

# **Danube-INCO.NET**

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

## **Deliverable 5.4**

### **Concrete outline of process for labelling of projects**

Project	Danube-INCO.NET
Project Number	609497
Deliverable Number:	D5.4
Submission Date	08.12.2014
Responsible author(s):	Miroslav Vesković, Helena Hiršenberger (UNS)



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>	WP5
<b>Work package Title</b>	Promoting Innovative and Inclusive Danube Societies
<b>Task Number</b>	T5.3
<b>Task Title</b>	Development and “Labelling” of Danube Region projects and proposals
<b>Deliverable Number</b>	D5.4
<b>Deliverable Title</b>	Concrete outline of process for labelling of projects
<b>File Name</b>	Deliverable_D5.4_final
<b>Number of pages</b>	23
<b>Dissemination level</b>	Public
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## Versioning and Contribution History

Version	Date	Author/Editor	Contributors	Description/Comments
_v01	28.04.2014	Helena Hiršenberger	Olivera Đuričić	Draft based on comments on the Concept Note
_v02	01.06.2014		Miroslav Vesković, Sanja Subotić Gantar	Define process and task flow
_v03	25.06.2014		Viktor Nedović, Milena Racić, Gordana Kažić	Improving content and structure, Application form
_v04	22.07.2014		Miroslav Vesković, Sanja Subotić Gantar	Improvements after 3 <sup>rd</sup> Annual Forum, LoR
_v05	11.08.2014		Martina Hartl	BMWFW comments
_v06	28.08.2014		Lena Tsipouri, Davor Kozmus	QA
_v07	14.11.2014		Helena Hiršenberger, Miroslav Vesković	Combining feedback from partners and QA
_v08	04.12.2014		Lena Tsipouri	QA
_final	28.11.2014			AC members

<b>Document last saved on</b>	11.01.2015
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### 1.1.1 List of Abbreviations

AC	Advisory Committee will be constituted by experienced representatives of the WP5.3 task partners: UNS (Task leader), ZSI, SIG (WP leader), RCISD, ASM-CIP and BMBFW (PA7 Steering Group member). The Advisory Committee is a semi-permanent body. This semi-permanent character implies that if conflict of interest occurs (some of the member organizations apply for the call in question) its member will not take part in the labelling process for that respective call.
CP	Contact Point for the EUSDR projects labelling will be established at the University of Novi Sad (UNS), which is in charge of the Task 5.3 <i>Development and "Labelling" of Danube Region projects and proposals</i> . UNS also provides technical and organizational support to the coordination of EUSDR Priority Area 7 (PA7) "To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)".
Danube-INCO.NET	Danube Region INCO-NET, an FP7 funded coordination and support action for the official EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in the field of research and innovation (R&I). Whereas the EUSDR addresses a wide variety of priority areas (ranging from PA 1A „Mobility/Waterways" to PA 11 „Security"), Danube-INCO.NET focuses mainly on two of them: PA 7 „Knowledge Society" and PA 8 „Competitiveness". The project supports the policy dialogue, creates networks, and analyses and supports R&I activities. Project website: <a href="http://danube-inco.net/">http://danube-inco.net/</a>
DoW	Description of Work - in the Seventh Framework Programme obligatory Annex 1 of the Project Application. It contains project summary, list of beneficiaries, overall budget breakdown, and workplan tables, very detailed description of Work Packages, list of project deliverables and milestone, project efforts and costs.
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region - The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) is a macro-regional strategy adopted by the European Commission in December 2010 and endorsed by the European Council in 2011. The Strategy was jointly developed by the Commission, together with the Danube Region countries and stakeholders, in order to address common challenges together. The Strategy seeks to create synergies and coordination between existing policies and initiatives taking place across the Danube Region. ( <a href="http://www.danube-region.eu/">http://www.danube-region.eu/</a> )
LoR	Letter of Recommendation
PA	Priority Area - the EUSDR addressed a wide range of issues which are divided among 11 Priority Areas and 4 Pillars: <i>A – Connect the Region, B – Protection the Environment, C – Building Prosperity, and D – Strengthening the Region.</i>
PACs	Priority Area Coordinators ensure the implementation of the Action Plan defined for the Priority Area by agreeing on planning, with targets, indicators and timetables, and by making sure there is effective cooperation between project promoters, programmes and funding sources. They also provide technical assistance and advice. The coordinators work in consultation with the Commission, and relevant EU agencies and national/regional bodies. Each PA is coordinated jointly by two Priority Area Coordinators from two different Danube Region Countries (e.g. PA 7 – Knowledge Society is coordinated jointly by Slovakia and Serbia)
SG	Steering Group of the Priority Area – each Priority Area has established a

Steering Group, in order to advise and assist PACs, for the smooth implementation of Priority Area targets and to ensure that suitable actions are anchored all over the region and in all participating states. Furthermore, the Steering Group also makes decisions regarding the future development of the PA, its objectives, co-operations and guidelines. The Steering Group is also responsible for the labelling of projects to receive a Letter of Recommendation (if the relevant procedure is established), but not for the operational initiation, administration, organization or execution of such projects. In the Steering Group all EUSDR countries are represented.

UNS University of Novi Sad (UNS), task leader of the Task 5.3 *Development and "Labelling" of Danube Region projects and proposals*. UNS also provides technical and organizational support to the coordination of EUSDR Priority Area 7 (PA7) "To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)".

WP Work Package

## 2 Executive Summary

The deliverable “*Concrete outline of process for labelling of projects*” is an integral part of the overall project attempt to promote innovative and inclusive Danube societies. It addresses the labelling of strategic projects of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and proposes the framework for a joint approach and coordination of all Priority Areas and Steering Groups in this regard.

The process outlined is based on the good labelling practices already established in some Priority Areas, and aims at consolidating the current activities to a joint approach (a common Danube region one stop shop) organized in four stages:

- 1) it starts with Priority Areas performing a selection of the most relevant calls,
- 2) and continues with extensive dissemination of selected calls,
- 3) through this facility assistance will be offered to potential applicants for project and consortium development aiming to enhance project’s strategic relevance for the EUSDR,
- 4) while finally Priority Areas will perform project evaluation and labelling,

The process ends with a Letter of Recommendation (LoR) issued to each project labelled as strategically relevant for the EUSDR. The letter will accompany the formal project application.

The specific objective is to provide a common system to support EUSDR Priority Areas and the work of their Steering Groups in targeting the most relevant calls under particular funding schemes (e.g. Horizon 2020) which fit into their objectives, complement their on-going activities and avoid duplication. Stakeholders expected to take part in future project proposals will be informed about targeted calls relevant for the EUSDR/Priority Area and invited to apply. Potential applicants will be offered assistance in steering them towards better integration of EUSDR objectives in project application. The most relevant proposals will be given the EUSDR label and the Letter of Recommendation (LoR). The assessment decision will be based purely on the proposal relevance for the EUSDR, PAs and targets and will not reflect a technical evaluation.

The main target groups are stakeholders who show capacities, willingness and readiness to take part in or coordinate projects and collaborations with clear EUSDR added value. These are researchers and research institutes, universities and departments, research related SMEs, non-governmental organizations, public institutions and other eligible parties in the Danube Region who plan to participate in large-scale projects that fit into the EUSDR objectives, addressing different funding sources.

### 3 Introduction

The development of excellent project proposals with a remarkably relevant impact in a transnational, macro-regional environment is a challenging venture. In order to encourage stakeholders to actively engage in implementing of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) through EU funding instruments in programming period 2014-2020 and with the intention to support the preparation of projects with a clear EUSDR added-value, the FP7 project Danube-INCO.NET proposes a Process for Labelling Projects. This Deliverable suggests the procedure for labelling projects which aspire to be regarded as highly relevant for the implementation of the EUSDR, as well as for the overall achievements of the EUSDR and Priority Area (PA) targets.

The objective of the Task **“Development and “Labelling” of Danube Region projects and proposals”** within the Work Package “Promoting Innovative and Inclusive Danube Societies” is to **support the development of targeted projects using different funding sources** which shall fit into the EUSDR objectives, complement the on-going activities and avoid duplication. This will be achieved by helping project proposals to improve their quality and relevance and through this obtain the EUSDR label. Receiving a EUSDR label is no pre-judgement to any comments of external evaluators of the European Commission or any other reviewers appointed in the context of each funding scheme. It merely reflects the strong commitment of the project application to the EUSDR implementation and its strategic relevance for the EUSDR and targeted PA(s). It is an acknowledgement of the project’s potential contribution to the overall achievements of the macro-regional strategy for the Danube Region in the respective field of the call addressed and PA(s) concerned.

The procedure for labelling projects outlined below evolved from the practice of project recommending and/or labelling already established in some of the PAs, while this time it reaches for the EUSDR-wide approach and the “EUSDR label”. In organizational terms, this attempt employs the operational mechanisms previously applied within PA10 – Institutional capacity and cooperation facilities *Technical Assistance Facility or Danube Region Projects (TAF-DRP)*<sup>1</sup> and *START – Danube Region Project Fund*<sup>2</sup>.

## 4 Labelling objectives and targets

### 4.1 Objectives

The Danube-INCO.NET project supports the evaluation of project proposals through “Letters of Recommendations” certifying their “relevance for the Danube Strategy”. Based on specific calls for proposals, announcements are circulated to a wide group of stakeholders aiming to create awareness, identify potential applicants and support project proposals with a specific relevance in and for the Danube Region.<sup>3</sup> Using this approach will on the one hand encourage joint project applications with strong Danube Consortiums, while on the other hand there is also intensive promotion of the relevant calls for proposals and an increased information exchange. A focus will be put on calls under Horizon 2020, along with European Territorial Cooperation and other particular calls focusing on the macro-region related to research, development and innovation actions.

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/pages/technical\\_assistance\\_facility-drp](http://www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/pages/technical_assistance_facility-drp)

<sup>2</sup><http://www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/pages/start>

<sup>3</sup>Description of Work (DoW), Task 5.3: Development and “Labelling” of Danube Region projects and proposals

The main objectives of project labelling are clearly presented in each step, from the selection of relevant calls, through dissemination of information, assistance in project/consortium design, to the assessment of proposals relevance for the Danube Strategy and in order to award the EUSDR label.

Moreover, the labelling process aims to support the good governance of the EUSDR and recognition of those projects which contribute most to defined targets and priority area's action plans. Although EUSDR labelling in public discussions sometimes lacks support from the relevant European Commission Directorates General, like DG Research and Innovation<sup>4</sup>, the Danube Region Foreign Affairs Ministers supports it, as it "called on Priority Area Steering Groups to further develop joint approach for labelling strategic projects of the EU strategy for the Danube Region until the end of 2014".<sup>5</sup> In order to promote closer cooperation and mutual understanding between the implementation of the EUSDR and relevant European funding schemes, and to promote joint recognition of the strategic projects, the following steps are proposed:

#### **4.1.1 Selection of relevant calls**

The specific objective is to provide for a common system to support PAs and work of their Steering Groups the most relevant calls under particular funding schemes (e.g. Horizon 2020), which fit into the PA objectives, complement their on-going activities and avoid duplication. The Steering Groups will be invited to indicate a few calls (up to 3) annually which they find their PA can benefit most if good quality projects dealing with specific PA targets are given support. At this stage the Steering Groups are making an initial selection which should strongly encourage stakeholders to act in compliance with PA targets.

#### **4.1.2 Dissemination of information**

This step seeks promotion and increased information exchange; announcements for selected calls will be circulated to propose projects with specific relevance in and for the Danube Region. Selected calls will be particularly advertised among stakeholders expected to apply in related future project proposals.

#### **4.1.3 Assistance in project/consortium development**

This step aims at providing assistance to improve the quality of Danube Region proposals to steer them towards a better integration with EUSDR objectives and strengthen their connection with the EUSDR.

#### **4.1.4 Evaluation and labelling**

The specific objective is to support the most relevant proposals for the EUSDR for each respective call and award them the EUSDR label. In this process no scientific, technological quality or other criteria will be assessed and this will also be clearly stated. The assessment decision will be based purely on the proposal relevance for the EUSDR, PAs and targets. Awarded projects will receive a Letter of Recommendation (LoR) to annex to their application.

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<sup>4</sup> The high-level event on "Scientific Support to the Danube Strategy", JRC,

<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/event/conference/scientific-support-danube-strategy-june-2014>

<sup>5</sup> Joint Statement of the Ministers of foreign affairs on the participation states of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and of the European Commission, Vienna, 26 June 2014, [http://www.danube-region.eu/attachments/article/616497/Joint\\_Statement\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.danube-region.eu/attachments/article/616497/Joint_Statement_FINAL.pdf)



## 4.2 Target audience

The process for labelling of projects targets three different audiences:

- *PAs and Steering Groups* for selecting relevant calls (1) and evaluating proposals (3-4)
- *Stakeholders* expected for designing proposals highly relevant to the Danube Strategy and for applying to receive the EUSDR label
- *Evaluators, programme managers and other management authorities* of relevant funding schemes for accepting EUSDR label in their calls.

### 4.2.1 EUSDR Priority Areas Steering Groups

PA Coordinators and Steering Groups are to some extent already familiar with the labelling issue and its aims (mainly through the work of their PA and their way of project recommendation/labelling), therefore within this approach they will be invited to join under the umbrella of EUSDR wide labelling and coordinate their labelling activities with other PAs. The success of the proposed EUSDR wide approach thus lies upon the active contribution of the PAs and Steering Groups. Each PA is expected to indicate the most relevant calls from their point of interest and later evaluate received proposals applying for the EUSDR label.

### 4.2.2 Funding schemes

Other important target groups are policy makers, RTDI administrations, and relevant funding schemes designers and call reviewers, who should become aware and committed to take into account the EUSDR objectives in designing calls and recognize the EUSDR “label” in their respective project selection process. The document *Relevance of the EUSDR label for your call* (a draft list of arguments for RTDI administrators and policy makers on the relevance of that label) explains the EUSDR labelling process and relevance of the projects recommended to the RTDI administration and project reviewers. It will be disseminated to these target groups once labelling procedure is launched and later to accompany each Letter of Recommendation.

Evaluators, programme managers and other management authorities of relevant funding schemes will be informed about and invited to take into account the EUSDR label in their calls. Although being fully aware that the EUSDR label cannot provide additional points to the projects, the evaluators, programme managers and other management authorities will be addressed with the invitation to consider and take into account the EUSDR label as an indicator that EUSDR labelled proposals were already evaluated by the governance of the EUSDR and assessed the most relevant in regard to the Danube Strategy, promising to provide substantial benefit to achieving EUSDR targets.

### 4.2.3 Stakeholders as potential project applicants

The main target groups are stakeholders who show capacities, willingness and readiness to take part in or coordinate projects and collaborations with clear EUSDR added value. These are researchers and research institutes, universities and departments, research related SMEs and companies, non-governmental organizations, public institutions and other eligible parties in the Danube Region who plan to participate in large-scale projects that fit into the EUSDR objectives, addressing different funding sources.

In order to complement the on-going activities and avoid duplication, the PAs will target specific calls, while projects answering them will apply for “labelling” and gain support from the relevant EUSDR Priority Area Steering Groups.

## 5 Labelling process

The proposed labelling process is based on the functional coordination of EUSDR PAs, PACs and Steering Groups to enable an integrated approach and wider recognition of the EUSDR “label” and Letter of Recommendation (LoR). The current situation lacks a common approach; even though some of the PAs have established very functional procedures and criteria for PA labelling and/or awarding LoRs. This proposal does not intend to influence PA governance and mechanisms already established. It aims to gather them all under an EUSDR umbrella for EUSDR project labelling (not individual PAs), to help those PAs with no labelling experience to develop some based on exchange of good practice with others. Moreover, it will provide management as well as technical support for the administration and coordination among PAs in the labelling process, as well as make available expert consultancy (Advisory Committee) in the proposals development.

In contacts with various stakeholders it has become clear that many of them would prefer having their projects awarded with EUSDR-wide label, compared to the current existing individual PA labelling/LoR, since they perceive EUSDR label more relevant<sup>6</sup>, giving better recognition and improved acceptance among different funders. Nevertheless, this proposal does not attempt to undermine the current practice and eliminate individual PA labelling/LoR, but to give added value to the current practices and provide a common approach and coordination among PAs in recognition of strategic projects highly significant to the EUSDR implementation. In addition the process aims to stimulate projects that tackle more than one PAs and motivate stakeholders to develop Danube Region specific large-scale collaborations. Compared to internal procedures some of the PAs already apply for labelling and recommending projects, the proposed integrated model upgrades the “label” and “LoR” and brings it one step forward - to the level of the Danube Strategy (not individual PA what is current practice), while keeping flexibility and criteria already established within each PA.

Aiming to address and actively involve all PAs and their governance structures (PACs, SGs) in the EUSDR labelling process, the approach proposed relies on the best practice example developed by PA10 - Institutional capacity and cooperation for the purpose of the Technical Assistance Facility of Danube Region Projects (TAF-DRP). The EUSDR wide labelling of projects will be a pilot-action, implemented in the framework of the Danube-INCO.NET project. With this pilot-action we are testing new application labelling procedures within Horizon 2020 and are gaining experience for other funding schemes.

The University of Novi Sad, which is in charge of the Task 5.3 *Development and “Labelling” of Danube Region projects and proposals* and is providing support to the coordination of EUSDR Priority Area 7 (PA7) “To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)” will act as managing and administrating “Contact Point (CP)” for the purpose of this Labelling Process. Further involved partners are the ZSI, SIG (as WP leader), RCISD, ASM-CIP as well as PA 7 Steering Group members who will be involved in a semi-permanent Advisory Committee (AC). Both CP and AC members will sign confidentiality agreement to ensure confidentiality of the information project applicants share with them in the labelling process. In addition replacement of members in case of a conflict of interest regarding specific call is foreseen to guarantee impartiality in the assessment.

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<sup>6</sup>Consultation process on D5.4 Concept Note, input from Austria

## 5.1 Selection of calls

The selection of relevant calls is the first step in proposed labelling process which seeks to provide a common system to support PAs and work of their Steering Groups in targeting the most relevant calls under particular funding schemes (e.g. Horizon 2020), which fit into the PA objectives, complement the on-going activities and avoid duplication.

Aiming to support each PA and coordination of leading actions towards targets' achievement, PAs governance bodies (PACs, SGs) will be invited to choose the most promising calls (up to 3 per year) for their field of interest among announced Horizon 2020 calls for funding. PACs and Steering Groups will be invited to mark only a few calls annually which they find their PA can benefit from the most if good quality projects dealing with specific PA targets are given support. At this stage PACs and Steering Groups are making the decision which strongly encourages stakeholders to act on in compliance with the PA targets.

The selection of calls sets up a clear pathway towards project implementation. It refers to all Priority Areas of the EUSDR. In order to avoid disproportionate work burden for management and administration, CP will rely on PACs and Steering Groups to identify those calls where their PA could make substantial difference to the status quo. The PACs are anchor points in the system and should ensure the selection of calls. Each PA is free to organise this process as they deem appropriate, with the involvement of the Steering Group. The outcome must be the selection of a maximum of 3 calls per PA annually. It is not required to choose all calls at the same time. However it is required to select calls prior to their opening, leaving enough time for the promotion and contacting of stakeholders. It is strongly recommended to perform calls selection twice a year, and inform CP accordingly.

Once a PA selects relevant calls, PACs submit their decision to the CP. CP enlists the call in its evidence and starts preparation of the next step – calls promotion and dissemination of information.

## 5.2 Dissemination

Announcements to stakeholders are circulated to advertise calls with a specific relevance in and for the region for “labelling” of projects. The selected calls for proposals will be intensively promoted through the Danube-INCO.NET dissemination platforms, as well as PA Steering Group communication channels (e.g. [www.danube-region.eu](http://www.danube-region.eu) and PA web pages).

The promotion actions will serve to present information about relevant calls to potential proposal applicants as well as to other stakeholders, to increase interest among target groups and indicate selected calls and possibility for projects to obtain the EUSDR label. It will make the full use of the project website <http://danube-inco.net>, the newsletter, together with other dissemination and promotion tools like e-mail announcements, public relations and related events. Through promotion and increased information exchange the selected calls will be particularly advertised among those stakeholders expected to take part in future project proposals responding to selected calls.

The dissemination of information about calls will be combined with the presentation and promotion of the EUSDR labelling purpose and the added-value that is expected from the projects applying for the label in regard to the measurable and feasible impact on EUSDR targets achievement. Through the third step of the labelling process – *Improvement of applications* – potential project applicants will be offered help in project design and partnership building. This assistance will refer to

strengthening the project partnership and improvement of its relevance in regard the EUSDR targets and actions<sup>7</sup>.

The selected calls that are particularly relevant to the EUSDR and the related Priority Area will be disseminated to stakeholders, while special attention will be given to those among them who show a high commitment to EUSDR, have expected capacity (human, research, financial) and are already involved in some of the EUSDR activities.

For the purpose of EUSDR labelling of projects we are looking for larger collaborative projects, with a strong macro-regional dimension. Those projects are expected to make a tangible and understandable contribution to the objectives of EUSDR as established in the EUSDR Action Plan and Roadmaps for action. In particular projects should involve a strong Danube consortium and make regional impact.

Large projects (ones with overall budget well above the one suggested by the selected call) applying for a EUSDR label are expected to represent a long-term commitment and capacity to deliver substantial impact in the referent field(s) of action, capability to combine different sources of funding, and involve a number of partners along the Danube basin.

Projects can be submitted by research institutes and universities, national, regional or local authorities, other bodies governed by public law and private (commercial and non-commercial) organisations (e.g. SMEs, NGOs, etc.), with legal personality, having their seat in any country/region of the Danube Region.

### 5.3 Improvement

Stakeholders interested in applying for selected calls will be offered broader assistance in project preparation aiming to improve their EUSDR relevance. The assistance will be provided by Danube-INCO.NET WP5.3 team and semi-permanent Advisory Committee, as well as respective PACs and Steering Group(s).

Application for the EUSDR label is open from the time of publication of the respective call until three weeks before the call deadline. This time limit of three weeks (21 days) applies to those projects that do not seek assistance of the CP, AC and PACs, and directly apply for the assessment stage of the process. However, project applicants who ask for recommendations related to consortium/partnership and EUSDR relevance are strongly encouraged to address the CP at any time between the official publication of the respective call, and not later than 6 weeks before the deadline.

Projects can send their *outlines* (in the respective forms of the call) or *Application Form - Concept note* (Annex II) clearly stating project title, PA and EUSDR actions/targets addressed, call applying for and call priorities, proposed consortium, project rationale, overall and specific objectives, main activities and outcomes, expected impact, project duration and budget, accompanied with a short statement on the relevance of the project proposal for the Danube Region.

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<sup>7</sup> This facility does not intent to overlap with the actions of the Horizon 2020 National Contact Points (NCP), but to perform advisory role for project development and improvement in regard to EUSDR relevance. It is assistance specifically designed for the Danube Region and for the projects interested in obtaining EUSDR label. It should complement with NCPs' efforts. NCPs will be informed about the EUSDR labelling process accordingly.

Projects applying for label are expected to make a tangible and understandable contribution to the objectives of the EUSDR and PA actions/targets they refer to. In particular the project should contribute to the Priority Area identified in the application, including envisaged outputs, results and impact.

Application Forms are submitted via e-mail to the address of the CP. Upon the receipt of the Application Form CP sends confirmation of receipt to the applicant and performs administrative check, including verification of the completeness of the application. In case some part of the application is missing CP notifies the applicant and requests amendment. CP submits completed applications to the AC and PACs asking for their recommendations for the improvement of application partnership and consortium capacity, as well as the proposal's relevance to the PA targets and Roadmap.

Based on the Application Form handed in, the AC and PACs suggest ways to improve the EUSDR relevance of proposals and steer them towards a better integration with EUSDR objectives. Applicants are informed about recommendations for proposal improvement by e-mail in three weeks after the receipt of Application Form, but not later than 21 days prior to the call deadline. The applicants may be suggested to involve additional partners in the project to strengthen the connection with the EUSDR and expected impact to the EUSDR; however it is fully up to the consortia to follow these suggestions if they wish.

#### **5.4 Assessment**

In the last phase of the process all projects that have applied for the EUSDR label will be assessed and evaluated. The evaluation will be performed solely based on their relevance to the EUSDR and PA(s) targets, objectives, and roadmaps. It will not assess the scientific or technological quality or other criteria, what will also be clearly stated in the Letter of Recommendation. Projects selected for the EUSDR label must demonstrate a strong macro-regional dimension in terms of impacts, partnership and/or location of the actions.

All projects that have applied, regardless of their participation in previous step (5.3 Improvement), will be assessed equally and will be subject of the evaluation by criteria established within addressed PA(s). For example, PA 7 established Criteria for Label the Flagship Projects<sup>8</sup> aiming to acknowledge outstanding projects which are expected to make a significant impact in the Danube Region in the fields of research, higher education or information technologies. It clearly says that in order to be considered for the PA 7 label a project must be jointly developed by a minimum of three Danube Region countries, having a decisive impact in at least five Danube countries, while the minimal financial volume of a project ranges from at least 1 mil EUR for networking activities up to more or equal 5 mil EUR for research projects.

Assessment and evaluation to be performed by Priority Area Coordinators and Steering Groups should continue policies of strategic project recommending and/or labelling, while CP and AC will provide support to formal criteria establishment in those PAs with no practice of this kind so far. Among all proposals asking for a EUSDR label related to a specific call, Priority Area Coordinators and/or Steering Groups will select up to three proposals the most relevant for the EUSDR and targeted PA(s).

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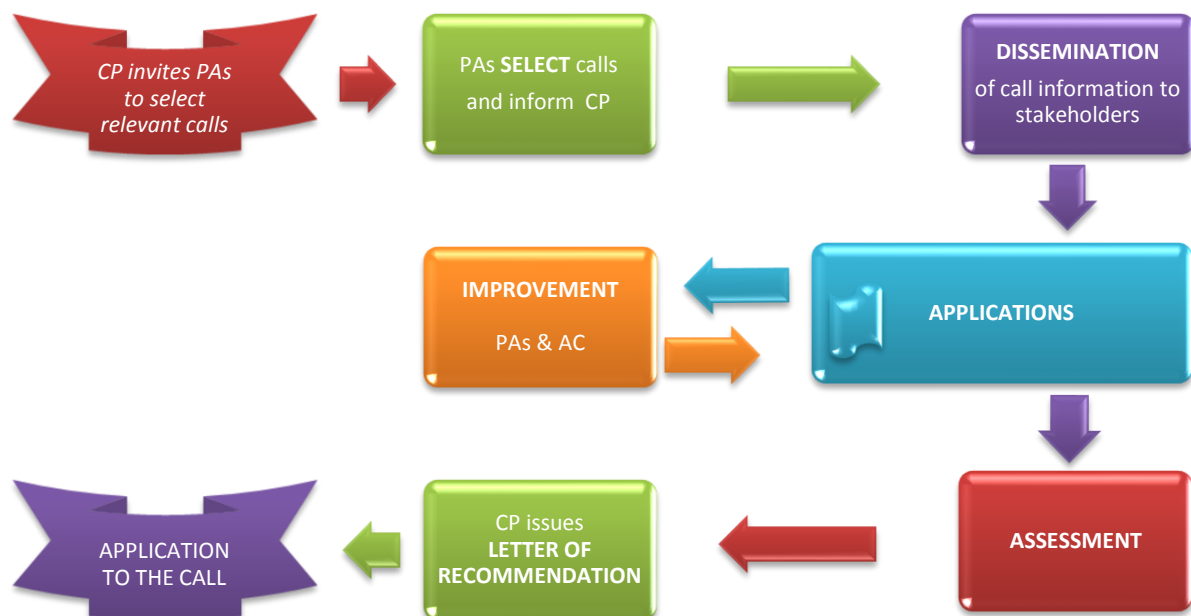
<sup>8</sup>Available on <http://groupspaces.com/KnowledgeSociety/pages/projects>

The assessment report which includes project ranking, clearly states the number of submitted projects, project titles, lead partners, consortiums, and planned budgets; PACs will send this report to the CP not later than 10 days before the call deadline.

CP will provide a Letter of Recommendation (LoR) to each project selected for the EUSDR label. The LoR will be made available to the project applicant not later than 5 days prior to the call deadline, in scanned copy via e-mail, while the original LoR will be sent to the applicant's postal address via regular mail. On behalf of this facility the LoR will be signed by Prof. Dr Miroslav Veskovc, Priority Area 7 Coordinator and Rector of the University of Novi Sad, which acts as CP.

## 5.5 Flowchart of labelling process

The chart below gives a quick overview on the sequence of tasks from the invitation sent to PACs to select the most relevant calls to the letter of recommendation to accompany project applications.



## 5.6 Pilot phase and next steps

Before launching this facility for all PAs of the EUSDR and inviting PACs and Steering Groups to start with the first step of identifying the most relevant calls for their PA, UNS as task leader proposes a pilot phase. The pilot phase will be carried within the Priority Area 7 – "To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)" and targets specific Horizon 2020 call<sup>9</sup>:

### Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation

Call for Twinning

H2020-TWINN-2015

Deadline date: 07-05-2015

Link:

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/calls/h2020-twinn-2015.html>

<sup>9</sup>List of open H2020 calls <http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020>

The pilot will be launched at the PA7 SG meeting in Vienna on December 10, 2014. The identified call will be publicised on the project and the PA7 web pages, and disseminated through electronic communication channels to the stakeholders, right after the deliverable D5.4 is accepted. Any valuable feedback and experience gained in the pilot phase within the PA 7 will be discussed, assessed and amended to the D5.4, if needed.

Together with running the pilot, in January 2105 CP will approach other PACs and circulate the first information about proposed labelling facility, starting to prepare them for this joint approach to EUSDR labelling. At the EUSDR Annual Forum 2015 in Ulm, Germany, it is planned to make an open presentation of the labelling facility, with the first practical feedback from the pilot and hopefully other PAs which will by then launch the facility within their field of reference.

## 5.7 Expected results

The labelling process presented in this document aims at boosting the information flow about relevant calls that are expected to support the implementation of EUSDR and PAs roadmaps, while improving networking and cooperation among stakeholders in the Danube Region. The ultimate expected result is the accelerated implementation of the EUSDR and Action Plan through advanced recognition of the most prominent project applications, first internally among EUSDR governance structures and right after externally among funding decision makers.

It is expected that this kind of joint approach and close co-ordination between the implementation of the EUSDR and stakeholders will result in an increased number of successful project applications with very strong consortiums, highly visible impact throughout the Danube macro-region and tangible outcomes. Moreover, setting the environment in favour of mutual understanding and positive reception of this initiative on behalf of the European Commission funding schemes (e.g. Horizon 2020) will increase chances for implementing and funding true strategic projects for the EUSDR, which will bring expected progress in connecting, strengthening, building prosperity and protection the environment of the Danube Region. In addition the establishment of formal relations and joint meetings with respective Call designers and recognition of the EUSDR objectives in the future calls (H2020, European Territorial Cooperation) can enlarge the impact of this activity.

The impact of this facility will be measured in the number of calls and dissemination activities (web pages, newsletters, e-mails), number of applications for EUSDR label, number of applications awarded label and number of applications received funding. Moreover, this activity is expected to increase the awareness of the research society on the relevance of EUSDR priorities, networking and complementarities.

### 5.7.1 Risks

Although the outline of the process for labelling of projects is based on the concrete needs for a coordinated EUSDR approach, which involve all PAs, PACs and Steering Groups equally, and even though it is recommended in the *Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Participating States of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and of the European Commission* in Vienna, 26 June 2014, below there are potential risks and threats to the proposed labelling process:

- EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators/Steering Groups disagree with the labelling process proposed

- Lack of collaboration with one or more PACs/SGs in running the labelling procedure: lack of interest and/or lack of time for one or more of proposed steps (selection of calls, improvement of proposals, assessment and evaluation)
- Funding programme committees and reviewers do not take the Letters of Recommendations into consideration
- Frustration by project applicants and partners if they do not receive the Letter of Recommendation
- Lack of funding for operational administration of CP and AC after Danube-INCO.NET project ends.

To mitigate risks and to provide alternative for action if expected results fail to materialize due to one or more listed risks occurred, following plan is foreseen. The proposed procedure is not the only one applicable and it does not intended to be strictly bounding, but flexible and feasible. The most important is to coordinate among PAs and enable large strategic project to be recognized on the highest EUSDR level. Therefore the EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators/Steering Groups who might disagree with the labelling process proposed will be invited to suggest alternative solution for the part(s) of the proposed process they disagree with. Through facilitation of divergence and mediation, an acceptable and feasible common solution will be defined. Broad dissemination of EUSDR labelling, the interest of the projects to be awarded EUSDR label, wider recognition on the side of stakeholders and funding schemes, together with the first positive effects and experience of the projects which received EUSDR label, will make a good influence among stakeholders in the Region and strengthen the facility. As labelling becomes an example of good practice the PAs/PACs/SGs which at first might show lack of interest or lack of time will start to recognize mutual benefits, while being also encouraged by the EUSDR governance structures and other parties interested to get more actively involved.

It is essential for the success of labeling facility to raise awareness of programme committees and reviewers and to ensure they take into consideration judgment and understand intentions of the EUSDR governance in regard to labeling the most promising project applications for the Danube Strategy. The letter *Relevance of the EUSDR label for your call* (Annex III) is proposed to provide the first inputs, while improved communication, dissemination of targeted information and lobbying shall all encourage recognition of EUSDR label and LoRs among relevant funding structures.

Sustainability of the proposed facility, once the Danube-INCO.NET project ends, will highly depend on its success during the project lifetime. If it starts to provide expected outcomes for the PAs and SGs in improving strategic projects EUSDR relevance and reaching defined targets, and to strategic projects in receiving better visibility and improving funding capacities, the facility will ensure financial sustainability through new technical assistance grants in the framework of Danube Transnational Programme or some other available funding scheme.



## 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The Priority Areas Coordinators and Steering Groups have already tackled the issue of labelling a number of times in regard to recognition of and providing support to the EUSDR strategic projects. At the same time the need is identified to develop better coordination among leading governance and implementation structures of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. Some of the PAs have already established internal policies and award labels and/or issue letters of recommendation to projects. In regard to criteria they have recognized within their SG, they evaluate/assess projects and award label and/or issue LoR to the ones which significantly contribute to defined PA Action Plan, targets and operation of the roadmaps. However, one integrated EUSDR level approach remained unsolved.

On the other hand, some of the PAs which have started with the labelling and/or recommending projects practice have faced another problem. Many small and medium projects and initiatives have recognized their chance in attaining EUSDR label. PAs became aware that with many projects addressing them, the time consuming process of projects review/evaluation affects their main role and shifts it from PA governance and policy level coordination towards project assessment and issuing LoRs. In order to deliver a balance, avoid overload of the SGs with a number of applications asking for the EUSDR label and support only strategic projects and actions with truly significant macro-regional impact, the Danube-INCO.NET project deals with *Development and "Labelling" of Danube Region projects and proposals* (task 5.3). As a result of an open discussion and coordination with policy makers and stakeholders in the region this Deliverable is presented.

It proposes a labelling process which starts with Priority Areas selection of the most relevant calls in regard to their action plans, targets and roadmaps. In the next stage it goes into dissemination of information to stakeholders, followed with consultation process on proposals improvement in terms of EUSDR relevance. Finally it concludes with the selection of those project applications that in a best manner support EUSDR implementation.

All Priority Areas are expected to joint this facility and use its technical (Contact Point) and expert (Advisory Committee) support provided for labelling of strategic projects. For the first time EUSDR wide coordination will enable projects to compete for a EUSDR-wide label and recommendation compared to ones received from individual Priority Areas. This step forward in coordination and introduction of a joint approach is the main added value of the labelling process proposed.

Once the proposed outline is approved within the task partners within Danube-INCO.NET project, it will be presented to all PACs and Steering Groups asking for their approval and their active participation in its implementation. Task partners are invited to propose their experts for the Advisory Committee, while Ministers of Foreign Affairs of The Participating States of the EUSDR and the European Commission will be informed about the progress further development of joint approach for labelling strategic projects for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region mapped until the end of 2014.

**Annex I – Draft request form****Application form – Project Concept Note**

<b>Project title in English</b>	
<b>Acronym</b>	
<b>Priority Area addressed</b>	
<b>EUSDR Action/Target addressed</b>	
<b>Call to be applied for</b>	
<b>Call priorities addressed</b>	

**A. Information about the applicant**

Applicant Institution/Department/Unit		
Address	Street	
	Code / City	
	Country	
Legal form (entity)		
Website of the institution		
Contact person for the project	Name:	
	Function :	
E-mail address		

**B. Project partners**

No.	Name of the Institution	City, Country	Contact person
<b>Role of the partners in the project</b> <i>Max 1000 words</i>			

**C. Project description**

<b>Project rationale</b> <i>Max 500 words</i>	
<b>Project overall objectives</b>	
<b>Specific objectives</b>	
<b>Target group(s)</b>	
<b>Main activities</b> <i>Max 500 words</i>	
<b>Main outcomes/results</b>	
<b>Specific impact</b>	
<b>Geographic focus of the impact</b>	<b>State the regions/countries impacted by the project</b>
<b>Duration</b>	<b>Start of the project:</b> <b>End of the project:</b>
<b>Estimated total costs of the project</b>	
<b>Relevance of the project for the Danube Region</b> <i>Max 500 words</i>	

## Annex II – Draft Letter of Recommendation

Place and date

To: **Title & the name of the person**  
 Function & Institution  
 Official address

### LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

On behalf of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) governance structure and of the task *Development and “Labelling” of Danube Region projects and proposals* in the framework of the Danube-INCO.NET project herewith I express full support to the below stated project applying to the Call **full name of the call**.

Project Full name and Acronym	Applicant Institution	Contact person

EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators and respective Steering Groups believe that this Call is particularly relevant to the Danube Strategy and its priorities. The project listed above is acknowledged as highly relevant for the Strategy, showing strong commitment to EUSDR objectives and promising valuable impact in and for the Danube macro-region. The Priority Area Coordinators and the Advisory Committee decided to award the project with the *EUSDR label* following two-stage consultation and evaluation process established under the umbrella of Danube-INCO.NET project.

The project has been selected in the top 3 among all applications competing for the EUSDR label, which confirms its quality in regard to EUSDR relevance, expected tangible and understandable impacts to the objectives of Danube Strategy as established in the relevant Action Plan and Priority Areas targets.

We acknowledge the principle of excellence of the Horizon 2020 which is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme. Therefore, we firmly believe that the project stated above, built on scientific collaboration aiming for strengthening and building prosperity in the macro-region, couples research and innovation, and notably responds to requirements of H2020 for achieving excellent science, industrial leadership and tackling societal challenges, valuing smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and contributing to securing Europe's global competitiveness.

We sincerely hope you would take into consideration this Letter of Recommendation and look forward to a possibility to experience outcomes of these projects and the continuation of a fruitful cooperation of stakeholders in the Danube Region and beyond.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the EUSDR labelling facility,

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Prof. Dr Miroslav Vesković  
 EUSDR PA 7 Coordinator

## Annex III – Relevance of the EUSDR label for your call

Place and date

To: **Title & the name of the person**  
Function & Institution  
Official address

Subject: **Relevance of the EUSDR letter of recommendation for the call**

On behalf of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) governance structure and the Managing Authority of a pilot facility established in the framework of Danube-INCO.NET project, task *Development and “Labelling” of Danube Region projects and proposals*, please let us address you with a few facts relevant for the EUSDR implementation in regard to this specific Call.

Background of the Strategy:

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region<sup>10</sup> is the second macro-regional strategy of the European Union, (the first one being the Baltic Sea strategy). Two further strategies are currently in preparation (Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region to be adopted in 2014 and the Strategy for the Alpine Region to be adopted in 2015). The novel approach of the European Commission to regional policy is outlined in 'macro-regional strategies' which provide an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council. To support policies defined in macro-regional strategies of the European Union, the European Structural and Investment Funds and other EU funding schemes are expected to provide support to the projects and initiatives that address common challenges faced by Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion.<sup>11</sup>

The Danube Strategy addresses a wide range of issues, divided in 4 pillars and 11 priority areas. Each priority area is managed by two Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) which ensure the implementation of the Action Plan (planning, targets, indicators and timetables) and facilitate effective cooperation between project promoters, programmes and funding sources. The PACs work in consultation with the Commission, relevant EU agencies and national/regional bodies, while Priority Area Steering Groups assures national policy support and involvement of relevant national stakeholders of countries involved.

Starting with “Three NOs” as basic principle of the Danube Strategy, meaning that the countries would not create new institutions, new legislation or require new Union funding for Strategy implementation, the PACs and respective Steering Groups are invited to targeted available funds and calls particularly relevant to the Danube Region Strategy.

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<sup>10</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperate/danube/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/danube/index_en.cfm), <http://www.danube-region.eu/>

<sup>11</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperate/macro\\_region\\_strategy/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/macro_region_strategy/index_en.cfm)

## Labelling and relevance to the Call:

Given the above context many Priority Areas have established mechanisms for labelling and recommending projects with high visible impact and tangible results for promoting the development and growth of the Danube Region.

Following conclusions of the Danube Region Foreign Affairs Ministers who “called on Priority Area Steering Groups to further develop joint approach for labelling strategic projects of the EU strategy for the Danube Region until the end of 2014”<sup>12</sup>, the Danube-INCO.NET project provided opportunity to promote closer cooperation and mutual understanding between implementation of the EUSDR and relevant European funding schemes, and joint recognition of the strategic projects. The labelling process developed as a result supports the good governance of the EUSDR and recognition of those projects which contribute the most to defined targets and priority areas action plans.

Therefore, project applications which are awarded with the EUSDR label and provided with Letter of Recommendation are top quality projects showing strong commitment to EUSDR objectives and promising valuable and tangible impact in and for the Danube macro-region. The decision is an outcome of joint and coordinated effort of Priority Area Coordinators, Steering Groups and the Advisory Committee organized in a two-stage consultation and evaluation process under the umbrella of Danube-INCO.NET project.

The label in no way means to pre-judge the evaluation of the independent experts for the Call. What the label intends to show is the perceived positive potential of the project with a view to macro-regional impacts, aiming to deliver solution in some of the most pressing challenges in the Danube Region.

We strongly believe that we, the Danube Strategy, and the Horizon 2020 as the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme ever, share the same philosophy of promoting high-level scientific collaboration for connecting, strengthening, building prosperity and protection of European macro-regions, through genuine support to projects which most significantly respond to defined macro-regional needs.

We sincerely hope that within that spirit you will take in consideration the EUSDR Letters of Recommendation.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the EUSDR labelling facility,

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Prof. Dr Miroslav Vesković  
EUSDR PA 7 Coordinator

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<sup>12</sup>Joint Statement of the Ministers of foreign affairs on the participation states of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and of the European Commission, Vienna, 26 June 2014, [http://www.danube-region.eu/attachments/article/616497/Joint\\_Statement\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.danube-region.eu/attachments/article/616497/Joint_Statement_FINAL.pdf)

## Annex IV – Proposal for the team of people carrying out the labelling process

The University of Novi Sad, in charge of the Task 5.3 *Development and “Labelling” of Danube Region projects and proposals* with its support team for coordination of EUSDR Priority Area 7 (PA 7) “To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)” will act as Contact Point (CP) for the purpose of this Labelling Process. Ms Sanja Subotic Gantar will take care of communication and written coordination with other PAs and project applicants, while other team members will provide smooth administration of applications and dissemination of information.

The Advisory Committee (AC) is seen as an expert body providing consultancy for improvement of applications quality in terms of EUSDR relevance and partnership. Its members will sign confidentiality agreements in order to ensure confidentiality of the information project applicants share with them in the labelling process. The AC is foreseen to be of semi-permanent membership, enabling the replacement of members in case of a conflict of interest regarding a specific call to guarantee impartiality in the assessment.

Partners of the Task 5.3, namely UNS (Task leader), ZSI, SIG (as WP leader), RCISD, ASM-CIP, as well as BMWFW as one of the leading PA 7 Steering Group members, were invited to name one person for the AC. AC members should be experienced in project management, well informed about EUSDR progress, actions and targets, and with a good overview of relevant stakeholders and the regional setting.

Institution	Name of AC member	Contact	Short Background
UNS	Prof. Dr Goran Stojanović	<a href="mailto:sgoran@uns.ac.rs">sgoran@uns.ac.rs</a>	Associate Professor, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad; Deputy Provincial Secretary for Science and Technological Development
ZSI	Elke Dall	<a href="mailto:dall@zsi.at">dall@zsi.at</a>	Research Policy & Development <a href="https://www.zsi.at/en/users/140">https://www.zsi.at/en/users/140</a>
SIG	Dr Jonathan Loeffler	<a href="mailto:loeffler@steinbeis-europa.de">loeffler@steinbeis-europa.de</a>	Managing Director, Steinbeis-Europa-Zentrum (SEZ)
RCISD	Virág Zsár	<a href="mailto:virag.zsar@rcisd.eu">virag.zsar@rcisd.eu</a>	Project manager and international expert
ASM-CIP	Dr Lidia Romanciuc	<a href="mailto:intprojects@asm.md">intprojects@asm.md</a>	Director of the Center of International Projects
BMWFW	Martina Hartl	<a href="mailto:martina.hartl@bmwfw.gv.at">martina.hartl@bmwfw.gv.at</a>	Federal Ministry of Science, research and Economy; Deputy Head of Department International Research Cooperation