

# TRANSFORMATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE REGION

Yurii Maslov<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** The attention of the supranational level to transboundary regions increased with the development of regional policy. The reform of the European structural funds, the concepts of equalization and identification of the endogenous potential of regions led to the intensification of cross-border cooperation. Of course, this is not only the merit of the European Union; the growth of Euroregions stimulated financial support, and this led to a new round of growth of Euroregions in the EU territories. The purpose of the article is to determine problems of transformational aspects for elaborating and improving the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region up to the condition of its possible implementation, as well as propose specific measures for its step-by-step implementation until 2020. The European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is another initiative created in the zonal field of Euroregions for greater cohesion with the supranational level. Most of the EGTC members are located in Eastern and Southern Europe. Moreover, if on the early stages EGTC were projects for the implementation of exclusively cross-border cooperation, then since 2012 they began to be created as platforms for cooperation between cities of different EU member states. EU regions are very diverse from a cultural and historical point of view and have different levels of socio-economic development. In the Danube region over the past two decades, fundamental changes have occurred, taking this into account, the article highlights several strategic directions of development. 1) Geographical association of Europe and the East. There is a huge potential for the development of existing transport and trade links. 2) The developed infrastructural architecture of the education system. Including different universities, but the quality of training varies. Education and training should be linked to the needs of the labour market, along with supporting student mobility throughout the entire Danube region. 3) The presence of millennial traditions of cultural, ethnic, and natural diversity. The presence of large cities and world heritage sites, including the concentration of capitals and cultural centres. This requires a modern approach to tourism offers and infrastructure so that both the guest and the host can get profit from this activity. 4) The ability to optimize and improve the use of renewable energy sources, such as water, wind biomass, thermal springs. There are also wide opportunities for improving energy efficiency by enhancing the efficiency of energy demand management and modernizing building and logistics. These measures will facilitate the transition to a low-carbon economy. 5) Availability of natural wealth: unique fauna and flora, the most valuable water resources and unique landscapes (for example, the Danube Delta, the Carpathians). They must be in constant preservation and recovery. Each designated area contains priority recommendations in various fields of activity. The transformational optimization strategy proposed by the author provides a stable framework for the policy of integration and cohesive development of the Danube region. It establishes priority areas aimed at creating the EU Region of the 21st century.

**Key words:** regional policy, European Union, EGTC, Lower Danube Euroregion, European integration, transformational strategy.

**JEL Classification:** R11, R38, R50, L51, F60

## 1. Introduction

The attention of the supranational level to transboundary regions increased with the development of regional policy. The reform of the European structural funds, the concepts of equalization and identification of the endogenous potential of regions led to the intensification of cross-border cooperation. Of course, this is not only the merit of the European Union; the

growth of Euroregions stimulated financial support, and this led to a new round of growth of Euroregions in the EU territories.

One of the aspects of the EU's financial approach to the development of cross-border cooperation is INTERREG – the program of interstate creation of a pan-European home at the micro level. In 1988, the EU Commission approved the EUREGIO model as the

*Corresponding author:*

<sup>1</sup> Odessa National Economic University, Ukraine.

best practical INTERREG manager (Perkmann, 2002). However, the real value of Euroregions for integration was assessed after the decision to expand, and the last round of the program contributed to the export of the EUREGIO model throughout Europe (including beyond the external borders of the European Union). Therefore, in terms of organization, Euroregions can be considered the guides of European power outside the EU.

The European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) – another initiative created in the zonal field of Euroregions for greater cohesion with the supranational level.

The EGTC is a stable legal structure with an autonomous legal personality but that exists within the legal framework of each member state. At the same time, the EGTC includes representatives of regional authorities, which contributes to the deepening of cross-border cooperation and creates conditions for building a more flexible management system. At the same time, EU intervention is not always positively perceived by national states (Zonova, 2012).

In addition to the financial aspect, which helps to integrate national and subnational actors with integration links, it is worth mentioning the activity of cross-border regions in facilitating the introduction of the principle of subsidiarity for protection against excessive bureaucratization, promotion of solutions to local problems directly in the place of origin, which can directly influence the European political landscape.

In Europe, considerable experience has been gained in the implementation of regional policy. Taking into account the complexity and heterogeneity of such a formation as the EU, we can talk about a multi-level regional policy aimed at the development of specific regions within national states and the economic consolidation of territories at the international level. This is necessary from the viewpoint of the qualitative development of the integration movement and its deepening. The instrument of such cohesion is the European groupings for territorial cooperation, which mainly arise where cooperation on the basis of common strategies and specific projects has been conducted for a long time and successfully.

In terms of increasing global competition and aggravating socio-economic problems within the European Union, in the regional policy programs for the period of 2014–2020, great attention is paid to the policy of cohesion, including territorial. Moreover, the strengthening of territorial unity and territorial cooperation is planned to be achieved by increasing financial resources (up to 30%) to support all types of territorial cooperation and stimulate the creation of EGTC.

## 2. The methodology of research

EU regions are very diverse from a cultural and historical point of view and have different levels of socio-

economic development. In Europe, problem areas are identified (primarily the regions of Eastern Europe, in which we observe the dramatic consequences of the transformation of the economic structure during the transition from a command-administrative to a market system, old industrial and rural regions). Regional policy is one of the most important spheres of socio-economic policy in the EU. Today, it represents not only the regional policy of each individual member state of the integration association but the cohesion policy pursued at the supranational level with the help of various financial, legal, and socio-political instruments (Perkmann, 2013).

The elimination of economic and political barriers within the EU (the creation of a common domestic market and the adoption of the Schengen agreements) stimulated the formation of economic regions with a common labour market in the border areas of the EU member states. This caused changes in the regional policy of the integration association. Since 1990, the EU has been implementing the INTERREG Community Initiative program, the main goal of which is to overcome the dividing influence of borders and ensure the functioning of the common European market. INTERREG III (2000–2006) was aimed at the development of socio-economic relations within the EU by stimulating transnational and interregional cooperation and balanced development of the territories of the Union (Application and effects of the ESPD, 2007).

Along with that, a number of documents were adopted on spatial planning at the pan-European level. One of the main documents, which is based on the recognition of cooperation between all territorial levels (vertical integration) and all sectors of the economy (horizontal integration), is the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (EUREGIO Presentation, 2016). Also, since 2002, the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) has been implemented, in which much attention is paid to efficiency, cohesion, i.e. balanced and stable development that stimulates competitiveness and reduces structural disparities between regions and countries, as well as environmental issues (Bannikov, 2014).

The period of program-organizational transformations of regional development for 2007–2013 is characterized by the following priorities: support for innovations, creation of new jobs and ensuring economic growth in all regions of the union, which is a structural part of the overall economic development strategy of the integration association.

Regional policy focuses on the achievement of three key goals (EUREGIO Presentation, 2016):

1) convergence (cohesion), i.e. supporting economic growth and increasing the level of employment in the least developed regions by investing in human capital, developing transport and energy infrastructure, innovation, improving the efficiency of the administrative machinery of regions;

2) regional competitiveness and employment, i.e. creating new jobs, increasing the competitiveness of regions by encouraging innovation, developing environmental protection measures, and developing regional labour markets;

3) European territorial cooperation, i.e. supporting all types of territorial cooperation and territorial cohesion between regions within the EU by promoting the integrated development of territories (Regional Policy – INFOREGIO, 2013).

Within the framework of territorial cooperation in the period of 2007–2013, three types of programs have been adopted: 1) border cooperation projects between certain territories of EU member states; 2) transnational projects aimed at organizing cooperation in large regions (for example, the Baltic Sea, Danube, Alpine, and Mediterranean regions); 3) interregional projects (INTERREG IVC, URBACT II, INTERACT II, ESPON), which cover 28 EU member states.

In the seven-year period (2014–2020), the EU's regional policy has focused on rallying the territories by providing support to all regions according to common rules (for all European structural and investment funds), simplifying the rules (clear requirements, using digital technologies (e-cohesion), simplifying reporting rules), linking financial support with the final result.

The next important change is the strengthening of territorial unity and territorial cooperation through the facilitation of conditions for the creation of European groupings of territorial cooperation (EGTC Group) (Regional Policy – INFOREGIO, 2013).

Tendencies to strengthening territorial cooperation at the regional and cross-border levels in Europe are

manifested in the creation of the EGTC, which are a tool to increase the efficiency of cooperation among regions and their economic and social cohesion.

At the moment, associations have been established in 18 EU member states (Table 1). In the period of 2008–2010, 18 EGTC project groups were founded.

EGTC are legal entities, and their members also have the status of legal entities, which allows government agencies of various countries participating in such an association to provide joint services without requiring the conclusion of preliminary international agreements signed and ratified by national parliaments. The EGTC must include representatives of at least two EU countries (Bannikov, 2014).

Most of the EGTC members are located in Eastern and Southern Europe. Moreover, if on the early stages EGTC were projects for the implementation of exclusively cross-border cooperation, then since 2012 they began to be created as platforms for cooperation between cities of different EU member states.

The functioning of the EGTC is based on agreements between national, regional or local authorities, as well as any other government agencies or associations (European Union – Committee of the regions. What is the EGTC (2017)). The agreement on the organization of EGTC establishes the goals and objectives of the association, its structure and management system (Table 2), and decision-making mechanisms, legal address, financing issues, duration of an agreement and its termination conditions. In addition, the organizers must inform the EU Member States and the Committee of the Regions about the EGTC creation. The composition of participants is determined in accordance with the goals and objectives of the association.

Table 1

### European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation

N <sup>o</sup>	Regions	Member States
Founded in 2011		
1	Euroregion Tirol-Südtirol/Alto Adige-Trentino	Austria – Italy
2	Eurorégion Aquitaine-Euskadi	France – Spain
3	Arrabona	Hungary – Slovakia
4	Pirineus-Cerdanya	France – Spain
5	Espacio Portalet	Spain – France
6	EGTC “Territory of municipalities: Gorizia, Mestna občina Nova Gorica and Občina Šempeter-Vrtojba”	Italy – Slovenia
7	Linieland van Waas en Hulst	Belgium – the Netherlands
8	Rába-Duna-Vág (RDV)	Hungary – Slovakia
Founded in 2012		
9	Bodrogközi	Hungary – Slovakia
10	Gate to Europe EGTC Ltd.	Hungary – Romania
11	Pannon	Hungary – Slovenia
12	Novohrad – Nógrád'	Hungary – Slovakia
13	BFXINI POLI – Network of European Cities for Sustainable Development	Greece – Cyprus – Bulgaria
14	European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN)	Cyprus – Belgium – the Czech Republic – France – Germany – Hungary – Luxembourg – the Netherlands. Spain acts as an observer

Source: compiled by the author based on: Regional Policy – INFOREGIO (2013), EUREGIO Presentation (2016) (at the beginning of 2015)

Table 2

**EGTC obligatory authorities**

Authority	Assembly (representation of all EGTC members)	Director
Functions	Making/approving decisions	Representation of EGTC at regional/national/supranational levels

Source: compiled by the author based on: European Union – Committee of the regions. *What is the EGTC (2017)*

The EGTC tasks are very diverse and can be to solve a specific problem or to develop a platform for the development of decision-making mechanisms for regional development as a whole. Creating EGTC can be associated with:

- 1) management of cross-border cooperation programs;
- 2) implementation of border cooperation projects at the regional and local levels;
- 3) other ways of cooperation, with or without EU financial support (for example, support for cross-border transport associations or bilateral municipal initiatives (building hospitals, waste recycling)).

In the first case, we are talking about EGTC as the legal representatives of the Euroregions in the international councils and committees. The objectives of the EGTC are very extensive and, above all, related to supporting economic, social, historical, and cultural links between the population of the regions through cooperation in various fields, such as energy, environment, transport, healthcare, education, research and innovation (Growing Regions, 2008). An example of such symbiosis is the EGTC “Euroregion ‘Tirol-Alto-Adige-Trentino’”. This association was founded in September 2011, although cooperation between its member regions has several decades, and the Euroregion as a platform for cross-border cooperation has existed since May 1998.

In the second case, the EGTC, acting at the local (less often at the regional) level, contributes to the implementation of the “bottom-up” principle when implementing programs of cross-border cooperation. For example, the EGTC Saar-Moselle Eurodistrict was founded in 2007 in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the region, conduct joint regional marketing activities for the Saar/Moselle region, and solve common problems. As an illustration, let’s call the launch of an electric train running on two energy sources between the cities of Saarbrücken and Sarreguemines (Kuzmin, 2014).

In the third case, EGTC is created to solve any specific problems in a particular area. An example of such a highly specialized association is the Hospital de Cerdanya EGTC on the French-Spanish border, established in May 2010 for the purpose of enhancing cross-border healthcare cooperation. Within this association, support is being provided for the construction of a hospital, the services of which will be available to both about 17 thousand residents of the region of Cerdanya in the Catalan Pyrenees and about 13 thousand residents of the regions of Cerdan and Capcir (Kodric M., 2011) (Hospital de la Cerdanya).

Thus, working together with all interested parties within specific regions, the EGTC makes it possible to implement an integrated approach to strengthening territorial cohesion by developing common measures to improve the socio-economic situation. Taking into account that the associations include actors from all political levels of neighbouring countries, this contributes to the achievement of the goal of the economic, political, social, and cultural unity of the EU. Moreover, the EGTC is a practical implementation of the concept of multi-level management, allowing different hierarchical levels of management to cooperate in one cooperative structure, which, in turn, allows regional and local authorities to directly participate in shaping the EU regional policy.

### 3. Results and discussion

In the Danube region over the past two decades, fundamental changes have occurred. The first transformational aspect is the wave-like expansion of the EU in 2004 and 2007 (Application and effects, 2007). The major part of the world’s most multi-ethnic river basin is currently located in the European Union (EU) area. There are new opportunities for solving problems and realizing the potential, especially for intensifying its efforts to overcome the economic crisis, taking into account future needs. Socio-economic development, competitiveness, natural resource management, and increasing resource efficiency can be improved, and security and transport corridors can be modernized. The Danube could open the EU to its closest neighbours, the region of the Black Sea, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. The EU strategy for the Danube Region can contribute to the implementation of the EU objectives, giving new strength to the main EU political initiatives, especially the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The Danube region is a functional area defined by its own river basin. Collaborating organizations, such as the Danube Commission and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, deal with specific issues. The strategy extends the specified approach in order to set priorities from the viewpoint of integration. Geographically, this applies primarily and not only to: within the EU – Germany (Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria), Austria, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria, as well as beyond its borders – Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine (regions along

the Danube and its tributaries). The strategy remains open to other partners in the region. Since the Danube flows into the Black Sea, it must be linked to the development prospects for the Black Sea. With a total population of over 100 million people, the fifth largest territory of the EU is of great interest to Europe.

Bringing together people, their ideas and needs in the Danube region is a serious and deep task. Transport links should be modernized. Energy resources can be made cheaper and safer by strengthening links and alternative sources. Development can be balanced in environmental protection, in the framework of a sustainable development approach and in accordance with the environmental *acquis communautaire* (the totality of all EU regulations), where applicable. In order to minimize risks and disasters, such as floods, droughts, and industrial accidents, joint work is needed. Through the creation of certain research and innovation perspectives, the Danube Region will be able to take a leading position in trade and entrepreneurship in the EU. The disparity in education and employment can be overcome. The Danube Region can become a safe and protected area where issues of conflict, marginalization, and crime are properly solved.

By 2020, all citizens of the Region should have the best prospects for higher education, employment, and wealth improvement at the place of residence. The Danube European integration strategy suggests a zonal transformation to the high-tech standards of the 21st century, according to the Concept of Sustainable Development, one of the most attractive in Europe (Otocan, 2011).

For a serious elaboration of problems and creation of an optimal association strategy, extensive consultations were held with interested organizations and their suggestions were heard. The governing bodies, including those from non-EU countries, also participated through the National Coordination Offices. The main institutional participants were the services of the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, and other regional authorities (Perkmann, 2013).

The Danube region has historically been under the special influence of an unstable situation, accompanied by a series of conflicts, population migration, and anti-democratic regimes; nevertheless, the fall of the Iron Curtain together with the EU expansion has given hope for the future. The above means the necessity to take into account the main problems (Regional Cohesion and competition in the age of globalization, 2000).

**Mobility.** The Danube River is the main corridor of the TEN-T. Its potential, however, is not fully utilized. The share of cargo is only 10%-20% of the volume transported along the Rhine. Since inland water transport has important advantages in terms of environmental protection and economic efficiency, its potential must be exploited on an ongoing basis. There is a particular need to develop multimodality, in the best

interconnection with other river basins, in a modernized and developed infrastructure of transport hubs, such as inland ports;

**Energy.** Prices in the region, in relative terms, are higher. Fragmented markets lead to higher costs and reduced competition. Dependence on a too limited number of external suppliers increases vulnerability, as evidenced by periodic winter crises. A wider range of supplies made through interconnections and natural regional markets will increase energy security. The crucial point is to increase economic efficiency, including the use of energy-saving and more renewable energy sources.

**Environment.** The Danube region is the main international hydrological basin and ecological corridor. This requires a regional approach to nature conservation, spatial planning, and natural resource management. Pollution does not recognize state borders. Major problems, such as untreated sewage, fertilizer and soil ingress into the river, heavily pollute the Danube. Also, the following should be taken into account: the impact of transport links on the environment, the development of tourism and new energy generation facilities.

**Environmental risks.** There are quite often cases of large floods, droughts, and industrial pollution. Prevention, readiness, and effective response require a high degree of cooperation and information sharing.

**Socio-economic aspects.** The region is characterized by very large differences. It includes both one of the most successful and one of the poorest regions of the EU. In particular, there is a lack of contacts and cooperation in both financial and institutional terms. Enterprises do not fully use the international scope of marketing, innovation, and research. The share of the population with higher education in the Danube region is lower than the average in 27 EU countries, which is again accompanied by a pronounced division. Usually, the best-skilled workers leave the country.

**Security, serious crimes, and organized crime.** There are also serious problems in this area. Human trafficking, smuggling of goods are particularly acute problems in a number of countries. Corruption undermines public confidence and hinders development.

These problems are best solved together, determining priorities, coordinating and implementing actions. For example, developers and environmental organizations must find innovative solutions in the interests of the entire region, solving the most complex issues together.

At the same time, the Danube region has broad prospects. It has a rich ethnocultural history, culture, cross-cultural traditions, and it is also rich in natural and balneological landscape uniqueness. There are huge development potential, many-sided creative one, availability of a skilled workforce, and powerful intellectual potential.

Let us distinguish strategic development areas (Yurasova, 2013; Martunyuk, 2017).

1) Geographical association of Europe and the East. There is a huge potential for the development of existing transport and trade links (for example, through the TRACECA transport network connecting the EU through the Black Sea region to the Caucasus and Central Asia).

2) The developed infrastructural architecture of the education system. Including different universities, but the quality of training varies. Education and training should be linked to the needs of the labour market, along with supporting student mobility throughout the entire Danube region.

3) The presence of millennial traditions of cultural, ethnic, and natural diversity. The presence of large cities and world heritage sites, including the concentration of capitals and cultural centres. This requires a modern approach to tourism offers and infrastructure so that both the guest and the host can get profit from this activity.

4) The ability to optimize and improve the use of renewable energy sources, such as water, wind biomass, thermal springs. There are also wide opportunities for improving energy efficiency by enhancing the efficiency of energy demand management and modernizing building and logistics. These measures will facilitate the transition to a low-carbon economy.

5) Availability of natural wealth: unique fauna and flora, the most valuable water resources, and unique landscapes (for example, the Danube Delta, the Carpathians). They must be in constant preservation and recovery.

The fullest use of these opportunities also requires the expansion of cooperation, planning, joint investment, and the development of key links. The indicated areas are examples of the transformational optimization of the Danube Strategy towards EGTC. Obviously, the proposed transformational transition plan is a recommendation, with obligatory adjustment options. Four key directions will allow harmoniously interacting and developing in accordance with the Concept of Sustainable Development.

Each direction contains priority recommendations in various fields of activity.

#### I. Association of the Danube region.

##### 1.1. Improved mobility and multimodality.

Modernization of inland waterways.

Activation of road, rail, and air traffic.

##### 1.2. Promoting more sustainable energy.

##### 1.3. Support for culture and tourism, the interaction between people.

For this, the following strategic objectives can be set (European Union, 2017):

– by 2020, increase river freight by 20% compared with 2010;

– elimination by 2020 of existing bottlenecks that impede navigation on the river, which should take into account ensuring the passage of class VIIb vessels throughout the year;

– reduced travel time for competitive rail passenger services between major cities;

– planned for three or five years, the implementation of the program “Four Railway Freight Corridors Crossing the Danube Region”;

– development of effective multimodal terminals in Danube River ports by 2020 for connection of inland waterways with rail and road transport;

– achievement of national goals based on climate and energy objectives defined in Europe 2020.

#### II. Environmental protection in the Danube Region

2.1. Restoration and preservation of water resources quality.

2.2. Environmental risk management.

2.3. Conservation of biodiversity, landscapes, and air and soil quality.

For this, the following strategic objectives can be set (European Union, 2017):

– achieving goals in the field of environmental protection and river basin management;

– reduction of nutrient levels in the Danube River in order to enable the Black Sea ecosystems to recover to conditions similar to 1960;

– the introduction of extensive flood risk management plans for the Danube (should have been submitted in 2015 based on the Floods Directive), which should include a significant reduction in flood risk by 2021, taking into account the possible effects of climate change;

– ensuring by 2020 the protection of viable populations of Danube sturgeon fish and other fish species inhabiting the basin, fighting invasive species;

– reduction by 25% of the zone prone to erosion with soil washout of more than 10 tons per hectare by 2020.

#### III. Creating a prosperous Danube region

3.1. Dissemination of knowledge in society through the introduction of research, educational, and information technologies.

3.2. Supporting the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development.

3.3. Investing in human resources and training.

For this, the following strategic objectives can be set (European Union, 2017):

– investing 3% of GDP in research and development by 2020;

– wide access for all EU citizens to the region by 2020;

– increase in the number of patents obtained in the region by 50% by 2021;

– increase in the share of the EU population who have reached 30-34 years old, having higher or equivalent to higher education, by 40% up to 2022.

#### IV. Strengthening of the Danube region.

4.1. The building of institutional capacity and collaboration.

4.2. Joint work to solve security issues and the fight against organized crime and serious crimes.

For this, the following strategic objectives can be set:

- improving the e-government platform by 2020 and reducing the bloated bureaucracy;
- achieving a maximum of 3 weeks for obtaining permission to go into business by 2020;
- ensuring fruitful cooperation among certain law enforcement units by 2020 for an effective system of information exchange between certain departments in order to improve security and fight organized crime and serious crimes in 14 countries.

#### 4. Conclusions

In Europe, considerable experience has been gained in the implementation of regional policy. Taking into account the complexity and heterogeneity of such a formation as the EU, we can talk about a multi-level regional policy aimed at the development of specific regions within the framework of national states and the economic consolidation of territories at the international level. This is necessary from the viewpoint of the qualitative development of the integration movement and its deepening. The instrument of such cohesion is the European groupings for territorial cooperation, which mainly arise where cooperation has been conducted on the basis of common strategies and specific projects for a long time and successfully.

In terms of increasing global competition and aggravating socio-economic problems within the European Union, in the regional policy programs for the period of 2014–2020, great attention is paid to the policy of cohesion, including territorial. Moreover, the strengthening of territorial unity and territorial cooperation is planned to be achieved by increasing financial resources (up to 30%) to support all types

of territorial cooperation and stimulate the EGTC creation.

The further success and actors capacity building of the Euroregions, their movement along the path of “privatization” of worldwide policy will depend on the fulfilment of several basic local tasks, namely, to determine the field of common interests; bring people together; create suitable institutions; develop joint projects; provide funding and control; demonstrate benefits of cooperation to citizens; guarantee transparency and awareness. This will have a serious impact on the EU and its adjacent territories.

Established links, both internal and those with other regions of Europe and the world, play a key role in the Danube region. Transport and energy infrastructures have many gaps and weaknesses over insufficient carrying capacity, quality, or poor service. More reliable connections between people, especially through culture and tourism, are also necessary.

Effective improvements require coordinated planning, funding, and implementation. The market collapse caused by external factors is strikingly evident in the lack of investment across borders. Large projects should be identified and implemented on a sustainable and cost-effective basis, with the distribution of costs and profits. The more users, the more effective the investments become, and the larger the scale, the greater the savings.

The transformational optimization strategy proposed by the author provides a stable framework for the policy of integration and cohesive development of the Danube region. It establishes priority areas aimed at creating the EU Region of the 21st century. Not only regulatory and information support but also real particular actions for interaction and cooperation are necessary in order to ensure a wide popularization of the strategy’s tasks.

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