

The Danube Civil Society Forum in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

General Assembly

30 June 1 July 2011, Eisenstadt/Kismarton, Austria

Working to complete and shape the European Unification in the Danube Region

The first Danube Civil Society Forum is scheduled to be held 30 June – 1 July 2011 in Eisenstadt/Kismarton, Austria, hosted by Foster Europe and the Danube Basin NGO Network Project. The event will be open for all non-profit, non-partisan NGOs active in the framework of the EUSDR.

Who we are?

The Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF)¹ will be the platform for civil society dialogue and networking in the Danube basin under the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). It will function as the interface for structured consultations between civil society and public and private authorities on the regional, national and EU level as well as to international and intergovernmental organisations active in the region.

The Danube Civil Society Forum is dedicated to support civil society organisations in the Danube basin. It aims to promote and enhance civil society participation and networking in the framework of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region.

We plan to hold the founding General Assembly of the Danube Civil Society Forum in June 2011 following the EU summit on the Danube Strategy.

A steering group, key-actors, of NGO representatives from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia and Ukraine has volunteered in establishing structures and draft programmes to be submitted to the General Assembly. The key actors meetings took place in Eisenstadt, hosted Foster Europe in June 2010, in Sremska Kamenica in October 2010,

¹ The Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) is an action foreseen in 4th pillar „Strengthening the Danube Region“ in the action plan of the EU Commission for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

hosted by NGO World and Danube and in Eisenstadt in February 2011, hosted again by Foster Europe.

How do we work?

The DCSF will focus its networking and project related action on its Working Groups. Four working groups have been formed so far along the four pillars of the EUSDR. This is to ensure, that the creativity and action build up in the working groups is compatible with the overall Danube Strategy.

These 4 pillars of the strategy and the Working Groups are:

WG 1: Connecting the Danube Region

This WG deals with the issues of Mobility of people and goods, Transport on water, rail, street and future transport and mobility scenarios, Energy, including sustainable energy production, the question of Nuclear Power Plants, new energy use and efficiency strategies, Culture & Tourism, cultural awareness and protection, culture production, green tourism and development of tourism strategies, encouraging People to People contacts and building cross boarder bridges of dialogue and understanding.

WG 2: Protecting the environment in the Danube Region

This WG focuses among others on Water Quality in the entire Danube Basin, Environmental Risk Management like flood prevention and safeguarding natural river banks, Preservation of Air, Water, Landscapes and Soil, including the issues of GMOs and genetic engineering, future of agriculture in the Danube basin.

WG 3: Building Prosperity in the Danube Region

This WG deals with all aspects of a knowledge based society, education, life-long learning, research, how to invest in people and skills, the question of competitiveness in the region. This includes question of education, labour market, demographic and migration questions.

WG 4: Strengthening the Danube Region

This WG focuses on institutional capacity building, including the establishment of the Danube Civil Society Forum and the improvement of public administration and services, combat corruption and fraud. Furthermore the WG deals with Security issues in terms of border security and fighting organised crime. Next to this the question of food security is part of this pillar.

The DCSF emphasises its policy to mainstream its key principles, the respect for democracy and human rights, the rule of law, good governance, the principles of market economy, social and environmental sustainable development, the principles of ethnic and gender equality as well

as the principle of regional balance throughout the entire structure and activities of the forum in all four pillars and all of its Working Groups. The DCSF has an open door policy to the representatives of Roma Civil Society Organisations.

All four thematic areas follow a wide interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary and comprehensive approach. In order to enable civil society to network on focused issues of trans-regional importance each Working Group may establish Sub-Working Groups along special thematic or regional areas i.e.: *biodiversity*, the *Danube Delta* or *life-long learning*. These working groups and sub-working groups will be the greenhouses of networking, cooperation and innovation in the DCSF. The DCSF is aware of the fact that it will not be able to cover all aspects of the Danube Strategy from the very beginning.

Working Group action and networking will be linked by the General Assembly (GA) of all members (regular and partners) convened every second year, the elected executive committee (EC) as well as the president and the vice-president (*all unsalaried*). If sufficient funding is secured a secretariat with an executive secretary (*paid*) will coordinate the various Working Groups, prepare the GA and assist the EC and the president/vice-president/treasurer in executing the GA decisions.²

Membership

The DCSF is determined to be open, inclusive and transparent. Membership in the DCSF is open to all NGOs who adhere to the Eisenstadt principles³ of civil society in the Danube Region, who work in the Danube Region, have a track record of competence and experience and who are able to contribute to the thematic aspects of the Danube Strategy (DS). Membership and any position with the DCSF are open to NGO representatives from all countries participating in the DCSF (EU-members, candidate states and non member states).

A special associate membership (Partnership) can be granted to NGOs and organisations who seek to cooperate with the DCSF or special working groups of the DCSF but are not able/willing to become fully fledged members.

All interested NGOs and civil society actors in the Danube basin are invited to join our network.

Role of the General Assembly

The General Assembly will convene all interested NGOs, civil society organisations and institutions from the academic sector that are active in issues related to the EU Strategy for

² Detailed statutes and by-laws, together with other organizational and legal matters will be decided upon during the first GA.

³ The **Guiding Principles of the Civil Society Forum in the Danube Basin** (Eisenstadt Principles), adopted 28 June in the Castle in Eisenstadt demand from candidates among others to be “non-governmental, non-profit and non-partisan organisations, academic institutions, individuals with special expertises on the issues related to the DS, i.e. grass roots organisations, trade unions, religious groups, minority groups, think tanks, non-profit foundations, national and international CSOs/networks and other relevant Civil Society actors from the Danube basin”.

the Danube Region. All participants declare that they will adhere to the Guiding Principles of Civil Society, notably being non-partisan, non-profit and non-governmental organisations. Institutions and experts that feel not to be able to adhere to these principles are invited to cooperate with the DCSF as non-voting observers.

The General Assembly will:

1. Decide on the formation and programming of the WGs and possible Sub-Working Groups;
2. Decide on the DCSF overall strategy and programming;
3. Vote on the chairperson of the 4 WGs as well as elect a president, vice president and treasurer. These people will form the DCSF executive committee.

Candidacies

Candidacies are open to all members of the DCSF who adhere to the Guiding Principles for Civil Society in the Danube Region. We encourage all interested and experienced NGOs to take responsibility and nominate qualified persons for the positions of WG chairpersons, president, vice president and treasurer.

While the chairpersons will be elected by the WG the GA plenum will vote on the president, vice president and treasurer.

This process will ensure a most democratic and participative approach of self organisation of the trans-regional and international Danube Civil Society Forum.

Cooperation

The DCSF would like to offer cooperation with all stakeholders in the Danube region. The DCSF is fully aware of the fact that the principles of the respect for democracy and human rights, the rule of law, good governance as well as the principles of market economy, social and environmental sustainable development are closely related to the economic structure and development of the region as well as to its economic actors and the business community.

While the DCSF is open to exchange and cooperate with the business sector it will limit its own outreach to the non-profit sector.

The Danube Civil Society Forum is one among the first actions in the Danube Strategy ready for action already in early 2011. Following intense discussions among key civil society actors from the entire Danube region and from a wide variety of thematic areas in a sequence of meetings 2010 the Danube Civil Society Forum has laid foundation to be established as soon as possible.

More than 120 NGOs and NGO Networks from the entire Region have joined the project so far and are willing to become members of the Danube Civil Society Forum, once founded.

The Danube Civil Society Forum will act as interface to public and private authorities on the regional, national and EU level as well as to international and intergovernmental organisations active in the region. It will be one of the few truly European and transnational actors in the Danube region promoting and shaping the idea of European Integration and the concept of the Danube Strategy.

Main outcomes

The main expected outcomes of the establishment of the DCSF are:

- Increased inter-regional and international cooperation and networking among Civil Society in the Danube Region,
- Increased influence of CS in democratic decision-making processes on the issues related to the Danube Region,
- Strengthened capacity of CS to further their agenda and communication,
- Increased capacity of CS to opinion building and promoting the EU Danube Strategy and its aims in the Region,
- Improved capacity of CS in service delivery,
- Strengthened cooperation between CS and public and private authorities in the Danube Region and the EU,
- Raised public awareness of the role of CS and fostering active citizenship and participation in the Region.

The bottom-up approach

Due to the nature of NGO work and civil society and their constituency, the DCSF implements a bottom-up approach with strongest links to the grass roots in the Danube region.

The establishment and work of the Danube Civil Society Forum will offer leverage to the concepts of active citizenship, participation, transparency and good governance in the DS. Furthermore the support for the DCSF by private and public authorities in the Danube region on the regional but mainly the national and EU level will be seen as the litmus test for nation states and the EU to be able to include a structured civil society in the Danube Strategy.

What is needed?

In the first phase of implementing EUSDR, the DSCF will need the continued clear political support from EUSDR stakeholders. The Danube Civil Society Forum should be met by the EU and the stakeholders of the EUSDR especially the EU Members States as well as the partner states and the respective cities and regions on three levels:

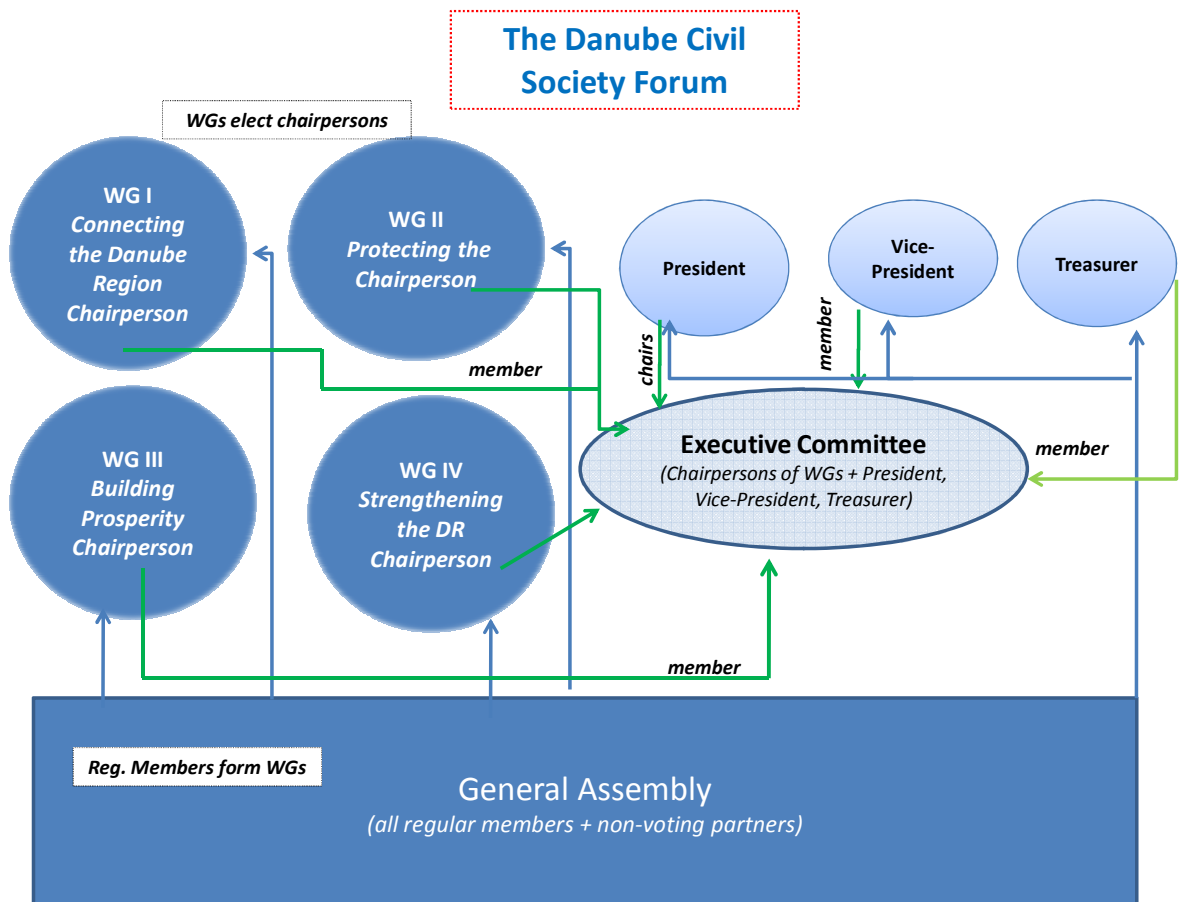
- as a partner in the implementation and future monitoring of the EUSDR;
- as a partner in building interregional dialogue and understanding;
- as a partner in building civil society and active citizens in the region.

The DCSF is modelled after the successful templates of the Civil Forum of the EaP (Fora held in Brussels 2009 and Berlin 2010) and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, established 1997.⁴

In order to resume work, we call on all interested NGOs and Civil Society Organisations to join our effort and take part in the first General Assembly of the Danube Civil Society Forum.

⁴ Both NGO structures work within the area of European Union policy and are funded between 25% and 100% by the EU Commission. The EaP fora held in Brussels and Berlin have been partly co-funded by the EESC. The Berlin forum 18/19 November was hosted by the German Federal Foreign Office.

DCSF Organisational Chart⁵



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⁵ The final decision on the DCSF and its organizational form and form is made exclusively by the participants of the DCSF first general assembly.