



# **Danube-INCO.NET**

**Advancing Research and Innovation  
in the Danube Region**

## **Report on Developments of coordination of funding activities**

Project	Danube-INCO.NET
Project Number	609497
Deliverable Number:	D6.35
Submission Date	19.12.2016
Responsible author(s):	Ulrike Kunze (DLR)



This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no [609497]

**Document Control Sheet**

<b>Work package Number</b>	WP6
<b>Work package Title</b>	Scaling up Danube Funding Mechanisms
<b>Task Number</b>	T6.2
<b>Task Title</b>	Scaling up Funding Mechanisms
<b>Deliverable Number</b>	D6.35
<b>Deliverable Title</b>	Report on Developments of coordination of funding activities
<b>File Name</b>	Deliverable_6.35_draft_final.docx
<b>Number of pages</b>	16
<b>Dissemination level</b>	Public
<b>Main author</b>	Ulrike Kunze (DLR)
<b>Contributors</b>	Martina Hartl (BMWFW), Ralf König (FFG)
<b>Quality Assurance</b>	Davor Kozmus

**Versioning and Contribution History**

Version	Date	Author/Editor	Contributors	Description/Comments
_v01	19.12.2016	Ulrike Kunze	Martina Hartl, Ralf König	First draft
_v02	23.01.2017		Davor Kozmus	QA
_v03	23.01.2017	Ulrike Kunze		integration of QA comments
_final	24.01.2017	Ulrike Kunze		Final version

<b>Document last saved on</b>	24.01.2017
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## List of Abbreviations

Article 185 TFEU	Article 185 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
BY	Bavaria
BaWü	Baden-Württemberg
BMBF	German Federal Ministry of Education and Research
BMWFW	Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy
COST	European Cooperation in Science and Technology
Danube-INCO.NET	Danube Region INCO-NET
DFCN	Danube Funding Coordination Network
DIS	Dedicated Implementation Structure
DoW	Description of Work
DRRIF	Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund
ERA-NET	instrument under the EU's Framework Programmes for coordination of activities supported by national funding bodies
EUSDR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
FP6	European Union's Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development
FP7	European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development
Horizon 2020	EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation 2014-2020
JAP	Joint Action Plan
JPI	Joint Programming Initiative
PA	Priority Area
R&I	Research & Innovation
STI	Science, Technology and Innovation
Widening countries	Countries that are ranked below 70% of the EU average of the composite indicator of Research Excellence
WP	Work Package

## 1 Executive Summary

Facing the heterogeneity and the multitude of national, regional and multilateral funding activities of the Danube Region, coordination of funding mechanisms is essential to avoid duplication of work and to make an impact in the development of the region. However, experiences made and studies carried out in the frame of the EUSDR Priority Area 7 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region<sup>1</sup> have shown that the idea of building up a joint fund for research and innovation support financed by all 14 Danube Region countries does not seem a realistic option for the moment. Nevertheless, there is an apparent interest in the countries to coordinate activities, and realistic alternatives were sought to overcome fragmentation by building up a flexible but sustainable network structure. Thus, a Danube Funding Coordination Network was created in May 2016 in Berlin whose aim is twofold: 1) exchange information, experiences, approaches and ideas on joint funding activities, and 2) cooperation with already existing funding programmes and initiatives targeting the Danube Region or opening them up for participation of Danube Region countries. To make it sustainable will be the challenge for the next years to come.

## 2 Introduction

The objective of this deliverable is to describe relevant activities and processes that have been carried out in the last three years (from 2014 to 2016) targeting the coordination of STI funding mechanisms from different actors under the EU Strategy for the Danube region (EUSDR).

This deliverable is part of Task T6.2 (*“Scaling up Funding Mechanisms”*) and updates Deliverable 6.11 (*“Roadmap towards a possible Article 185 Programme for the Danube”*) which was submitted in October 2014. Deliverable D6.11 is also part of Task 6.2 and assesses the potential for scaling up dedicated funding mechanisms in the Danube Region to a greater joint Danube programme. In this way, the deliverable explores possibilities for developing an Article 185 TFEU<sup>2</sup> initiative for the Danube Region and identifies necessary first steps towards its implementation including a Roadmap for the next years.

The assessment in D6.11 was carried out in a more general and theoretical way, taking as a model other existing Article 185 measures. However, the concrete developments regarding the coordination of funding mechanisms in the Danube Region in the last years have to be looked at closely.

These developments and discussions are described in the following chapters. The relevant activities and motivations are explained that finally led to the establishment of a realistic organisational structure aiming at the coordination of funding instruments in the Danube Region: the Danube Funding Coordination Network (DFCN). Deliverable D6.39 (*“Report on the support to the establishment of a sustainable Funding Coordination Network”*) will outline details on the establishment of the DFCN under Task 6.3.

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. DRRIF Feasibility Study: <http://www.danube-region.eu/communication/news/616525-feasibility-study-for-the-danube-region-research-and-innovation-fund-drrif>

<sup>2</sup> Article 185 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) [ex Article 169 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (TEC)] enables the EU to participate in research programmes undertaken jointly by several Member States, including participation in the structures created for the execution of national programmes.

### 3 Developments of coordination of funding mechanisms

The overall objective for the coordination of funding mechanisms is to overcome fragmentation of R&I funding activities in the Danube region, to avoid duplication of work and to build up a superordinate framework for transnational cooperation in order to overcome the divide between upper and the lower Danube region. Considering on one hand the heterogeneity of this region, and on the other hand the multiplicity and complexity of existing instruments and programmes, we can see an apparent need for coordination of R&I funding mechanisms and for the alignment of strategies at different levels.

#### 3.1 An Article 185 measure for the Danube Region?

The Article 185 TFEU instrument foresees the participation of the EU in the joint implementation of (parts of) research and development national programmes. Implementing Article 185 TFEU in the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme (and with small changes in Horizon2020) implies that the participating EU Member States integrate their research efforts by defining and committing themselves to a joint research programme, in which the EU promotes the voluntary integration of scientific, managerial (single implementing structure) and financial (between EU & MS) aspects. The EU provides financial support to the joint implementation of the national research programmes involved, based on a joint programme and the setting-up of a dedicated implementation structure (DIS). An Article 185 measure can be considered as the “*closest*” form of coordinating national funding mechanisms, since it reflects the integration of national funding mechanisms of a region. Typical instruments of Article 185 measures are the following activities:

- Joint Calls with a broad variety of different grant types (e.g. Integrated Projects, Networks of Excellence);
- Researcher Mobility Grants, Senior Fellowships;
- Bottom-up type funding; in particular for SMEs.

Under the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programmes, five Article 185 (ex. Art 169) initiatives were established:

- Ambient Assisted Living (AAL); [www.aal-europe.eu](http://www.aal-europe.eu)
- BONUS; [www.bonusportal.org](http://www.bonusportal.org)
- European and Developing Countries Clinical trials Partnership (EDCTP); [www.edctp.org](http://www.edctp.org)
- European Metrology Research Programme (EMRP); [www.emrponline.eu](http://www.emrponline.eu)
- Eurostars; [www.eurostars-eureka.eu](http://www.eurostars-eureka.eu).

4 of the 5 current Article 185 initiatives have opted for a successor programme with extended scope under Horizon 2020. BONUS Art. 185 started later than the others and plans to follow with a successor programme at a later stage during Horizon 2020<sup>3</sup>.

In order to estimate the possibility to establish an Article 185 measure for the Danube Region, two initiatives will be examined in the next subchapters: the existing BONUS programme (targeting the Baltic Sea region) and the PRIMA initiative, which is expected to be adopted in 2017 (targeting the Mediterranean countries).

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<sup>3</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/art-185\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/art-185_en.htm)

### 3.1.1 The BONUS programme

The BONUS programme is based on a macro-regional strategy (EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, EUSBSR) and may therefore be considered as a possible blueprint for the establishment of an Article 185 measure for the Danube Region. The BONUS Programme was set up by a joint decision of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on 22 September 2010 and has evolved through three consecutive steps: it was based on the BONUS ERA-NET 2003-2008 during which the conditions for a jointly funded programme were established; then a BONUS+ call for proposals was launched in 2007 with a total budget of EUR 22 million €, and finally the BONUS programme, the joint research and development programme 2010-2016 under Article 185.

As BONUS is also being based on an EU macro-regional Strategy, one could suggest that a similar coordinated funding mechanism could be adequate for the Danube Region. However, differences between the two regions at different levels prevail:

- greater heterogeneity in the research and innovation systems of the Danube Region countries than in the Baltic Sea countries;
- a more pronounced innovation divide between the upstream and the downstream countries of the Danube Region than in the Baltic Sea region;
- differences in EU membership level of the Danube Region countries<sup>4</sup>;
- a less solid basis of institutional cooperation in the Danube Region than in the Baltic Sea region, etc.).

Furthermore, the framework conditions at European level including commitment, motivation and support to such a programme have changed compared to the situation when BONUS started; presumably there might be less support by the EU stakeholders for such an Article 185 measure for the Danube region than in the starting period of the BONUS programme. Therefore, BONUS does not seem to be an adequate model for an Article 185 measure for the Danube Region.

### 3.1.2 The PRIMA initiative

An initiative under Article 185 TFEU for the Mediterranean countries currently brought forward is the “Partnership in Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA)”<sup>5</sup>. Its preparation already started in 2012 and builds on several activities carried out in the Mediterranean region: the Monitoring Committee for the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation (MoCo), the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership/Barcelona Declaration) of the Foreign Ministers, the European Neighbourhood Policy/ENP, the Union for the Mediterranean and several EU funded projects.

The vision of PRIMA is to define a long term sustainable strategy for research and innovation for the Euro-Mediterranean Area with the highest social-economic impact, towards a scientific, management and financial integration of national programmes, and based on the principles of co-ownership, co-decision and co-financing. The initiative aims to strengthen cooperation and coordination of research and innovation activities in order to meet the challenges of food systems and water resources in the Mediterranean basin.

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<sup>4</sup> In the current situation for the EUSDR and the Danube Region, there are 9 EU Member States and 5 non-EU Member States. Out of these 5 non-EU MS, 4 countries are associated to H2020 (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia) while Ukraine is considered as a Third Country.

<sup>5</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/index.cfm?pg=prima>

The development of PRIMA is based on a Joint Action Plan (JAP), addressing the Grand Challenges of the Mediterranean Region. Working Groups have been installed for discussing legal aspects and issues such as participation of third countries (international agreements), financial issues, the establishment of Dedicated Implementation Structure (DIS), thematic scope.

In 2014, a proposal for PRIMA was submitted to the Commission by a number of EU member states as well as non-EU countries from the Mediterranean Region. The European Commission has carried out a public consultation on PRIMA in the first semester of 2016 the results of which are now available<sup>6</sup>. On October 18, 2016 the European commission has presented a proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and the Council on the participation of the Union in the Article 185 initiative PRIMA<sup>7</sup>.

The Commission's proposal already includes Cyprus, Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia. The participation of Germany is currently under negotiation. As the initiative is evolving over time, more participants are expected to follow, both EU and non-EU countries.

Funding for the €400 million partnership will come from the participating countries (currently around €200 million), matched by a €200 million contribution from the EU through its current research framework programme Horizon 2020. The partnership is scheduled to run for 10 years, starting in 2018. Further information and relevant documents are available on the PRIMA website.

### 3.1.3 Conclusions

It is clear that an Article 185 measure for the Danube Region would give the regional cooperation a higher significance and greater visibility, but also national R&I landscapes and the community of the Danube stakeholders a stronger position.

However, as all existing Article 185 initiatives and the running PRIMA initiative show, the process of developing and implementing an Article 185 programme is very complex as well as time and effort consuming. A well-prepared joint programme and priorities and well-organised implementation structure are necessary. The question whether an Article 185 measure is the adequate instrument for the coordination of funds in the Danube region or if "*smaller and faster*", but also more flexible instruments are more suitable, has to be generally discussed. Advantages and disadvantages have to be weighed against each other against the background of the specificity of the region in question. The ongoing preparations for the PRIMA initiative show that the process of establishing such an initiative is not only a very demanding and time consuming process, but has primarily to be founded on strong motivation and reliable political and financial commitment by all involved parties. The crucial argument is to have strong commitments by all involved stakeholders from the concerned Danube Region countries<sup>8</sup>, and also the EU Commission also has to be in favour of such a measure and should be supportive. This doesn't seem to be the case for the Danube Region.

Taking into account the developments and discussions concerning coordination of funding in the Danube Region in the relevant committees and groups in the frame of the EUSDR, an Article 185

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<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/pdf/prima/prima-ia\\_consultation\\_ssr.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none](https://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/pdf/prima/prima-ia_consultation_ssr.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none)

<sup>7</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1478769521795&uri=CELEX:52016PC0662>

<sup>8</sup> Germany (Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria), Austria, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria within the EU, and Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (the regions along the Danube) outside the EU.

measure for the Danube region does not seem a feasible instrument to implement. This may be due to many reasons such as heterogeneity of the region in terms of research and innovation systems, and also lack of political will and commitment. Furthermore, also the establishment of a joint fund for research and innovation for the Danube Region ( - an instrument less complex and costly than an Art. 185 measure - ) was considered not to be a realistic option. This finding was demonstrated in a Feasibility Study contracted under Priority Area 7 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (see chapter 3.3 and the following chapters). Other structures and instruments for the coordination of funding mechanisms have proved more suitable, and synergies between European, national and regional programmes have to be exploited.

### **3.2 Bi- or multilateral activities for the coordination of funding mechanisms**

Several multilateral initiatives supporting the coordination of funding mechanisms have been ongoing during the last years, mostly closely related to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and especially to the Priority Area 7. They are mainly based on existing and running national programmes or bilateral agreements:

- The Ulm process (German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, BMBF)

In July 2012, Ministers and Vice-Ministers in charge of research and innovation of 11 Danube Region countries convened in Ulm (Germany) on invitation of the German Federal Minister of Education and Research. They agreed on specific steps in their cooperation towards the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in the fields of research and innovation. A Communiqué was endorsed in which the Research Ministers expressed their commitment to join forces and to increasingly engage in joint activities. Subsequently, an *“Ulm Follow up Working Group”* led by the BMBF was built to implement further steps in the cooperation. Based on discussions of this Working Group, a multilateral call was launched in 2015 by BMBF especially dedicated to the countries of the Danube region supporting networking, workshops and mobility of researchers in order to strengthen links between Danube upstream and downstream countries. The call is co-funded by the three Danube Region countries Hungary, Moldova and Serbia. Joint protocols on the implementation were signed and the details of the call management (funding, application, administration) were agreed upon. The evaluation process of the applications is based on the lead-agency-principle and conducted by the German side. Funded projects are selected jointly.

- BMWFW multilateral call

Austria, the Czech Republic, Serbia and Slovakia are joining forces to support cross-border multilateral co-operation the Danube Region. Using their existing bilateral agreements the countries have decided to launch a pilot call allowing researchers from at least three of these countries to work together through supporting the mobility of researchers among the participating countries to carry out joint research projects. In this regard, funding will be made available for visits and exchanges of scientists conducting joint research.

The aims of the call are to:

- contribute to scientific advancement in the abovementioned countries by funding researchers’ mobility in the frame of joint research projects;
- contribute to research capacity development in the region;
- support the advancement of cross-border research cooperation; and to

- provide an opportunity for young/female researchers in the above-mentioned countries to cooperate in an international setting and to develop their scientific careers.

The call was open for all scientific disciplines and thematic areas, including social sciences as well as humanities. After the selection meeting in December 2016, projects are expected to start in 2017 with duration of max. 2 years.

### 3.3 Activities under Priority Area 7 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Priority Area 7 (PA7) of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region is entitled "To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)" and coordinated by Slovakia and Serbia. One of its main targets and flagship projects was the establishment of a joint fund for supporting joint multilateral projects called "Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund (DRRIF)". In February 2013, during the 5<sup>th</sup> SG meeting of PA7, a Working Group was established under the PA7 Steering Group for the "Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund (DRRIF) and coordination of national funds", led by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW). In the frame of this DRRIF-Working Group, a feasibility study was subcontracted in order to explore the possibilities and framework conditions for setting-up such a fund in the Danube Region. The feasibility study came to the conclusion that there are 3 options for the coordination of funding mechanisms in the Danube Region: Alternative 1 would be a Fund<sup>9</sup>, Alternative 2 a Funding Network<sup>10</sup> and Alternative 3 a Support Centre<sup>11</sup>.

The feasibility study<sup>12</sup> was discussed in the course of several DRRIF Working Group meetings. During the meeting on March 17, 2015, it was agreed that such a joint fund is currently not a feasible option, as reflected in the meeting minutes (quotation): „All of the present countries/regions (AT, BA, BY, CZ, DE, HR, HU, SK, RS) agreed that with view to the results of the analysis, the further work [...] should focus on developing **Alternative 2 ‘Funding Network’** and **Alternative 3 ‘Support Centre’** in more detail, as for the moment they seem to have higher chances for implementation". In the following PA7 Steering Group meeting on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 in Bratislava, a voting for each of these two alternatives was carried out by the countries present. It resulted in the following picture: nine votes for the ‘Funding Network’ (AT, BaWü, BY, CZ, DE, HU, HR, RS, SI) and four (six) votes for the ‘Support Center’ (SK, RS, AT and DE for in kind contributions, BaWü if based on more Information, Bavaria no real difference to the ‘Funding Network’). This distribution shows that more countries would opt for a Funding Network than for a Support Center.

The importance of such a Danube Funding Coordination Network (DFCN) was underlined also during a panel discussion that took place in the frame of the 4<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum in Ulm on October 30, 2015 with the title "The way forward in aligning transnational R&I funding and activities in the Danube Region". High interest in the coordination of funding mechanisms was expressed by the

<sup>9</sup> The fund's goal should be to obtain financial resources from European, national and private sources to finance projects in accordance with its selected vertical and horizontal thematic areas, which help to increase the R&I level and cohesion among the DR countries. The BONUS programme for the Baltic Sea Region is an already existing institution that is similar both in its terms as well as geographic scope.

<sup>10</sup> The network's goal would be to identify existing national, bilateral and regional projects, calls or programme opportunities of funding and research performing institutions active in R&I in the DR which can be interlinked across borders to provide added value to the DR in the area of research, development and innovation.

<sup>11</sup> The Support Centre's goal would be to indirectly support R&I cooperation in the Danube Region by supporting establishment of new successful partnerships of applicants and by interlinking the existing funding and research institutions. The Support Centre will not directly finance any R&D projects.

<sup>12</sup> Ministry for Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, European Commission DG Regio, 2015. Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund. Programme Document/Feasibility Study. 212 pages.

discussants and participants and the establishment of a Funding Coordination network was highly welcomed.

As the DRRIF Working Group cooperates closely with the Danube-INCO.NET project, it was decided to discuss further steps during a joint Danube-INCO.NET and DRRIF Working Group meeting under PA7 on September 18, 2015 in Vienna. It was decided to hand over part of the preparatory activities on such a funding coordination network from the DRRIF to Danube-INCO.NETs WP6, which focuses exactly on this topic, and to continue in close cooperation between both initiatives involving also the members of the DRRIF Working Group. The activities of the DRRIF Working Group under PA7 and the discussions during its meetings as well as the participating members themselves are significant elements for further developments in this regard.

The further development resulted in concrete steps for the establishment of the Danube Funding Coordination Network, DFCN (see chapter 4.4). A separate Danube-INCO.NET Deliverable (D6.39) is dedicated to the establishment and functioning of the Danube Funding Coordination Network.

### **3.4 Cooperation supported by Danube-INCO.NET**

When taking over the mission to bring forward and establish a '*Funding Network*', Danube-INCO.NETs Task T6.3 in WP 6 had to be adapted to the new situation<sup>13</sup> taking into account that the DRRIF was no longer a realistic option.

In order to monitor developments of the coordination of funding, the WP6 leader participated in the meetings of the PA7 Steering Group and also of the Working Group on coordination of funding. Furthermore, the WP6 leader considered in detail the outcomes of the DRRIF feasibility study performed under PA7 and took part in the discussions with the subcontractor of the feasibility study (Ernest Young). Recognising that the majority of the PA7 SG member countries opted for the Funding Network, activities were undertaken in WP6 of the Danube-INCO.NET project to support the preparation of such a Funding Network. This included

- organising a Workshop on the establishment of a Danube Funding Coordination Network (DFCN) in close cooperation with the PA7 Steering Group,
- preparing all relevant documents (agenda, list of participants, background paper, Terms of Reference) for the Workshop and the creation of the DFCN,
- getting in contact with other multilateral initiatives interested in cooperation possibilities (EUREKA, Joint Programming Initiatives, ERA-NET and ERA-NET Platforms, SET Plan Working Group, COST), and
- implementing the Workshop finally establishing the DFCN.

The Workshop for the establishment of the Network was scheduled for May 30 and 31, 2016 in Berlin. The aim of the meeting was to lay the basis for a flexible, but sustainable coordination structure supporting the cooperation of stakeholders interested in funding and performing joint S&T activities in the Danube Region. On the first day (May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016), participants discussed and agreed on the mission, objectives, instruments and guidelines for the functioning of the planned DFCN at a more general level. This part was foreseen for nominated network members only. On the second day

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<sup>13</sup> Originally, it was foreseen in the Description of Work of Danube-INCO.NET to support the operation of a possible DRRIF; but as this was not an adequate goal anymore, the Description of Work was amended and Task T6.3 was renamed "Support to the establishment of a Funding Coordination Network (FCN)".

(May 31<sup>th</sup>, 2016), examples for successful ongoing and planned coordinated actions and cooperation possibilities for future activities will be presented and discussed.

In preparation of this meeting, different ways were investigated by the WP6 leader DLR PT to explore cooperation activities with multilateral initiatives and programmes already ongoing. This included EUREKA, COST, Joint Programming Initiatives, running and planned ERA-NETs, and also cooperation with the SET Plan Joint Action Working Group. Some of these possibilities were looked at closer, others proved not useful or feasible. The instruments taken up are described in the sub chapters 3.4.1 until 3.4.5 below.

Details on the Danube Funding Coordination Network are given in Deliverable D6.39.

### **3.4.1 EUREKA**

One important activity in WP 6 was the cooperation with the EUREKA Programme where a Call targeting the Danube Region countries was planned. Taking into account also the developments in Task T6.1 led by FFG (meetings of Funding Parties), close cooperation with the respective activities concerning the EUREKA programme undertaken by the project partner FFG helped create synergies. A joint Workshop of Danube-INCO.NET and EUREKA partners was organised in December 2014 in Vienna and details of the EUREKA Danube Region call were discussed. 11 countries<sup>14</sup> participated in the EUREKA call that was opened on March 9, 2015. More than 80 project outlines with 301 participants were submitted; this demonstrates the great interest in the instrument. However, coordination among the participating countries was not satisfactorily achieved, especially with view to the evaluation process and the securing of adequate funding resources; lessons learned, such as harmonised deadlines, better coordination of the evaluation, and the necessary strong commitment from countries participating in the call were crucial prerequisites for the preparation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> EUREKA Danube Region call planned for March 2017. The participation of six countries<sup>15</sup> in this call is currently under negotiation.

### **3.4.2 Joint Programming Initiatives (JPI)<sup>16</sup>**

The overall aim of the Joint Programming process is to pool national research efforts in order to make better use of Europe's precious public R&D resources and to tackle common European challenges more effectively in a few key areas.

It is a structured and strategic process whereby Member States agree, on a voluntary basis and in a partnership approach, on common visions and Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas (SRIA) to address major societal challenges. On a variable geometry basis, Member States commit to Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs) where they implement together joint Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas including joint funding activities based on funding mechanisms (ERA-NETs, ERA-NET Cofund) offered by the EU-Framework Programmes FP7 and Horizon 2020.

There are 10 JPIs that have been launched to date; in the frame of the Danube-INCO.NET and the DFCN, three JPIs were considered for closer cooperation. It was proposed to them by Danube-INCO.NET (acting as interface) to connect their networks with relevant stakeholders in the Danube Region. As the cooperation with the widening countries is high on the political and European agenda,

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<sup>14</sup> Austria (AT), Bosnia and Hercegovina (BA), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Czech Republic (CZ), Germany (DE), Hungary (HU), Montenegro (ME), Romania (RO), Serbia (RS), Slovak Republic (SK).

<sup>15</sup> Austria (AT), Czech Republic (CZ), Germany (DE), Hungary (HU), Croatia (HR), Romania (RO).

<sup>16</sup> Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/what-joint-programming\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/what-joint-programming_en.html)

it is to be implemented in different Working Groups and activities in view of integration of the new EU member States. Consequently, there was high interest in the JPIs to cooperate with Danube-INCO.NET. During the Workshop, all three JPIs were represented and contributed to the agenda. The following points were discussed and in all three cases, follow up activities were agreed upon:

- **Joint Programme in Neurodegenerative Disease Research/Alzheimer and other Neurodegenerative Diseases (JPND):** the involvement of new Central-Eastern European countries is planned (Horizon2020 project JP sustain<sup>17</sup>) with establishment of a Task Force, interviews and a Workshop foreseen in spring 2017;
- **More Years, Better Lives (MY, BL) - The Potential and Challenges of Demographic Change:** a call is planned in 2016 on “Welfare, Wellbeing and Demographic Change: Understanding Welfare Models” in which 11 countries (14 funding agencies) participate; cooperation is possible for the Danube countries by joining the consortium;
- **Urban Europe (UE) - Global Urban Challenges, Joint European Solutions:** outreach to widening countries by expansion of the JPI UE network is implemented by the Horizon2020 project ‘EXPAND’ (Enhancing co-creation in JPI Urban Europe through widening Member State and stakeholder participation); to this aim, a joint Workshop with Danube-INCO.NET will be organised in March 2017.

### 3.4.3 ERA-NET/ERA-NET Platform

In the frame of the EU-Lisbon strategy 2009, ERA-Networks were proposed as part of the European Research Area concept to provide coordination and collaboration among national and regional programmes through a step-wise approach. Taking into account the great number of ERA-NETs (28) in the field of KBBE (Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy) in the Framework programmes FP6 and FP7, the **PLATFORM of bio-economy ERA-NET Actions** was established as a strategic forum for mutual learning and dissemination dedicated to coordinators and participants of P2P-partnerships in the bio-economy area. It started in FP7 with 13 partners and was followed up in H2020 with 9 partners. In view of the outreach to the Widening countries, a Master-Class on Inclusiveness in ERA-NETs was organised in May 2016 in Vienna in order to provide training and guidance on how to get actively involved in bio-economy related collaboration actions. Furthermore, the Annual Event in October 2016 in Ljubljana was also dedicated to the topic of inclusiveness (title: “*The bigger picture: ERA-NETs for Inclusiveness and Innovation*”). A representative of Danube-INCO.NET was invited to the Annual Event.

As a model of a self-sustained funding network, **IraSME<sup>18</sup>** was presented during the DFCN Workshop as a good practice example. It was initiated in 2005 (FP 6) as an ERA-NET (EraSME), then continued in FP7 as a common ERA-NET with the network CORNET<sup>19</sup> (IraSME) and its consortium had at its high time partners from 13 countries. From January 2011 on it was a self-sustained network targeting international research activities by SMEs involving ministries and funding agencies. However, IraSME is not a funding programme but synchronises national funding systems. In May 2016, the 18<sup>th</sup> call for proposals was opened.

<sup>17</sup> [http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/198527\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/198527_en.html)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ira-sme.net>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.cornet.online>

Cooperation possibilities in view of upcoming ERA-NETs Co-Fund calls in the EU Horizon2020 Work Programmes of Societal Challenge 5 in the field of energy were also assessed. Support by Danube-INCO.NET for consortium creation and integration of Danube Region countries in ERA-NET applications was foreseen in a specific targeted H2020 (Energy) call topic. This included personal discussions with potential applicants/coordinators in past and upcoming ERA-NET calls, but also more strategic considerations on involvement of the Danube Region countries in Committees such as the SET Plan Steering Group or Working Group<sup>20</sup>. However, it was difficult to bring this activity forward, as the concerned stakeholders and contact persons reported that the meetings of these groups has often foreseen involvement of stakeholders from the Danube Region countries but that the response to invitations and commitment was low. Unfortunately, several discussions and different meetings proved that further actions towards creation of consortium for planned call were not feasible due to lack of commitment and funding, and were therefore abandoned.

The lack of an ERA-NET especially targeting the Danube Region makes further steps toward the establishment of a common fund or even an Art. 185 measure very difficult, as the ERA-NET instrument can be considered as an instrument for building trust and for experiencing joint funding activities. In the Baltic Sea Region, an ERA-NET was one of the first steps towards establishing the BONUS programme.

#### **3.4.4 COST**

It was envisaged to prepare a dedicated Targeted Network within the COST<sup>21</sup> programme to bring together researchers and research related stakeholders around selected topics of current relevance to jointly address societal challenges. The aim was to pair scientific excellence from and for the Danube Region with relevant application experience (from economic actors, non-governmental institutions or policy making as relevant). Additional benefits will be created by applying interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches and collaborations.

A Workshop was organised in the frame of WP2 with relevant stakeholders in April 2016 in Novi Sad with more than 20 experts from eight countries in the region. Three areas of interest have been discussed in detail, namely Energy, Food and Agriculture as well as Innovation Systems. Based on the work of the experts an outline proposal for such a Targeted Network has been provided to the COST president. For the moment however COST is re-evaluating the instrument of Targeted Networks and has not yet concluded these discussions, therefore delaying all further efforts in this respect.

## **4 Follow up activities**

During the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Funding Coordination Network, the network was officially launched and Terms of Reference were agreed upon by the participants. As nominations for DFCN members had not been received from all participating countries prior to the meeting, the nomination of further experts from countries had to be undertaken. It was concluded to address the EUSDR National Contact Points in order to complete the list of nominations.

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<sup>20</sup> The European Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET-Plan) aims to accelerate the development and deployment of low-carbon technologies. It seeks to improve new technologies and bring down costs by co-ordinating research and helping to finance projects. The SET-Plan promotes research and innovation efforts across Europe by supporting technologies with the greatest impact on the EU's transformation to a low-carbon energy system. It promotes cooperation amongst EU countries, companies, research institutions, and the EU itself. The SET-Plan includes the SET-Plan Steering Group, European Industrial Initiatives, the European Energy Research Alliance, and the SET-Plan Information System.

<sup>21</sup> [www.cost.eu](http://www.cost.eu)

The 2<sup>nd</sup> DFCN meeting was held in Bratislava on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016 organised by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic during the Slovak EU Council Presidency and the EUSDR Presidency back to back with the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual EUSDR Forum. Details on the meeting are available also in the deliverable D6.39.

## 5 Conclusions and outlook/recommendations

Considering the fragmented funding landscape in the Danube Region, coordination of funding mechanisms in the Danube Region is crucial in order to use synergies and to avoid duplication of work. Bearing in mind the developments that have taken place in the last three years and that are described in the preceding chapters of this report, it shows that the necessity for aligning national and multilateral programmes has been widely recognised, and that steps have been taken at different levels to achieve this alignment.

However, one important finding in this process was the outcome of the DRRIF Feasibility Study subcontracted under the PA7 Working Group explaining that the establishment of a fund financed by all Danube Region countries to support joint activities is not a realistic option. This correlates with the conclusions made in the Danube-INCO.NET deliverable D6.11 (*“Roadmap towards a possible Article 185 Programme for the Danube”*). To start such a process of building up a fund or even an Art. 185 initiative for the Danube region appears to be beyond the means due to a lack of political will and financial commitment. The reason for this could be the absence of a funding scheme like an ERA-NET especially targeting the Danube Region which can be considered as an instrument for building trust and for experiencing joint funding activities.

Thematically orientated ERA initiatives (such as still running FP7 ERA-NET/ERA-NET plus projects or running Horizon2020 ERA-NET Cofund actions) offer multifaceted participation, cooperation and funding opportunities<sup>22</sup> for the Danube Region countries. These P2P-networks are in general not addressing or targeting the Danube Region directly, but increased participation in these networks would definitely strengthen sustainable integration of Danube Region countries in the European Research Area which is also an overall EU policy goal for widening countries. Danube Region countries are encouraged to be more pro-active in identifying, selecting and participating in those EU P2P networks which are (at national level) of thematic relevance and importance. Danube-INCO.NET (during its project lifetime) and also the DFCN will support and encourage pro-active participation of the Danube Region countries to more actively involve them in existing and upcoming ERA-NET Cofund actions. In addition, some P2P-networks (such as ‘Transcan-2’<sup>23</sup>) and Coordination and Support Actions (such as ‘EXPAND’) are addressing activities related to extending cooperation with less active EU (or ‘Widening’) countries among which the majority are Danube Region countries.

Nevertheless, the option chosen by Danube-INCO.NET and PA7 stakeholders to establish a flexible but sustainable network structure, not relying on financial contributions and not obliging the network members to commit fixed provisions, consisted in a feasible way for the alignment of funding. The created DFCN relies on the cooperation with existing initiatives and programmes based on mutual interest; the widespread prioritisation of the outreach to widening countries (such as

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.era-learn.eu/h2020-calls-for-p2p/calls-2016> ;  
<https://www.era-learn.eu/h2020-calls-for-p2p/calls-2017>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.transcanfp7.eu/>

propagated in Horizon2020 and other programmes) leads to an even better cooperation basis with shared advantage from both sides.

It is now important to keep the momentum of the DFCN and to follow up on the joint actions agreed upon during the DFCN meetings and also to schedule regularly further DFCN meetings. Members should engage in bringing forward the activities and the rotating co-chairmanship should guarantee for sustainability.

Furthermore, other coordination activities (i.e. in other PAs of the EUSDR or at other levels) could be consulted in order to benefit from their achievements and their lessons.