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Europe

ARGE Donauländer seeks to promote EU Danube strategy

The twenty-first conference of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft (ARGE) Donauländer (Working Community of Danube Countries) at City Hall chaired by the city of Vienna focused on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. ARGE called for specific projects and adequate EU financing.

Culture and research, transport and shipping, business and tourism, youth and sport, regional development and environmental protection were the main focuses of the activity reports by the various working groups. Representatives of the city of Vienna spoke of the progress in the DonauHanse cooperation project with Odessa on the Black Sea and of the cultural initiative "Literature in Flux", which is being supported by Vienna. As part of this project the Stadt Wien is sailing upstream from Belgrade to Vienna and functions as a floating literary club fostering cultural integration through readings and podium discussions in seven countries.

Adequate financing

The participants pointed to the continued need to emphasise the important role of the cities and regions of the Danube area in ongoing negotiations for future EU funding in the period 2014 to 2020 and to ensure adequate financial resources. The ARGE heads of government are also urging that the EU Strategy for the Danube Region be pushed forward and consolidated through specific projects.

Europe put to the test

"We are in the first year of the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. The work to date on this strategy has given rise to new and innovative forms of cooperation between regions, institutions and society," said ARGE chairman and host, mayor Michael Häupl, in his review. He pointed out that the cooperation should offer added value for the inhabitants not only of the richer countries but also of the poorer regions. "The most important theme for all countries in the Danube region is the mastery of the greatest economic and financial crisis since the end of the Second World War," he continued. Many regions had suffered critical setbacks in their economic performance over the last few months, threatening the social balance within Europe. "Europe is being put to the test," he said, "and necessary reforms must be implemented quickly. I am convinced that Europe in future will be a Europe of regions, and this is where the strength of the ARGE Danube countries lies."

Vienna co-chairmanship in key area

“The EU Strategy for the Danube Region shows the direction that reforms should be taking,” Häupl continued. “I should like particularly to emphasise priority area 10 – stepping up institutional capacity and cooperation – as the central issue in the fourth pillar, strengthening the Danube region. It has been included at the initiative of Austria in the EU Action Plan on the basis of a joint position by the federal provinces. The main focus is governance, a key area in my opinion for the successful implementation of the Danube Region Strategy and the role of the towns, municipalities and regions.” The aim should be to give new stimulus to the socioeconomic development of Europe and to strengthen links between people, institutions and business, explained the mayor. In this regard synergies between all involved actors needed to be exploited. Vienna had been commissioned by the European Commission in Brussels to coordinate this priority area along with Slovenia. The city of Vienna would take advantage of this function to establish a good position for the towns and regions in the finalisation of the EU cohesion policy in the new funding period starting in 2014.

ARGE chairmanship in 2012 to Lower Austria

At the conclusion of the 21st Conference of the Heads of Government of the ARGE Danube countries Häupl handed over chairmanship for the next to years from January 2012 to Lower Austria, whose governor Erwin Pröll emphasised the “great importance of the regions for Europe as a whole”. The regions would play a leading role in helping Europe out of the crisis and towards new prosperity, he continued, and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region offered great potential in that regard.

Info:

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Donauländer (ARGE Donau)

The Arbeitsgemeinschaft Donauländer (ARGE Donau) is the oldest regional association in the Danube region. It was founded on 17 May 1990 in the Wachau in Lower Austria as a “working community promoting collaboration amongst its members to foster the overall development of the Danube region in the interests of its inhabitants and to promote peaceful cooperation in Europe”. The chair rotates every two years (Vienna: 2010–11, Lower Austria: 2012–13). Recommendations are adopted unanimously. It has forty members (from Baden-Württemberg to Odessa), two observers (districts of South Moravia, Czech Republic, and Nitra, Slovakia). Total number of inhabitants: around 80 million, total area: approx. 650,000 m².



<http://www.argedonau.at/neu/index.htm>

EU Strategy for the Danube Region – billions available There is no additional EU funding for the Strategy for the Danube Region but considerable sums are already available to the regions. According to the EU Commission, Member States can obtain funding in various ways from the Cohesion Fund (bridging the gap between rich and poor countries). The Directorate General for Regional Policy notes that there are some €100 billion available for the Danube Region from the EU Cohesion Fund for the period 2007–13 alone. Additional resources from other EU funding programmes (pre-accession aid or EU neighbourhood programmes) considerably increase the amount available. Danube Region Strategy projects can also be financed through EU financial institutions (Investment Bank, Investment Fund, EBRD). The Commission would also like to see input from private investors and public-private partnerships. If all these options were exhausted, hundreds of billions of euros would already be available to implement the Strategy without any additional funding.

Study

A first scientific study has described the EU Strategy for the Danube Region as a “serious and promising effort to deepen cooperation in the EU over the long term without relying on further Treaty revisions”: Carsten Schymik: Blueprint for a Macro-Region: EU Strategies for the Baltic Sea and Danube Regions, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, January 2011, online: [online](#)

Link:

[21st ARGE Donauländer Regional Conference](#)

[Conference documents](#)

[Projects](#)

[EU Strategy for the Danube Region](#)

 [EU funding](#)

[Rk](#)

[Nö-pd](#)

<http://www.halma-network.eu/projekte.html>;

<http://www.literature-in-flux.eu/deutsch>

[Wien-Odessa Donauhase](#)

Further reading:

[Twentieth anniversary of ARGE Donauländer: closer cooperation in an enlarged Europe](#)

[EU Strategy for the Danube Region: safeguarding the future through the development of macro-regions](#)

[EU Strategy for the Danube Region benefits the people](#)

[Strategy for the Danube region: good opportunity for towns in the region](#)

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