



## **European Commission – Speech**

Vienna, Austria, 9 October 2018

### **EU Trade-Counsellor of the Representation of the European Commission in Austria**

**Dr. Johann Sollgruber**, Vice-President of Danube Business Forum

Key note speech Chamber of Commerce 9. October 2018

### **Danube Business Forum**

Ladies and gentlemen,  
Honourable Minister, dear Vice-President Schenz, Excellencies, dear entrepreneurs of the Danube region.

As a co-founder of the Danube Business Forum, dating back to in 2011, I am honoured to deliver five key messages to you. We are approaching in 2020 ten years of Danube Business Forum and I am very proud of this.

First message:

Businesses do not like borders, closure of routes, being in traffic jams and paying custom duties like Mr Trump requests it. They do not want fragmented markets, but free movement of people, goods, capital and investment. This is the foundation of Europe and an overarching principle of European values and also true for the 14 Danube countries.

You being entrepreneurs from South-East Europe want us to provide the framework conditions for doing business and to do everything to facilitate investment and eliminate trade barriers.

Second:

The Danube EU-strategy is designed around four pillars:

- Connecting road, air-traffic, water and energy
- Protecting environment
- Promoting competitiveness, skills and innovation
- Ensuring rule of law and security, something the minister will appreciate.

Much hope has been associated with the EU Danube strategy, but the decision was not to grant additional funds to it. Today the strategy suffers a lack of political ownership. The Romanian Minister for trade and economy whom I met last week told me that the Romanian government is going to promote the EU Danube strategy during the EU-Presidency first half 2019. We agreed to respond to the Silk Road initiative by promoting the *one river- one strategy* slogan and motion.

Third message:

Much has been achieved so far in relation to inland navigation. The famous ICPDR and the Danube Commission have done a great job.

But the objective of reaching an increase of cargo volumes of 20% by 2020 will not be met. The potential of the Danube corresponds only to 10% of the one of the river Rhine. Upgrading of fluvial ports and ensuring that the minimum draught of the Danube river can be ensured for navigation must be an ultimate goal.

Let me provide you with some Flagship projects like DREAM – a Danube River Research and Management project, digital inland navigation, the Danube knowledge cluster, combining 70 universities that has been set up in order to combat brain drain. Digitalised customs services in Mohács are a very good example to modernize. The LNG vessel model project should pave the way into a new era in the Danube fleet. An LNG master plan in Enns-shafen, Constanța and in Ruse is under progress. And the SEE hydro- power a plan for 2020 is in a phase of implementation.

Future:

Fourth,

Looking ahead I want to see the Danube area associated with new brands, like Danube Soya, Danube Tourism or Danube Cargo.

The macro regional strategy will provide investors with large scale opportunities. After BREXIT nearly every fourth European citizen will live in the Danube region. Therefore it deserves enhanced attention. The European Commission has proposed that for Bulgaria the European Cohesion policy allocation will be increased to € 8.9 billion and €27.2 billion for Romania for the period year 2021-2027. This is much more than the Russians have ever invested and the Chinese will ever invest in this part of Europe!

The new Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 will invest 13% of total allocation to countries eligible for the COHESION FUND (GNI/HEAD < 90 % OF EU27 AVERAGE), 62% in LESS-DEVELOPED REGIONS, 14% in TRANSITION REGIONS and 11% in MORE-DEVELOPED regions according to the Commissions' proposal. It will be embedded into 5 policy objectives:

- A smarter Europe, through innovation, digitisation, economic transformation
- A greener, low-carbon Europe, implementing the Paris Agreement
- A more connected Europe, with strategic transport and digital networks;
- A more social Europe,
- A Europe closer to citizens.

Let us realise our dreams.

Empress Maria Theresa wanted to connect Trieste with the Danube and the Greeks and Serbs dream to connect Thessaloniki with the port of Belgrade with a Danube canal. The Romanian government had the plan to connect Bucharest with the Danube.

Ladies and gentlemen! Let us materialize plans before the Chinese come to do it!

Fifth,

Ladies and gentlemen let us create a Danube cyberspace, a Danube data cloud. Let the Danube region be the avant-garde for block chain technology in logistics!

I hope this year's Danube Business Forum will provide us with energy and food for thought in achieving these ambitious goals. Thank you very much for your appreciated attention.

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