

## **THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN PROMOTING THE POTENTIAL OF THE DANUBE BASIN IN THE LIGHT OF THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE REGION**

On 21 October 2010, in cooperation with the International Scientific Forum “Danube-River of Cooperation“ the Institute of International Politics and Economics (IIPE) organized XXI International Scientific Conference “Danube – River of Cooperation” entitled *The Role of Civil Society in Promoting the Potential of the Danube Basin in the Light of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region*.

The conference was opened by Božidar Đelić, Deputy Prime minister of the Republic of Serbia and Chairman of the Working Group of Serbia’s Participation in Developing the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. At the beginning of his speech, the Deputy Prime Minister informed the conference participants and media representatives that the European Commission would submit a draft strategy to the European Council on 9 December and expressed the expectation that the EU Strategy for Danube would be adopted in the first half of 2011 during Hungarian presidency. The Deputy Prime Minister emphasized the importance of the Strategy, pointing out that it was one of the EU responses to the economic crisis and that it would have a direct effect on more than 100 million people in the Danube River basin. He also noted that even those European states that did not belong to the Danube River Basin like Italy, Spain, Finland and Sweden expressed their interest in the Strategy. Speaking of its importance for Serbia the Deputy Prime Minister emphasized that more that 80 Serbian municipalities would be able to apply for the projects within the Strategy. The importance of the Strategy also reflected in the fact that Serbia should be co-coordinator, alongside with one of EU member countries, in four fields of strategy implementation such as: 1) infrastructure; 2) tourism and culture; 3) knowledge, economy and technology; and 4) security, and especially environmental protection and prevention of illegal trade and migration on the Danube. Analyzing the possibilities for its implementation as early as in 2013, the Deputy Prime Minister noted that the Strategy should make a balance between the set expectations and *three NOs*: 1) no new money, 2) no new institutions and 3) no new legislation. At the end of his speech, the Deputy Prime Minister mentioned the role of the civil society in the Strategy implementation. He noted that multidimensional strategies carried with themselves the risk of leaving the needs of ordinary citizens behind also emphasizing that the role of civil society organizations was to prevent such a risk.

Later in the opening session, Duško Dimitrijević, Ph.D., Director of the IPE, delivered a greeting speech and spoke about the relations between the IPE and the International Scientific Forum “Danube-River of Cooperation“. The next participant of this session was Dejan Ralević, Deputy Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. Mr. Ralević spoke of the place of the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in drafting the Danube Strategy emphasizing that the Serbian proposals were incorporated in the draft strategy. He expressed the expectation that Serbia would be equally involved in the Strategy implementation as it was involved in the Strategy drafting. Analyzing the importance of regional cooperation for Serbia’s EU integration process, Mr. Ralević pointed out that the Danube was one of the bases for Serbia’s European identity stressing that cooperation in the Danube River Basin would be an additional opportunity. Later in this session, Dragana Milovanović, head of Division for Strategic Planning and Management and International Cooperation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia, presented the results of the participation of the Water Directorate in drafting the Danube Strategy. In the first part of her presentation, Mrs. Milovanović spoke of the participation of the Water Directorate in drafting the Danube River Basin Management Plan, which was adopted in 2009 and became an integral part of the Danube Strategy. Later, Mrs. Milovanović analyzed possible main directions of the Strategy implementation in Serbia and pointed out that water supply and sanitation would be the most important. At the end of her presentation, Mrs. Milovanović analyzed the financial aspects of the Strategy implementation in this field and estimated that the investments for carrying it out should be about 6 billion euros. At the end of the opening session, Zoltán Hajdú, Ph.D., representative of the Danube Network of National and Sub-Regional Economic and Professional Advocacy Organizations for the EU Danube Strategy, spoke of the need for cooperation of civil society organizations in the Danube River basin, especially in the region of the Middle and Lower Danube.

The conference had three working sessions and its moderator was Edita Stojić-Karanović, Ph.D., Professorial Fellow at the IPE and President of the International Scientific Forum “Danube – River of Cooperation”.

The first working session was held under the title *The EU Strategy for the Danube Region – Activities, Goals and Priorities of Serbia*. The first participant was Sanda Šimić, Assistant Director of the European Integration Office of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, who presented the Cross-Border and Transnational Cooperation Programme. This programme is a part of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), which was incorporated in the 2007-2013 EU budgets in order to prepare the candidates and potential candidates for the use of EU structural funds. Most of Mrs. Šimić’s presentation

was dedicated to cooperation programmes with Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia, this including the information on the territories covered by these programmes, their goals, number of projects and the phases of their implementation. Later in her presentation, Mrs. Šimić pointed to the main problems related to the implementation of these programmes such as co-financing of projects, unmodified legislation and a lack of systemic solution for budgetary support for application for the projects. The second participant of this session was Milan Dimkić, Ph.D., Director of the Institute “Jaroslav Černi”, who analyzed the state of the hydrographical network of Serbia and the main problems in this field. Speaking of the hydrographical network Mr. Dimkić emphasized that the Danube flow increased two times in Serbia and that the water quality analysis showed that the Danube was cleaner at the exit from Serbia than at its entrance. Later in his presentation, Mr. Dimkić analyzed four main hydrographical problems in Serbia and they are as follows: 1) the problem of water supply, especially in Bačka, Banat and Šumadija; 2) protection from polluted water; 3) irrigation; and 4) flood and erosion control. At the end of his presentation, Mr. Dimkić estimated that 7 billion euros in the next 20 years or 350 million each year would make solve these problems. The presentations of these two participants were followed by a discussion.

The second working session was held under the title *The Role of the Civil Sector in the Coordination of Public Policies in the Light of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region*. The first participant was Ljubiša Adamović, Ph.D., representative of the European Centre for Peace and Development (ECPD). At the beginning of his presentation, Mr. Adamović summarized the main activities of the ECPD, especially in the field of environmental protection. Later in the presentation, he pointed out that the low level of environmental awareness in Serbia was the reflection of the negative social environment whose main characteristics were very bad social conditions, poverty, corruption and the low price of electricity and water as well as a lack of appropriate penalties. Mr. Adamović criticized the lack of long-term government plans in the multi-party system because the governments planed their policies on a short-term basis, from one election cycle to another. At the end, Mr. Adamović presented several projects of the ECPD with focus on the improvement of environmental awareness. The second participant of this session was Svetlana Stefanović, representative of the European Movement in Serbia (EMS). In the first part of her presentation, Mrs. Stefanović pointed out the main problems in the relations between the civil society and the Danube Strategy. In the second part, she presented the conclusions and proposals adopted at the international conference on the Danube Strategy that was organized by EMS on 7 May 2010. This conference had been a part of the activities directed towards holding a public debate on the Danube Strategy in Serbia, which also included the conference organized in the Serbian Chamber of Commerce on

30 March on ideas, goals and economic aspects of the Strategy, as well as international conference organized at the IIPE on 6 April on the position on the Strategy and knowledge economy. The third participant was Edita Stojić-Karanović, who emphasized the importance of partnership among civil society organizations for carrying out ideas and projects and presented a project where the International Scientific Forum “Danube – River of Cooperation” cooperated with other organizations. This was followed by a discussion in which other participants of the conference took part.

The third working session was dedicated to the presentations of the projects aimed at research, support and self-organizing of the civil society. Ivona Lađevac, M.A., and Slobodan Janković, M.A., Research Associates at the IIPE, presented the project *Debating Serbia's European future: the Voice of Civil Society in Decision Making*, which IIPE carries out in cooperation with the European Institute in Sofia, Bulgaria. This project is a part of a broader project *Strengthening Serbia-EU Civil Society Dialogue*, granted by the European Commission Delegation to Serbia in 2010. The project has the following three goals: 1) strengthening of the Serbia-EU civil society dialogue; 2) increasing the contribution of civil society organizations in creation and implementation of public policies; and 3) extension of dialogue between civil society organizations and authorities in Serbia in the EU integration process. The first component of the project are field research, whose results will be used as a basis for the second component – debates, which will be held in Belgrade, Zrenjanin, Novi Sad, Čačak, Vranje and Novi Pazar in the first half of 2011. The first component of the project was implemented successful and the IIPE with its partner from Bulgaria started the preparations for the debates. Later in this session, Zorica Korać, representative of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), presented the *Project SECTOR: Supporting Environmental Civil Society Organisations*. In 2006, the REC and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency launched the project in order to promote the development of a vibrant and democratic environmental civil society within the region. The first part of the project lasted for four years (2006-2010). In October 2009, an additional SECTOR component for Serbia (SECTOR II) was initiated for the support to Serbian civil society groups. SECTOR II is to be implemented from October 2009 until March 2011. The third presentation dealt with the Danube Network of National and Sub-regional Economic and Professional Advocacy Organizations for the EU Danube Strategy. Zoltán Hajdú, representative of this organization, summarized the results of its main projects. This session ended with the discussion on the details related to presented projects.

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