

Dear Danubians, dear stakeholders of the Danube Region Programme,

As we step into the festive season, we warmly welcome you to this edition of the Interreg Danube Region Programme Newsletter. In this issue, we share the latest news from across the Programme, looking back at recent achievements and ahead to the opportunities that await.

Leading Change in Transnational Cooperation - Interview with Imre Csalagovits, Head of the Managing Authority



[Imre Csalagovits, Head of the Managing Authority](#)

During the 2014–2020 period, the DRP—then known as the DTP—followed the South East Europe Transnational Programme, under the lead of the same Managing Authority. At the time, it was the only EU transnational programme open to non-EU countries, involving six IPA and two ENPI countries. A key achievement was the successful integration of external funds into the ERDF system, making participation and project implementation easier for IPA and ENPI partners.

To gain firsthand insight into this process, we spoke with Imre Csalagovits, Head of the DRP Managing Authority, who has been leading the Programme since the South East Europe Transnational Programme era.

Danube Region Programme: Could you share your reflections on this groundbreaking initiative and its impact on shaping the management of Interreg programmes?

Imre: *Following the major EU enlargement in 2014, Partner States agreed to reshape the formal CADSES programme into two parts, reflecting the growth in participating countries from 4 to 11. This led to the creation of the South East Europe (SEE) Programme, with a clear mission: to support the*

integration of new Member States while helping prepare neighbouring third countries for future accession.

The programme's geographical focus shifted to the Western Balkans, placing them at the heart of a region surrounded by both new and long-standing EU Member States. This proved to be an ideal environment to actively support the integration process. At the same time, it created valuable momentum for developing innovative management approaches—especially in areas such as accession support, simplification, and improved effectiveness.

To support this new direction, Partner States and the European Commission appointed a new programme management institution, VATI in Budapest, located in a newly acceded Member State. Drawing on its fresh and hands-on experience in managing external EU funds, the new Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat successfully integrated IPA funds into the ERDF programme. For the first time, this allowed partners from third countries to be fully and financially integrated into transnational projects.

In close cooperation with the European Commission, the SEE MA/JS also achieved another milestone: becoming the first transnational programme to design and implement a simplified cost option scheme approved by DG REGIO.

The launch of the new programme was a remarkable success. Nearly 1,000 project proposals were submitted in the very first call, clearly demonstrating the strong momentum and the high level of interest in genuine transnational cooperation across the region.

Danube Region Programme: But you did not stop there. In the DTP, you also integrated the management of ENPI funds for Moldova and Ukraine. Could you tell us more about that step?

Imre: *With the launch of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), the programme area evolved once again. Germany and the Czech Republic joined the programme, while Italy and Greece stepped out. This shift naturally reshaped the programme's focus, but supporting the integration of third countries remained a key priority.*

Around 2014, this new framework also opened the door to closer cooperation with our Eastern neighbours. Over the course of the programme period, this made it possible to achieve full financial integration for partners from Ukraine and Moldova—following a path similar to that taken earlier by the Western Balkan countries.

Danube Region Programme: And what did this development mean for the non EU partners themselves?

Imre: *Our main goal was not traditional capacity building. While structured training is more systematically covered by the IPA and ENI programmes and other initiatives, our focus was on something different: ensuring that partners from neighbouring countries were fully involved in every development opportunity available. This included access to formal and informal networks, as well as active participation in transnational structures.*

Through our programmes—SEE, DTP, and DRP—we enabled non-EU Member States to take part fully in ERDF programmes many years before any potential accession. This hands-on involvement proved to be the most effective way to build real capacity for EU programme management.

As a result, integration was highly successful. By 2018, all participating non-Member States had established the necessary structures for ERDF programme management. These structures are fully sustainable and can continue operating after accession without the need for major adjustments or further development.

Danube Region Programme: In the DRP, we see a notably high number of non-EU partners. What explains these large numbers?

Imre: *In the ongoing Danube Region Program, we see a huge development in terms of participation of Western Balkan countries. By today, not only their spending rates are exceeding the proportional ceilings, but they started to take lead in initiate new transnational projects. Emerging probability of restarting the accession process at European level is clearly boosting the co-operation in this direction and it has already a clear impact on project content and co-operation dynamic.*

At the same time, Ukraine and Moldova developed a fully competent and corresponding management system which is working fluently. It is still an important task ahead us to support these two countries in setting up their project generation and development procedures. In order to accelerate this process a specific Project Development Facility is under development and consideration. By the support of this new potential scheme, we are hoping that by the beginning of the next program period, all partners form any DRP countries will have the same opportunities shaping an entirely balanced integration process.

We should also highlight, that these efforts for territorial integration are not only related to the accession countries themselves, in each initiatives all partner states are potentially participating, working jointly for a more integrated and emerging Danube region.

Danube Region Programme: Thank you!

Year in review:

A Successful and Rewarding Year for the Danube Region Programme! - Ene Simona, Head of the Joint Secretariat



[Simona Ene, Head of the Joint Secretariat](#)

As 2025 gently comes to a close, we look back on a year full of dedication, collaboration, and progress toward a sustainable future for our beloved Danube Region. Simona shares her reflections on the achievements, lessons, and hopes that will guide us into the year ahead:

Simona: 2025 has been a busy and rewarding year for the Danube Region Programme. With the approval of the 2nd Call projects, the Programme now has **139 projects under implementation**, all working to reduce disparities, strengthen stakeholder capacities, and build a more resilient Danube Region.

Programme implementation is running smoothly. This is reflected in **strong financial performance** and **overall positive audit outcomes**, confirming the Programme's sound management and effective delivery.

We are especially proud that several of our projects have already gained international recognition. **SpongeCity** received [FAO Technical Recognition in the category "Land, Soil and Water Resource Management"](#). **NONA** was highlighted as a flagship project of the [New European Bauhaus on the Danube \(NEB Lab\)](#). In addition, **RomansWineDanube** was honoured with the prestigious ["Cultural Routes Best Practice Award" of the Council of Europe](#) in the Research and Development category.

The 2025 was dedicated, as well to the design and launch of the third call. The MA/JS along with the support of the Monitoring Committee worked hard to identify the topics for the third Call and thus bridge the gaps. The DRP conducted a comprehensive analysis to assess the expected outcomes of the previously approved projects and identify remaining gaps. The submission of Application Forms closed on 15th December and we are looking forward to welcoming new projects into the DRP family.

Throughout the year, the Danube Region Programme MA/JS also focused on building **strong synergies**—both among Programme projects and with other Interreg programmes, such as **Interreg Central Europe**. Webinars and in-person meetings helped connect projects and increase the impact of their results across the region.

Get to know the non-EU Lead Partners

As has been emphasised, the Interreg Danube Region Programme was a pioneer in enabling non-EU partners to participate smoothly in EU-funded projects. In this newsletter, we present videos of two non-EU lead partners from the first call: [SpinIT](#) from Bosnia and Herzegovina and [#RomansWineDanube](#) from Serbia.

Watch the videos to learn more about the projects and to see the great work that the Interreg Danube Region Programme has done for the Interreg community as a whole.

SpinIT VIDEO: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7396173357903261697>

#RomansWineDanube

VIDEO: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7406336572398297088>

Programme objectives in focus. Achievements underway.

Read our informative articles to find out how the initiatives financed by the Interreg Danube Region Programme help to achieve its objectives. Follow us on social media to stay updated on our latest articles. Get inspired!

- [Advancing smart specialisation and Industry 4.0 in the Danube Region](#)
- [Circular Economy as a Catalyst for Sustainable Development in the Danube Basin](#)
- [Region-Wide Efforts Driving Early Detection of Ground Movement Risks and Sustainable Land Use Management](#)
- [Nature-Based Solutions: The Danube Region's Path to Climate Resilience in Urban Areas](#)
- [Journeys That Connect: Routes of Shared Heritage in the Danube Region](#)

Interreg Danube Region Programme Annual Event held in Sarajevo

On 5 November 2025 in Sarajevo, the Interreg Danube Region Programme hosted its Annual Event at the EUSDR Annual Forum, highlighting the future of EU Cohesion Policy, transnational cooperation, and key regional challenges shaping the Danube Region. Read [more](#) about this inspiring event.

Kids' corner

Those cosy days are approaching! We'll be spending more time with our loved ones. If there are children around, invite them to sit with you over a warm cup of tea and beigli. You can all sit on the time machine and go back to the Iron Age! :) [Here](#) is a guideline on how life looked in the Iron Age, which was a time of great innovation and development.

Enjoy while reading it and exploring the past together with the young!



[Leisure and educational time backed by the DTP](#)