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Pop, Ruxandra Eugenia

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RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION OF THE DANUBE DELTA - STRATEGIES AT EUROPEAN LEVEL AND IMPLEMENTATION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

RUXANDRA – EUGENIA POP[1]

Abstract: *The present paper aims to explore the contribution and implications of Romania to the development of the Danube region over the years, focusing on the interactions between internal and international factors. From the analyzed ones, we can affirm the fact that the internal factors play a secondary role in the development of the strategies, the majority role holding the international factors. Regarding the present and future strategies established at European level we can conclude that in their formulation the awareness should be extended to the perceptions of the local communities in the area, thus analyzing their identity, cultural heritage, economic and social potential of the analyzed areas. During the paper will analyze aspects such as: historical, geographical and socio-cultural context, the economic importance of the Danube in the European context, the European institutional framework for the international use of the Danube, the Strategy of the European Union at the level of the Danube region, national aspects related to the Danube Delta region.*

Key words: *Romanian Danube region, capitalization of the potential of the Danube Delta region, identity of the Danube region.*

JEL Classification*: J18, Q38, Q58*

INTRODUCTION

The Danube is undoubtedly a river that has always had considerable economic importance for Europe, as it crosses 10 countries (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine) and 4 capitals (Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, Belgrade). Also, the importance of the Danube Basin is given by the fact that about 81 million people live in this area, on an area of 817,000 square km, according to data provided by ICPDR, 2016 (International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River). Although it is the second longest river in Europe, it should be noted that Volga (the longest river in Europe) crosses only Russia, as opposed to the Danube.

From a geographical point of view, the Danube practically links three different regions of Europe, with different characteristics, with particularities and with different degrees of economic development, as follows.

- The developed region of Western Europe;
- The developed middle region of Central Europe;
- Less developed and developing region of Eastern Europe.

It is interesting to note that these three distinct regions are delimited by the three sections of the Danube, as follows:

- The first section: located between the Black Forest Mountains (Germany) and Hungary;
- The second section: located between Hungary and the Iron Gates;
- Third section: located between the Iron Gates and the Danube Delta;

From a cultural point of view, along the Danube four major dialects can be distinguished:

- German (in Germany and Austria);
- Slavic (in Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria); Hungarian (in Hungary); Romanian (in Romania and Moldova).

[1] CS Pop Ruxandra – Eugenia, ICEADR, Bucharest, pop.ruxandra@iceadr.ro

From an economic point of view, the importance of the Danube derives primarily from the activity of maritime, naval transport, dating back to the 7th century, when the Greeks were exploring certain parts of the river and completing trading activities. Astfel, prezența acestui fluviu a reprezentat baza apariției unor orașe importante ca Viena, Budapesta, Belgrad, Ruse. În prezent, rolul economic al Dunării nu este reprezentat doar de transport ci și de alte funcții economice, cum ar fi:

- *Generation of electricity* (for example, the hydroelectric power station at the Iron Gates);
- *Water source*, for both industry and population (for example, in cities like Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Russia);
- *Irrigation network for agriculture* (in countries such as Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria);
- Fishing

After World War II, several projects were developed on a large scale to develop the transport function, the most important of which being:

- The Danube-Black Sea Canal, built in Romania (1987) between Cernavodă and Constanța;
- Rhine-Main-Danube Canal (1992), connection between the North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean and the Black Sea.

The major problem that derives from most of the mentioned economic activities is pollution, which affects the waters of the Danube, both for industrial use and for the consumption of the population, for irrigation and fishing. Thus, reducing pollution is a challenge that society must face, in order to preserve the environment but also to prevent severe economic losses.

Thus, taking into account the existing framework, we will analyze the European strategy for the Danube region, and the degree of its implementation, both at national and at European level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to carry out the present work, the current legislative framework regarding the strategies of the European Commission for the Danube Delta, as well as the specialized literature for the case study area (the Danube Delta), and other publications of interest for the studied subject were analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

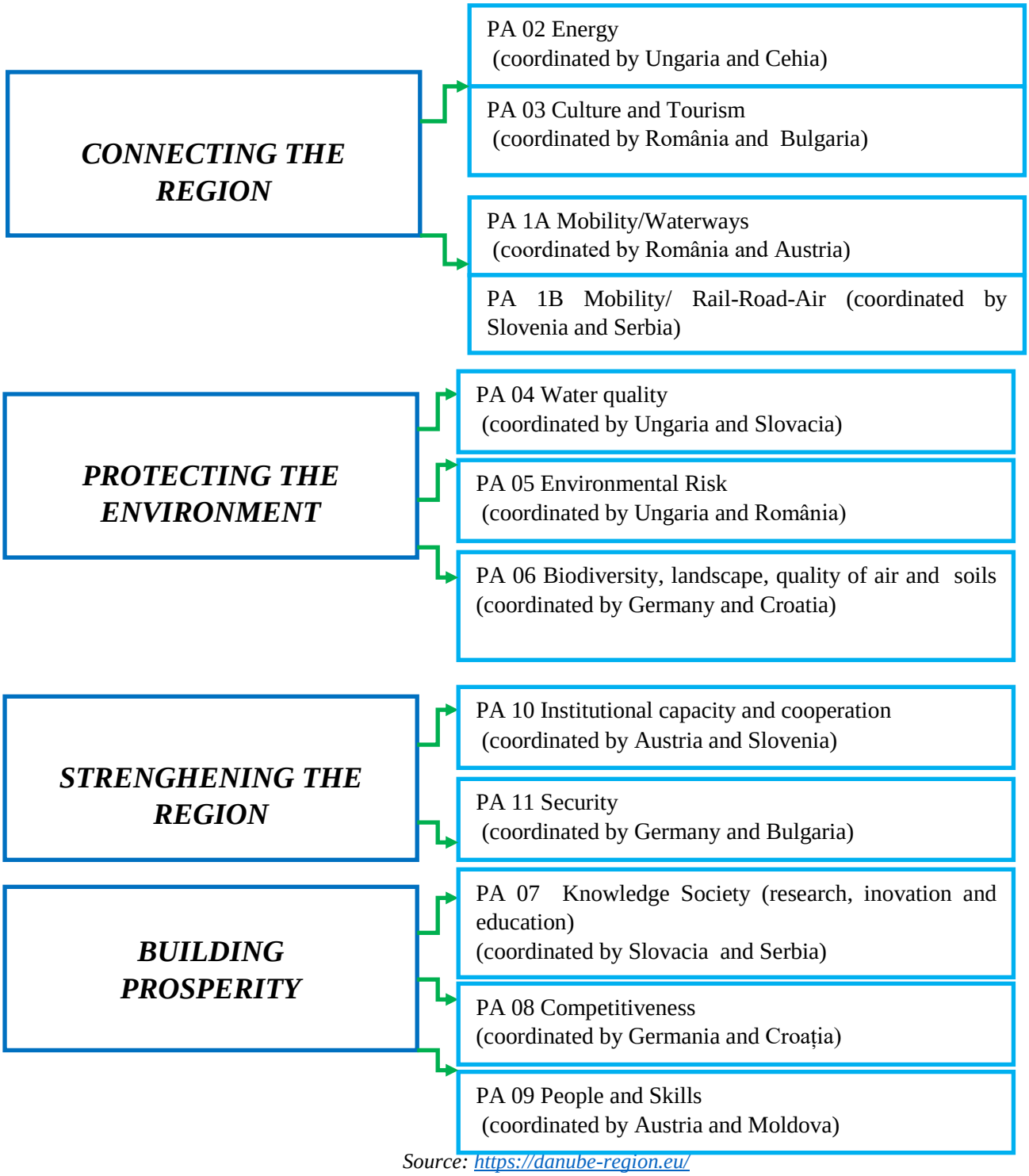
The strategy of the European Commission for the Danube Region (2010) envisages 14 countries of which 9 countries are Member States (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia) and 5 non-Member States (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Ukraine and Moldova). Currently, at the level of the European Union, four strategies are distinguished, at the macro-regional level:

- EU Strategy for the Baltic Region
- EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region;
- EU Strategy for the Alpine Region;
- EU Strategy for the ***Danube Region*** (European Commission, 2016)

At the level of the last strategy of the 4 mentioned, a series of objectives and challenges are outlined, which are intended to be addressed: *improving the quality of the modes of transport (road infrastructure, water, railway); the development of the energy network, the elimination or diminution of the existing gaps in the areas of interest, the improvement of the cooperation and coordination in the level of education, research and innovation, the improvement of the security and the security.*

The European Strategy for the Danube Region is structured on 4 pillars and 12 priorities, each priority being coordinated by 2 countries called Priority Area Coordinators (see figure 1).

Figure 1 – Pillars and Priority Areas (Strategy of the Danube Region)



Source: https://danube-region.eu/

This strategy is not provided with a separate budget but requires the participation of the Member States in order to use the funds that are part of the cohesion policy or other European financial instruments, which can be obtained from international organizations or from bilateral donations. This financial aspect implies that the countries of the Danube region should develop a long-term, integrated approach in order to use these funds in a most competitive and synergistic manner.

Romania is one of the countries with high access to the river but this is not sufficiently exploited to the real potential, proof in this regard being also the multiple scientific publications in which the region was analyzed historically, geographically, socially, politically and culturally. . In order to capitalize on the economic potential of the Danube, a country or a region must be either a producer of goods, which can lead to selling over longer distances, including by river transport, or a significant buyer of goods, which can attract sellers' attention and attract high demand. These two hypotheses are linked to each other, in the sense that you cannot have high purchasing power if you do not produce and sell something in return, to have financial resources. Unfortunately, the historical and geographical past of the Danube area in Romania has brought it into a passive rather than an active position.

Among the most important weaknesses of the analyzed region we can mention:Capacitatea administrativă locală de a creiona și implementa strategii pe termen lung, în ceea ce privește infrastructura, mediul înconjurător, cercetare și educație;

- The policy of the European strategy in force of not having a distinct budget for this, which leads to the need to have very developed capacities of coordination and administration, which is not necessarily characteristic for Romania;
- The current geopolitical context between Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Moldova and Hungary, in terms of cooperation between these states.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we analyzed aspects related to the studied area, from the geographical, historical and also the current context. Also, it was tried to synthesize the Strategy of the Danube Region, of the pillars and priorities relevant for it, but also their degree of implementation at national level and not only.

We tried to delimit the weaknesses and strengths of the studied area and the areas on which strategies can be implemented continuously, both in the short and medium term on the studied area.

Romania has a high potential for the economic development of the Danube region, and several projects will certainly be developed in the areas of interest for the analyzed area, such as energy, transport, fisheries, agriculture, and tourism.

At present, there are two positive aspects characteristic of the area analyzed in the paper, such as membership of the European Union, on the one hand, and on the other hand the existence of the EU Danube Strategy. Both aspects thus allow access to additional financial resources and a better management of the use of these resources.

For the development and capitalization of the economic potential in the Danube area of Romania, it is important that the central, regional, local authorities, both the state and the private ones, to the actors from the business, academic and civil society fields, to cooperate, to identify possible projects to develop the area and to support these actions in the long term, especially in the areas of interest of the area such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism, infrastructure and transport.

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