

**Speech by Mr. Ovidiu Dranga, Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania**

**„Building the Future of the Danube Region: the Romanian Perspective”**

- Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, April 11, 2013 -

*Dear Vice-Chancellor Dr. Busek,*

*Dear Ambassador Winkler,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am particularly pleased to have been offered the opportunity to address this afternoon such a distinguished and well informed audience in the Vienna Diplomatic Academy. Let me from the outset pay a reverence to this prestigious institution you are so aptly leading, dear Ambassador Winkler, an institution that can rightfully be proud of its long-standing tradition of training students in international relations. Indeed the Romanian foreign service counts among its members several alumni of the Vienna Diplomatic Academy. For some time now, Bucharest has had a Diplomatic Institute of its own offering training to future practitioners in the business of diplomacy coming from increasingly many corners of the world.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

In 2008 Romania, together with Austria, were launching, by a diplomatic demarche addressed to the President of the European Commission, the idea of setting up a EU Strategy for the Danube Region. After almost two years since its endorsement, by the European Council in June 2011, the Strategy for the Danube macro-region is developing into an innovative process, guided by dynamic parameters such as sustainable development and reflecting the new dimension of EU cohesion policy - the territorial dimension.

Allow me to start my few thoughts on the Romanian perspective for the Danube Strategy by underlining the importance of the future EU Regional policy. The new Regional Policy should be an investment instrument for our future. It should help Member States and regions to unlock their economic potential. It should be the catalyst for the transformation and development of the competitiveness of the regions, putting them back on the track of recovery. For these reasons, we must make every effort to increase its effectiveness. Our success will depend on our joint capability, Romanian-Austrian or other formats of cooperation, to ensure good quality design of programmes and to generate robust evidence on their effects and impact. The EU

Strategy for the Danube Region can be a proof of this new spirit of the EU Regional Policy in the next financial period 2014-2020.

We live in challenging times. The crisis touches the lives of citizens everywhere across the Union. Austerity measures and fiscal consolidation of national budgets reduce significantly the available public finances. This makes it imperative to spend public resources in a smart, effective and efficient way. However, austerity alone is not the solution. The recovery of European economy requires development, growth and jobs. The Europe 2020 Strategy provides the framework for action for the Union's long-term growth. And Cohesion Policy is the key instrument for investing in the regions, with the aim of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. An important instrument will be in this respect the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

If our challenge for the new period is to spend wisely in order to generate growth, in order to do this we need to be result-oriented. This is why we, in the Romanian Foreign Ministry, in our coordinating capacity for the implementation of the Strategy, are turning to our partners in continuing the process, to help deliver quantifiable results. This is a collective, long time effort, where we engage together with all our partners and colleagues in the 12 countries participating in the Strategy.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The Danube Strategy extends the core principles that underpinned the very creation of the European Union – bringing peace, prosperity and confidence to its citizens - to the newer member states from the macro-region of the Danube basin.

Macro-regional strategies represent the new approach to cohesion policy - one which is better adapted to a significantly larger and far more diverse Europe, where “one size fits all” approaches no longer respond to the complex challenges of our time. The macro-regional framework highlights similarities stemming from common territorial features. It thus stimulates the development of new macroregional initiatives, based on a deeper understanding of the benefits that integrated, transnational, cross-cutting cooperation can bring. It also sets a model and an incentive for candidate countries from the Western Balkans and for aspiring countries from the immediate Eastern neighbourhood, namely the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. A model about the virtues of cooperation versus competition and divergences; about transforming geographic dividing lines into areas of encounter and exchange; about tackling the risks engendered by disparities - exclusion, irregular migration, social discontent, organized crime or even security threats – through cohesion policies.

I believe there is no coincidence in the fact that Romania and Austria were precisely the two countries which initiated, together, in 2008, the idea of a new integrated approach of the European Union to the Danube Region. Austria, as a country which joined the EU in 1995 – at precisely the time when Romania was officially putting

forward its candidacy to become a member – was well placed to know what newer members need, but also what obstacles new members face in their attempt to reach – quickly, if possible - the level of cohesion and prosperity that older members had achieved in decades. Moreover Austria, as a former stronghold on the border of the democratic Europe, was also well placed to understand the advantages one could get – with good policies and innovative instruments – from switching from the role of stronghold to the role of a gateway. Austria brought to the Union, as its “dowry”, its connections to markets, people and opportunities laying eastwards, in what are now the new member states and beyond, in what is the wider region of the Danube river basin.

Romania, in its turn, was well placed in the region to watch and to assess the growth that such a far-reaching approach could generate – and to learn from this lesson. Romania could draw practical conclusions from the understanding that the Danube, in an enlarged European Union, is no longer a border – on the contrary, it is and needs to be treated as a link and a catalyzer. I won't go so far back to the time when the Danube was a stronghold against the advance of the Ottoman Empire, or, more recently a highly guarded border between the communist countries and the corridor towards the free world, which Yugoslavia was for some time. More recently, in the nineties, during the Yugoslav crisis, Romania was strictly monitored by the Western European Union to prevent navigation – at least for some goods and for some destinations – on the Danube. Even worse, navigation towards the lower Romanian and Bulgarian sector was further hindered by the ruins of bridges up the river, which had collapsed under bombings.

It was high time, especially after the completion of the latest wave of enlargement of the EU, to step beyond such realities and to look with a different approach at what this long and generous river can offer to the citizens along its extended borders, who deserve to live together in peace, cooperation and prosperity.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

The challenges facing this macro-region know no borders. Interconnecting the transport and infrastructure networks, ensuring energy security, environmental protection and environmental risk management for flood prevention, protecting the cultural and natural heritage, providing citizen safety – all these were identified as priority cooperation areas for states in the region. The Strategy was built on four central pillars, including 11 distinct priority areas. The related activity of each priority area is jointly coordinated by two states in the region – because the Strategy is not only about what we try to achieve, but also about how we do it: it is about learning to work together, and to do it for the benefit of the broader region. Romania coordinates three interlinked and challenging Priority Areas of the Danube Strategy: inland navigation (with Austria), management of environmental risks (with Hungary), promoting culture and tourism (with Bulgaria). In this capacity, Romania has brought and brings its own practical contribution to the process of implementation.

The integrated bottom-up approach, coupled with exercising multi-layered governance to conduct day-to-day business, is in itself an *acquis*. Not always easy to

put in practice, admittedly, but it is the only way to have as many stakeholders on board as possible, to cooperate and coordinate effectively and to share responsibility. We strongly believe that the Strategy for the Danube Region enjoys such a strong support because it provides an adequate, up-to-date as well as forward looking response to the challenges faced by the EU as a result of enlargement, economic crisis and climate change.

*Distinguished audience,*

The EU Danube Strategy has a substantial external dimension. Through the Danube region, the European Union opens up to the Black Sea region, and across the Black Sea to South Caucasus and Central Asia. It also makes the connection between the North Sea and the Black Sea, via the Rhine-Main channel.

There is a logical link and growing interest for an integrated approach of the Danube and Black Sea macro-regions, also taken into account in the connections made between the two regions in the strategic programming documents proposed by the European Commission in relation with Romania. Such an integrated approach can be shaped, on one hand, by capitalizing on the recent experience of implementing the Danube Strategy and creating synergies between priority areas of development of the Danube Strategy and sectors of similar importance for the Black Sea region (such as the environment, renewable energy, stimulating the commercial corridor East-West). A further integrated approach of the Danube and Black Sea macro-regions becomes a logical subject of reflection in a broader perspective, looking forward to the consecutive Presidencies of the EU that Austria and Romania will hold in 2019. This reflection can be developed by incorporating lessons learned in the Baltic and Danube cooperation and I am confident that it would generate added value through already established European mechanisms. This reflection should obviously take into account the Black Sea Synergy, the Integrated Maritime Policy, but also environmental policies and transports networks.

The added value of the macro-regional strategic approach – after almost four years since the adoption of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and two years of the Danube Strategy - seems to be a unanimously recognised, if we judge by the interest of the Commission and of countries concerned to develop other such formats of macroregional cooperation, like the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian or, perhaps in the future, the Alpine one. This is why the first implementation report of the Danube Strategy, just released by the Commission, is a cornerstone for this Strategy, but also an incentive and a set of guidelines for future designs of cooperation based on this valuable tool.

While being an EU-driven instrument for macro-regional cooperation, the EU Danube Strategy should be viewed in the wider context of existing regional cooperation platforms on our continent, in our part of the continent in particular. Other regionally-driven and owned initiatives, such as the South East Europe Cooperation Process, are complementary to European integration, key instruments for facilitating political dialogue, developing projects of joint interest and tackling common challenges. It will be one of our top priorities in 2013 to further foster and develop these objectives, as

Chairmanship-in-Office of SEECP (June 2013-June 2014). The Romanian Chairmanship will focus on those areas where tangible progress is achievable. The overall purpose will be to strengthen and make SEECP more efficient while attempting to do more with existing resources.

Let me use this opportunity to spell out our priorities while chairing the SEECP. We will promote the launching of projects and the consolidation of cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs area, with a focus on combating corruption and organised crime, a regional project that combines increasing confidence-building and dialogue among Participating states with an economic component (tourism, employment and increasing competitiveness). We will also organize panels dedicated to energy security issues or statistics.

While concentrating on making the SEECP more efficient, we will also attempt to seek complementarity between EUSDR and SEECP initiatives and projects meant to further the development of South-East Europe, as well as its European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

Coming closer to practical aspects of implementing the EU Danube Strategy, I would like to point out that interconnection will play a core role in the Strategy objectives. And here I want to point out the fruitful cooperation with the Austrian partners in the field of navigation. In the past we had results by linking together the port of Ems and Galati but the future will be more ambitious, by organising, this year, the so called “trip on the Danube” with the participation of vice-chancellor Erhard Busek, whom we were glad to have again in Bucharest only last week. I am also very pleased to meet here again colleagues and partners from Austria - a country which remains a driving force and a privileged partner in the process of implementation of the Danube Strategy.

On concrete bilateral projects that can support the aims of the Strategy I had the privilege to discuss last October in Bucharest with Ambassador Johannes Kyrle, Secretary General of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One particularly appealing idea is to initiate a substantive exchange and cooperation among our Diplomatic Institute and the Vienna Diplomatic Academy, an idea supported also by Dr. Erhard Busek and which we would very much like to see taking off.

*Dear Ambassador Winkler,*

*Dear Dr. Busek,*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

It is my first presence at the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna. It is therefore a first opportunity to thank to all those in the Austrian diplomatic community who embraced the idea of the Danube Strategy from the very beginning. The select attendance of this

meeting is already a proof of the support to our common efforts for building and implementing the Strategy. I believe the reason for this is that the Strategy, by its scope, targets and way of action, is addressing not only the needs of our countries, of the macro-region and the regions within the macro-region, but the needs of the citizens themselves.

Since the Strategy is a long term project, we consider it essential to maintain the political momentum and the visibility of the Strategy in our countries as well as with regard to European institutions. That is why we will be happy to host, in Bucharest, on October 28 and 29, the second edition of the Annual Forum of the Strategy, which we will organize together with the European Commission. We also intend to host the traditional meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs – which has by now been entrusted with a clear political guidance role – in the margins of the Annual Forum. We are confident that the Bucharest Annual Forum of the Danube Strategy will contribute, by the joint efforts of all the stakeholders involved in all participating countries, to not only promote the goals of the Strategy, but also to bringing it closer to our communities and public opinion.

I will not finish without reiterating Romania's strong commitment and dedication to the successful implementation of the EU Danube Strategy. As the saying goes, the past - we have inherited it; but, we can create the future. And the future of the Danube Region lies in our hands, in the hands of all those back home who feel represented by us here, today in Vienna and who trust that the decisions we take and the actions we perform will transform the region to make it competitive in the challenging global environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Thank you for your attention.*