2002-2008) (based on Szatmáry, 2010); higher GDP per capita growth of the new Member States, Croatia and Serbia is indicated by the red arrow, whereas slower GDP per capita growth of the regions lying along the Upper Danube is indicated by the green arrow.

Table 2: The proportion of 23-24-year-old people having finished at least high school in the certain Member States (Royo, 2010)
Table 3: Distribution of age groups in Danube Region and EU-27 (European Commission)

Table 4: Employment deficit and untapped but releasable potential in the region (European Commission)
Table 5: European Innovation Union Scoreboard (IUS) – comparison of the years 2006 and 2010 (Buchbauer, 2010: 8.)

Table 6: The GDP share of R&D expenditure of the Danube countries in 2007 (European Commission)
Table 7: GDP growth of the members of the Danube Strategy between 2000 and 2008 (European Commission)

Table 8: Shift of GDP growth of the members of ESDR in 2009 (European Commission)