



**Joint Statement of the Ministers responsible for the implementation of the
EU Strategy for the Danube Region**

Budapest, 19 October 2017

We, the Ministers responsible for the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (hereinafter referred to as „EUSDR“) – acknowledging the ministerial declarations of the previous Annual Fora – give the following joint statement on the occasion of the 6th Annual Forum of the EUSDR taking place in Budapest, Hungary.

We believe that the issues of regional energy security, infrastructure development and clean connectivity are at the core of our future economic development and prosperity. These subjects rely on regional cooperation in the fields of research and innovation in order to promote the development and the competitiveness of the Danube Region. We must address these issues in a holistic, integrated manner, taking into account perspectives and experiences of local actors and civil society as important contributors to and beneficiaries of the EUSDR. This attitude combined with a bottom-up approach could significantly increase the ownership of all involved stakeholders including civil society.

With regard to energy security, as the current decade draws nearer to its close, we recognise that the map of the Central and South-East European gas supply routes will undergo profound transformations in the coming years. A number of important policy developments are set to occur until 2019, resulting, inter alia, in the need to rethink the role that the EU Strategy for the Danube Region plays in advancing regional energy security post 2020. We underline the urgency of diversifying our energy sources and supply routes by completing regional gas network connections, thus enabling access to new infrastructure projects, for example the Southern Gas Corridor, which is the European Union’s flagship diversification project and reiterate the necessity of finalising other connectivity projects between EUSDR member countries. In this regard, there are a number of European platforms (e.g. EU Projects of Common Interest, Projects of Energy Community Interest, Connecting Europe Facility, Central and South Eastern Europe Gas Connectivity projects, Projects of Mutual Interest, etc.) that provide the basis for fully interconnected gas and electricity networks in the Danube region. We also reaffirm our support for the work of regional stakeholders aiming to increase market and research cooperation and to implement efficient, sustainable, flexible and integrated energy solutions.

We firmly believe that regional infrastructure development is key to ensuring the sustainable and stable economic development of the region. In order to achieve better interconnectivity, a clear understanding of the current level of implementation of a number of strategic infrastructure development projects is essential. As such, harmonizing the high-level strategic infrastructure development plans with the experience of the grass-root implementers is a first step. Therefore, we call on all national stakeholders within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region to continue the development of the TEN-T corridors, its capillary networks - while also

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taking into account elements of Green Infrastructure – while also further increasing the number of border crossings within the region, provided that it is done in the logic of the development of the TEN-T corridors and green infrastructure.

We recognize the transformative impact of the ongoing technologic developments revolutionizing the transport sector. The unfolding shift of reliance on traditional fossil fuels towards environmentally friendly energy solutions is evermore apparent. To this end, we urge all national stakeholders to explore options for advancing the integration of such energy solutions into their national energy portfolios. The unprecedented attention and support from private businesses as key drivers of the process enable the rapid proliferation of clean technologies in the transportation sector worldwide, to which all national policymakers should react accordingly. Promoting the use of low-emission vehicles that run on alternative fuels goes hand-in-hand with the creation of a reliable regional recharging network. Pursuing this, we encourage continuing financing and supporting research and development programs with the objective of advancing the spread of clean transportation in the region.

Successful implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region is only possible with the execution of all strategic projects, supported on the one hand by EU and national funds, and on the other by close cooperation between the participating countries. In this respect, European Territorial Cooperation programmes – in all their forms, be it interregional, transnational or cross-border – are extremely relevant supporting mechanisms by virtue of their now over 20 years of experience in financing and facilitating cooperation between countries. Optimal use of available financial resources is a prerequisite to fully unlocking the potential of the EUSDR and its programs. Furthermore, we are convinced that the EUSDR and the funding instruments that are operating in the Danube Region should be brought to the greatest possible congruence.