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NEW ROLE OF MACRO-REGIONS IN EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

STUDY - PART I

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POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

New role of macro-regions in European Territorial Cooperation

STUDY

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Abstract

This study provides a critical analysis of the future role of macro-regions in the implementation of European Territorial Cooperation. On the basis of a literature review and case studies, the study offers an assessment of potential benefits in the development of new macro-regional strategies as well as the most common risks and difficulties in their implementation. Recommendations are derived to inform the position of the European Parliament on how it can efficiently support the creation and implementation of new macro-regional strategies.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIC	Adriatic Ionian Council
AII	Adriatic Ionian Initiative
ARLEM	Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly
ASCAME	Association of the Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry
BDF	Baltic Development Forum
BIF	Baltic Institute of Finland
BSAP	Baltic Sea Action Plan
BSR	Baltic Sea Region
CBSS	Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat
CDCR	Council of Danube Cities and Regions
CEI	Central European Initiative
CoR	Committee of the Regions
CPMR	Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions
CPR	Common Provision Regulation
CSF	Common Strategic Framework
DCP	Danube Cooperation Process
DG	Directorate General
DTC	Danube Tourist Commission
EC	European Commission
EEA	European Economic Area
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EGTC	European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation
EIB	European Investment Bank
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument
EP	European Parliament
EPRC	European Policies Research Centre
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESI	European Structural and Investment
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union

EUSAIR	European Union Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region
EUSALP	European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region
EUSBSR	European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HA	Horizontal Action
HAL	Horizontal Action Leader
HELCOM	Helsinki Commission
HLG	High Level Group
ICPDR	International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IMC	Inter-Mediterranean Commission
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession
Lab Group	Laboratory Group
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MLG	Multi-Level Governance
MRS	Macro-regional Strategies
NCP	National Contact Point
NEFCO	Nordic Environment Finance Corporation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIB	Nordic Investment Bank
OP	Operational Programme
PA	Priority Area
PAC	Priority Area Coordinator
PC	Programming Committee
SECI	Southeast European Cooperative Initiative
SEE	South East Europe
SG	Steering Group
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TEN-T	Trans European Network of Transport
UBC	Union of Baltic Cities
VASAB	Vision And Strategies Around the Baltic Sea

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Macro-regional strategies (MRS) have become a crucial element in the design of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) for post-2013 Cohesion Policy. Currently, the European Union (EU) is implementing two MRS, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). The EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Sea has been adopted in October 2014. In addition there are proposals and debates on the creation of strategies for other macro-regions, in particular for the Alpine Region, the Carpathian Region, the North Sea, the Black Sea, the Western and Eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea and the coastal region of the Atlantic Arc.

The objective of this study has been to analyse the new role of macro-regions in ETC, based on a comparison of case studies on MRS in consideration, preparation and implementation and a review of policy documents. Chapter 1 sets out the objectives, design and methodology in more detail. Based on case study analysis, the aim of the research design is to get a holistic picture of the different proposals for macro-regional cooperation, best practices, but also opportunities and risks for the future. The methodology draws on a literature review and interviews with selected stakeholders.

Chapter 2 provides the reader with a general introduction into the **evolution of conceptions and regulations related to macro-regional cooperation.** The chapter begins with a conceptual definition of macro-regions and MRS as major emerging sites of governance in ETC. The literature analysis reveals that MRS are instruments both of Regional Policy, as well as a tool of Foreign Policy. The debate around the future of MRS is then situated in the context of the contrasting views around Cohesion Policy post-2013 and the changing regulatory framework. In this context, questions related to the governance of future MRS will become all the more crucial. The contributions of the European Parliament (EP) clearly suggest that it advocates a place-based, contractual approach to macro-regional cooperation in line with the EU2020 Agenda. The added value is perceived in MRS being a vehicle for involving neighbouring countries, creating territorial synergies and reducing regional disparities.

Macro-regional profiles on strategies considered, prepared and implemented are presented in Chapter 3. The contrasting territorial contexts of the 9 MRS are illustrated in a map. The profiles describe process, actors or issues related to macro-regional cooperation in the different areas. These assemble where it is possible, information on time horizon and geographical coverage, actors and principal issues covered. These tables serve as a short introduction to the more detailed analysis of the case studies in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Strengths and weaknesses of the strategies for the Baltic Sea and Danube Region are analysed in Chapter 4. The European Commission (EC) has been the main driving force behind MRS, in spite of the many well-established pre-existing organisations in the Baltic and Danube Region. The EUSBSR was the first strategy to be adopted and it has been a source of inspiration for the other MRS. The EUSBSR and the EUSDR function as an umbrella for cooperation initiatives, most of which existed before the strategies were established. It is difficult to assess whether the strategies have influenced the nature or extent of these initiatives. The lack of involvement of some Member States (in both strategies), and the limited commitment at operational level, are identified as key challenges by interviewed stakeholders. The need for stronger and more reliable Steering Committees for each Priority Area has been recognized as an instrument to encourage improved commitment of relevant bodies in each Member State.

Chapter 5 illustrates the findings of our case study analysis for the **strategies in preparation,** Adriatic Ionian and Alpine. EUSAIR and EUSALP, the **MRS** currently in preparation[1], demonstrate indeed how macro-regional cooperation is **applied in very different historical, political and socio-economic contexts.** In socio-economic terms, the **dramatic disparities among the EUSAIR countries** are well known, whereas EUSALP is one of the European areas featuring the highest cohesion. If the *feasibility* of the strategies is considered, the **possibility for the EUSALP territories to access a series of complementary financing tools** has to be emphasized. On the other side, where the **necessity of the strategy** is concerned, the historical opportunity to increase the coordination of the existing cooperation instruments in the Adriatic and Ionian areas is easily recognizable. In case of EUSALP, a sort of continuity between the existing territorial policies and the Strategy can be seen, with some risks of overlapping with the transnational cooperation tools.

MRS under consideration: the strategies for the Carpathian Region, the North Sea, the Black Sea, the Atlantic Arc, the Western and Eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea are analysed in Chapter 6. The chapter begins by briefly describing the development of the strategies under consideration, before delineating emerging issues, risks and difficulties for the future. This analysis clearly shows the wealth of different territorial contexts in which macro-regional cooperation is applied. At the present stage, the concept of some of these strategies is not clearly related to definite needs or identified actors/sub-territories, while for others there remains considerable doubt about the need of macro-regional cooperation due to the high degree of socio-economic cohesion. In others the feasibility of macro-regional cooperation due to existing socio-economic inequalities and political instability needs to be questioned.

From the vantage point of post-2013 Cohesion Policy, a classification of MRS has been built around a close evaluation of cohesion need as well as the ability to implement ETC as an instrument of social, economic and territorial cohesion on the level of the macro-region. The analysis suggests three different sets of MRS; (1) MRS as potential instruments of EU Foreign Policy (Mediterranean; Black Sea); (2) MRS as potential instruments for tackling uneven development (EUSDR; EUSBSR; Adriatic-Ionian; Carpathian); and finally, (3) MRS as potential instruments for the exploitation of territorial synergies (EUSALP; Atlantic Arc; North Sea).

Based on this classification and the detailed results of the case study analyses this final chapter brings together **the conclusions of the study** and provides **policy recommendations** to inform the position of the EP:

- **Added value:** Added value of MRS to ETC/Cohesion Policy should be closely evaluated in terms of the type of macro-region considered. The three approaches mapped out suggest different types of added value for different categories of macro-regional cooperation;
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** A pre-assessment of political and financial needs and abilities should play an important role in assessing feasibility of future strategies;

[1] The preparation phase starts with the EC's Communication calling for the development of a macro-regional strategy for a defined area. The main aim of this phase is to create the groundwork for the establishment of a strategy, the main pillars, choice of objectives, in a vertically and horizontally coordinated consultation process. The European Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region (EUSAIR) has been formally adopted in October 2014. In the context of the study period the strategy has been considered as being in preparation. Two pragmatic reasons can be mobilized to justify this choice: (1) it is too early to evaluate the main implementation steps which still lie ahead (2) it is better compared to the Alpine strategy than to the pilot MRS Baltic and Danube.

- **Technical assistance:** The European Parliament should continue its financial support for transnational activities, but closely assess how and what it can deliver in the upcoming years;
- **Regulatory framework:** The notion of conditionality in macro-regional cooperation as well as the usefulness of EGTC to MRS should be studied in closer detail by the European Parliament in the coming years.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Scope and objectives of the study

This study has eight key objectives:

(1) To identify the future role of macro-regions in the ETC;

(2) To analyse the potential added value of macro-regions in the Cohesion Policy and ETC in particular;

(3) To identify implementation processes used in the current MRS;

(4) To identify the risks and difficulties from the implementation of the current MRS;

(5) To identify ways of involving diverse partners in the preparation and implementation of the MRS;

(6) To identify the different approaches of EU Member States regarding the involvement in the MRS;

(7) To assess the role of the EP and the Committee of Regions in the monitoring of the creation and implementation of MRS in Europe;

(8) To propose measures for policy makers in the short and long term at European, national and regional level.

1.2. Methodology and material

Around each of the study's eight objectives (above) research questions were formulated (Table 1). Appropriate research methods were then identified alongside each of these research questions. The majority of the research questions were addressed using a combination of two approaches: (i) literature review of policy documents and academic articles related to ETC and/or the development of MRS; and (ii) interviews with key actors involved in the development and/or implementation of the MRS or the ETC Programme[2].

Table 1: Study objectives

Study objectives	Research questions
1. To identify the future role of macro-regions in the ETC	– Who were/are the key actors promoting macro-regional cooperation and what were/are the main reasons for doing so? – What were the main expectations and proposals of the EP regarding the macro-regional policy and what were their reception by the EC, Council and Member States? – What are the main scope and objectives of the MRS and how do these correspond with ETC objectives? – What is the financial and political context in which existing and future MRS have been (or are being) established?

[2] The interviews were semi-structured in nature and followed a standard set of questions. Most of the interviews were carried out by telephone or VOIP (e.g. Skype).

Study objectives	Research questions
2. To analyse the potential added value of macro-regions in the Cohesion Policy and ETC in particular	– What are the main benefits of creation and implementation of MRS? – Are the benefits specific to particular groups of actors or types of regions? – To what extent do different policy sectors (e.g. maritime policy, development of transport , cross-border infrastructure, environment protection etc.) view the development of MRS as important or influential for their own policy sector? – How can trans-European infrastructure projects be supported under the MRS?
3. To identify implementation processes used in the current MRS	– What is the administrative structure of macro-regions? How did it evolve over time?
4. To identify the risks and difficulties from the implementation of the current MRS	– What are the main difficulties in the implementation of MRS? – How are these difficulties being addressed in the different macro-regional contexts? – What are the best practices from the already existing MRS?
5. To identify ways of involving diverse partners in the preparation and implementation of the MRS	– How are local, regional and social partners involved in the preparation of the MRS? – How are these actors involved in the different stages of strategy formulation and implementation? – What are the governance arrangements for each of the MRS? – Have any problems and difficulties been encountered in the governance of these strategies? – What are the strengths and weaknesses of different governance models?
6. To identify the different approaches of EU Member States regarding the involvement in the MRS	– What are the different approaches of EU Member States regarding their involvement in the MRS? – How were the specific goals and objectives of the MRS generated and agreed between the different Member States participating?
7. To assess the role of the EP and the Committee of Regions in the monitoring of the creation and implementation of MRS in Europe	– How can EU Cohesion Policy and ETC in particular best support macro-regions? – How to incorporate the MRS into the OPs? – How can the Structural and Investment Funds, Connecting Europe Facility and Horizon 2020 programme be efficiently used in the implementation of the MRS? – How should the new macro-regions be linked to the new OPs? Should the new OPs be modified when a new macro-region is created? – To what extent can the EGTC provide the benefits for implementation of MRS?
8. To propose measures for policy makers in the short and long term at European, national and regional level	– What sort of measures (at the European, national and regional levels) can be used to promote MRS in the future?

Source: Author

1.2.1. Literature review

An in-depth literature review was carried out to produce a descriptive overview on the evolution of the concepts and regulations of macro-regional cooperation, focusing on the questions outlined in the study's Terms of Reference. In view of defining the concept of macro-regional cooperation, the literature review covers academic literature about macro-regions and MRS.

The literature review also covers existing publically-available EU-level information on macro-regional cooperation, relevant academic literature, and evaluations at Member State and regional level where available.

1.2.2. Case Studies

A distinction between three types of MRS, based on their stage of development, was made in the research design:

(1) MRS where implementation has already started (i.e. Baltic; Danube). Each case study was subject to detailed analysis and involved an extensive number of interviews with key actors to address the questions itemised in Table 1;

(2) MRS in an advanced stage of development but not yet implemented (i.e. Adriatic and Ionian Region[3]; Alpine Region). Analysis of these two case studies was limited to a smaller number of questions itemised in Table 1 (and fewer interviews with key actors than for Type 1);

(3) MRS at an early stage of development or consideration (i.e. Carpathian Region; North Sea; Black Sea; Atlantic Arc; the Western and Eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea). Analysis of these case studies was limited to the compilation of a brief profile of each of these MRS by means of a short literature review and a few interviews with key actors.

1.2.3. Desk research

The case studies are partly based on desk research using the OPs, Annual Implementation Reports, evaluations, and specific ex-ante assessments (when relevant and available), as well as EU-level material.

1.2.4. Comparative analysis of the case studies

Comparative analysis of case studies is based on the results related to actors, processes and content of the individual case studies. Cross-analysis was carried out with the particular goal to evaluate the MRS's ability a) to foster effectiveness to implement ETC regulation for MRS and b) to generate greater efficiency in combination between ETC/CP and MRS. As such, the analysis is partly based on case studies and partly based on additional desk research related to the assessment of cohesion need and ability to implement ETC.

1.2.5. Drawing conclusions and recommendations

Policy recommendations are formulated in terms of their ability a) to foster effectiveness to implement ETC regulation for MRS and b) to generate greater efficiency in combination between ETC/CP and MRS. Potential policy measures are addressed to policymakers of European and national/local levels, as well as specifically to the EP. These recommendations follow from case study analysis and recommend measures for three different phases; (1) the stage of conceiving of and testing the feasibility of the macro-regional approach to a territorial problem; (2) the stage of preparing the making of a macro-regional strategy; and finally, (3) the stage of implementing MRS. In all cases it was possible to formulate general and class specific recommendations for measures.

[3] The European Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region (EUSAIR) has been formally adopted in October 2014. In the context of the study period the strategy has been considered as being in preparation. Two pragmatic reasons can be mobilized to justify this choice: (1) it is too early to evaluate the main implementation steps which still lie ahead (2) it is better compared to the Alpine strategy than to the pilot MRS Baltic and Danube.

2. EVOLUTION OF MACRO-REGIONS IN EU CONCEPTIONS AND REGULATIONS

KEY FINDINGS

- The **concept of macro-region** has considerably evolved since its first use in the context of the INTERREG programming period at the end of the 1990s. Macro-regional strategies **(MRS)** represent a **major emerging instrument of governance** in the EU that involves a plurality of state and non-state actors around a series of functional problems in a given territory.
- Proposals and debates around the future of MRS are deeply related to contrasting views around Cohesion Policy post-2013. The new Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) sets out the legal context for the **greater integration between OPs and MRS,** as well as **the possible use of EGTC in cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries.**
- On the background of ever scarcer economic resources and the general willingness of the Commission to step back from day to day implementation of MRS, the main task for the future is to address some **crucial challenges and obstacles in the governance of the implementation of MRS** as well as the **potential interaction with different financial instruments.**
- The EP advocates a **place-based, contractual approach to macro-regional cooperation,** particularly as a vehicle of involving neighbouring countries, creating territorial synergies and reducing regional disparities. The translation of this approach into concrete recommendations for a governance model of MRS is a key question for the future.

Discussions around the scope, added value and governance of macro-regional cooperation are situated at the very heart of the debates addressing the challenges to European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) in post 2013 Cohesion Policy. As suggested by the EPRC in their 2011 report on future options for Cohesion Policy for the European Parliament, there "is a strong case that territorial cooperation allocations should be conditional on a **supportive political/ policy framework being established by the participating Member States** to demonstrate that **the EU programme is part of a wider strategy of cross-border or transnational cooperation (...)** and that it has **the political commitment and resources of Member State authorities at national, regional and local levels"[4].** It is on the background of this argument, amongst others, that the two first MRS in the Baltic Sea and Danube Region have been created and implemented. In the programming period 2014-2020, the ETC regulation was specifically adapted to allow for better addressing some of the challenges to the future of Cohesion Policy. Together with the EGTC, MRS have been marked out as particularly important instruments to further territorial cooperation post-2013.

The translation of the major strategic guidelines of the Barca Report into the new Common Provisions Regulation, and the institutionalization of ETC as a Treaty objective, provided further impetus to the development of several proposals for MRS.

[4] European Parliament (2011a): *Comparative study on the visions and options for Cohesion Policy after 2013.*

Starting in the two pilot-regions (Baltic and Danube), various proposals for potential MRS were developed, leading to the prospect of a **macro-regionalization of Cohesion Policy** or in other words, the increasing definition of the problems, solutions and instruments of territorial cohesion in terms of **macro-regions.** Akin to this we have seen the development of various different proposals for new macro-regions in Europe.

In this first part we consider the evolution **of conceptions and regulations** related to macro-regional cooperation. Particular attention will be given to **the position of the EP** in this review.

2.1. Macro-regional cooperation: piloting a "territorialized" Cohesion Policy

Macro-regions and Macro-regionalization

The concept of macro-region historically precedes its relatively recent emergence as a notion and instrument of ETC. Macro-regional concepts can be traced back to the inception of the INTERREG programming period at the end of the 1990s, and have as an object of scientific inquiry, featured widely in academic papers and studies related to the study of regionalization. The term macro-region was first formally defined in the context of discussions around the Baltic Sea Strategy, which was to become the first region to adopt a macro-regional strategy in 2009. A macro-region has consequently been understood as "an area including a territory from a number of different Member States or regions associated with one or more common features and challenges"[5].

Macro-regions represent **"soft policy spaces"[6].** Their geographical boundaries are flexible and subject to negotiation, dependent on the common needs and issues that they are created to address. The scale of macro-regional cooperation is defined by the **overlapping of territorial and functional characteristics** across different policy areas. While macro-regions involve states, membership is not conditional on the geographic coverage of their whole sovereign territory and there is no principle that excludes a priori one region being a member of several macro-regions[7]. **Macro-regionalization** may therefore be understood as "processes (...) which aim at the building of functional and transnational regions of those (administrative) regions and municipalities at the sub-national level of EU member and partner countries that share a sufficient number of issues in common"[8].

Macro-regions are not created *ex-nihilo;* they super-impose themselves as a "soft" strategic layer upon a contrasting set of pre-existing histories of transnational cooperation on the European territory.

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5 Schmitt et al (2009): *EU macro-regions and macro-regional strategies – A scoping study,* NORDREGIO electronic working paper 2009:4.

6 Stead, D. (2014a): *European Integration and Spatial Rescaling in the Baltic region: Soft spaces, soft planning and soft security.* European Planning Studies 22(4) 680-693.Stead, D. (2014b): *Rescaling environmental governance – the influence of European transnational cooperation initiatives.* Environmental Policy and Governance 24(5) 324-337.

7 European Commission (2012a): *Communication concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,* COM(2012) 128, Brussels.

8 Kern, C.; Gänzle, S. (2013): "*Macro-regionalisation" as a New Form of European Governance: The Case of the European Union's Strategies for the Baltic Sea and the Danube Regions. 2013:* 3. ISL WORKING PAPER. Department of Political Science and Management, University of Agder.

Referring essentially to soft forms of transnational cooperation, macro-regions may also, in some cases, be conceived as milestones in wider processes of regionalization, whereby existing transnational policy networks are increasingly **"solidified"** and formalized[9]. In its resolution on the Northern Dimension in November 2005, the EP called for the development of a strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The initial call for such strategy has been above all motivated by what has been perceived as the untapped potential in existing transnational networks. The EUSBSR has been implemented in 2009 as a pilot project for a new way of territorial cooperation. In others, we may argue, they constitute a stepping stone for the development and coordination of transnational linkages that did not exist in a very intensive manner beforehand. Shortly after the kick-off of EUSBSR, the European Council endorsed the development of another macro-region, the Danube strategy, following amongst other consultations, a call of the EP for the making of Danube strategy "to be developed as part of the ETC"[10].

Macro-regional strategies

Macro-regional strategies represent a **major emerging site of governance** in the EU that involves a plurality of state and non-state actors around a series of functional problems in a given territory. The **problem of multi-level governance (MLG),** that is of how state and non-state actors manage, if at all, to organise their common interests across several territorial layers and across a range of functional domains, lies at the very heart of macro-regional development. As a form of governance, the macro-region is in as much the centre of a **vertical coordination function,** between higher and lower order powers, the EU institutions, nation-states and regional and local layers, as it is in a **horizontal coordination function,** between these national authorities and different communities.

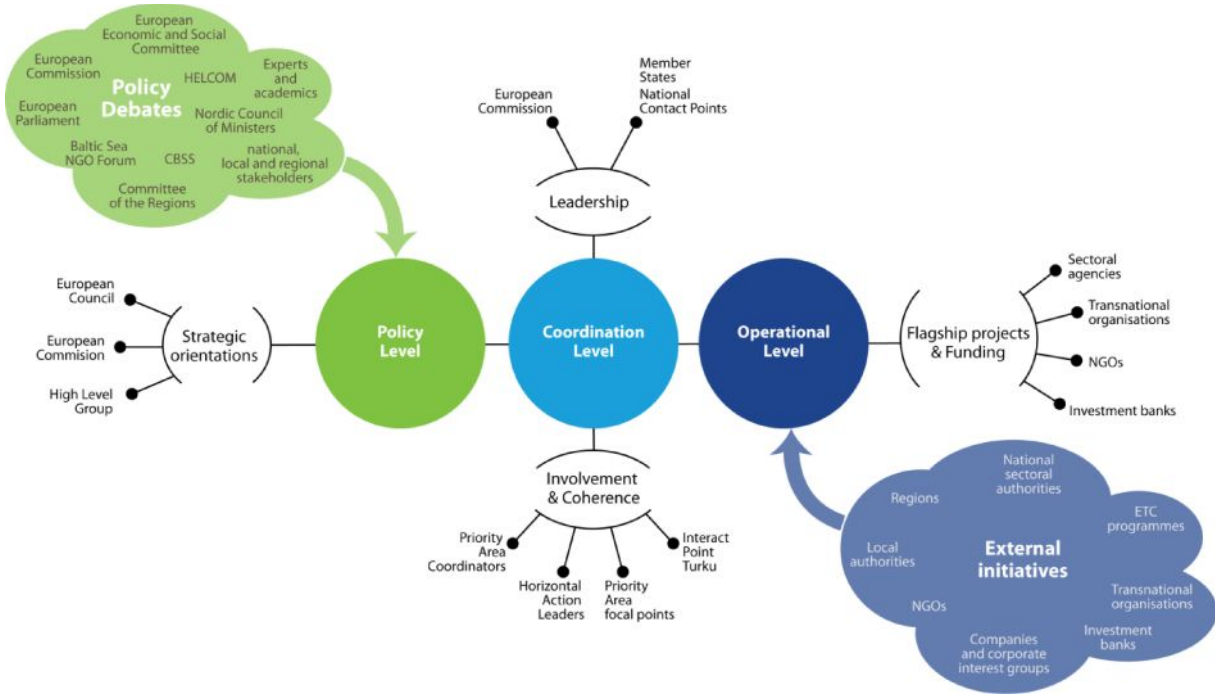
MRS are generally based on a **three-tiered governance system,** distinguishing between policy, coordination and operational measures. National Contact Points (NCP) appointed by each Member state play a major role coordinating and supporting MRS design and implementation, and encouraging stakeholder involvement. On the EU level, MRS are established by the **Community method** between EC issuing "communications" on possible strategies that have to be endorsed by Council and EP. In this process, the Committee of Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) as well as other actors play also a central role as commentators and observers of the different policy developments.

The emergence of MRS may be viewed as a departure from traditionally Member State driven policy formulation in European territorial management of ESDP since 1990. While Territorial Agenda and ESDP have for most of its existence been dependent on the initiative of Member States, the macro-regional approach is mainly driven by the Commission, backed by the EU parliament and the Committee of Regions. The Commission has taken a **leading role in the steering and communication** of the two existing MRS in the Baltic Sea and Danube Region.

[9] Schmitt, P. (2014): *When soft spaces harden: The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,* pre-proof version, accepted for publication in Environment & planning A.

[10] Katasarovy, I. (2012): *EU macro-regional strategies: State of play,* Library of the European Parliament, 28.02.2012.

Figure 1: Governance of EUSBSR



Source: Spatial Foresight 2014, partly adapted from EUSBSR website: http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/governance

At the same time, macro-regional cooperation is crucially dependent on the resources of nation states. A macro-region is best conceived as a **complex and heterogeneous network** rather than as a single commanding authority. The function of state sovereignty in a macro-regional strategy is to pool and bundle resources together with other states and actors so as to realize the collective capacities of the network as a whole. The imperative to do more with what is already there has from the very outset been a guiding principle of the macro-regional approach to territorial cooperation. From the beginning **three no's** – no new legislation, no new institutions, now new funding – were clearly spelled out in the Commission's proposals for the implementation of a EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea in 2009[11]:

- *No new legislation*: MRS are founded on Action Plans as a main strategic document. Basically, the MRS have taken the form of "communications" issued by the EC and endorsed by the European Council. The Member States decided to implement the strategies, but no binding regulations have been issued;
- *Now new funding*: Since they do not have a dedicated budget of their own, MRS need to find synergies between various different funding streams at different levels, with the aim of using these existing funds in a more efficient way;
- *No new institutions*: In the absence of new institutions, multi-level governance, that is fostering the better interaction of existing institutions and actors, has become a guiding principle of the macro-regional approach.

The reasons for implementing the three no's rule as framework conditions of macro-regional cooperation are directly related to the Commission's proposals around the future of EU Cohesion Policy.

[11] European Commission (2009): *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,* COM(2009) 248 final.

Implicit in the demands for a stronger performance focus on core priorities, more rigorous programming and more binding contractual relationships is a rejection of misrepresentations of Cohesion Policy being a mere "pot of money" to achieve EU priorities without a "clear overall narrative"[12]. Further the rule is seen as a motivation factor for the more effective absorption of existing funds and resources, and the already existing networks and resources existing on a transnational level.

Macro-regional strategies as pilots of a "territorialized" Cohesion Policy

Macro-regions are nodes in a network formed by different actors that often **differ in their relative powers and capacities to bundle resources available.** Macro-regionalization implies thus **a process of integrative balancing** between these diverging interests and capacities. As an instrument of Cohesion Policy, MRS demonstrate an approach that goes **beyond a GDP based development paradigm.** MRS are best conceived **as laboratories of a new place based approach to Cohesion Policy,** deepening and widening indicators and approaches to territorial cohesion. The EP, while committed to a place based approach towards Cohesion Policy, has based its interpretation of MLG on a **contractual understanding of trans-national cooperation,** with a strong dimension related to performance targets, conditionality and monitoring and **possibly EGTC as an operational instrument[13].** This is in contrast with certain strands of the Commission that favour a sectoral and classically redistributive approach to trans-national cooperation. It also differs from the views followed by the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and most nation states that generally perceive macro-regional cooperation as a purely bottom-up process with no or less binding agreements on the European level. These sorts of value conflicts are characteristic of the integrative balancing process that macro-regional cooperation is the name of[14].

The balancing of regional disparities is as much a goal of MRS as the creation of synergies for growth and employment. But as a concept macro-regions are imageries of both **the internal and external re-scaling** of the territorial borders of the EU. MRS have become an instrument governing **the relations between the EU Member States and its external neighbours.** As we will see later, analysis of the initial EU MRS as well as possible future ones shows that except for the Atlantic Arc Region, all of the strategies have or are planning to involve non-EU Member States. In this context, MRS have also important interstices with forms of Neighbourhood Policy such as the Eastern Partnership, the Northern Dimension and the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) Assistance for the Western Balkans. In other words, MRS are both an instrument of **Regional Policy,** fostering the comparative development and cohesion and the **balancing and synergies between** the European territories as well, as well as a tool of **Foreign Policy,** by defending and nurturing the relationships that the EU develops externally.

In the last section we defined the concept of macro-region and macro-regionalization on the basis of the two existing MRS. In the next section, we will position these concepts in the evolution of proposals for the regulatory framework of Cohesion Policy and macro-regional cooperation post- 2013.

[12] European Commission (2011a): *Impact Assessment accompanying the Draft Regulation,* Commission Staff Working Paper, SEC(2011)1141, Brussels.
[13] European Parliament 2011.
[14] Committee of the Regions (2012): *Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on "Developing a maritime strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area",* (2012/C 391/01), Brussels.

2.2. From pilot to policy: macro-regional strategies post-2013

The added value of MRS

The European Parliament has emphasized from the very start of the policy process that "the European added value of macro-regions lies in **greater cooperation between states and regions"[15].** In a resolution from June 2012, the European Parliament openly discussed the evolution of MRS, and its present and future prospects. The Parliament has expressed the view that macro-regional cooperation should receive more attention in the framework of ETC "particularly when these territories have been divided by borders and **can further the integration of new Member States and their regions"[16].** This suggests that the involvement of non-member countries through macro-regional cooperation needs to some extent be judged on the basis of the propensity of their becoming part of the EU, and *a contrario* provides less added value where such projects are minor or simply absent. This decisive support for the external dimension of MRS is not shared in the same manner by all policy actors. Recently the Council has for instance more cautiously stated that macro-regional strategies "should maintain their focus on the development of EU countries and may contribute to European integration where the participation of non-EU countries constitutes an added value towards achieving the goals of the macro-regional strategies"[17].

According to the EP "territorial cooperation and MRS could also be useful instruments **for identifying and combating regional disparities,** e.g. in access to education and employment, and for **promoting convergence** between European regions"[18]. This suggests that macro-regional cooperation should be judged on the basis of its capacity to address issues related to regional disparities, at least in contexts where such reduction is desirable. This is echoed in proposals by several other actors such as the CoR and the EESC , who has been arguing that MRS "facilitate convergence between the resources of the regions and those of the various Member States, based on the implementation of coordinated "governance", and the creation of "mutual benefit" for all parties"[19].

The EP has further recommended that macro-regional initiatives should **promote structural projects** taking into account the multi-annual financial framework 2014-2020. Furthermore, the EP suggests better coordination between OPs and priorities in macro-regions. In order to address these difficulties, a "roadmap for MRS" should be defined, that works as long term strategy for the development of macro-regions. Their development should be structured around a pre-development phase steered by the Commission, defining the future governance of the projected area[20].

In June 2013, the EC presented a report that clarifies the concept of MRS, evaluates the added value of existing strategies and provides recommendations for future work.

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15 European Parliament (2010): *Report on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the role of macro-regions in the future cohesion policy*.

16 European Parliament (2012a): *Resolution from the Committee on Regional Development on the evolution of EU macro-regional strategies: present practice and future prospects, especially in the Mediterranean*, 2011/2179 INI, Brussels

17 CoE2014http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/attachments/article/590686/Council%20Conclusions%20on%20governance%20-%202014.pdf

18 European Parliament (2012b): *Resolution from the European Parliament on optimizing the role of territorial development in cohesion policy*, Brussels.

19 EESC (2013): *Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on "Developing a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean — the benefits for island Member States"*, Brussels.

20 European Parliament(2011b): *Resolution on the European Strategy for the Atlantic Region.*

It considers the achievements to date, both advantages and difficulties, against the overall EU policy framework, including the Europe 2020 Strategy, and the territorial perspective present in the Treaties. The EC[21] identified the following fields in which MRS in general create added value:

- Results in terms of projects, actions, decisions, networks;
- Improved policy development;
- Improved value for money;
- Greater integration and coordination;
- Tackling regional inequality and promoting territorial cohesion;
- Promoting multi-level governance;
- Improved cooperation with neighbouring countries.

EUSBSR and EUSDR are generally mentioned as good examples for the different aspects of added value that macro-regional cooperation can deliver.

Macro-regional strategies and European Territorial Cooperation

Particularly important in this respect has been the added value of MRS suggested for the objective of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC). The principal aim of ETC is to promote common solutions across EU territorial borders through cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. If ETC is generally perceived as providing great added value to Cohesion Policy, concerns have been voiced in the last programming periods over the effectiveness of the funds put at its disposal. Part of these criticism relates to a perceived much **too loose focus of the priorities of transnational programmes,** the **complexity of governance procedures,** the **excessive number of "cooperation" spaces** and the **little use made of institutional mechanisms such as EGTC** to overcome administrative and regulatory differences. The evolution of concepts and regulations related to macro-regional cooperation has to be seen in the light of these discussions.

In the programming period 2014-2020, the ETC regulation was specifically adapted to allow for some of the challenges mentioned above to be better addressed. The institutionalization of MRS in the Cohesion Policy package for the next period has been a particularly important result thereof. According to this new regulatory framework **"macro-regional strategy"** means an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council, **which may be supported by the ESI Funds among others**, to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area relating **to Member States and third countries** located in the same geographical area which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing **to achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion[22].** This definition is particularly important because it reemphasizes the potential financial foundation of MRS, their internal as well as external scope and their importance to the achievement of place-based Cohesion Policy. Moreover, the definition has served to distinguish MRS from sea-basin strategies, which is a much looser strategic concept centred on the sharing of a sea-basin as a common geographic space.

[21] European Commission (2014a): *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies,* Brussels, 20.5.2014, COM(2014) 284 final.

[22] European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/macro_region_strategy/index_en.cfm

In a motion on the optimization of the role of territorial development in Cohesion Policy from 2012, the EP has further discussed mechanisms to create synergies between the European funding programmes in order to improve the effectiveness of European funding at local and regional level. The Parliament has expressed the view that a macro-regional strategy **"would make territorial cooperation projects and the EGTC more beneficial,** and that this would **enhance synergies with major EU strategies** (..)"[23]. This suggests that MRS should have an effect on the efficiency and the effectiveness of territorial cooperation, and that added European value needs to be judged on this basis. In the past, proposals existed for a "three yeses" rule, involving more complementary funding, more institutional coordination and more new projects. The EESC does for instance take the view that the "three No's" should be abandoned, taking into account the experiences of the Baltic Sea and the Danube Region. With the introduction of pilot projects and preparatory actions as temporary financial support for macro-regional cooperation in the EU budget, the EP has sought to take somewhat of an **intermediary role between the EC's "three no's" position and the call for a "three yeses" rule** by others.

Together with the EGTC, MRS have been marked out as particularly important instruments to territorial cooperation post-2013 in the new CPR. With regard to transnational cooperation, the EP introduced a provision requiring the Commission to take account of existing and future macro-regional and sea-basin strategies when **deciding on the list of transnational areas to receive financial support.** Where Member States and regions participate in macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, the cooperation programmes concerned should set out how interventions could contribute to such strategies. The REGI Committee's position stipulated that EGTCs should be regarded as a "priority instrument" for the implementation of territorial cooperation not only within the EU, but also with third countries. As such EGTC should assist the attainment of Europe 2020 objectives as well as support the implementation of MRS. In a nutshell, the new CPR sets out the legal context for the greater integration between OPs and MRS, as well as the possible use of EGTC in cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries.

Efforts have been made to further integrate transnational programs and macro-regional strategies. In mid-2011, the EU Transnational Cooperation Programme Alpine Space (Partner States: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Switzerland) started a strategy development process, with the aim to define medium and long-term strategic orientation and priorities for the Alpine area for which a macro-regional strategy is currently in planning. In 2013 the EC introduced the concept of a transnational Danube programme for the 2014 – 2020 period. Geographically, the Danube Programme area overlaps with the territory addressed by the EUSDR and comprising also the Danube river basin. South East Europe (SEE) can be considered as a direct predecessor of the Danube Programme. These developments can be considered a direct result of the new regulatory context, and are motivated by the objective to increase the efficiency of financial allocation to MRS on the backdrop of important impasses in funding allocation experienced by above all the EUSDR in the past.

The governance of macro-regional strategies

The main task for the future of MRS is to address some crucial challenges and obstacles in the governance of their implementation. This is especially crucial in the context of new proposals for MRS and their foreseeable multiplication as an instrument of Cohesion Policy.

[23] European Parliament 2012b.

Concerning the governance of MRS, a first assessment of the Baltic Sea and Danube Region strategy by the EP suggests for the Commission to **retain its strong role in the coordination and dialogue process** for future MRS. This view is shared by the CoR[24], the EESC[25] and other non-governmental institutions such as the CPMR[26]. In line with the CoR, the EP has further called for an **intensification of multi-level governance,** particularly emphasizing the regional and local layer, in order to avoid **"the trap of intergovernmental governance".** Moreover, the Parliament has clearly expressed the importance of the "pre-development phase" as a crucial period for the definition of future governance arrangements for each macro-regional strategy, arguing for the Commission to "provide the necessary human and financial resources for such investment". The funding for this phase should come from the territorial cooperation area of Cohesion Policy. However, no clear framework has been specified by the Parliament so far on how this could look like in practice.

In an opinion published in October 2013, the Council has called on the Commission to facilitate discussions around the improvement of the governance of MRS[27]. The Commission has reacted to these views by defining new ways of interaction between the key elements of this governance – Member State and Commission, NCP, and experts in the different thematic areas. Crucially, the report suggests that **over-dependence on the European Commission as a spokesperson of MRS is not desirable,** and a better balance between EC and other national and regional authorities is needed. Again, this step seems motivated by the increasing scarcity of resources available on the Commission's side, as well as the general perception that EUSDR and EUSBSR are pilot projects that necessitated more extensive top-down coordination than future strategies[28].

The Commission recommends that countries and regions should take general strategic leadership at the ministerial level, with a **rotating chair and the nomination of a special representative** for each strategy, approved by the countries concerned. Sectoral ministers should drive progress in different thematic areas. NCPs should coordinate at national level with the thematic experts and should have the lead in coordination and operational leadership. In addition trans-national programmes and INTERACT should provide targeted facilitation. Moreover, the EC suggests using especially the institutional and capacity building support of newly aligned transnational programmes. A stronger involvement of civil society, including national and regional parliaments is also recommended.

Initial reactions to this proposal have been mixed. The **Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)** has expressed its satisfaction with the report, especially as to what regards the proposal to draw on existing regional organisations, as is the case of the CPMR's Geographical Commissions which bring together the Regions bordering Europe's main sea basins. Similarly, the CPMR supports the need to jointly address MRS and those relating to the sea basins.

[24] Committee of the Regions (2013): *Opinion concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies,* CoR 28,29 November 2013, Brussels.
[25] Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on "Developing a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean — the benefits for island Member States" (February 2013).
[26] Opinion from the CPMR political bureau macro-regional and sea basin strategies-preparing the future of European integration.
[27] Council of Europe 2013.
[28] European Commission 2014a.

In this regard, the CPMR asks the Commission to ensure better coordination of the actions led by its different Directorates General in order to align these strategies better with existing EU sectoral funding. However, the CPMR – the only macro-regional based organisation – also regrets the Commission's static vision of governance based on Member States, NCPs and experts, and calls for the establishment of a **more flexible and adaptable system of governance,** involving politicians, actors working on the ground, and notably regional authorities, who are much closer to citizens' concerns. The Commission should nevertheless **maintain a leading role in supporting the launch of these strategies** in order to ensure that they provide added value to the EU[29]. This view is shared by the Council which in its reaction to the EC communication asked the Commission to continue playing a leading role in strategic coordination of all key delivery stages of the macro-regional strategies, where its involvement brings a clear added-value[30]. Further, the Council also sees an enhanced role for the European and national parliaments, in view of strengthening MRS as veritable instances of multi-level governance.

2.3. The European Parliament in the evolution of macro-regional conceptions and regulations

In the last two sections we examined the evolution of concepts and regulations for macro-regional cooperation in the EU policy context. The following set of points should illustrate the position of the EP on these matters:

- **Cohesion Policy and MRS:** The Parliament is committed to a place based (as opposed to sectoral) approach towards Cohesion Policy. This is based on a contractual understanding of trans-national cooperation and multi-level governance, with a strong dimension related to performance targets, conditionality and monitoring;
- **Added value of MRS:** Proposals by the Parliament suggest that MRS should have an effect on the efficiency and the effectiveness of territorial cooperation, and that added European value needs to be judged on this basis. Macro-regional cooperation should also be judged on the basis of its capacity to address issues related to regional disparities, at least in contexts where such reduction is desirable;
- **Governance of MRS:** The opinions of the Parliament suggest for the Commission to **retain its strong role in the coordination and dialogue process** for future MRS. The EP has further called for an **intensification of multi-level governance**;
- **Coordination with OPs:** The EP has suggested better coordination between OPs and priorities in the macro-regions. The EP has recommended that macro-regional strategies should **promote structural projects** taking into account the multi-annual financial framework 2014-2020.

Having examined the evolution of concepts related to macro-regional cooperation, their relationship to ETC as well as the particular position of the EP on the matter, the next section will present the reader with a practical overview of EU macro-regions considered, implemented and planned.

[29] Opinion from the CPMR political bureau macro-regional and sea basin strategies-preparing the future of European integration.

[30] CoE 2014 http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/attachments/article/590686/Council%20Conclusions%20on%20governance%20-%202014.pdf

3. THE MACRO-REGIONS AT A GLANCE

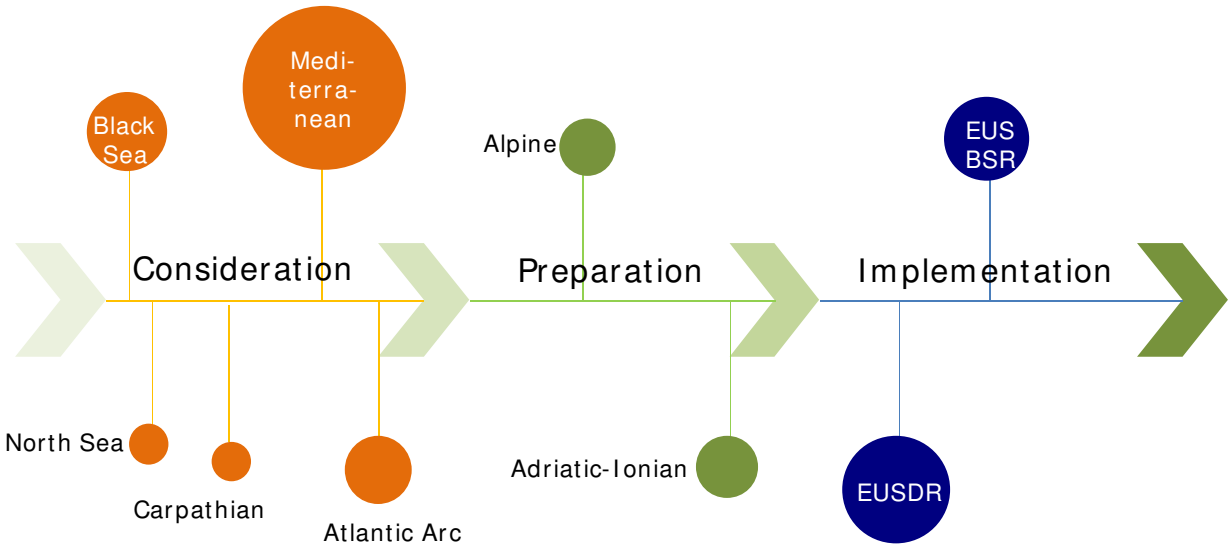
KEY FINDINGS

The **Europe of macro-regions** is a set of existing, prepared and conceived MRS.

- Two existing MRS which are **in the implementation phase,** the European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR – started in 2009) and the European Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR – started in 2011)
- Two strategies **in preparation;** the European strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR – accepted in October 2014) and the European Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP – to be accepted by June 2015).
- Five strategies **under consideration;** a strategy for the Atlantic Region or Atlantic Arc; for the Mediterranean; for the North Sea area and for the Black Sea.

The **Europe of macro-regions** is a set of existing, prepared and conceived MRS.

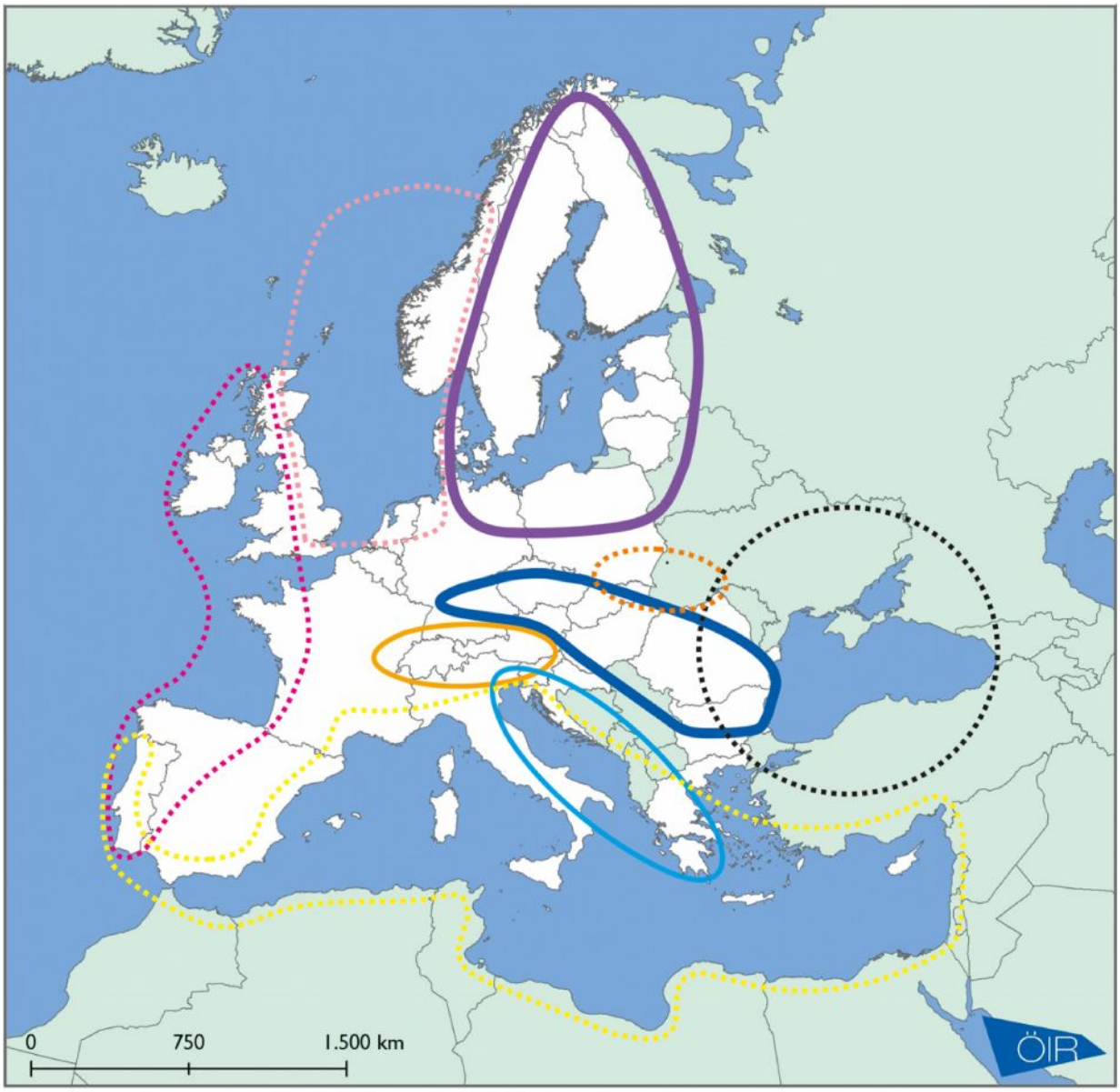
Figure 2: Macro-regions under consideration, in preparation and in implementation



Source: ÖIR 2014

The contrasting territorial contexts of the 9 MRS are illustrated in the map below for the reader to locate them. We have chosen to represent this on a map showing states according to EU membership status. It can immediately be seen that they are positioned in quite contrasting contexts related to the achievement of Cohesion Policy.

Figure 3: Macro-regional strategy areas of the European Union



Source: ÖIR 2014

In what follows, we will provide the reader with a basic introduction to these distinct strategies and proposals by means of a set of short fact sheets. These will assemble where it is possible, information on time horizon and geographical coverage, actors and principal issues covered. These tables should serve as a short introduction to the more detailed analysis of the case studies in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

3.1. European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

Process starting date; (anticipated) year of adoption	The official process of developing a macro-regional strategy in the Baltic Sea Region started in 2007, when the European Council called upon the Commission to "present an EUSBSR", as a result of a Swedish government initiative. Two years later, the first Communication of the Strategy, accompanied by the first Action Plan was published and adopted.
Time Horizon	The ESBSR incorporates the environmental Baltic Sea Action Plan, whose main time horizon is 2030. As part of the Strategy, a Maritime Spatial Planning document entitled "Vision 2030" and a Baltic Transport Outlook 2030 have been produced.
Definition for geographical coverage	The EUSBSR covers countries surrounding the Baltic Sea Region, having as a common denominator the Baltic sea basin. Challenges and opportunities related to the sea area were the starting point to augment cooperation among countries in the Region.
No. of countries	Eight EU countries take part in the EUSBSR
EU Member States	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden
Non-EU States, Third countries	The Strategy implies an extended cooperation with three neighbouring countries: Norway, Russia and Belarus
Leading countries	Swedish authorities played a key role in the first phases of strategy elaboration, and remain an important player together with Finland and Denmark
Leading Directorate General (DG) within the Commission	DG Regio. However, other DGs also take part in the Strategy, especially DG Mare, DG Markt and DG RTD. Twenty DGs take part in the EUSBSR Inter-Service Working Group
Key issues	The enhancement of economic growth and environmental challenges of the Baltic Sea were the main initial justification for the Strategy. However, it soon became obvious that coordination could be of added value in a number of fields. A key issue in this respect is to align the strategies and actions of the numerous, well-established transnational cooperation structures in the Baltic Sea Region.
Set-up	The EUSBSR currently has the following structure: – 3 Objectives ("save the sea", "increase prosperity", "connect the Region"), each of which comprises 4 sub-objectives; – 17 Priority Areas (PAs), with a series of Flagship projects for each of them; – 5 Horizontal Actions.
Sub-regions	When it comes to addressing environmental challenges, the Baltic Sea Basin is an important sub-entity of the Baltic Sea Region. In terms of Metropolitan economic development and maritime clusters, the focus is on the "Central Baltic Region" or "Northern Growth Corridor" running from Stockholm to Saint-Petersburg. Finally, a number of corridors are considered as part of the ambition to better connect the Baltic Sea Region internally and externally, e.g. the Scandinavian-Adriatic corridor running through Eastern Germany and the Rail Baltica Growth Corridor from Helsinki to Rotterdam and Antwerp through the Baltic States
Action Plan	The first Action Plan of the EUSBSR was adopted in June 2009. After extensive discussions with Member States, stakeholders and relevant services of the EC, a revised Action Plan was published in early 2013. According to the first Action Plan, the EUSBSR had four Pillars: (1) To make the Baltic Sea an environmentally sustainable place; (2) To make the Baltic Sea a prosperous place; (3) To make the Baltic Sea an accessible and attractive place; (4) To make the Baltic Sea a safe and secure place.

	Each of the Pillars had PAs, coordinated by one or two Member States, while there was also a number of Horizontal Actions.
	The 2013 Action Plan put forward the three objectives of the Strategy: (1) Save the sea; (2) Increase prosperity; (3) Connect the Region. Each of the objectives has four sub-objectives. Moreover, there are in total 17 PAs and 5 Horizontal Actions, coordinated by different institutions of the Region.
Overview of policy issues addressed	The Strategy focuses on the environmental issues, connectivity, attractiveness and prosperity, while seeking to coordinate the numerous cooperation structures and funding sources of the Region.
Supporting transnational structures: **1. political** **2. economic and/ or** **3. project-based cooperation**	There is a long cooperation history in the Baltic Sea Region. Several of the cooperation structures play an important role in the implementation of the EUSBSR. (1) Council of the Baltic Sea States, Nordic Council of Ministers, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, VASAB, Baltic Sea States Sub-regional cooperation; (2) Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association; (3) Baltic Sea Region Programme (transnational cooperation), South Baltic Programme (cross-border cooperation), Central Baltic Programme (cross-border cooperation). Other institutions involved in the implementation of the EUSBSR are the Union of the Baltic Sea Cities, the Baltic Development Forum, the Euroregion Baltic, the Swedish Institute, the ScanBalt fmba, the Baltic Institute of Finland, the Baltic Sea Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) network.

Source: Author

3.2. European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

Process starting date; (anticipated) year of adoption	The EUSDR is a macro-regional strategy adopted by the EC in December 2010, by the General Affairs Council on 13th April 2011 and by European Council on 24th June 2011.
Time Horizon	Undetermined
Definition for geographical coverage	The Danube Region includes an area of approximately 800,000 km². The territory is linked by common challenges such as floods, improvement of the navigability of rivers, environmental and security issues.
No. of countries	14
EU Member States	Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania Slovakia and Slovenia
Non-EU States	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine
Leading countries	It was Austria and Romania who initially submitted a call to the EU Council which then formally asked the EU Commission to prepare an EUSDR by the end of 2010.
Leading DG/ S	DG REGIO – leading
Key issues	The Danube Strategy tackles the following key issues: mobility, energy sources and efficiency, water quality and quantity, biodiversity, socio-economic development, education and capacity, culture and identity, safety.

Set-up	The DR Strategy is structured as below: – 4 objectives: connecting the Danube Region, protecting the environment; building prosperity; strengthening the Region; – 11 PAs[31]; – 129 actions with 400 projects[32]; – 123 flagship projects.
Sub-regions	The Carpathian Region (Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine) under the PAs: "To improve mobility and multimodality" & "To manage environmental risks". Other distinctions in the Region are made between Upper Danube, Central Danube and Lower Danube Area.
Action Plan	The Action Plan was originally published in 2010 by the EC after an intensive exchange with and on the basis of contributions and proposals delivered by countries, regional bodies and others, incl. non-governmental stakeholders of the Region. It has not changed since.
Overview of policy issues addressed	The issues to be addressed are included in the policies as below: – Transport policy; – Environmental policy; – Education policy; – Security policy.
Supporting transnational structures: **1. political** **2. economic and/ or** **3. project-based cooperations**	Several EU programmes contribute to this strategy, in particular: (IPA) National, Cross-border Cooperation and Multi-beneficiary country programmes and several (European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument – ENPI) programmes. Following institutions are cooperating at a macro-regional level: (1) Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM, 1953); (2) Danube Commission (1964); (3) Danube Rectors Conference (DCR, 1983); (4) Working Community of the Danube Countries (1989); (5) Central European Initiative (CEI, 1989); (6) Council of Danube Cities and Regions (CDCR, 1998); (7) International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR, 1998); (8) International Sava River Basin Commission (ISBRC, 2001); (9) Regional Cooperation Council (2008); (10) Danube Tourist Commission (DTC).

Source: Author

3.3. European Union Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR)

Process starting date; (anticipated) year of adoption	On 5th May 2010 the eight States participating in the Adriatic Ionian Initiative (AII) signed the "Ancona Declaration on the support to the EUSAIR", promoted by the Italian Government. The Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, adopted by the Commission on 30th November 2012, prepared the ground for the Strategy and was then incorporated, with special regard to the first pillar. In 2014, the Communication of the Strategy[33], accompanied by the first Action

[31] To improve mobility and multimodality (inland waters, rail, road and air); to encourage more sustainable energy; to promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts; to restore and maintain the quality of waters; to manage environmental risks; to preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils; to develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT); to support the competitiveness of enterprises; to invest in people and skills; to step up institutional capacity and cooperation; to work together to promote security and tackle organised and serious crime.

[32] Of which 150 are already in implementation (EC 2013b, p. 4).

	Plan, was published. The Strategy was endorsed by the General Affairs Council on 29th September 2014 and subsequently by the European Council on 24th October 2014.
Time Horizon	not specified
Definition for geographical coverage	The Adriatic Ionian Region is a functional area primarily defined by the Adriatic and Ionian Seas basin. Covering also an important terrestrial surface area, it treats the marine, coastal and terrestrial areas as interconnected systems. Ports play a dominant role throughout the territory due to the growing movements of goods, services and peoples owing to Croatia's accession to the EU and with the prospect of EU accession for other countries in the Region. Attention to land-sea linkages also highlights impacts of unsustainable land-based activities on coastal areas and marine ecosystems.
No. of countries	Eight countries take part in the EUSAIR
EU Member States	Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia
Non-EU States, Third countries	The Strategy implies an extended cooperation with four non-EU countries: Albania, Montenegro, Serbia (EU candidate status) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (potential candidate for EU membership).
Leading countries	Italian and Greek authorities played a key role in the first phases of strategy elaboration, and remain important players.
Leading DG within the Commission	DG Regio in close cooperation with DG Mare
Key issues	The general objective of the Strategy is to promote sustainable economic and social prosperity in the Region. This will be achieved through growth and jobs creation, and by improving its attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity, while preserving the environment and ensuring healthy and balanced marine and coastal ecosystems. The reinforcing of the implementation of existing EU policies in the Region could bring an EU added value, while offering the opportunity for all participating countries to align their policies with the EU-2020 overall vision. It will thereby also contribute to bringing Western Balkan countries closer to the EU by offering them opportunities for working closely with Member States, to address common challenges and opportunities specific to the Region[34].
Set-up	The EUSAIR currently has the following structure[35]: – 4 Pillars ("blue growth", "connecting the Region", "environmental quality", "sustainable tourism"); two of them have 3 topics, and other two have 2 topics; – 2 Cross-Cutting aspects (capacity-building; research and innovation); – 2 Horizontal Principles for all 4 pillars (climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk management).
Sub-regions	not specified
Action Plan	The first Action Plan of the EUSAIR was adopted in June 2014 after an extensive, bottom-up consultation process that involved a wide range of stakeholders from the Adriatic-Ionian Region representing not only national, regional and local authorities, but also the private sector, academia and civil society. According to the Action Plan, the EUSAIR has four Pillars: (1) Blue growth; (2) Connecting the Region; (3) Environmental quality; (4) Sustainable tourism.

[33] European Commission (2014b): *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region,* Brussels, 17.6.2014, COM(2014) 357 final.

[34] European Commission 2014b.

[35] European Commission 2014b.

	The Action Plan for each pillar: – Indicates the coordinating countries; – Defines specific objectives; – Identifies topics; – Identifies the links with other pillars; – Identifies Cross-Cutting Issues. At Topic level, the Action Plan: – Provides a list of indicative actions; – Identifies, for each action, the indicative actors; – Indicates, for each action, the examples of possible projects; – Provides examples of targets by 2020.
Overview of policy issues addressed	The Strategy focuses on the driving innovative maritime and marine growth, environmental issues, connectivity, sustainable tourism.
Supporting transnational structures: **1. political** **2. economic and/ or** **3. project-based cooperation**	There is a long cooperation history in the Adriatic Ionian Region. Several of the cooperation structures play an important role in the implementation of the EUSAIR. (1) Adriatic Ionian Initiative, Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities; (2) Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce, UniAdrion (Network of Universities from the Adriatic-Ionian Region); (3) IPA Adriatic CBC Programme 2007-2013, SEE Programme 2007-2013, Adriatic Ionian Programme 2014-2020 (transnational cooperation), Italy-Greece, Italy-Croatia and Italy-Slovenia (cross-border cooperation), the IPA CBC Programme Greece-Albania, the IPA CBC Programme Italy-Albania-Montenegro.

Source: Author

3.4. European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)

Process starting date; (anticipated) year of adoption	The process of developing a macro-regional strategy in the Alpine Region started with the "Common Declaration adopted during the Summit of Regions – Strategy for the Alps" on 12th March 2010 at Mittenwald, Bavaria. Subsequently, with the Resolution of 23rd May 2013[36] the EP called "for a macro-regional strategy for the Alps to be the subject of a comprehensive evaluation by the Commission, based on objective criteria and measurable indicators". On 19th-20th December 2013, the European Council invited the Commission, in co-operation with Member States, to elaborate an EUSALP[37]. From 16th July to 15th October 2014, DG Regio was conducting a public consultation to gather contributions from citizens, organisations and public authorities. On 10th July 2014, the CoR presented the Working Document "An Alpine macro-regional strategy for the EU" for the meeting of the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy[38].
Time Horizon	not specified
Definition for geographical coverage	The Alpine Region has a population of around 70 million people. The EU countries involved in the Region are five, while the non-EU countries are two, all situated at the heart of a mountain range at the centre of Europe. Diversity is what characterizes the Alpine Region. Its territories are diverse not only on a demographic, social and economic level, but also on cultural and linguistic aspect. Equally, government systems and traditions are diverse among the regions. Given the common specificities as well as the diversities of the Alpine area, the call for cooperation has been issued.
No. of countries	Seven countries take part in the Alpine Region

[36] European Parliament resolution of 23rd May 2013 on a macro-regional strategy for the Alps (2013/2549(RSP)) P7_TA-PROV(2013)0229.

[37] European Council Brussels, 20th December 2013, EUCO 217/13, CO EUR 15, CONCL 8.

[38] Working Document, Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy, An Alpine macro-regional strategy for the European Union, COTER-V-050, Committee of the Regions, 23rd Commission meeting, 10th July 2014.

EU Member States	Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia
Non-EU States, Third countries	The Strategy implies an extended cooperation with an EEA EFTA State, Liechtenstein, and a EFTA State, Switzerland.
Leading countries	France, steering the joint process of formulation of the Strategy
Leading DG within the Commission	DG Regio
Key issues	The main challenge of the Strategy should be to tackle the economic, social and territorial imbalances existing in the Alpine Region, with particular regard to the imbalances between cities and rural areas in the Alps[39]. The main opportunities should be in stimulating an innovative and sustainable model of development, able to conciliate the promotion of growth and jobs, and the preservation and enjoyment of natural and cultural assets in the area.
Set-up	not specified
Sub-regions	not specified
Action Plan	not specified
Overview of policy issues addressed	Enhancing attractiveness and competitiveness of the Alpine Region as well as reducing social and territorial disparities for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the Region constitute a tailor-made contribution to the growth of the Region in line with EU 2020 Strategy objectives.
Supporting transnational structures: **1. political** **2. economic and/ or** **3. project-based cooperation**	There is cooperation in the Alpine Region: (1) Alpine Convention, EUREGIO (EGTC between Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino); (2) EFTA (European Free Trade Association), EEA (European Economic Area); (3) TNC programmes: Alpine Space, Central Europe; CBC programmes: Italy-Austria, Italy – France (Alps – ALCOTRA), Italy-Slovenia, Germany (Bavaria)-Austria, Alpenrhein – Bodensee – Hochrhein (covering territories belonging to Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein and Switzerland), Slovenia-Austria, France-Switzerland, Italy-Switzerland.

Source: Author

3.5. European Union Strategy for the Carpathian Region

Process starting date; (anticipated) year of adoption	The process followed these steps: – In 1993 the Carpathian Euroregion project started, as a political initiative supported by Ministries of International Affairs of the Republic of Poland, Hungary and Ukraine; – In May 2003 the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) was adopted and signed by the seven Parties (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine) in Kyiv, Ukraine, and entered into force in January 2006; – In 2005 there was the first presentation of the concept of Carpathian Horizon 2020 in Brussels (meeting with the Commissioner of Regional Development - D. Hubner); – In January 2013 the Karpacki Horizont 2020 Association drafted a Working Document regarding “The Carpathian Euroregion Development Strategy”.
Time Horizon	not specified

[39] European Commission 2014a.

Definition for geographical coverage	On the basis of the "Atlas of the Carpathian macro-region" document[40] this large mountain region represents one of the most important biodiversity hotspots in Europe. In geographic and demographic terms, the neighbouring country Ukraine plays a very significant role in the potential macro-region. Its participation as an active actor is one of the crucial conditions in the process of development of the Region.
No. of countries	The Working Document regarding "The Carpathian Euroregion Development Strategy" presented by the Association Carpathian Euroregion Poland[41] identifies four EU countries that could take part in the Carpathian Region.
EU Member States	Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia
Non-EU States, Third countries	The Strategy for the Carpathian macro-region could imply an extended cooperation with one neighbouring country: Ukraine.
Leading countries	Poland. It has to be stated that it is not clear if the Association Carpathian Euroregion Poland acts: (a) On behalf of the other regional associations of the area; (b) On behalf of the polish government.
Leading DG within the Commission	DG Regio
Key issues	On the basis of the Working Document regarding "The Carpathian Euroregion Development Strategy", there are four key challenges: – To create environment promoting innovation and enterprise development; – To enable the development of social and human capital in the Region; – To enhance uniform development of all areas in the Region and improved access to it; – To enhance institutional interrelations within the area and to increase movement of ideas and know-how. The main challenge for the Carpathian Region is therefore to manage those significant changes to achieve a sustainable economic prosperity without the loss of its natural and cultural characteristics.
Set-up	not specified
Sub-regions	not specified
Action Plan	Following the Working Document regarding "The Carpathian Euroregion Development Strategy" presented by the Association Carpathian Euroregion Poland, the implementation of the Action Plan is foreseen in 2016.
Overview of policy issues addressed	On the basis of the Working Document regarding "The Carpathian Euroregion Development Strategy" the Strategy will be focused on: – Economics, to overcome the wide disparities (and hence realize the high potential) in research and productive innovation; – Accessibility, with the improvement of networks, for ending the energy isolation of parts of the Region, and ensuring sustainability of transport modes and the sustainable development of the cities being sub-local development centres as well as rural areas; – Creation and reinforcement of internal institutional relations between particular areas in the Region and actors, and stakeholders supporting the development of the Region.
Supporting transnational structures:	There is cooperation in the Carpathian area. (1) Carpathian Convention; Eastern Partnership (ENP Joint Initiative);

[40] Palacky University and European Academy (EURAC), Ruffini, Flavio V.; Ptacek, Pavel (eds., 2009): *Atlas of the Carpathian Macroregion, Carpathian Project.*

[41] Working Document regarding The Carpathian Euroregion Development Strategy – "Carpathian Horizon 2020", Rzeszów, 13th January 2013, Version 1.0 (for discussion).

1. political **2. economic and/ or** **3. project-based cooperation**	(2) Carpathian Region Business Network; Karpacki Horizont 2020 Association; (3) The Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Programme, the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Programme, the Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova Programme (Land-Border Programmes), the Hungary-Romania-Programme, the Poland-Slovakia Programme, the Hungary-Slovak Republic Programme (Cross-border Cooperation Programmes).

Source: Author

3.6. European Union Strategy for the North Sea Region

Process starting date; (anticipated) year of adoption	In 2010, the Committee of the Regions (in Opinion CdR 99/2010) called on Member States to task the European Commission with drawing up a strategy for the North Sea-English Channel area with an emphasis on Maritime Policy, the environment, transport, industry and science[42]. In 2011, the North Sea Commission adopted the "North Sea Region 2020" strategy paper, developed in consultation with its members and stakeholders, and dialogue with the European Parliament. The Strategy is implemented through an Action Plan and a number of workplans[43]. In 2013, the European Parliament approved a budget of 250,000 Euros for a "preparatory action" (13 03 77 14) beginning in 2014 to "analyse the region's growth potential with a view to investigate the added value of having a future shared macro-regional strategy for the North Sea area". The "preparatory action" budget will be used finance a North Sea stakeholder conference scheduled for 2014[44]. A second stakeholder conference may be organised in 2015. It should be noted that the "preparatory action" does not aim to establish a macro-regional strategy but only seeks to examine the areas and sectors of common interest and to explore and build commitment among stakeholders in order to provide a basis for decision on the future development and the creation of growth in the North Sea Region.
Time Horizon	It seems unlikely that a formal macro-regional strategy will be developed for the North Sea Region in the next few years[45].
Definition for geographical coverage	If developed at all, a macro-regional strategy for the North Sea Region will most probably build closely on the "North Sea Region 2020" strategy, developed by the North Sea Commission which represents 34 member regions from 8 countries bordering the North Sea (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom).
No. of countries	The North Sea Commission represents regions in 8 countries (see above) but this does not necessarily mean that all will be involved in the development of a macro-regional strategy (see above).
EU Member States	North Sea Commission members from: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom
Non-EU States, Third countries	North Sea Commission members from: Norway
Leading countries	Many Member States are currently hesitant or neutral about committing to a macro-regional strategy for the North Sea Region. In general, national governments are less interested than regional authorities. There is some regional interest in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK (e.g. Scotland). There is some support in Sweden but it is not such an active driver for the macro-regional strategy for the North Sea Region as it was for the Baltic Sea Region. Norway is generally positive towards a macro-regional strategy for the North Sea Region but is of course not an EU member.

[42] http://cor.europa.eu/en/activities/opinions/pages/opinion-factsheet.aspx?OpinionNumber=CDR%2099/2010
[43] www.northseacommission.info/index.php/strategy-and-development/north-sea-region-2020
[44] www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/imco/dv/comreportbudget_/comreportbudget_en.pdf
[45] This is also the opinion expressed in the North Sea Region Programme 2014-2020 (p.112), www.northsearegion.eu/files/user/File/NSRP_2014_2020/FINAL_COOPERATION_PROGRAMME_FOR_INTERNAL_MS_CONSULTATION.pdf

Leading DG within the Commission	DG-MARE; some early involvement by DG-REGIO; interest shown by DG-ENER
Key issues	Maritime cooperation and energy networks are currently considered to be two of the key issues. Other key issues may reflect the strategic priorities contained in the "North Sea Region 2020" strategy paper: – Managing maritime space; – Increasing accessibility and clean transport; – Tackling climate change; – Attractive and sustainable communities; – Promoting innovation, excellence and sustainability.
Set-up	not yet decided
Sub-regions	not yet decided
Action Plan	No, but there is an Action Plan for the "North Sea Region 2020" strategy (see above).
Overview of policy issues addressed	The "North Sea Region 2020" strategy identifies the following policy issues alongside its five strategic priorities: – *Managing Maritime Space*: maritime spatial planning; exploitation of marine resources; North Sea stakeholder forum; – *Increasing Accessibility and Clean Transport*: promote development of multimodal corridors; optimise performance of multimodal logistics chains; clean transport; clean shipping; – *Tackling Climate Change*: climate change adaptation; low-carbon technologies and energy efficient/green technologies; renewable energy and North Sea energy grid; – *Attractive and Sustainable Communities*: competitiveness of sectors and enterprises (tourism and maritime); demography; development of skills and employability; – *Promoting Innovation, Excellence and Sustainability*: a horizontal priority (no specific policy issues identified).
Supporting transnational structures: **1. political** **2. economic and/ or** **3. project-based cooperation**	Track record of cooperation in the North Sea Region: North Sea Commission (founded in 1989) – facilitates partnerships between regions connected with the North Sea and promotes the North Sea Basin as an economic entity within Europe. Unlike most international organisations, the members of the North Sea Commission are primarily subnational administrative divisions rather than states. INTERREG North Sea Region transnational cooperation programmes (IIC, IIIB, IVB)[46]. NORVISION – A Spatial Perspective for the North Sea Region, an advisory document which was prepared to try to influence spatial planning in the North Sea Region. The document was prepared by consultants (PLANCO Consulting, Germany) together with representatives from national and sub-national spatial planning offices and INTERREG IIC project leaders across the North Sea Region. It presented a vision that sought to: (i) identify the benefits of working together on spatial planning; (ii) demonstrate how principles of spatial development could be applied; (iii) provide a spatial context for inputs to the development of the INTERREG III programme; (iv) inspire regional planners in developing sustainable spatial planning policies; and (v) promote cross-sector co-ordination in the North Sea Region.

Source: Author

[46] Boundaries of the INTERREG North Sea Region transnational cooperation programmes shifted between each of these programming periods.

3.7. European Union Strategy for the Black Sea Region

Process starting date; (anticipated) year of adoption	After the *"Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament – Black Sea Synergy – a New Regional Cooperation Initiative"* in 2007[47], the official process of developing a macro-regional strategy in the Black Sea Region started in 2011, when the EP adopted the resolution on an *"EU Strategy for the Black Sea"*[48]. In the last three years, the EU Black Sea strategy has not been drafted, yet.
Time Horizon	not specified
Definition for geographical coverage	The Black Sea Region is a distinct geographical area rich in natural resources and strategically located at the junction of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. Given the confluence of cultures in the Black Sea area, growing regional cooperation could have beneficial effects beyond the Region itself.
No. of countries	Three EU countries take part in the Black Sea Region
EU Member States	Greece, Bulgaria, Romania
Non-EU States, Third countries	The Strategy implies an extended cooperation with seven No-EU countries: Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey.
Leading countries	not specified
Leading DG within the Commission	not specified
Key issues	The EP Resolution underlines that, given the strategic importance of the Black Sea Region for the EU and the rather limited results of the Black Sea Sinergy, the new strategy for the Black Sea Region should be launched to enhance the coherence and visibility of EU action in the Region. This new strategy should be an integral part of the EU's broader foreign and security policy vision.
Set-up	not yet decided
Sub-regions	not specified
Action Plan	not specified
Overview of policy issues addressed	On the basis of the EP Resolution, the main objective pursued by the EU and the Member States in the EU Strategy for the Black Sea Region should be to establish an area of peace, democracy, prosperity and stability, founded on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and providing for EU energy security; the good governance, the rule of law, promotion of respect of human rights, migration management, energy, transport, the environment, and economic and social development should constitute priority actions.
Supporting transnational structures: **1. political** **2. economic and/ or** **3. project-based cooperation**	Although there was cooperation in the past, in the last three years the tensions between the countries (in particular between Russia and Ukraine) have seriously weakened the process of cooperation in the area. (1) Black Sea Synergy; (2) Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), Association of the Black Sea Zone Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB); (3) Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova Programme (Land-Border Programme), Black Sea Programme (Sea-Basin Programme), SEE programme (transnational programme), Greece-Bulgaria programme, Romania-Bulgaria programme, Bulgaria-Turkey IPA programme 2007-2013 (cross-border programmes).

Source: Author

[47] European Commission (2007): *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament concerning the Black Sea Synergy – a new regional cooperation initiative,* Brussels, 11.4.2007, COM(2007) 160 final.

[48] Strasbourg, European Parliament resolution of 20th January 2011 on an EU Strategy for the Black Sea – 2010/2087(INI).

3.8. European Union Strategy for the Atlantic Arc Region

Process starting date; (anticipated) year of adoption	The Faro declaration of 1989 translated in practical terms the intention of the Atlantic Regions to cooperate, in order to address common challenges and define an identity based on their maritime and peripheral characteristics. This led to the creation of the Atlantic Arc Commission in the CPMR. Ten years later, the cities decided to create a network, in order to enhance the local dimension of this form of cooperation. The Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities was therefore created (Rennes, 2000). On 21st November 2011, the EC decided to consult the EESC on the *"Communication from the Commission to the EP, the Council, the EESC and the CoR – Developing a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area"*[49]. In 2012, at the 481st plenary session, held on 23rd and 24th May (meeting of 24th May), the EESC adopted the opinion called *"EU Strategy for the Atlantic Region"* by 151 votes to 2, with 5 abstentions[50]. On 13th May 2013, with the *"Communication from the Commission to the EP, the Council, the EESC and the CoR – Action Plan for a Maritime Strategy in the Atlantic area – Delivering smart, sustainable and inclusive growth"*[51], the Commission invited the EP and the Council to endorse the Action Plan for the Maritime Strategy in the Atlantic area.
Time Horizon	not specified
Definition for geographical coverage	The European Atlantic Arc is an extensive geographical area stretching from North to South, which is linked by the Atlantic Ocean. The European Atlantic Region has a significant tradition of political cooperation in order to promote initiatives of common interest, covered by European transnational programmes. This cooperation involves not only regional authorities, but also civil society. The EESC opinion considers that the Atlantic area comprises a variety of regions with their own development challenges, whose unity and specific features are rooted in their maritime nature and global outreach and their lack of connections with the European economic and political centres.
No. of countries	Five EU countries take part in the Atlantic Arc Region
EU Member States	Ireland, United Kingdom, France, Spain, Portugal
Non-EU States, Third countries	The Strategy implies a cooperation with: Iceland, Norway, Greenland, Faroe Islands. The EESC opinion underlines that although the North Sea Regions have common interests in the Atlantic area, in future they could develop their own strategy.
Leading countries	not specified
Leading DG within the Commission	not specified

[49] European Commission (2011b): *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning "Developing a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area",* Brussels, 21.11.2011, COM(2011) 782 final.

[50] ECO/306 – CESE 1298/2012, Brussels, 24th May 2012. This opinion was written in response to the request of the European Commission to consult the EESC about the "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Developing a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area".

[51] European Commission (2013a): *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning Action Plan for a Maritime Strategy in the Atlantic area. Delivering smart, sustainable and inclusive growth,* Brussels, 13.5.2013, COM(2013) 279 final.

Key issues	The EESC opinion proposes a macro-regional strategy which, in conjunction with the maritime pillar, incorporates the territorial pillar, taking account of the experiences of the Baltic Sea and Danube Regions. On the basis of the EESC opinion, the maritime dimension could be a key feature of this area. Its shared economic, technological and cultural heritage includes indeed activities such as fishing, shipbuilding, the metallurgical industry, engineering, research and science, ports, trade and maritime transport.
Set-up	not yet decided
Sub-regions	not specified
Action Plan	not specified
Overview of policy issues addressed	Following the EESC opinion, the priority objectives of the Atlantic macro-region should be based on the thematic pillars of the Europe 2020 Strategy.
Supporting transnational structures: **1. political** **2. economic and/ or** **3. project-based cooperation**	There is a long cooperation history in the Atlantic Arc Region. (1) Atlantic Arc Commission, Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities; (2) Atlantic Transnational Network; (3) Atlantic Area programme, North West Europe programme, South West Europe programme, Madeira-Açores-Canarias programme (transnational cooperation); Ireland-Wales programme, Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland programme, United Kingdom-Ireland (PEACE III) programme, France-Spain-Andorra programme, France (Channel)-England programme, Two Seas programme, Spain-Portugal programme (cross-border cooperation).

Source: Author

3.9. European Union Strategy for the Western and Eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea Region

Process starting date; (anticipated) year of adoption	On 22nd May 2012 (17 years after the Barcelona Declaration adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of November 1995) Andreas Mavroyiannis, Deputy Minister to the President for European Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, requested the EESC, on behalf of the forthcoming Cyprus Presidency, to draw up an exploratory opinion on: "Developing a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean – the benefits for island Member States". At its 485th plenary session, held on 12th and 13th December 2012 (meeting of 12th December), the EESC adopted the opinion by 147 votes to 1 with 5 abstentions[52]. In the last two years the building process of the Mediterranean macro-region seems to mark a slowdown, probably due to the fact that the Mediterranean Region remains a breeding-ground of political instability and armed conflict, with undesirable loss of life, destruction of property, and consequences for business and trade, as well as for the environment.
Time Horizon	not specified
Definition for geographical coverage	The Mediterranean Region is bordered by over twenty countries and a large part of the Mediterranean Sea remains outside national jurisdiction. As a result, the starting point to strengthen cooperation in this area could be the improvement of the management of maritime activities, the protection of the marine environment and maritime heritage, the prevention and fight pollution, the ensuring of a safer and more secure maritime space.
No. of countries	Nine EU countries take part in the EU Strategy for the Mediterranean Sea Region.

[52] ECO/332 A macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean, Brussels, 12th December 2012 "OPINION of the European Economic and Social Committee on Developing a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean – the benefits for island Member States (exploratory opinion for the Cyprus Presidency)".

EU Member States	Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Croatia, Slovenia and Malta.
Non-EU States, Third countries	The Strategy implies an extended cooperation with twelve neighbouring countries and the Palestinian Authority: Montenegro, Albania, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.
Leading countries	On the basis of the EESC opinion, Cyprus and Malta could play a particularly important role in any new strategy framed by the EU.
Leading DG within the Commission	DG Regio in cooperation with the European External Action Service. DG Mare.
Key issues	The objective of this strategy should be to create policies helping countries in the Mediterranean Region to strengthen their economic and social relations, and to cooperate in resolving common problems, allowing the Region to become internationally competitive, prosperous, safe and environmentally sustainable. Such a macro-regional strategy should also coordinate all the policies, objectives and measures of EU bodies with those of the Member States, the regions, local economic and social councils, and all stakeholders in the Mediterranean, in particular small and isolated island Member States in the Region. The Strategy is also expected to resolve the problems caused by the current economic crisis, by accelerating rates of growth, creating job opportunities and reducing unemployment.
Set-up	The Mediterranean Sea Strategy is not decided yet, but in relation to the opinion of the EESC, there will be: – 7 Objectives; – 6 Pillars which are consistent with the Europe 2020 strategy.
Sub-regions	Following the EESC opinion, the macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean could be articulated into two subregional strategies: for the Eastern and Western Mediterranean basin.
Action Plan	not specified
Overview of policy issues addressed	The Strategy will focus on cooperation for resolving common problems, allowing the Region to become internationally competitive, prosperous, safe and environmentally sustainable.
Supporting transnational structures: **1. political** **2. economic and/ or** **3. project-based cooperation**	There is cooperation in the Mediterranean Region. (1) *No* major political *cooperation examples found;* (2) ASCAME (Association of the Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry), ANIMA Investment Network (multi-country cooperation platform for economic development in the Mediterranean); (3) MED Programme (transnational ETC), ENPI CBC Mediterranean Sea Programme (Sea-Basin Programme), Italy-Tunisia Programme (Sea-crossing Programme); Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (formerly known as the Barcelona process).

Source: Author

4. EXISTING MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE STRATEGIES FOR THE BALTIC SEA AND DANUBE REGION

KEY FINDINGS

- The EC has been the main driving force, in spite of the many well-established pre-existing organisations in the Baltic and Danube Region. The EUSBSR was the first strategy to be adopted and it has been a source of inspiration for the other MRS.
- The EUSBSR and the EUSDR function as an umbrella for cooperation initiatives, most of which existed before the strategies were established. It is difficult to assess whether the strategies have influenced the nature or extent of these initiatives.
- The lack of involvement of Member States (in both strategies), and the limited commitment at operational level, are identified as key challenges by some stakeholders. The need for stronger and more reliable Steering Committees for each Priority Area has been recognized as an instrument to encourage improved commitment of relevant bodies in each Member State.

4.1. Baltic Sea Region

The first macro-regional strategy was proposed and adopted in the Baltic Sea Region. The process of developing a macro-regional strategy started in 2007 when the European Council called upon the Commission to present an EUSBSR, as a result of the Swedish government initiative. This strategy covers countries having as a common denominator the Baltic Sea basin. Eight EU Member States are part of the Strategy (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden) and there is an extended cooperation also with neighbouring countries such as Norway, Russia and Belarus. The communication of the EC on the EUSBSR was accompanied by the Action Plan, which determined the objectives of the Strategy after a public consultation of the stakeholders and the drafting of a scoping document. The Action Plan initially had four pillars. After the revision, which took in consideration the stakeholders' indications, it has now three pillars/objectives: "save the sea", "connect the Region", "increase prosperity" each of which comprises 4 sub-objectives. The Action Plan is then further divided in PAs (17 for the EUSBSR). This structure is followed also for the later approved MRS but further on, every strategy has its own particular structural and organisational features. In the case of EUSBSR the particularity are the Horizontal Actions which are actions coordinated between the different PAs. The consensus reached among the participating States around the key objectives is then concretized through measures such as the "Flagship projects", which continued implementation may to a greater or lesser extent be influenced by the Strategy.

The EP played a role at the early stages of development of an integrated policy for the Baltic Sea Region. Two reports can be considered as the starting point of the Strategy: the first one entitled "Europe's EUSBSR", submitted in November 2005 by the Baltic Strategy Working Group (7 MEPs)[53] to the EC, the EP and to the Presidency of the Council highlighting four policy fields requiring policy measures at the level of the Baltic Sea Region: environment, economic development, culture and education and security. The second report, "Report on a Baltic Sea Strategy for the Northern Dimension" prepared by the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the EP in October 2006, described two policy axes: (1) Growth and economic development to be enhanced by creating a better connected Baltic Sea Region; (2) The major environmental concerns of the Baltic Sea to be addressed. On the basis of this report, the Parliament adopted a resolution "urging the Commission to come up with a proposal for an EU Baltic Sea Strategy in order to reinforce the internal pillar of the Northern Dimension" (EP, Committee on Foreign Affairs 2006). This process gained momentum when the European Council, by initiative of the Swedish government called upon the Commission "to present an EUSBSR" in 2007. The strategy-development process involved over 20 Directorates General (DGs) led by DG REGIO[54].

After this, the EC launched an extensive consultation process organising stakeholder conferences, round tables, a youth conference and an on-line consultation, involving Member States, regions and NGOs. This process brought several inputs from a wide range of stakeholders which were then used to draft the scoping document containing four proposed objectives for the strategy (and later on also the PAs under each objective). It also inspired (by agreement of the majority of the stakeholders) the principle of no new institutions.

The resulting strategy was endorsed by the European Council in October 2009. **This strategy and its accompanying Action Plan differ significantly from the EP's resolution of 2006.** The main divergences between the Parliament and the EC regarding the content of the Strategy were related to the emphasis given by the former to the Baltic cooperation and integration for EU external relations[55] whereas the latter focused on identifying concrete issues that require coordinated transnational measures[56].

The position of the Commission prevailed also regarding the budget for the strategy: While the EP called "for an own EU budget line for the Baltic Sea Strategy, possibly under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument", the EC considered that the strategy should be based on a coordination of existing instruments[57], as "the key problem in the region is the failure of largely fragmented existing governance structures to provide a sufficiently robust framework in which the priority issues of the BSR can be addressed in an integrated manner"[58].

[53] Christopher Beazley, Michael Gahler, Satu Hassi, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Ģirts Valdis Kristovskis, Henrik Lax and Alexander Stubb.

[54] http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/baltic/contact_en.cfm

[55] Especially the Northern Dimension, referred to as a possible instrument to establish a "constructive cooperation with [the European Union's] external partners in the region, and in particular Russia".

[56] European Commission (2009b): *Commission Staff Working Document: Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region – Action Plan,* SEC (2009)712.

[57] Bengtsson, R. (2009): *An EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: Good Intentions Meet Complex Challenges.* Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies. European Policy Analysis 9-2009.

[58] European Commission (2009c): *Commission Staff Working Document: Impact Assessment,* SEC (2009)702.

4.1.1. Content

The initial central justification of the Strategy was to address the environmental and resource-management related challenges of the Baltic Sea. This was the main background for the Swedish initiative, and the only objective explicitly mentioned in the conclusions of the European Council of December 2007. The objective was progressively broadened to include the previously mentioned "four pillars"[59]:

(1) To make the Baltic Sea an environmentally sustainable place;

(2) To make the Baltic Sea a prosperous place;

(3) To make the Baltic Sea an accessible and attractive place;

(4) To make the Baltic Sea a safe and secure place.

After the revision of the Action Plan in 2013, the "four pillars" became **"three objectives":**

(1) Save the sea;

(2) Increase prosperity;

(3) Connect the Region.

These pillars are further materialised into **17 PAs** which are seen as sectoral structures: Member States show their interest on relevant PAs, and after following mainly a "first serve first take" procedure PAs are divided between the Member States. **Horizontal Actions** instead are seen as cross-sectoral actions. For each Horizontal Action, there are at least two Horizontal Action Leaders (HAL) appointed, who are responsible for the coordination and implementation of the Horizontal Actions.

4.1.2. Actors involved

The EUSBSR has been designed based on an assessment of a **rich and multifaceted pre-existing multinational governance landscape.** This landscape includes well-established cooperation bodies for national authorities in and around the Baltic Sea such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic Council, the Baltic Council of Ministers and the Baltic Assembly. In addition to these assemblies and fora, a number of organisations provide concrete inputs and contributions to the Strategy. The decision-making and implementation frameworks set up for the EUSBSR must be understood in light of this pre-existing Baltic governance landscape. **The objective is to encourage a convergence between existing organisations with regards to the strategic objectives they pursue, and a better coordination of their initiatives and measures.**

The division of Priority Area Coordination responsibilities shows the level of commitment of the participating States reflecting for example that the over-representation of small countries (except for Latvia and Estonia) is due to their general higher commitment to international cooperation within fields of specific interest. In all countries, Priority Action Coordinators are typically sectoral ministries or public agencies, reflecting the interest of policy sectors in the Strategy. On the other hand, after the adoption of the revised Action Plan in 2013, the transnational bodies are also involved in the coordination of the PAs and HALs (as the case of Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and social well-being coordinating health-component of Priority Area 12) and the EC assumes no longer any Horizontal Actions.

[59] European Commission 2009c.

As illustrated by the notion of "integrated maritime governance", the limit between sectoral and transversal policy action is increasingly blurred in the context of the EUSBSR. The **increased awareness of cross-sectoral interdependencies,** and the enhanced preparedness of authorities traditionally perceived as "sectoral" to assume a wider coordinating role appears as an important potential added value of the Strategy.

Some BSR countries have demonstrated their commitment to the Strategy by establishing dedicated internal structures of coordination. Sweden has for example created a network of agencies to strengthen the implementation of the EUSBSR, bringing all 21 county administrative boards and 34 public agencies to come together and work actively on issues related to the Baltic Sea. The leadership is under the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth ("Tillväxtverket")[60].

The transnational organisations are listed as follows:

- The Union of Baltic Cities (UBC);
- The Baltic Development Forum (BDF);
- The Euroregion Baltic;
- The Swedish Institute;
- ScanBalt fmba;
- The Baltic Institute of Finland (BIF);
- The Baltic Sea NGO network.

4.1.3. Governance

The EUSBSR has a **three-tiered governance system,** distinguishing between policy, coordination and operational measures. At the **state level,** NCPs appointed by each Member State play a major role coordinating and supporting EUSBSR design and implementation, and encouraging stakeholder involvement. At the **regional level** the Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) are responsible for the coordination of the necessary actions of a Priority Area, which aim at the better implementation of the EUSBSR. For each Priority Area at least two PACs from two different participating countries are appointed. At a **European level** the **EC,** mainly through DG Regio, is the institution which so far has followed the design and implementation of the Strategy. The **High Level Group (HLG)** is another permanent body – comprised of senior civil servants from each Member State (EU 28) and representatives of the CoR, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Nordic Investment Bank – who advises the Commission on the objectives, the development and the implementation of the EUSBSR. The **Council of the EU** instead after adopting the Strategy in 2009, has subsequently endorsed the revisions of the EUSBSR. It has also made **recommendations on the governance and on the content** of the Strategy. More concretely:

The EC is expected to:

- Submit amendments to the strategy to the Council or respectively from the HLG on the proposed amendments;
- Be responsible for monitoring and evaluation activities;
- Organise an annual Baltic forum;

[60] http://www.government.se/sb/d/13015/a/178493/pressitem/178493#anc178493 and http://www.government.se/sb/d/13012/a/178563

- Do not assume responsibility for the implementation on the ground (which is assumed by the national, regional and local actors and the transnational bodies);
- Ensure the strategic coordination of elaboration and revision of the EUSBSR;
- Facilitate the implementation of the EUSBSR in cooperation with the Member States by supporting the alignment of programmes or financial instruments with the EUSBSR objectives, by identifying and addressing obstacles to the effective implementation of the EUSBSR, by ensuring disseminating information, best practices and lessons learned in the implementation of the EUSBSR and by ensuring the adequate internal capacity in order to undertake the implementation of the EUSBSR;
- Take the EUSBSR into account when relevant policy initiatives and programmes planning is concerned;
- Encourage dialogue and cooperation with stakeholders from other interested Baltic Sea Region States.

The Member States are expected to:

- Ensure that the political commitment to the EUSBSR is upheld by all relevant sectoral authorities and appropriate reference is made to the strategy in all relevant for a;
- Include the EUSBSR on the agenda of the European Council when appropriate;
- Ensure that the Strategy is respected in national and regional strategic planning, as well as in existing policies and programmes;
- Appoint the NCPs as well as the PACs and support their work by ensuring that they have the competences and resources needed to carry out the tasks assigned.

The actions of the EUSBSR are implemented by means of **flagship projects** which are usually the result of a policy consultation within a Priority Area or Horizontal Action. They are expected to have a clear transnational dimension and can develop key solutions, new methodologies or practices or new forms of cooperation, while they may also concern key investments of regional importance.

4.1.4. Relation to Cohesion Policy

When projects generating income to pay back a loan are concerned, investment banks play a role in terms of financing. For this purpose, specific funds have been set up, such as the Baltic Sea Action Plan Fund (BSAP Fund), which is managed by the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) and the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO). While this fund has funded EUSBSR flagship projects, it was established independently from the Strategy.

For "non-bankable" projects, European sources of funding dominate, and in particular ETC programmes. Different programmes and bodies are asked to get involved in the Strategy. The latter includes Programmes under objectives 1 (Convergence), 2 (Competitiveness and Employment) and 3 (Territorial Cooperation) of the EU Cohesion Policy, as well as the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) programmes.

Furthermore, the role of the **INTERACT Point Turku** (Finland) needs to be mentioned. It is part of the decentralised implementation structure of INTERACT Programme, which on its own is part of the ETC objective and is designed to capitalise the experience accumulated through ETC programmes in the areas of regional development, cross-border cooperation,

transnational cooperation and interregional cooperation. It plays an important role in creating a link between the EU Cohesion Policy and the EUSBSR by providing services such individual advisory services, training opportunities, management tools, and information services to programme bodies and stakeholders in the regions of North-East Europe, covering all the area of EUSBSR. These services are delivered in close cooperation with the NCPs. One of the needs identified by the EUSBSR stakeholders is a systematic inventory on all available funding sources in the Baltic Sea Region that can be applied to the EUSBSR implementation. In order to facilitate further implementation of the EUSBSR, INTERACT Point Turku is at the moment proceeding with two studies in parallel. One of them ("Alignment of funding for implementation of the EUSBSR") is aimed at collecting and disseminating information on funding possibilities within the Region for 2014-2020 while the other one is analysing and describing examples of cooperation methods and tools applied by the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds programmes for 2014-2020[61].

4.2. Danube Region

The second strategy that already entered the implementation phase is the EUSDR. The strategy aims to better tackle the common challenges (floods) and opportunities (improvement of the waterway transport) related to the Danube river by better coordinating the efforts of the single Member States. Austria and Romania are the countries, which started the process submitting a call to the EU Council. The latter then formally asked the EU Commission to prepare an EUSDR by the end of 2010. Consequently the Commission started a broad based consultation process to prepare the EUSDR, involving relevant Member States and including public consultation. As in the Baltic Sea strategy, the consultation process was founded on a scoping document suggesting the potential thematic pillars of a future strategy.

While several resolutions of the EP before 2009 have addressed the importance of the Danube river as a "strategic transportation route" and the unique habitat of the Danube delta, it is notable that **the EPs call on the Commission for a strategic approach to these issues has at this point in time formally remained anchored in the framework of European Neighbourhood Policy** and a discussion around the future of the Black Sea Region. This is indicative of certain contrast with respect to the development of the EUSBSR, were the EP had taken strong initiative form a very early stage on.

Fourteen countries participate at the EUDSR of which nine are EU Member States (Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia) and five are non-EU Member States (Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine and Moldova).

Before its formal endorsement by the Council, the initial proposal by the EC has been reviewed and commented upon by the EP, the CoR and the EESC as well as other stakeholders on the EU level. In a resolution passed on 21st January 2010, the EP welcomes the development of a Danube Strategy on the model of the EUSBSR; and the resolution passed on 17th February 2011 positively assessed the approach taken by the EC during the consultation process. The resolution further underlines the importance of the transnational dimension of the EUSDR, emphasizing particularly the contribution of such strategy to the objective of territorial cooperation.

[61] Call for tenders on a study on "Alignment of funding for implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region", – INTERACT Point Turku, September 2014.

The document also stresses that the major added value of "EU MRS is seen in multi-level cooperation, coordination and better strategic investments using the available funding, not in additional allocation of resources". In April 2011, the Council endorsed the Communication and its annexed Action Plan.

As it is the case of EUSBSR, the Danube Strategy can build on a vast network of pre-existing transnational cooperation networks. The most relevant ones are listed as follows:

- The Stability Pact for South East;
- The Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI);
- The Danube Cooperation Process initiative (DCP);
- The International Commission for the Sava River Basin (Sava Commission);
- The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR);
- The Central European Initiative (CEI);
- The Danube International navigation; the Corridor VII Steering Committee in the area of transport and transport infrastructure;
- The Danube Tourist Commission (DTC) concerning the promotion of Danube tourism and the Danube as a brand tourist destination;
- The Working Community of Danube Regions (ARGE Donaulaender) concerning sub-regional territorial cooperation along the Danube;
- The Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM) concerning research, academic and cultural cooperation a/o.

4.2.1. Content

The Action Plan of EUSDR was endorsed definitely in June 2011, incorporating quite accurately the requests from the national position papers. It consists of **4 objectives** (Connecting the Danube Region, Protecting the environment, Building prosperity, Strengthening the Region), **11 PAs** – "To improve mobility and intermodality", "To encourage more sustainable energy", "To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts", "To restore and maintain the quality of waters", "To manage environmental risks", "To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils", "To develop the Knowledge Society", "To support the competitiveness of enterprises", "To invest in people and skills", "To step up institutional capacity and cooperation", "To work together to tackle security and organised crime" –, 129 actions with 400 projects and 123 flagship projects. It was originally published in 2010 and it has not changed since. Concerning the implementation process, all of the actions should be elaborated and transformed into concrete projects. The Commission makes states, regional, urban and local stakeholders responsible for this process.

An analysis of the national position papers submitted in the making of the Danube Strategy reveals certain convergence and divergence tendencies regarding strategic content and foreseen added value from EUSDR. **Intermodal transport,** and here especially the improvement of the **navigability of the Danube River,** has by far been the most addressed issue of national interests, followed by energy, governance improvement, environmental protection and tourism.

The **PAs are run by PACs,** which have similar tasks as in the Baltic Sea Region: ensuring the implementation of the Action Plan defined for the Priority Area by agreeing on planning, with targets, indicators and timetables, providing technical assistance and advice.

Reporting and evaluation are key aspects in the coordination of the Strategy. This is the responsibility of the Commission in partnership with the PACs and other stakeholders. The reports should include progress (identified by the Coordinators) in relation to the implementation of the Action Plan.

In addition, in order to raise efficiency of the implementation of the Strategy, the Commission also organises an **Annual Forum.** Participators (national and regional authorities, the EU institutions, the private sector and civil society) are gathering to discuss, consult and revise actions. A revision process of the Strategy (taken as a good practice from the EUSBSR) is at an ongoing phase as a need to focus deeper into less topics. It takes into account the observations and suggestions of the stakeholders involved, after a first phase of strategy implementation.

4.2.2. Actors involved

EU Member States play the most active part in the decision making process of EUSDR with Austria, Hungary Germany and Romania coordinating three PAs respectively. A second level of involvement in decision making is composed of some new Member States like Bulgaria, Slovakia and Croatia and the Candidate State Serbia, which are involved in the coordination of two PAs respectively. Moldova is directly involved in the coordination of PA9. Ukraine and Bosnia Herzegovina are not involved in any form of coordination of the PAs. In contrast to EUSBSR, all PACs have been working in Steering Groups (SGs) from the very beginning to feedback horizontal topics to the national level.

An effort has been made within the distribution of PACs to involve most of the countries present in the strategy through a **bi-national system of coordination.** This allocation in tandems has been a benefit to the integration of new Member States and for the functional coordination of PAs. It allowed for objectives in PAs in the context of uneven distribution of resources and capacities for involvement amongst the EUSDR Member States. Yet, from the start there was a perception that SGs could be staffed with more competencies and decision-making powers, and that there is a need to ensure a constant level of participation.

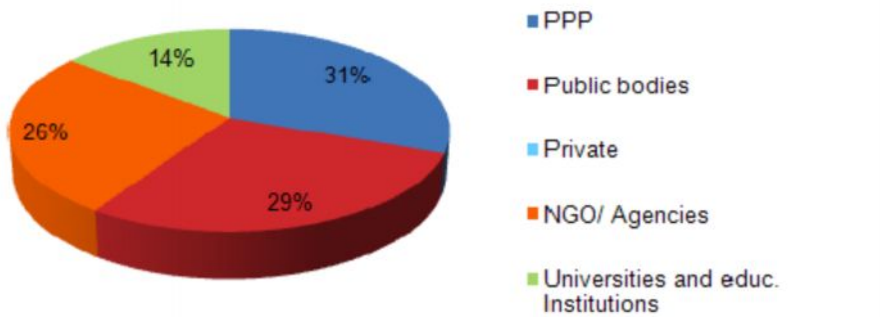
As far as **horizontal actions** are concerned, the EUSDR Action Plan lists a certain number of horizontal policies principles that are essential for the successful implementation and the coherence of the Strategy. However, there exists no similar denomination for the governance of these horizontal policy areas as in EUSBSR with designated HALs. This may have to do with the absence of specific historic transnational links that are not well established in EUSDR case. In the absence of this layer, certain PAs fulfil a more horizontal role than others – this is typically the case of PA10, which is working on governance and financial issues that are by their nature a horizontal issue.

The Danube Strategy develops into a wide-ranging cooperation platform to address the commonly identified challenges. **24 PACs** and **14 NCPs** drive the implementation forward, identifying key stakeholders in the Danube Region, defining roadmaps and targets, and advance concrete projects.

Over 400 projects have been identified in the frame of EUSDR, 150 of them are already in implementation. These are mainly large volume projects with a total value of 49 billion Euros in the Danube area[62].

As can be seen from Figure 4, about 30% of these projects have been governed by Private-Public Partnerships, 29% by public actors, 26% by NGOs and 14% by Universities and research institutions. One reason for the **lack of private actor involvement** is that as suggested "cooperation across national borders has been running along very different logic in the public and in the private sector and territorial cooperation programmes have been primarily geared towards the public sector"[63]. The graphic shows that national and regional authorities took the leadership in the majority of flagship projects and implementation activities.

Figure 4: Distribution of project beneficiaries by type



Source: metis 2012, p. 18

The involvement of the stakeholders, according to the annual report of EUSDR (2012) of the Danube Region, is guaranteed via thematic Working Groups which meet twice a year (or more often, if necessary) for a discussion of relevant topics on an expert level. Members of the SG are also participating in these events. Additionally, the stakeholders are also involved and informed via Annual Stakeholder Conferences. Civil society actors are included throughout the Strategy, in stakeholder seminars, SGs or the Annual Forum, and are addressed in particular in priority area 10 on "Institutional Capacity".

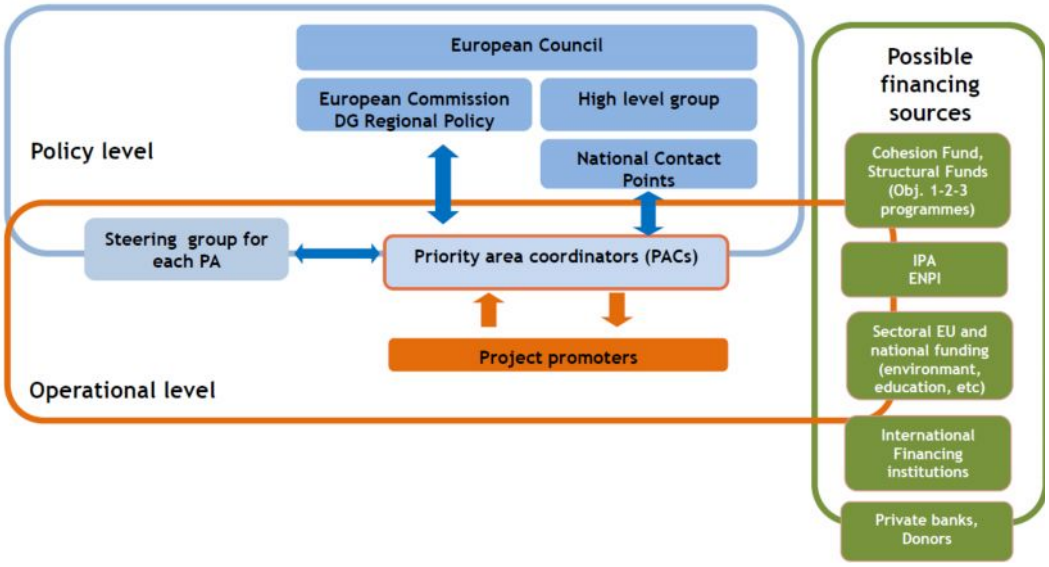
Some countries have been more committed to adjust their strategic governance regime to the requirements of the macro-regional strategy than others. Austria has for instance set up a national coordination platform supported by representatives of relevant ministries, the federal levels, the social partners etc. to bring together the national stakeholders involved in the Strategy from the chancellery to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs etc.

4.2.3. Governance

The Danube Strategy Policy and governance aspects **are in great part built on the experience of the EUSBSR.** The following figure provides a description of the main layers of EUSDR governance.

[62] European Commission 2013b.
[63] metis (2012): Analysis of needs for financial instruments in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) – Final Report, p. 18.

Figure 5: The governance model of the EUSDR



Source: EUSDR 2011

For the coordination of each priority area the responsibility is of the **EU Member States** together with **non-Member States, regions** and relevant **EU agencies or regional bodies**. Non-members and regions are excluded from coordination at the EU level, actions considering security, serious and organised crime. An additional role in coordination is played by the **NCPs** which are monitoring the practical aspects of the actions taken. The **Commission** underlines that governance of the EUSDR should be trans-national, inter-sectoral and inter-institutional, which in principle indicates using a multi-level governance approach.

The EC coordinated the making of the policy in consultation with the HLG. As the executive of the EU, the Commission prepared the Strategy in 2010 in consultation with all partner countries. Regarding the implementation of the Strategy, the Commission helps implement the Strategy by facilitating and supporting actions of the participating countries. It coordinates the implementation at the policy level, assisted again by a **HLG.**

The NCPs coordinate and keep an overview of the participation of their country in the implementation of the EUSDR including all 11 PAs. The role of the NCPs is to promote the Strategy and inform relevant stakeholders on the national level of key developments. NCPs also assist the EC in its facilitation role.

4.2.4. Relation to Cohesion Policy

Transnational cooperation has a considerable tradition in the Danube area, reaching back to 1996 with the CADSES Programme. This was followed by CADSES II until 2007, when the SEE was set up with some geographical adjustments. From 2007-2013, the OP Central Europe and the OP South-East Europe have financed projects in the EUSDR. 15 ETC programmes are relevant for the Danube Region amounting to 1.15 billion Euros.

A major factor that distinguishes EUSBSR from the EUSDR is the use of ETC financial instruments directed to non-EU countries, which prevails in the Danube Region. There is the IPA and the ENPI. IPA has funded projects and initiatives such as the Western Balkans Investment Framework, which gives priority to strategy related projects.

In 2013 the EC introduced the concept of a transnational DANUBE programme for the 2014 – 2020 period. Geographically, the DANUBE Programme area overlaps with the territory addressed by the EUSDR, comprising also the Danube river basin. The Danube Transnational Programme may contribute to EUSDR by providing assistance to the governance of the Strategy, either by supporting the activity of the PACs or by ensuring that proper quality, mature projects are prepared for the implementation of the EUSDR goals. Moreover, the programme can enhance the sense of ownership by providing the platform for communication among different stakeholder representing the regional governmental bodies and civil society.

According to information from the interviews, EGTC was not really a topic in the Danube Region strategy. In the Danube programme debate, the Hungarians suggested an EGTC to allow more political autonomy from their national political administration, but in the daily practice of EUSDR these approaches are not widely used.

The EUSDR Laboratory Group (Lab Group) and INTERACT Point Vienna are relevant networking platforms within the Strategy. They bring together representatives of EU Cohesion Policy programmes, EC representatives and interested PACs.

4.3. Conclusions

Common points

- Role of the EC

The EC has been the main driving force, in spite of the many well-established pre-existing organisations in the Baltic and Danube Region. The EUSBSR was the first strategy to be adopted and it has been a source of inspiration for the other MRS. However, methods and solutions cannot necessarily be transposed to other areas, as they are adapted to specific transnational policy-making landscape, with a large number of organisations and well-established habits of cooperation for many countries. Nonetheless the EC had to play a major role ensuring that the strategy did not lose its momentum, and in the adjustment of objectives and targets. The active and strategic role of DG Regio has been seen as a necessary factor, and in general as an advantage by the PACs, despite its limited expected role for the future.

The experience of EUSDR has confirmed that the role of the Commission is an essential element. Without the Commission, MRS are reduced to inter-governmental strategies. Member States want the Commission to remain more involved in the process. In the report on the governance of MRS, the Commission indicated that it wants to disengage from implementation and expects transnational programmes to support governance structures, PACs, Strategy point etc. The Commission has been present in all political, thematic and coordinating layers. The reason is that it is the only institution providing political backing for European cooperation. The European Council has pushed for the creation of a Strategy Point as a coordinating layer that replaces the strong role of the Commission. For the Danube Region, this means that Member States have to cooperate still more closely and take over stronger political leadership and responsibility.

- Difficult assessment of added value

The EUSBSR and the EUSDR function as an umbrella for cooperation initiatives, most of which existed before the strategies were established. It is difficult to assess whether the strategies have influenced the nature or extent of these initiatives.

This would require a counterfactual evaluation of the strategies' added-value based on extensive interviews with involved actors and in-depth studies of individual processes. Also the models developed to address the disparities between participating countries are still relatively young, and it is difficult to assess whether they will prove to have an added value.

- Complexity of the internal governance

In the EUSBSR the high complexity in the governance structure contributes on the one hand to a broad involvement of actors but may also cause some confusion and reluctance to get involved. Given the broad nature of the strategy, complex implementation mechanisms have been developed to take over responsibilities and carry through coordination tasks. The multiplicity of actors, consisting in a wide range of organisations, brings the risk that the strategy could lose (a) focus and (b) the ownership and responsibility felt by the single stakeholders. If the feeling of ownership, commitment and responsibility towards the strategy declines, the entire strategy is weakened. This leads to the question whether the complexity needed for the elaboration and the implementation of the strategies is too high to be useful since there are signs that the commitment of some organisations is not always as high as might be desirable or needed.

For the EUSDR it is necessary to mention the issue of the accountability of the governing bodies regarding the decisions taken in terms of macro-regional policy. For example, whereas in Austria PAs are seen as transnational organs without any direct accountability to national ministries, in a country like Hungary they are directly accountable to the national political layers.

The lack of involvement of Member States (in both strategies), and the limited commitment at operational level, are identified as key challenges by some PACs. The need for stronger and more reliable Steering Committees for each Priority Area has been recognized as an instrument to encourage improved commitment of relevant bodies in each Member State. However, this can be challenging, e.g. in the case of Federal States such as Germany. Finally, major questions with regard to the replicability of the model to other strategies relate to how to shield macro-regional governance from electoral and political cycles.

Regarding EUSBSR, the specific findings are the following:

- *The EUSBSR has enhanced the visibility of Baltic cooperation and facilitated integrated, cross-sectoral action*
  The visibility was enhanced both internally (within the BSR) and at the European level; it can be capitalised by encouraging individual actors and stakeholders to support projects addressing transnational opportunities and challenges; the EUSBSR has also contributed to cross-sectoral measures, especially when it comes to addressing the environmental challenges in the Baltic Sea; the high level political backing of the Strategy has encouraged e.g. actors from the agricultural sector and city authorities to develop pro-active policies to reduce emissions of pollutants;
- *Cooperation and exchanges in the Baltic Sea Region remain particularly dynamic*
  Notwithstanding the mentioned internal governance challenges for the EUSBSR, the extent and vitality of cooperation and exchanges in the Baltic Sea is undeniable; the different seed money facilities are important to ensure that new ideas and initiatives are encouraged within these networks, so that they remain fully in phase with emerging transnational issues as well as with European and global policy agendas.

Regarding EUSDR, the specific findings are the following:

- *The EUSDR has been the test-bed of new approaches to European integration*
  The replication of the PAC/NCPs model from EUSBSR has been used as an interesting way to involve new Member States and neighbouring countries, mostly by establishing new networks where there were no prior; there is evidence that national coordination works better in countries that have set up inter-ministerial working groups for coordinating EUSDR;
- *Disparities between participating countries*
  The investigation has shown that the Strategy cannot do away with pre-existing regional disparities; the main reasons are to be found in the unequal access to resources by the participating countries, in the differences in capacities and skills to make use of existing opportunities but also in the contrasts in political cultures; especially the financial gap between the participating countries in the EUSDR causes irregular attendance of the Steering and Working Groups, the Annual Forum etc.; hence the question is how to enable a better absorption of funds among new Member States and neighbouring countries as well as the spread of capacities and skills?
- *The EUSDR has been the laboratory for the experimentation of new forms of transnational participation and civil society networks*
  EUSDR has led to the successful combination of the agendas of different non-governmental interest groups; the resulting "local actor approach" to participation is considered one of the best working cooperation networks in EUSDR; discussions have already taken place on how to make this approach replicable to other MRS such as the Baltic Sea and the Atlantic strategy; nevertheless more involvement of the national and regional actors is needed; in this context, it is also important to state that there has been a general dissatisfaction with involvement of MPs both from the EP and national parliaments in meetings and processes of the EUSDR; particularly from the vantage point of civil society actors, a further involvement of parliaments in the process would be desirable to increase the accountability of the process;
- *The absences of strong pre-existing transnational linkages as well as the presence of stark regional disparities call for a critical adaption of political expectations on value added*
  The translation of NCP/PAC governance generally worked in the case of EUSDR, and was supplemented by SGs as an additional governance item of the Strategy; the absence of a strong history of transnational networks in Danube Region (at least comparable to the level of EUSBSR) has influenced the self-perception of coordinating actors (most of them conceive themselves as state employees rather than transnational agents) and also their knowledge and capacity to make use of the EUSDR as a transnational strategy. This suggests that in the case of EUSDR, the added value of the strategy needs to be evaluated also in terms of the building up of such networks. PACs in the Danube area generally conceive network building as remarkable improvement in the way regional cooperation takes place as opposed to before.

5. MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES IN PREPARATION: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE STRATEGIES FOR THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN REGION AND ALPINE REGION

KEY FINDINGS

- EUSAIR and EUSALP, the **MRS** currently in preparation, demonstrate indeed how macro-regional cooperation is **applied in very different historical, political and socio-economic** contexts. In socio-economic terms, the dramatic disparities among the EUSAIR countries are well known, whereas EUSALP is one of the European areas featuring the highest cohesion.
- If the feasibility of the strategies is considered, the **possibility for the EUSALP** territories **to access a series of complementary financing tools** has to be emphasized. In the Alpine Region, well experimented regional, cross-border and transnational programmes are available and accessible by a wide range of stakeholders and beneficiaries. **EUSAIR** countries, regions and territories suffer on the contrary a significantly high fragmentation, with dramatic disparities corresponding to **unequal access to financing tools**, especially when the regional development is concerned.
- On the other side, if the **necessity of the strategy** is concerned, the historical opportunity to increase the coordination of the existing cooperation instruments in the Adriatic and Ionian area, making the national and regional development programmes share common targets, is easily recognizable. In case of EUSALP, a sort of continuity between the existing territorial policies and the Strategy can be seen, with some risks of overlapping with the transnational cooperation tools.

5.1. Adriatic Ionian Region

The EUSAIR was the third macro-regional strategy to be launched by the EC. EUSAIR is expected to contribute to further integration of the internal market, to the stability of the area, to foster cooperation between EU and non-EU countries, assisting participating candidate and potential candidate countries on their path towards the EU. Eight countries participate in the Strategy. Four of them are Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia), and four are non-EU Countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia).

The Adriatic Ionian Region is a functional area primarily defined by the Adriatic and Ionian Seas basin. Covering also an important terrestrial surface area, it treats the marine, coastal and terrestrial areas as interconnected systems. Ports play a dominant role throughout the territory due to the growing movements of goods, services and peoples owing to Croatia's accession to the EU and with the prospect of EU accession for other countries in the Region. Attention to land-sea linkages also highlights impacts of unsustainable land-based activities on coastal areas and marine ecosystems.

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR) finds its origins in the "Adriatic Ionian Initiative (AII)"[64] established at the Summit on Development and Security on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, held in Ancona (Italy) on 19th/20th May 2000. The core issue of the Declaration was to highlight the fact that to promote political and economic stability, thus creating a solid base for the process of European integration, strengthening regional cooperation was an important step to achieve. In 2002, the Federative Union of Serbia and Montenegro joined the Initiative, and after the referendum in Montenegro both States preserved the status of Adriatic Ionian Initiative participating countries. The Adriatic Ionian Initiative started out with the intent to provide common solutions to common problems, from fighting against organised crime to the need to protect the natural environment of the Adriatic-Ionian Sea. The most favourable solution was considered to be concerted cooperation, not only among countries, but also among local administrations, civil society, associations and all private and public stakeholders involved in the process of enhancing sustainable development in the Region.

Along with the change of actors involved, cooperation itself gradually assumed different forms, including the establishment of partnerships involving Adriatic Ionian networks and fora such as the Forum of the Adriatic Ionian Chambers of Commerce[65], the Adriatic Ionian Forum of Cities and Towns[66] or UniAdrion (the Adriatic Ionian network of Universities)[67].

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Adriatic Ionian Initiative (May 2010), the Adriatic Ionian Council (AIC) of the eight Foreign Ministers issued a "Declaration on the Support to the EUSAIR" which provided the future strategy with the necessary intergovernmental anchorage[68]. Since then, every AIC has confirmed the commitment, cohesion and convinced political support of the eight Governments to achieve the common objective (Brussels Declaration under Montenegrin Chairmanship in 2011, Belgrade Declaration under Serbian Chairmanship in 2012 and Brussels Declaration under Slovenian Chairmanship in 2013). The European Council took note of these political indications in the Conclusions of the meeting of 22nd/23rd June 2011, when Member States were invited "to keep working in collaboration with the Commission at possible future macro-regions with particular reference to the Adriatic Ionian macro-region". In its Conclusions on the Integrated Maritime Policy of December 2011, the Council of the EU expressed support for the "on-going work of Adriatic and Ionian Member States to enhance maritime cooperation with non-EU neighbours in the area within the framework of a macro-regional strategy"[69].

On 30th November 2012 the EC published "A Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas"[70]. Through the document, the countries of the Adriatic and Ionian area, acknowledged to undertake a cooperation starting from the sea, their main common natural asset. Thus, needs and potential of sea-related activities in the maritime area were assessed, and a framework to move towards a coherent maritime strategy was established. This strategy was the first component of the Adriatic Ionian macro-regional strategy.

64 http://www.aii-ps.org/
65 http://www.forumaic.org
66 http://www.faic.eu/index_en.asp
67 http://www.uniadrion.net
68 Declaration of the Adriatic Ionian Council on the support to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region. The 12th Adriatic Ionian Council Ancona, 5th May 2010.
69 Conclusions on integrated maritime policy, 3139th ENVIRONMENT Council meeting, Brussels, 19th December 2011.
70 European Commission (2012b): *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "A Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas",* Brussels, 30.11.2012, COM(2012) 713 final.

The process gained momentum when the European Council of 14th December 2012 asked the EC to present a new EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region before the end of 2014[71], "subject to the evaluation of the concept of MRS" of June 2013[72].

On 21st October 2013, the EC presented the Scoping Paper for the public consultation. The Scoping Paper included four proposed pillars for the strategy, which later became the four pillars of the Action Plan adopted in June 2014.

From 25th October 2013 to 17th January 2014, the EC actively searched the contribution of all those interested (including Member States, non-EU countries, regional and local authorities, inter-governmental and non-governmental bodies, public organisations, enterprises, civil society and general public) promoting a public consultation on the EUSAIR with the aim to reach relevant stakeholders and to gather their ideas in order to make sure that the Strategy is realistic in its starting point, appropriate in its objectives and responsive to the real needs of inhabitants of the Region.

On the 21st and 22nd January 2014 in an Opinion adopted in the Plenary Session of the EESC, it was acknowledged the need to include a stronger social dimension in the EUSAIR, together with the importance of policing and security for the progress and prosperity of the Adriatic and Ionian Region (the EESC calls on the Council to increase FRONTEX's budget and power to act). Moreover, it was underlined the fact that the Discussion Paper on an EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (August 2013), "does not adequately address the issues surrounding irregular and illegal migration flows. The EU must make greater efforts in helping the Adriatic and Ionian Region to cope with the challenge of migration and to integrate immigrants into society"[73].

In June 2014 the EC presented three official documents relating to the Adriatic Ionian macro-region:

(1) Communication from the Commission to the EP, the Council, the EESC and the CoR concerning the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region[74];

(2) Commission Staff Working Document – Action Plan[75];

(3) Commission Staff Working Document – Supportive Analytical Document[76].

The General Affairs Council endorsed the EUSAIR on 29th September 2014 and so did the European Council on 24th October 2014. The launch conference of EUSAIR was held in Brussels on 18th November 2014.

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71 Conclusions of the European Council, point n.26 (Regional Strategies), EUCO 205/12, 13th/14th December 2012.

72 European Commission (2013b): *Report from the Commission concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies,* (COM(2013) 468 final.

73 Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) (exploratory opinion), ECO/359, point 1.6, Brussels, 21st January 2014.

74 European Commission 2014b.

75 European Commission (2014d): *Commission Staff Working Document – Action Plan, Accompanying the document "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions" concerning the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region,* {COM(2014) 357 final}, {SWD(2014) 191 final}, Brussels, 17.6.2014, SWD(2014) 190 final.

76 European Commission (2014c): *Commission Staff Working Document – Supportive Analytical Document, Accompanying the document "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions" concerning the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region,* {COM(2014) 357 final}, {SWD(2014) 190 final}, Brussels, 17.6.2014, SWD(2014) 191 final.

5.1.1. Content

In June 2014 the EC, after the public consultation process, published the already mentioned official Communication concerning the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region[77]. The central justification of the Strategy is to promote sustainable economic and social prosperity in the Region through growth and jobs creation, and by improving its attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity, while preserving the environment and ensuring healthy and balanced marine and coastal ecosystems. Moreover, the EUSAIR is intended to significantly contribute to the EU integration of the candidate/potential candidate countries in the Region.

The Strategy is focused on areas of regional mutual interest and it is structured around **four interdependent pillars,** all having as horizontal principle climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as disaster risk management:

(1) Blue Growth;

(2) Connecting the Region (transport and energy networks);

(3) Environmental quality;

(4) Sustainable tourism.

Two cross-cutting aspects were also identified:

- Capacity-building, including communication, for efficient implementation and for raising public awareness and support;
- Research and innovation to boost high-skilled employment, growth and competitiveness. Cooperation within transnational networks can bring ideas to markets, and help develop new products and services.

The objective of the first pillar, **Blue Growth,** which is expected to be coordinated by Greece and Montenegro, is to drive innovative maritime and marine growth in the Region by promoting sustainable economic development and jobs and business opportunities in the Blue economy, including fisheries and aquaculture. To this end, the Strategy aims at promoting clusters involving research centres, public agencies and private companies. Coordinated fishery management will improve data collection, monitoring and control. Joint planning efforts and increased administrative and cooperation capacity will improve use of existing resources and maritime governance at sea basin level.

The objective of the second pillar, **Connecting the Region,** which is expected to be coordinated by Italy and Serbia, is to improve transport and energy connectivity in the Region and with the rest of Europe. This pillar underlines the need to implement inter-linked and sustainable transport in the Region, through cooperation, in order to reduce bottlenecks, and develop infrastructure network and regulatory framework. Coordinated monitoring of maritime traffic and multi-modal transport will increase competitiveness.

The objective of the third pillar, **Environmental quality,** which is expected to be coordinated by Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, is to address environmental quality through cooperation at the level of the Region. Enhancing environmental quality will contribute to good environmental status for marine and coastal ecosystems, reducing pollution of the sea, limiting, mitigating and compensating soil sealing, reducing air pollution

[77] European Commission 2014b.

and halting loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystems. The benefits of cooperation and joint action here are several: to preserve eco-regions spanning several countries, to ensure that infrastructure investments neither deteriorate the environment and landscapes nor increase pollution.

The objective of the fourth pillar, **Sustainable tourism,** which is expected to be coordinated by Croatia and Albania, is to develop the full potential of the Region in terms of innovative, sustainable, responsible quality tourism. Diversification of tourism products and services, along with tackling seasonality, will boost business and create jobs. World-wide marketing of an Adriatic-Ionian "brand" of tourism products and services is expected to increase demand.

In the same month of June 2014, the EC published the Action Plan of the Strategy[78]. The Action Plan, accompanying the EUSAIR Communication, describes the operational components of the Strategy and elucidates on the indispensable linkage between the objectives stated and concrete actions undertaken to achieve these objectives. Covering the four pillars and the related topics set out in the Communication, it lists a number of indicative actions and examples of projects assumed to contribute to meet the needs identified in relation to these topics. The Action Plan also underlines the importance of an integrated approach taking into account effects of each action on other policy fields. More concretely, when implementing these actions, broad consultation of the bodies in charge of other policy fields is required at all levels of planning and decision-making.

The Action Plan is conceived to be rolling. This means that new actions may be added as needs change over time while existing actions are adapted as they move closer to completion. It is structured so as to reflect the four pillars as well as the topics selected under each pillar. Accordingly, the Action Plan incorporates the following features:

- Pillars: these address the core challenges and opportunities identified as being of central importance for the Adriatic-Ionian Region. They are at the core of the Strategy and are essential to the success of its work, and how it is communicated;
- Topics under each pillar: these represent the main areas where the macro-regional strategy can contribute to improvements (either through tackling the main challenges or through seizing the main opportunities);
- The support of the pillars to the Europe 2020 Strategy.

For each pillar, the coordinating countries identified specific objectives and topics. For each topic the Action Plan:

- Provides a list of indicative actions. An action is the intervention which countries and stakeholders carry out in order to address the different topics. It can be a new approach, an increased coordination in policy making, policy review, support to a process already engaged, a networking initiative, etc. An action may not necessarily require financing. All actions should be understood without prejudice to existing EU competences and requirements of the EU acquis;
- Indicates, for each action, the indicative actors;
- Indicates, for each action, the examples of possible projects: the Action Plan is not meant to list specific projects. Projects are presented by way of examples to stimulate further initiatives, as the Strategy progresses and as new ideas emerge, and to illustrate what is needed. Concrete projects to be implemented have to be

[78] European Commission 2014d.

identified by the coordination mechanism of the Strategy; as a general rule, each project would have a lead organisation/country and a deadline;

- Provides examples of targets by 2020.

The Action Plan, accompanying the Strategy, shall be implemented by mobilising and aligning all available EU, international, national and private funding of relevance for the four pillars and the specific topics identified under each pillar. To enhance the monitoring, reposting and evaluation process, it should be established a database including existing projects and providing data, on the basis of which the necessity of possible projects can be justified. For the sake of comparability, monitoring of the Action Plan will preferably make use of available statistical indicators from the European Statistical System (ESS). If appropriate, statistical data collections and territorial analyses will furthermore make use of harmonised spatial definitions (e.g. NUTS) and existing typologies for coastal regions (based on NUTS 3 regions) and coastal areas (based on Local Administrative Units).

Result indicators may relate to not easily quantifiably results (e.g. increased coordination of policies across national boundaries). Consequently, results indicators will not exclusively be variables to be measured in quantitative terms. Depending on the context, they can also be assessed in qualitative terms.

Targets are associated for result indicators in order to convey a sense of direction to the actions/project. However, these targets can be, at best, approximate estimates subject to regular revision and adaptation in pace with the implementation of the Action Plan. Equally to result indicators, they may be set in quantitative terms (e.g. attaching a quantified value or a range of quantified values to the change expected) or they may indicate, in qualitative terms, the expected direction and pace of change as compared to a baseline situation.

5.1.2. Actors

The strategy appears as the product of a process having involved **institutions and stakeholders of European, inter-governmental, transnational, cross-border, national, regional and local level.** On the other side, the Strategy was designed and finalised thanks to a fundamental role played by the European institutions. The role of the **EC,** as highlighted in the following paragraph, is expected to be fundamental also in the implementation phase.

A key institutional role in the strategy making was played by the already mentioned **Adriatic and Ionian Initiative.** In terms of idea generation and consensus making, it is also important to mention the massive work carried out by the **Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities** and by **the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce,** which include partners from seven countries (all EUSAIR countries apart of Serbia): Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro and Slovenia. In addition, **UNIADRION,** a university network across the Adriatic-Ionian Region, offers an academic platform to the Strategy, covering scientific areas like protection, cataloguing and promotion of cultural heritage, sustainable environment, cultural tourism and development, economy, communication, ports and economic relations.

Such a high level of involvement of institutional, territorial and sectoral stakeholders represents a good basis for the consultation, which was conducted between 2013 and 2014.

Based on the Discussion Paper developed by the Commission in close cooperation with the NCPs from the eight participating countries, it included also an on-line consultation, launched by DG Regional and Urban Policy on 25th October 2013 and closed on 17th January 2014, with a total duration of 12 weeks.

5.1.3. Governance

EUSAIR is a European macro-regional strategy featured by a significant participation of non-EU countries, with great socio-economic disparities and evident imbalances in their institutional and administrative capacity, which require strong and clear coordination provided at the EU level, necessary to overcome diverging national interests. Given the strong predominance of differences and dissimilarities, the coordination of EUSAIR is a particular delicate process. A clear opportunity is represented by the lessons learnt from the previous MRS (both EUSBSR and EUSDR), summarised in the EC report on the governance of MRS, published one month before the Communication on EUSAIR.

The role of the **EC** in EUSAIR will be the one of an independent facilitator, **providing EU perspective and guaranteeing policy coordination.** It is underlined that the initiative is financially neutral for the EC, as a proof that the MRS do not imply additional costs. The lead DG is DG Regional and Urban Policy, in close cooperation with DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, in consideration of the experience gained through preparation of the Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Seas. In the initial phase, the EC has ensured:

- Inter-service coordination within Commission Services: mainly DG Agriculture and Rural Development, DG Climate Action, DG Enlargement, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, DG Energy, DG Enterprise and Industry, DG Environment, the Joint Research Centre, DG MOVE, DG Research and Innovation and the Secretariat-General;
- An extensive consultation process: from the EUSBSR and EUSDR it is possible to notice that the political acceptance of the actions proposed was high, thanks to a wide and open consultation process. Therefore, the Commission used the same tools and the same approach when preparing the macro-regional EUSAIR, i.e. meetings with specifically-appointed NCPs, organising extensive stakeholder consultation, including on-line public consultation and inter-service coordination within Commission services;
- A Communication and an Action Plan: the structure and organisation of both documents reflects lessons learnt in the preparation and implementation of previous MRS as well as main messages from the consultation process.

While the EC guarantees the policy coordination, it will be the duty of the **eight participating countries to take care of the Strategy's coordination mechanism.** Each pillar of the mechanism should be made up by two coordinators from relevant line ministries and representing two countries (one EU and one non-EU), working closely with counterparts in the Region, in consultation with the Commission, relevant EU agencies and regional bodies. This involves securing agreement on a plan associated to a timetable, and ensuring close contacts between project promoters, programmes and funding sources. It also involves providing technical assistance and advice as required. This work is expected to be transnational, inter-sectoral and inter-institutional.

This model of coordination, as proposed in the Action Plan, could be modified by the Council. A significant support by the EC in the coordination of the Strategy is however expected in the final model of coordination.

As illustrated in paragraph 5.1.1, the Strategy consists of 4 pillars, mentioned below with their respective coordinators:

- Blue Growth. Coordinators: Greece and Montenegro;
- Connecting the Region. Coordinators: Italy and Serbia;
- Environmental quality. Coordinators: Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina;
- Sustainable tourism. Coordinators: Croatia and Albania.

The **NCPs** are expected to have the lead in the coordination and operational leadership. They will meet regularly to ensure continuous coordination and good information flow. Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece, Serbia and Slovenia appointed one NCP, whereas Croatia, Italy and Montenegro appointed two NCPs.

In addition, the participating countries identified **Focal Points** with regard to specific sectors like Fishery; Maritime Affairs; Transport, Environment; Tourism; Regional Development; Spatial Planning; Science, Education and Sport; Competitiveness; Energy; Cultural Heritage; SMEs; Labour; Agriculture and Rural Development; Blue Growth.

Implementation of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region would be monitored at three levels:

- The first level regards the putting in place of the necessary **governance structures** (e.g. thematic working groups, establishing responsible actors for the collection of data, establishment of communication arrangements within the Region and contact points for stakeholders);
- The second level consists of defining the **targets** for each action selected for implementation. To this end, it is mandatory first to define **baselines.** When evaluating the actual impact of the Strategy, a medium-term rather than a short-term perspective needs to be adopted;
- The third part relates to **result indicators.** In light of the baseline situation and the defined targets, results indicators will need to be worked out against which progress in achieving the Strategy's overall objectives can be evaluated. This will be a responsibility of the pillar Coordinators.

The participating countries will organise an **Annual Forum** in order to evaluate results and elaborate, when appropriate, new approaches. The monitoring and evaluation mechanism, however, is not sufficiently defined, yet. Some of the targets (for instance related to tourism) are clearly linked with the performances of the national and regional programmes. This is the reason why the external coherence of the national and regional programmes with the macro-regional strategy seems to be a crucial issue for the success of EUSAIR. On the other side, a contribution to the increasing of the administrative capacity in the macro-regional area is expected from the transnational Adriatic-Ionian Programme 2014-2020.

5.1.4. Relation to Cohesion Policy

At this stage, when the Strategy is not implemented, yet, few key points regarding the relation between EUSAIR and the Cohesion Policy can be indicated.

There will be support from the ETC to transnational and cross-border actions contributing to the achievement of results envisaged by the Strategy. The publication, in June 2014, of the EUSAIR Communication and Action Plan allowed the programmes, which were still in the drafting phase, to improve the coherence with the Strategy.

It is worth mentioning that this is one of the elements, which the compulsory ex-ante evaluation has to take into consideration.

The **transnational Adriatic Ionian Cooperation Programme** corresponds to the macro-regional area, as the maps below show.

Figure 6: Maps of EUSAIR and of the Adriatic Ionian Cooperation Programme

Source: EC Communication on EUSAIR

Source: Draft of Adriatic and Ionian Programme of July 2014

It will guarantee the possibility to implement transnational projects of macro-regional interest. More specifically, this programme should support the governance and the implementation of EUSAIR mainly under the Thematic Objective 11.

Cross-border cooperation is guaranteed by a series of programmes, which strictly belong to the ETC when Member States are concerned, and are funded by **IPA** when candidate or potential candidate countries belong to the area of cooperation. In spite of this coverage by the EU funded programmes, an **unequal access to the resources,** which would be necessary to finance the actions necessary to reach the EUSAIR targets, is necessarily foreseen in case of an area featured by such a fragmented political and socio-economic landscape. In addition, it must be repeated that for the achievement of some of the ambitious EUSAIR targets, a strong contribution from the national and regional programmes seem to be necessary. This is for instance the case of the fourth pillar, where targets like "50% increase in tourist arrivals from countries outside the Region" and "50% increase in tourism arrivals during the off-season period" are mentioned. This aspect affects the possibility for all countries involved in the Strategy effectively to contribute to its success. Finally, as the **stakeholders express high expectations** from the Strategy without showing a full awareness of the budgetary constraints, the unequal access to the financing tools risks to become a negative factor in terms of consensus in the mid-term.

5.2. Alpine Region

The aim of the EUSALP is to enhance cooperation and investment to the benefits of all parties involved: states, regions, civil society stakeholders and European citizens. Built on the long tradition and co-operation in the Alps, the strategy is not intended to duplicate existing co-operation structures, but to complement them, with the objective to enhance the

attractiveness of the area in Europe, taking better advantage of its assets and seizing its opportunities for sustainable and innovative development in a European context.

Equally to the other MRS already started (EUSBSR, EUSDR) or almost ready to start (EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region), this Strategy is based on the need to provide coordinated responses to issues which can be better handled together than separately. Thus, the strategy seeks to release the potential of the Alpine Region, through the encouragement of participants to re-think new strategies to increase the available opportunities of their territory.

Currently, the Strategy is still at its initial stage. For this reason, it is not possible to take into consideration the implementation aspects or to assess the success of the Strategy itself.

5.2.1. Content

The initial central justification of the strategy was to "ensure a sustainable development for the fragile biotope and the economic and leisure area the Alps represent. This Strategy for the Alps pursues the objective that the alpine regions assume their responsibilities in the future strategic orientation of such area and that alpine regions will be represented in an appropriated way in international agreements and programmes (i.e. Alpine Convention, drafting of strategic bases in the territorial development programmes)"[79].

Progressively, the scope of the strategy was broadened. According to the mentioned Scoping Paper published by the EC in the occasion of the public consultation of mid-2014, the **main challenge of the strategy should be to tackle the economic, social and territorial imbalances existing in the Alpine Region.** In turn, this would help stimulating an innovative and sustainable model of development, able to conciliate the promotion of growth and jobs, and the preservation of natural and cultural assets in the area.

The Strategy will build upon **three general action-oriented pillars:**

- To improve the competitiveness, prosperity and cohesion of the Alpine Region;
- To ensure accessibility and connectivity for all the inhabitants of the Alpine Region;
- To make the Alpine Region environmentally sustainable and attractive.

More specifically, since the strategy will focus on defined areas of (macro-) regional mutual interest, the PAs and specific objectives selected should reflect genuine commitment to working together to achieve common solutions to challenges, or unused potentials.

This will be attained through the following **3 thematic pillars:**

Pillar 1. Fostering sustainable growth and promoting innovation in the Alps: from theory to practice, from research centres to enterprises.

The Alpine Region constitutes the largest European economic and productive hub, with a high potential for development. However, lack of economic, social and territorial cohesion is still an issue. The main challenge to enhance homogenous development is due to the presence of the imposing mountain range which favours disparities among different territories, making the gap between rural and urban areas extremely wide.

[79] Common Declaration Adopted during the Summit of Regions, Strategy for the Alps, Mittenwald, Bavaria, 12 March 2010.

For instance, access to social and economic services still remains quite difficult in rural areas at the core of the Alps, contrary to surrounding urban areas which develop more easily.

Thus, in order to bridge this gap and to improve cohesion, the strategy seeks to support innovative economic development in the Alpine Region. The benefits of engaging in a more balanced model of development through innovative approaches that take into account the diversity/specificity of Alpine territories are several, above which is the enhancement of the notion of sustainability. The goal of the strategy is indeed to show to Europe that a competitive economy can successfully combine prosperity, energy-efficiency, a high quality of life and traditional values. This is facilitated by co-operation embracing a variety of economic activities, in the domains of agriculture, industry, commerce, tourism and other services.

The main priorities of this Pillar will be the following:

- To develop innovation and research capacity and transfer into practice;
- To improve and develop support for enterprises;
- To promote high levels of employment, with the aim of ensuring full employment in the Region.

Pillar 2. Connectivity for all: in search of a balanced territorial development through environmentally friendly mobility patterns, transport systems and communication services and infrastructures.

The Alpine Region is a major European crossroad. However, sustainable transport systems are a major challenge for the Region. Thus, a coordinated policy able to match the transport needs of the macro-region, population welfare and the equilibrium of (a particularly fragile) environment is a priority for this Strategy. The notion of connectivity does not only refer to transport systems, but it also embraces communication infrastructures and services (including tourism). Although citizens and business in the Alps are usually well connected, a higher accessibility to ICT could further bridge accessibility gaps remaining in the Region, as well as contribute to a more sustainable model of development.

The main priorities of this Pillar will be the following:

- To enhance overall transport systems in terms of sustainability and quality;
- To improve sustainable accessibility for all Alpine areas;
- To better connect society in the Region.

Pillar 3. Ensuring sustainability in the Alpine Region: preserving the Alpine heritage and promoting a sustainable use of natural and cultural resources.

One of the main features of the Alpine Region is its outstanding natural and cultural heritage. Natural resources (in particular, clean and abundant water, minerals, a variety of landscapes and great biodiversity), and strong and diverse cultural life are major assets of this Region. However, the use of natural resources (like water or biomass), and the exploitation of their potential (such as energy sufficiency or regional capacity for energy storage) are not properly carried out in an environmentally friendly way. At the same time, climate change could particularly affect the Alpine Region in terms of availability of resources and threats to population. For these reasons, joint regional responses are necessary to establish efficient management systems.

The main priorities of this Pillar will be the following:

- To reinforce Alpine natural and cultural resources as assets of a high quality living area;
- To strengthen the position of the Alpine Region as world-class in terms of energy efficiency and sustainable production of renewable energy;
- To tackle potential threat, such as those of climate change, improving Alpine risk management including risk dialogue.

5.2.2. Actors

On 20th December 2013 the **European Council** mandated the EC to prepare, in cooperation with Member States, an EU Alpine Strategy by June 2015. Subsequently, the **EC, states** and **regions** established a Steering Committee which would accompany the preparation of the Strategy. The Steering Committee (SC) is equally composed of representatives from Alpine states and regions, and chaired by the EC. Two international organisations/structures are in the SC as observers: the **Alpine Convention** and the **Alpine Space Programme.**

At the present stage, the regions, the Member States (with France steering the joint process of formulation of the Strategy), the Alpine Convention and the Alpine Space transnational cooperation Programme have significantly contributed to the definition of the concept of the Strategy, whereas the European institutions have defined the steps for the finalisation and endorsement of the Strategy.

The **public consultation,** launched by the EC from 16th July until 15th October, aimed at involving in this process a high number of significant actors, gathering the stakeholders' ideas and interests, in order to improve the capacity of the strategy to answer real needs.

5.2.3. Governance

Currently there is no Action Plan yet, but the public consultation will be useful to identify the key actors concerned for better co-operation and coordination in the Alpine Region in the next years, contributing to clarify who should have, in the stakeholders' view, ultimate responsibility for achieving results under the new Strategy, and who should be the key decision makers.

Furthermore, the contributions were discussed in the occasion of the stakeholders' conference, which was organised in Milan, on 1st/2nd December 2014, and supported the preparation of the EUSALP.

5.2.4. Relation to Cohesion Policy

At this stage, when the Strategy is not implemented, yet, only a general comment on the relation between EUSALP and the Cohesion Policy can be provided. The macro-regional area is featured by a **high socio-economic cohesion,** even if imbalances between rural mountainous area and urban areas are well recognizable. The two non-EU countries, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, do not suffer of the lack of EU funded regional development programmes, as it is the case of the non-EU countries belonging to EUSDR or (especially) to EUSAIR. In addition, the **level of political, social and economic cooperation in the macro-regional area is high.**

The already mentioned Alpine Space transnational programme includes all countries involved in EUSALP, and there are cross-border cooperation programmes covering Swiss territories: Alpenrhein – Bodensee – Hochrhein, France-Switzerland, Italy-Switzerland. On the other side, the Swiss referendum on mass immigration of February 2014 may have a profound effect on EU – Switzerland relations.

5.3. Conclusions

Conclusions cannot be drawn with reference to the implementation of the Strategies, to be started already. However, it is particularly interesting to compare their concepts. The **MRS** EUSAIR and EUSALP demonstrate indeed how this paradigm is **applied in very different historical, political and socio-economic contexts.** If the number of countries involved (eight in EUSAIR, seven in EUSALP) and the mass of inhabitants (about seventy millions in both cases) are elements in common between the two MRS, there are other factors that make EUSAIR and EUSALP significantly diverge.

If the recent history is considered, it is necessary to remind that in the 1990s the Western Balkans suffered a series of military conflicts. The post war period was featured by an active approach by the EU, in an attempt to stabilize the Region and eventually create a European future for the countries that were a result of the breakup of Yugoslavia. As a matter of fact, EUSAIR is now composed by four non-EU countries with the status of candidate or potential candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina). The historical and political profile of EUSALP is totally different, with two non-EU countries (Switzerland and Liechtenstein) which are featured by high levels of institutional and administrative capacity, allowing them to cooperate at the same level with the EU countries. **The role that a macro-regional strategy can play in the two areas is therefore significantly different.** EUSAIR is unanimously considered as a valuable opportunity for candidate and potential candidate countries to work alongside EU members, in particular contributing to the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. EUSALP, which is not called to take on this kind of challenge, can on the other side rely on a more robust framework of cooperation, even if the effects of the Swiss referendum on mass immigration (February 2014) have still to be understood and assessed.

In socio-economic terms, the **dramatic disparities among the EUSAIR countries** are well known, whereas EUSALP is one of the European areas featured by the highest cohesion. This evident difference between the two strategies can be interpreted in two ways. If the *feasibility* of the strategies is considered, the **possibility for the EUSALP territories to access a series of complementary financing tools** has to be emphasized. In the Alpine Region, well experimented regional, cross-border and transnational programmes are available and accessible by a wide range of stakeholders and beneficiaries. EUSAIR countries, regions and territories suffer on the contrary a significantly high fragmentation, with dramatic disparities corresponding to unequal access to financing tools, especially when the regional development is concerned. On the other side, if the necessity of the Strategy is concerned, the historical opportunity to increase the coordination of the existing cooperation instruments in the Adriatic and Ionian area, making the national and regional development programmes share common targets, is easily recognizable. In case of EUSALP, a sort of continuity between the existing territorial policies and the Strategy can be seen, with some risks of overlapping with the transnational cooperation tools.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that both strategies are featured by the **presence of a geographic indisputable element,** the Adriatic and Ionian seas in the first case and the Alps, the dominant mountain range in Europe, in the second one**. Only in case of EUSAIR, however, the macro-regional strategy was specifically prepared by a sectoral strategy.** The Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, adopted by the Commission on 30th November 2012 and now incorporated into the Strategy, contributed indeed to highlight the opportunities of the maritime economy – "blue growth", land-sea transport, energy connectivity, protecting the environment and sustainable tourism.

6. MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES UNDER CONSIDERATION: THE STRATEGIES FOR THE CARPATHIAN REGION, NORTH SEA, BLACK SEA, ATLANTIC ARC, THE WESTERN AND EASTERN PARTS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

KEY FINDINGS

- The five **MRS under consideration show a very different level of development** – ranging from merely working papers in the case of the Carpathian strategy to the endorsement process by the EP and Council in the case of the Black Sea and the Atlantic Arc strategies. However the speed of development slowed down considerably in some of the strategies under consideration due to the geo-political situation (political conflicts in the Middle East and the Ukraine).
- There are **very heterogeneous approaches with respect to the initialisation** of the MRS taken. Ranging from initiatives of cities (Atlantic Arc) over MRS carried through by mainly one Member State (Carpathian, Eastern Mediterranean) to the rather "traditional" initiative of the EP or the Commission (Black Sea and North Sea).
- In all MRS under consideration there is a **rather weak orientation on common regional needs**. If any common issues are to be found, environmental concerns as well as economic development across borders are the common denominator.
- **External relations and territorial cohesion are hardly any drivers for the MRS** in question, as some are confronted with political instability (military conflicts, social and political unrest) (Carpathian, Mediterranean East and West, Black Sea), which hinder cooperation and which may not be overcome by the MRS themselves.

6.1. General description of current state of affairs with the strategies

Carpathian

The Carpathian Region, featured by a large mountainous range representing one of the most important biodiversity hotspots in Europe, would include territories belonging to four EU countries (Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia) and to one non-EU country (Ukraine).

The main challenge for the Carpathian Region is to manage those significant changes in economy, accessibility and energy networks that are necessary to achieve a sustainable economic prosperity without the loss of its natural and cultural characteristics.

In 1993 the Carpathian Euroregion project started, as a political initiative supported by Ministries of International Affairs of the Republic of Poland, Hungary and Ukraine.

After ten years, in May 2003 the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) was adopted and signed by seven Parties (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine) in Kyiv, Ukraine, and entered into force in January 2006.

In 2005 there was the first presentation of the concept of Carpathian Horizon 2020 in Brussels (meeting with the Commissioner of Regional Development - D. Hübner). In January 2013 the Karpacki Horizont 2020 Association drafted a Working Document regarding "The Carpathian Euroregion Development Strategy".

North Sea

If developed, a macro-regional strategy for the North Sea Region will most probably see the participation of eight countries bordering the North Sea. Seven of them are EU countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom), and one is a non-EU country (Norway).

The key issues for the North Sea Region are maritime cooperation and energy networks. Other key issues may reflect the strategic priorities contained in the "North Sea Region 2020" strategy paper: managing maritime space, increasing accessibility and clean transport, tackling climate change, attractive and sustainable communities, promoting innovation, excellence and sustainability.

In 2010, the CoR (in Opinion CdR 99/2010) called on Member States to task the EC with drawing up a Strategy for the North Sea-English Channel area with an emphasis on Maritime Policy, the environment, transport, industry and science.

In 2011, the North Sea Commission adopted the "North Sea Region 2020" strategy paper, developed in consultation with its members and stakeholders, and dialogue with the EP. The Strategy is completed by an Action Plan and a number of workplans.

In 2013, the EP approved a budget of 250,000 Euros for a "preparatory action" beginning in 2014 to "analyse the Region's growth potential with a view to investigate the added value of having a future shared macro-regional strategy for the North Sea area". The "preparatory action" budget will be used to finance a North Sea stakeholder conference scheduled for 2014. A second stakeholder conference may be organised in 2015.

It should be noted that the "preparatory action" does not aim to establish a macro-regional strategy but only seeks to examine the areas and sectors of common interest and to explore and build commitment among stakeholders in order to provide a basis for decision on the future development and the creation of growth in the North Sea Region.

Black Sea

The Black Sea Region is a geographical area rich in natural resources and strategically located at the junction of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. If developed, the macro-region should cover territories of three EU countries (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania) and of seven non-EU countries (Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey).

The key challenges for the EU Strategy for the Black Sea Region is to establish an area of peace, democracy, prosperity and stability, founded on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and providing for EU energy security; the good governance, the rule of law, promotion of respect of human rights, migration management, energy, transport, the environment, and economic and social development should constitute priority actions.

After the "Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament – Black Sea Synergy – a New Regional Cooperation Initiative" in 2007[80], the official process of developing a macro-regional strategy in the Black Sea Region started in 2011, when the EP adopted the resolution on an "EU Strategy for the Black Sea"[81]. In the last three years, the EU Black Sea strategy has not been elaborated, yet.

Atlantic Arc

The European Atlantic Arc is an extensive geographical area covering territories of five EU countries (Ireland, United Kingdom, France, Spain, Portugal) and four non-EU countries (Iceland, Norway, Greenland, Faroe Islands). The Faro Declaration of 1989 translated in practical terms the intention of the Atlantic Regions to cooperate, in order to address common challenges and define an identity based on their maritime and peripheral characteristics. This led to the creation of the Atlantic Arc Commission in the CPMR. Ten years later, the cities decided to create a network, in order to enhance the local dimension of this form of cooperation. The Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities was therefore created (Rennes, 2000).

The common challenges of the Atlantic Arc Region are rooted in their:

- Maritime nature: the area is heavily depended on the sea, but the sea is a fragile area that requires the promotion of a sustainable development model;
- Their lack of connections with the European economic and political centres: the Atlantic Arc covers peripheral area but with an close-knit network of Atlantic territories. Thus the accessibility and connectivity within those territories is an important factor for the Region.

On 21st November 2011, the EC decided to consult the EESC on the "Communication from the Commission to the EP, the Council, the EESC and the CoR – Developing a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area". On 24th May 2012 the EESC adopted the opinion called "EU Strategy for the Atlantic Region".

On 13th May 2013, with the "Communication from the Commission to the EP, the Council, the EESC and the CoR – Action Plan for a Maritime Strategy in the Atlantic area – Delivering smart, sustainable and inclusive growth", the Commission invited the EP and the Council to endorse the Action Plan for the Maritime Strategy in the Atlantic area.

Western Eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea

Dramatic inequalities – made obvious by the evident phenomenon of emigration – are a key issue in the Region. The objective of this strategy should therefore be to create policies helping countries in the Mediterranean Region to strengthen their economic and social relations, and to cooperate in resolving common problems, allowing the Region to become internationally competitive, prosperous, safe and environmentally sustainable.

[80] European Commission 2007.
[81] Strasbourg, European Parliament resolution of 20th January 2011 on an EU Strategy for the Black Sea – 2010/2087(INI).

On 22nd May 2012 (17 years after the Barcelona Declaration adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of November 1995) Andreas Mavroyiannis, Deputy Minister to the President for European Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, requested the EESC, on behalf of the forthcoming Cyprus Presidency, to draw up an exploratory opinion on: "Developing a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean – the benefits for island Member States". On the 12th December 2012 the EESC adopted the opinion by 147 votes to 1 with 5 abstentions[82].

In parallel, in the same year 2012, the EP approved the report of EP Member François Alfonsi on the evolution of EU MRS, entitled "Present practice and future prospects, especially in the Mediterranean". The report endorses the macro-regional approach to territorial cooperation policies between territories belonging to a services and working area, emphasizes the importance of the Mediterranean as a decentralised area of cooperation and, and indicates the option to design three distinct macro-regions: one in the western Mediterranean, another in the central Mediterranean — known as the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region — and the third in the eastern Mediterranean. A structured mechanism for coordination between these possible macro-regions is also proposed.

In the last two years the building process of the Mediterranean macro-region seems to mark a slowdown, probably due to the fact that the Mediterranean Region remains a breeding-ground of political instability and armed conflict, with undesirable loss of life, destruction of property, and consequences for business and trade, as well as for the environment.

6.2. Emerging issues/ problems/ difficulties

Carpathian

At the present stage, the concept of the Strategy is not clearly related to definite needs or identified actors/sub-territories. On the basis of the Working Document regarding "The Carpathian Euroregion Development Strategy", there are four key challenges:

- To create environment promoting innovation and enterprise development;
- To enable the development of social and human capital in the Region;
- To enhance uniform development of all areas in the Region and improved access to it;
- To enhance institutional interrelations within the area and to increase movement of ideas and know-how.

Even if the official strategy has still not been presented, on the basis of the Working Document regarding "The Carpathian Euroregion Development Strategy" the strategy is expected to be focused on:

(1) Economics, to overcome the wide disparities (and hence realize the high potential) in research and productive innovation;

[82] ECO/332 A macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean, Brussels, 12th December 2012 "OPINION of the European Economic and Social Committee on Developing a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean – the benefits for island Member States (exploratory opinion for the Cyprus Presidency)".

(2) Accessibility, with the improvement of networks, for ending the energy isolation of parts of the Region, and ensuring sustainability of transport modes and the sustainable development of the cities being sub-local development centres as well as rural areas;

(3) Creation and reinforcement of internal institutional relations between particular areas in the Region and actors, and stakeholders supporting the development of the Region.

It must be emphasized that this possible macro-regional strategy is based on an extended cooperation with an important neighbouring country, Ukraine, which is following a gradual progress towards political association and economic integration with the EU. This aspect could represent a specific element in terms of the Strategy's added value.

North Sea

Many Member States are currently hesitant or neutral about committing to a macro-regional strategy for the North Sea Region. In general, national governments are less interested than regional authorities. There is some regional interest in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK (e.g. Scotland). There is some support in Sweden but it is not such an active driver for the macro-regional strategy for the North Sea Region as it was for the Baltic Sea Region. Norway is generally positive towards a macro-regional strategy for the North Sea Region but is of course not an EU member.

Furthermore, at the present stage the concept of the strategy is not clearly related to definite needs or identified actors/sub-territories. Maritime cooperation and energy networks are currently considered to be two of the key issues.

This macro-regional area is featured by an extremely high level of socio-economic cohesion, and includes only one non-EU country, Norway, which joined the EEA in 1994. The contribution to the enlargement policies is therefore low, and this could suggest to evaluate a sectoral strategic approach in spite of a macro-regional one.

Black Sea

At the present stage, the concept of the Strategy is not clearly related to definite needs or identified actors/sub-territories. The EP Resolution (20th January 2011) underlines that, given the strategic importance of the Black Sea Region for the EU and the rather limited results of the Black Sea Synergy, the new strategy for the Black Sea Region should be launched to enhance the coherence and visibility of EU action in the Region. This new strategy should be an integral part of the EU's broader Foreign and Security Policy vision.

This area, however, has become particularly unstable with concrete cases of conflict between Ukraine and Russia. This matter of fact requests to reconsider the orientation of the EP Resolution, which indicates as main strategy's objective the establishment of an area of peace, democracy, prosperity and stability, founded on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and providing for EU energy security. In this view, the good governance, the rule of law, promotion of respect of human rights, migration management, energy, transport, the environment, and economic and social development should constitute priority actions. In the current geopolitical context, it seems necessary to assess with care if the macro-regional paradigm can still be considered as the most appropriate, or if it risks to be adopted at a too early stage.

Atlantic Arc

At the present stage, the concept of the Strategy is not clearly related to definite needs or identified actors/sub-territories, even if the EESC opinion underlines that the maritime dimension could be a key feature of this area. Its shared economic, technological and cultural heritage includes indeed activities such as fishing, shipbuilding, the metallurgical industry, engineering, research and science, ports, trade and maritime transport. In particular, the EESC opinion considers that the Atlantic area comprises a variety of regions with their own development challenges, whose unity and specific features are rooted in their maritime nature and global outreach and their lack of connections with the European economic and political centres.

It must be noted, however, that the Atlantic Area is featured by a significant level of cohesion, even if some disparities emerge when Portugal is considered. Finally, as this possible macro-region includes only one candidate country (Iceland), its contribution to the enlargement policies has to be considered as not particularly high.

Western Eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea

The Mediterranean area is featured by dramatic inequalities, which are clearly represented by the evident phenomenon of migration, including illegal immigration with related health risks for the migrants and significant security problems for the European countries. Some countries are experiencing dramatic conflicts (e.g. Syria, the Palestinian Authority, Israel), and others present unstable political conditions (e.g. Egypt), with the evident difficulty to design a macro-regional prospect. According to the experience gained in EUSBSR and EUSDR, the participation in a macro-regional strategy requires indeed not only peaceful conditions, but also a good level of institutional and administrative capacity. On the one hand, the great demographic and economic potential of the Mediterranean area suggests exploring new forms of cooperation in the area. On the other hand, it seems that a macro-regional project can be designed only in the long term.

7. POLICY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY FINDINGS

- From the vantage point of post-2013 Cohesion Policy, a classification of a Member State can build on a close evaluation of **cohesion need** as well as the **ability to implement ETC** as an instrument of social, economic and territorial cohesion on the level of the macro-region.
- The analysis suggest three different sets of MRS; (1) **MRS as potential instruments of EU Foreign Policy** (Mediterranean; Black Sea); (2) **MRS as potential instruments for tackling uneven development** (EUSDR; EUSBSR; Adriatic-Ionian; Carpathian); and finally, (3) **MRS as potential instruments for the exploitation of territorial synergies** (EUSALP; Atlantic Arc; North Sea).
- The three approaches mapped out can be linked to one main evaluative criterion respectively; **integration and coordination** in the case of Foreign Policy-oriented MRS; **tackling regional disparities and promoting territorial cohesion** in the case balance-oriented MRS; and finally, **improved value for money** for synergy-oriented MRS. There are two evaluative criteria that cannot be applied to all approaches to macro-regional cooperation **(improved value for money & tackling regional disparities and promoting territorial cohesion).**
- For the new strategies that are currently under consideration, the EP could play an important role in some type of **pre-assessment of political and financial needs and abilities with regards to ETC** to form the basis for further investigation into the feasibility of a macro-regional approach. This could be performed for all strategies on the basis of a selective appropriation of the different criteria for added value existing.
- The strengthened support for the transnational cooperation structures in the implementation of MRS that the Parliament currently delivers becomes all the more crucial in the upcoming years. This would justify a **closer investigation concerning the budgetary assistance to transnational cooperation that the Parliament can provide in the upcoming years.**
- The notion of **conditionality in trans-national cooperation** as well as **the usefulness of EGTC** should be studied in closer detail in the coming years.

7.1. Horizontal conclusions on different macro-regional approaches

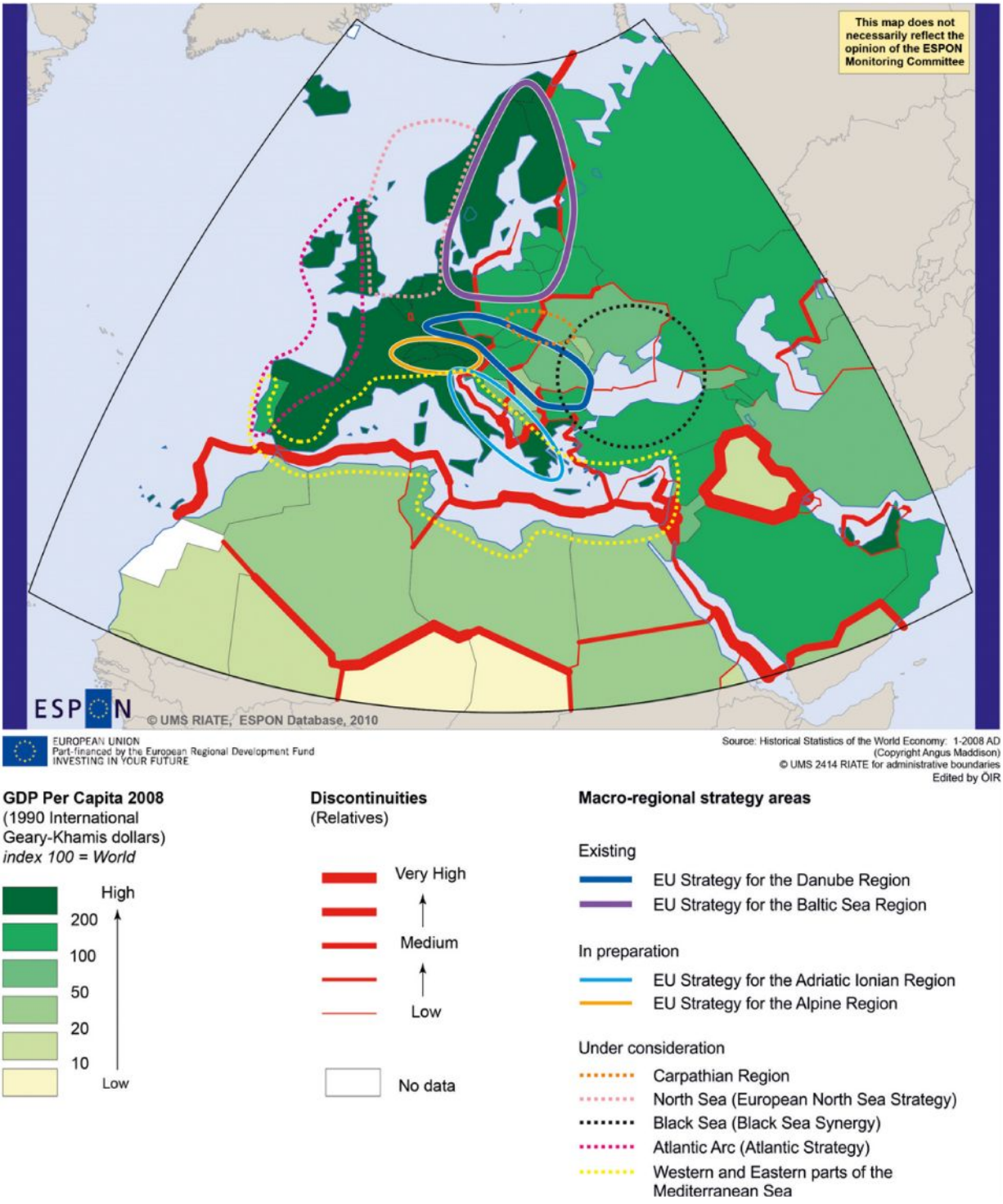
Having studied EU macro-regional strategies conceived, prepared and implemented, the objective of the following chapter will be to derive horizontal conclusions from a cross-analysis of MRS in relation to Cohesion Policy and ETC. Starting from a classification of macro-regional approaches we will distinguish between different policy orientations of MRS. On the basis of this, we shall derive a set of policy conclusions and recommendations as well as roadmap for the EP to support the development of new MRS in the near future.

Classifying macro-regions from the vantage point of social, economic and territorial cohesion

From the vantage point of post-2013 Cohesion Policy, a classification of MRS can build on a close evaluation of **cohesion need** – defined as a reduction in socio-economic and territorial disparities through territorial cooperation – as well as the **ability to implement ETC** as an instrument of social, economic and territorial cohesion on the level of the macro-region.

Need for reduction in socio-economic disparities

Figure 7: Macro-regional strategy areas and discontinuities in GDP per Capita (2008)



Source: ÖIR 2014

Figure 7 assembles existing, prepared and projected MRS on the background of an illustration of cross-border discontinuities in GDP per capita in Europe. It shows that the **Europe of macro-regions** is built on important cross-border discontinuities in wealth between countries. Where discontinuities in GDP per capita on NUTS 1 level are sometimes **negligible (Alpine & North Sea),** there is set of strategies where imbalances in wealth are slightly more **accentuated (Atlantic Arc, Danube & Baltic).**

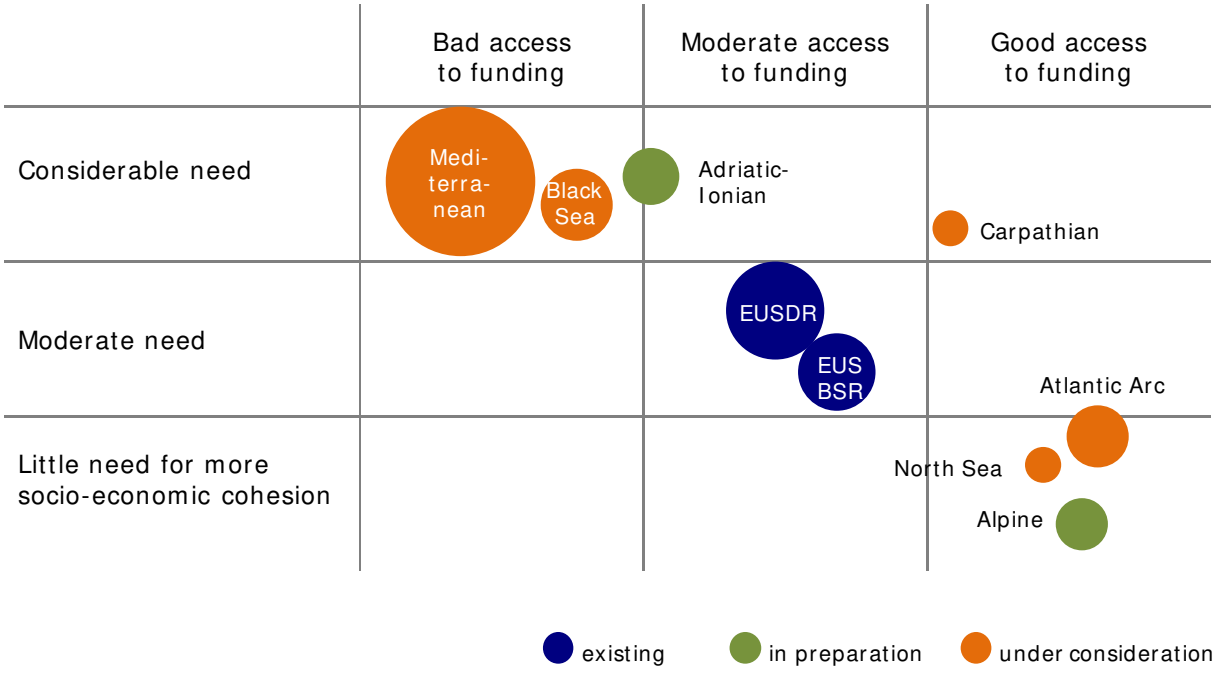
Finally, there exists also a set of macro-regions that show **considerable** discontinuities in GDP per capita distribution. Among those we can find the **Adriatic-Ionian Strategy,** and the proposals for **Carpathian, Mediterranean and Black Sea Strategies.** It is fair to assume that the higher the discontinuity between countries within a MRS, the greater the need for territorial Cohesion Policy. Likewise, we deem it rational to state that where such discontinuities are negligible or non-existent, there is relatively little added value for fostering MRS as an instrument in the reduction of disparities.

This does not suggest that there is no other added value to be extracted from a macro-regional approach, for where disparities do not play such big of a role, or can only be tackled at too high of a cost, other problems like the **relationship with external neighbours** or the **fostering of growth and competitiveness** may take precedence. Typically, at the level of the Alpine Space, there are major cohesion issues at the sub-regional level, linked to specific development conditions of alpine communities. For the moment, it will be useful to stick to the description of cohesion as the reduction of disparities, but we will come back to these other dimension at a later stage.

Ability to implement

The ability to implement territorial cohesion on the level of the macro-region is both to be conceived as a **financial ability** and an **institutional capacity and political commitment** to deal with the complexity of territorial cooperation. Financial ability has an **equity dimension –** the equal ability to access financial support from Cohesion Policy funds and ETC programmes – and an **efficiency dimension –** the absorption rate of funds put at the disposal of Member States. From the equity dimension, it is worth noting that not all macro-regions illustrate the same degree of accessibility to Cohesion Policy funds and ETC programmes. In some of the proposed macro-regions, almost all participating countries have access to a mix of Cohesion Policy financing and transnational programmes **(Atlantic, North Sea, Alpine and to some degree Carpathian),** whereas in others a large degree of prospected participating states could not benefit from access to funding **(Adriatic Ionian, Mediterranean & Black Sea).** In many ways this equity issue finds its origins in the status of countries in a MRS – that is the difference between member, pre-accession and non-EU Member States. The figure below maps access to cohesion funds and ETC programmes available (equity) to GDP per capita discontinuities (cohesion need) among macro-regions.

Figure 8: Cohesion need and equity in access to cohesion and ETC funds



Source: ÖIR 2014

This graphic illustrates the grounding paradox of macro-regional policy as a Cohesion Policy and territorial cooperation policy instrument: those macro-regions that would be most in need of policy intervention are also those that have least access to the funds put at the disposal of this endeavour, and vice versa. This point raises important questions with regards to **the equitability in access to cohesion and ETC financing** among MRS. Proposals for MRS in the **Mediterranean** and **Black Sea** are particularly threatened by the meagre prospects of stable financing for projects out of the defined pots, difficulties that may have been encountered in EUSDR and EUSBSR but risk to accentuate in the new strategies currently discussed. Based on the experiences of existing MRS, the **Adriatic-Ionian Strategy** can be considered a test-bed for the treatment of *MRS that display a high need of socio-economic cohesion but barriers in access to financing instruments.* Their success in financial terms seems to depend on the capacity of other financial instruments, such as the European Neighbourhood Instrument, to make up for the gap hereby identified. On the other side, we can see that a close observation of the Alpine Strategy could be of use to understand the logic of MRS in contexts with *little need of socio-economic cohesion and low barriers in access to finance.* The graphic also shows that the two first strategies, EUSBR and EUSDR, are in many ways to be conceived as authoritative case studies representing the wealth of equity issues that can be encountered among the proposals that are out there.

The equity dimension is not to be confused with **the efficiency dimension,** but these two aspects are deeply correlated[83]. We think it is fair to assume that the lack of co-financing capacity among certain Member States which influences absorption is to a great extent dependent on available budgetary resources, and therefore GDP discontinuity, but political and organisational reasons – that is the way that states choose to administer funds on a national level – cannot be totally excluded as a reason without examination of a counterfactual.

[83] For as Müller et al. has shown "on average, only 52.8% of the funds allocated per Member State were actually paid out in the Danube Region, whereas the average was about 61.2% in the total EU" and "one of the reasons of the low absorption rates in the Danube Region is that co-financing capacity was not available" (2014 pp. 221).

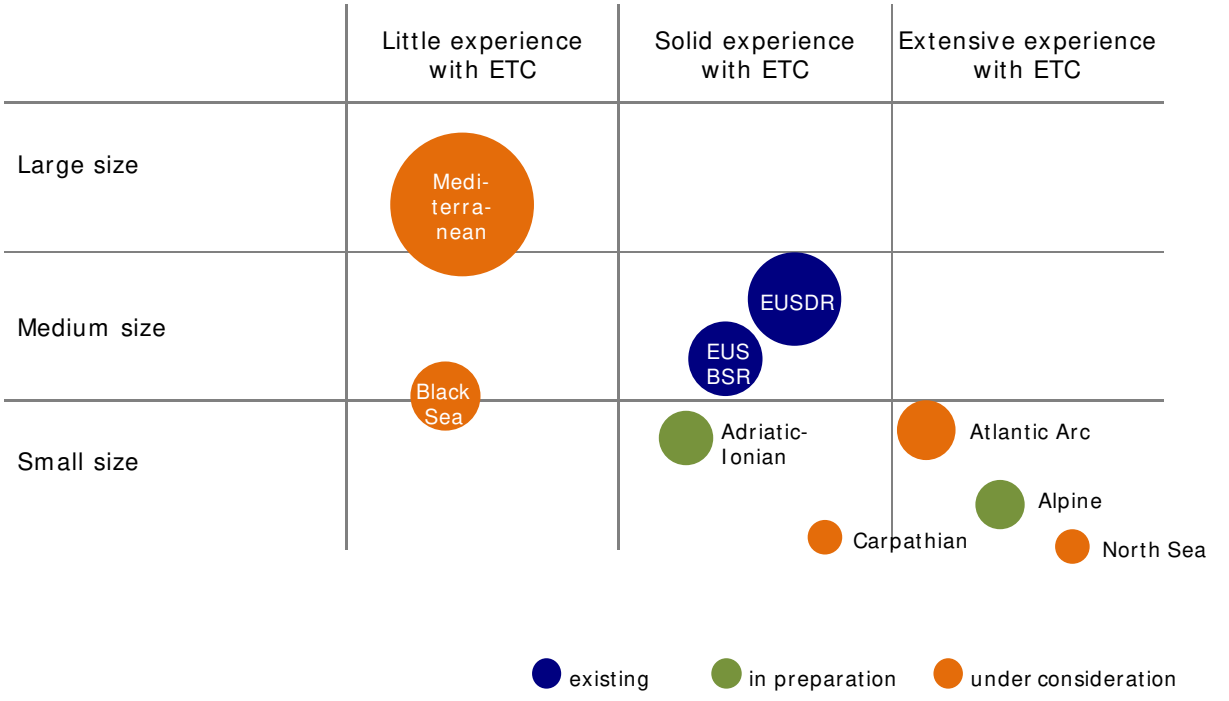
This suggests that financial equity and efficiency dimensions with regards to certain new MRS **(Mediterranean, Adriatic-Ionian, Black Sea)** should play a relatively more important role in strategy formulation than in the case of others **(North Sea, Atlantic & Carpathian).** To be more precise, the former strategies will need to closely think of possible alternatives to and linkages with existing ETC and Cohesion funds, whereas the latter are under dissimilar pressure in this regard.

Institutional capacity will refer to the capacity for collective action for territorial cooperation among the Member States. This factor may both be defined in terms of the sheer **number of actors and states** involved in the strategy's implementation. We deem it rational to assume that the number of states involved in the strategy can be conceived as an indicator for the complexity of ETC governance in an MRS. This is due to the sheer amount of coordination activity and heterogeneity in approaches to be expected. It is also justified by the pre-eminent role that national governments already occupy and will occupy in the future according to Commission's latest proposal concerning the governance of MRS. Figure 9 below represents MRS not according to their size in population, but to the amount of national coordinators involved in strategy implementation. The smallest MRS tend to involve about 5 members **(Carpathian, North Sea)** while the biggest will involve over 10 national administrations **(EUSDR, EUSBSR, Black Sea).** The case of the **Mediterranean** Strategy deserves special attention since it aims to potentially involve almost four times as many national authorities as the smallest new MRS.

Further, institutional capacity could also be evaluated in terms of **experience in European transnational cooperation.** This factor has been defined in terms of the average participation in ETC programmes per state in a MRS. Evidently, this definition ignores the wealth of cooperation structures, mechanisms and methods that are and go beyond the mere logic of the programmes. But in the absence of an accurate description of this term, and particularly with the prospect of an ever greater need for interaction between ETC and MRS, we believe it is fair to use it as a proxy for such experience. We may therefore argue that the larger in size and the less experience there is with ETC, the more complex the anticipated governance of transnational coordination in a given MRS.

Consequently, Figure 9 is illustration of a gap in the anticipated complexity of territorial cooperation. We may distinguish between three sets of MRS as a result of this mapping of size onto state type; (1) those that exemplify a low degree of coordination complexity **(Atlantic Arc, North Sea, Alpine and Carpathian);** (2) those that exhibit a moderate degree of coordination complexity **(Adriatic Ionian, EUSBSR and EUSDR);** and finally, those for which a high degree of coordination complexity can be anticipated **(Mediterranean and Black Sea).** It will again be important to emphasize that **neither of the two aforementioned criteria are sufficient to describe the effectiveness of MLG within a macro-regional space**, but that they may be conceived as a proxy for assessing the complexity of collective action in the absence of a better way to conceive this.

Figure 9: MRS size and experience with administering ETC



Source: ÖIR 2014

A policy model of macro-regional cooperation

The result of the cross-analysis of cohesion need, access to funds and complexity of territorial cooperation can be seen in Table 2. The table categorizes existing, prepared and considered MRS according to the factors defined above.

Table 2 illustrates that MRS are instruments addressed to quite contrasting contexts and needs in terms of territorial cooperation. The analysis suggests three different sets of MRS; **(1) MRS as potential instruments of EU Foreign Policy** (in red, Mediterranean; Black Sea); **(2) MRS as potential instruments for tackling uneven development** (in green, EUSDR; EUSBSR; Adriatic-Ionian; Carpathian); and finally, **(3) MRS as potential instruments for the exploitation of territorial synergies** (in blue, EUSALP; Atlantic Arc; North Sea). Evidently, all MRS analyzed combine elements of Foreign Policy, reduction of disparities and sustainable growth/competitiveness. However, we will argue that some strategies are from their very structural disposition inclined towards one class rather than another. This does not exclude that MRS change and transform upon these structural characteristics. For instance, it is possible to imagine that strategic focus shifts from one position to another, or is better placed at the interstice between the grounding positions we have tried to discern. An interesting case is EUSAIR which embodies both an important Foreign Policy (conflict history in the Balkans) and reduction of territorial disparities dimension. Or North Sea and Alpine Strategies, where Foreign Policy elements combine with the creation of synergies through regional development. This can be seen in Figure 10.

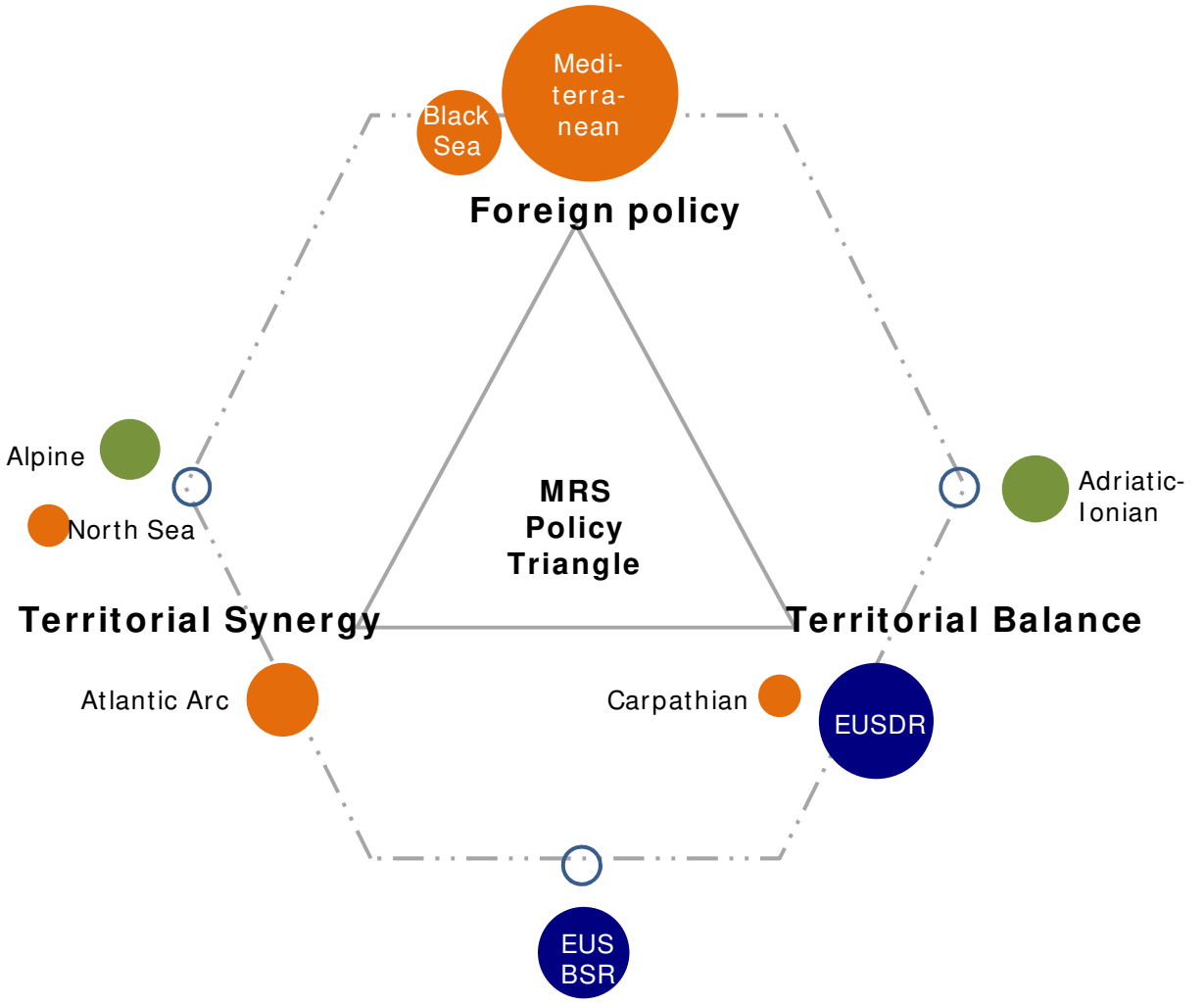
Table 2: Cohesion need and ability to implement ETC

MRS	Cohesion Need	Access to funds	Complexity of ETC
EUS BSR	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
EUSDR	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – High
Adriatic-Ionian	Considerable	Moderate	Moderate
Alpine	Marginal	Good	Low
Atlantic Arc	Marginal	Good	Low
Black Sea	Considerable	Bad	High
Carpathian	Considerable	Good	Low – Moderate
North Sea	Marginal	Good	Low
Medi-terra-nean	Considerable	Bad	High

Source: ÖIR 2014

The result is a model that combines the three policy orientations of MRS, Territorial Synergy, Territorial Balance and Foreign Policy in a triangular way. The policy model outlined above does not suggest what approach should be followed, as this is evidently always determined by particular local needs. Rather the model suggests what goals MRS can best achieve on the basis of existing potentials for territorial cooperation. It suggests that resources should be invested in the reduction of economic disparities, where such resources are available. In the case of the Mediterranean, there is considerable need for such reduction, but in the absence of sufficient ETC and Cohesion Policy resources, other instruments would need to be mobilized in order to achieve a balancing out of uneven development if desired. However, if this cannot be achieved, it may be worthwhile investing in the more Foreign Policy related aspects of MRS.

Figure 10: MRS Policy orientation Triangle



Source: ÖIR 2014

From policy orientation to added value of MRS

The EC[84] identified the following fields in which MRS in general could create added value:

- Results in terms of projects, actions, decisions, networks;
- Improved policy development;
- Improved value for money;
- Greater integration and coordination;
- Tackling regional inequality and promoting territorial cohesion.

The above outlined policy model suggests that this set of evaluative criteria cannot be applied in an indiscriminate manner to the MRS approaches at hand. This can be seen from Table 3 below that categorizes the evaluative criteria as suggested by EC according to three approaches deduced from the policy model.

[84] European Commission 2013b.

Table 3: MRS policy models and added value

	Main evaluative criterion	Other evaluative criteria	No evaluative criterion
Foreign Policy	✓ Greater integration and coordination	✓ Results in terms of projects, actions, decisions, networks ✓ Improved policy development ✓ Tackling regional inequality and promoting territorial cohesion	✗ Improved value for money
Territorial Balance	✓ Tackling regional inequality and promoting territorial cohesion	✓ Greater integration and coordination ✓ Results in terms of projects, actions, decisions, networks ✓ Improved policy development ✓ Improved value for money	
Territorial Synergy	✓ Improved value for money	✓ Results in terms of projects, actions, decisions, networks ✓ Improved policy development ✓ Greater integration and coordination	✗ Tackling regional inequality and promoting territorial cohesion

Source: ÖIR 2014

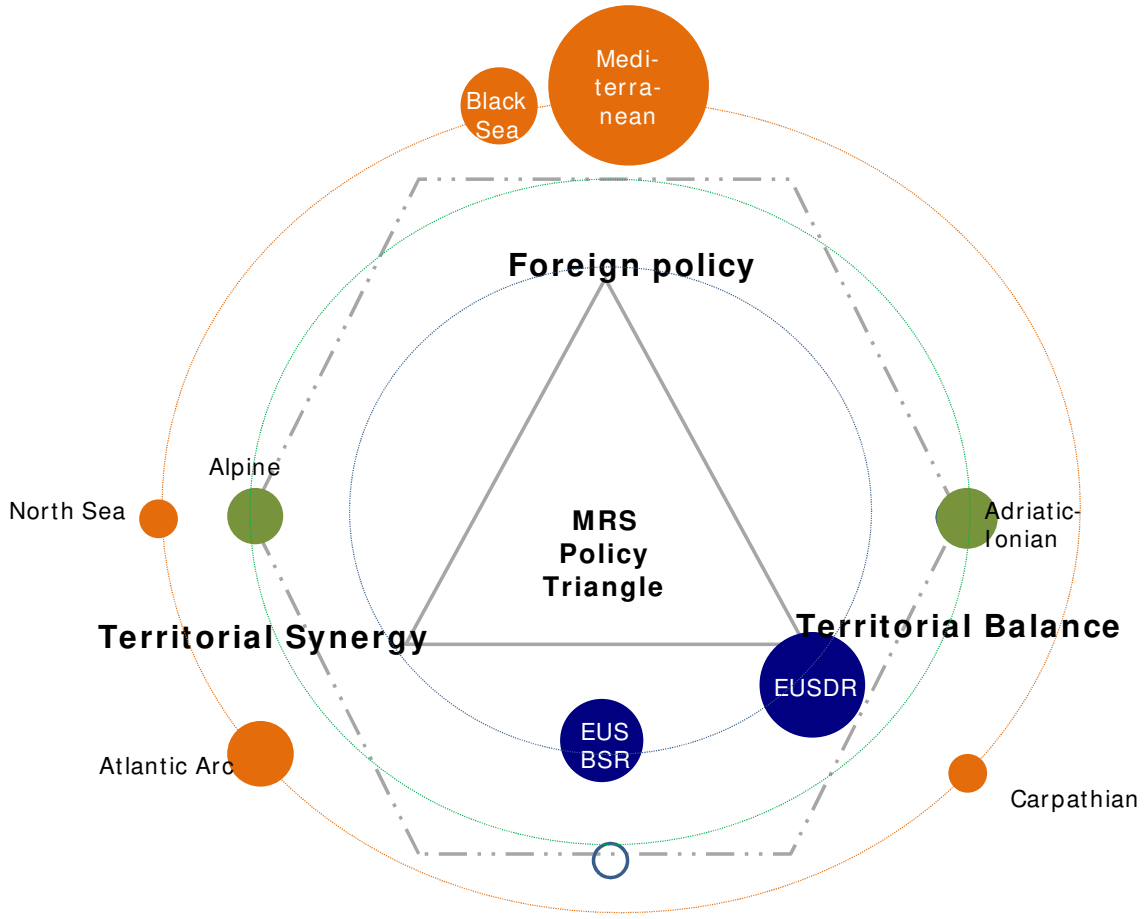
The table above suggests the following findings in terms of evaluation of added value of MRS. First it may be pointed out that each of the three approaches mapped out can be linked to one main evaluative criterion; **integration and coordination** in the case of Foreign Policy-oriented MRS; **Tackling regional disparities and promoting territorial cohesion** in the case balance-oriented MRS; and finally, **Improved value for money** for synergy-oriented MRS. The table also suggest that there are two evaluative criteria that cannot be applied to all approaches to macro-regional cooperation. While Foreign Policy-oriented MRS can do something to foster greater integration and cooperation, it will be difficult to imagine that they can be judged on the basis of the improved value for money that they deliver. On the other hand, we may very well think that synergy-oriented strategies have their primary *raison d'être* in the improved value for money that they achieve. They should not, however be judged in terms of their propensity to tackling regional inequalities and promoting territorial cohesion. Generally though, as can be seen from the table, all MRS can be evaluated in terms of greater integration and coordination, improved policy development and results of some way or the other in terms of projects, actions decisions and networks.

7.2. General messages and recommendations for the preparation of new macro-regional strategies

Based on the horizontal conclusions from case study analysis it is possible to generate a set of general messages and recommendations for the preparation of new MRS.

The general policy recommendations are formulated in terms of their ability a) **to foster effectiveness to implement ETC regulation for MRS** and b) **to generate greater efficiency in combination between ETC/ CP and MRS.** Potential policy measures are addressed to policymakers of European and national/local levels. These recommendations follow from case study analysis and recommend measures for three different phases; (1) the stage of conceiving of and testing the feasibility of macro-regional approach to a territorial problem; (2) the stage of preparing the making of a macro-regional strategy; and finally, (3) the stage of implementing MRS. In all cases it is be possible to formulate general and class specific recommendations for measures.

Figure 11: MRS policy orientations for strategies in consideration, preparation and implementation



Source: ÖIR 2014

As the figure above illustrates, the existing proposals and manifestations of MRS are at quite different stages in policy development. Our hypothesis is that the further we move away from the core of the triangle, the more manoeuvring radius there is for influencing strategy development and vice versa. We can see that certain macro-regions are in what we call conception phase; this is the case of Mediterranean, Black Sea, Carpathian, Atlantic Arc and North Sea. Others are currently prepared but not yet in implementation; this is the case of Alpine and Adriatic-Ionian. Finally, we have the two cases of EUSDR and EUSBSR which are in implementation.

Table 4: Logic of conclusions

Addressee	Stage of MRS	MRS Class	Type	Domain
– European institutions – National governments, local and regional actors	– Conceptualization – Preparation – Implementation	– Foreign-oriented – Synergy–oriented – Balance-oriented	– Efficiency – Effectiveness – Other	– Feasibility of the MR Strategy – Consultation process – Choice of objectives – Administrative organisation Financial Framework – Interaction between MRS and other sectors – Use of new OPs (incl. ETC OPs) – Monitoring and Evaluation

Source: ÖIR 2014

MRS Conception phase

The conceptualization stage is the time period that precedes the call by the EC's Communication calling for the elaboration of a macro-regional strategy. The main aim of this phase is to establish the need, feasibility of and major aim in applying a macro-regional strategy to a problem within a given territory. It builds on existing proposals for a territorial strategy or definitions of territorial problem, be it foreign, balance or synergy related.

Table 5: Recommended measures for conception phase

Recommendation	Type	Who to implement?	MRS Class	Affects
MRS should be an instrument that gives priority to the inclusion of a set of actors featuring a heterogeneous level of socio-economic development – for that matter need for socio-economic cohesion and ability to access ETC need to be assessed.	Effectiveness	EC, Council and EP	Balance-oriented	Carpathian
Evaluation of political, regional stability needs to precede strategy formulation.	Effectiveness	EC, Council and EP	Foreign-oriented	Medi-terra-nean; Black Sea
Evaluation of growth and synergy potentials needs to precede strategy formulation	Effectiveness	EC, Council and EP	Synergy-oriented	Atlantic Arc; North Sea
Link Action Plan and division of tasks to a clear pre-assessment of financial needs and ability for strategic coordination.	Efficiency	EC, Council and EP	All	

Source: ÖIR 2014

To guarantee the financial viability of potential strategy implementation it is recommended to link potential actions, thematic priorities and division of tasks **to a clear pre-assessment of financial needs and ability for strategic coordination for macro-regional cooperation.** This suggests that where financial need is too high to be covered by available instruments so that ability for strategic coordination is seriously hampered, applying a macro-regional approach should be questioned. Such assessment should be performed for all classes of strategies by the EC. On the Member States side the sectoral policies should get more involved.

In the light of our analysis such **feasibility test** can take different forms and derivatives depending on the class of macro-regional cooperation. Proposals for balance-oriented macro-regions should be closely analysed in terms of the type of socio-economic disparities and their ability to address these through ETC and other forms of financing.

Proposals for Foreign-oriented macro-regions could be preceded by a rigorous assessment of political, regional stability. Evaluation of growth and synergy potentials could precede proposals for synergy-oriented macro-regions.

MRS Preparation phase

The preparation phase starts with the EC's Communication calling for the development of a macro-regional strategy for a defined area. The main aim of this phase is to create the groundwork for the establishment of a strategy, the main pillars, choice of objectives, in a vertically and horizontally coordinated consultation process.

Table 6: Recommended measures for preparation phase

Recommendation	Type	Who to implement?	MRS Class	Affects
Initial consultations should be given more time and resources in order to achieve a better coverage of interests.	Effectiveness	EC	All	
Formulation of national proposals should be aligned to the strategic context provided by MRS, EU2020, 2014-2020 programming period etc.	Other	National authorities	All	
Civil society actors should find a coordinated position with local and regional authorities already in the consultation phase to improve upon their bargaining position.	Effectiveness	Regional and local actors	All	
Organise national consultation conferences prior to the consultation period launched by the EU	Effectiveness	National authorities	All	
Social and economical disparities should be considered as a key objective.	Effectiveness	EC	Balance-oriented	Adriatic-Ionian
The creation of growth and competitiveness through territorial synergies should be considered a key objective	Effectiveness	EC	Synergy-oriented	Alpine
The development of cooperation structures and the greater coordination of existing ones should be considered a key objective	Effectiveness	EC	Foreign-oriented	Adriatic-Ionian
Focus clearly on few objectives	Effectiveness	EC	All	

Source: ÖIR 2014

Recommendations are particularly addressing consultation phase and choice of objectives. A particular problem emerging from the case studies of existing strategies is the scope of the consultation process and its ability to cover a great deal of the interests present. Initial consultations should be given more time and resources by the EC in order to achieve a better coverage of interests. At the same time, civil society actors should find a coordinated position with local and regional authorities already in the consultation phase to improve upon their bargaining position. National authorities could help by organizing national consultation conferences prior to the consultation period launched by the EU, in order to fortify accountability on the national level.

For what concerns the formulation choice of objectives, national positions should be aligned to the strategic context provided by other MRS, EU2020, 2014-2020 programming period etc. As has been pointed out in several evaluations, potential Action Plans need to clearly focus on a set of achievable objectives. According to specific classes, key objectives could vary. For balance-oriented and Foreign Policy-oriented strategies in preparation, such as the Adriatic Ionian, social and economical disparities and the development of cooperation structures and the greater coordination of existing ones respectively should be considered as key objectives. For synergy-oriented strategies such as Alpine, the creation of growth and competitiveness through territorial synergies should be considered a key objective.

Implementation of MRS

The implementation phase starts as soon as the proposal for an MRS is formally accepted by EP and European Council. The main aim of this phase is the execution of the objectives laid out in the Action Plan.

Recommended measures address potentials for the betterment of multi-level governance (MLG) and the more efficient coordination of funding to realize projects.

A couple of measures could be useful to increase the effectiveness of implementation structures on national, regional and local level. Based on the existing experiences in Austria and Sweden it may be advisable to coordinate activities within government through a national actor platform, including relevant ministries, local and regional layers and civil society. National authorities should further better inform NGOs about the decisions of the SGs and give them enhanced possibility to comment on them. Regional and local actors on the other side should foster the creation of regional and local representation structures (on the model of CDCR). Their activities should be from the very outset included in the programme of the MRS Annual Forum (on the model of the Participation Day piloted in June 2014 in Vienna).

The coordination of ETC programmes and MRS can build on the transnational model of INTERACT points, tested in the existing MRS. However, as especially the case study of EUSDR has shown, efforts by INTERACT are more often than not constrained by fluctuations in personnel as well as underlying differences in the national administration of MRS and ETC. Where old Member State countries do generally have separate administrative structures for ETC and MRS, in most new Member States these two are generally highly integrated. Political fluctuations in new Member States have shown to have a significant effect on the administration of MRS and the composition of SGs. Another aspect of this issue has been the relative degree of power of PAs within their national jurisdiction. A basic recommendation for national authorities is to ensure the continuity of the transnational cooperation structures as well as to watch on their equal capacities to participate in meetings, and communicate the work within their own national jurisdictions[85].

[85] "There is a strong case (as argued in the Barca Report) that territorial cooperation allocations should be conditional on a supportive political/policy framework being established by the participating Member States to demonstrate that the EU programme is part of a wider strategy of cross-border or transnational cooperation (including complementary actions – potentially smaller projects – financed wholly by the Member States) and that it has the political commitment and resources of Member State authorities at national, regional and local levels." (EP 2012 pp. 133).

To guarantee the effective implementation of the strategy, national authorities need to ensure continuity beyond the changes in their staffing of public authorities. A crucial question relates to the **degree of control** that can be exercised over these bureaucratic fluctuations. The option of using an **EGTC** for the administration of transnational coordination within MRS could be an instrument for shielding PAs from national political powers. However such step would be a clear contradiction of the rule of "no new institutions", and raises further questions about the financing and openness and flexibility of such entity.

The option of making the administration of MRS dependent on ETC only has been questioned on the basis of a grounding contradiction between the sectoral logics of transnational programmes and the cross-sectoral approach of MRS. As Böhme (2013) suggests, MRS should be looking for funding beyond what is available for ETC and Cohesion Policy, to avoid clash between different priorities of MRS and OPs. This includes the potential alignment of ETC with the European Neighbourhood Instrument in the case of Foreign Policy-oriented strategies. For balance-oriented MRS, it could be allowed to use the ERDF to finance "basic infrastructure" in the framework of a major cross-border or interregional project carried out in partnership with one or more other Region(s) from a different category[86].

To ensure the better coordination of different EU Structural Funds cooperation needs to start at the level of the Commission. An inter-service group on macro-regions between different DGs of the Commission should be set up to ensure better alignment of funding streams. The geographical and thematic alignment of transnational programmes and macro-regional cooperation spaces is to be further continued. In this context it is however crucial that the EC issues guidelines[87] on how CSF funds can be used to implement projects in the framework of the macro-regional and the sea basin strategies. Further, it may be important for future strategies to clarify the way in which funding from the different sources can be used in combination.

The technical assistance of the EP to the PAs as well as the pilot projects financed have been crucial to the kick-starting of MRS implementation and should therefore be continued. However, given the disparities in resources between different countries it may be advisable to make the amount of financial contribution dependent on the financial need of PAs. For macro-regional projects with very high European added value it may be advisable, as CPMR (2013) suggest, increasing the pre-financing rates.

[86] http://www.spatialforesight.eu/tl_files/files/editors/dokumente/Brief-2013-3-130710.pdf

[87] Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 288/2014 of 25th February 2014 (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.087.01.0001.01.ENG), based on articles 15(2)(a)(ii), 27(3) and 70(2)(b) of the Common Provisions Regulation.

Table 7: Recommended measures for implementation phase

Recommendation	Type	Who to implement?	MRS Class	Affects
Foster the creation of regional and local representation structures (on the model CDCR)	Effectiveness	Regional and local actors	All	
Coordinate activities within government through a national actor platform, including relevant ministries, local and regional layers and civil society.	Effectiveness	National authorities	All	
Include local and civil society activities in the programme of the MRS Annual Forum (on the model of the Participation Day piloted in June 2014 in Vienna)	Effectiveness	National authorities	All	
NGOs should be informed about the decisions of the SGs and have the possibility to comment on them	Effectiveness	National authorities	All	
Ensure continuity in the implementation bodies beyond the change in the public authorities staff	Effectiveness	National authorities	All	
Set up of macro-regions Task force between different DGs of the Commission to ensure better alignement of funding	Efficiency	EC	All	
Guidelines on how CSF funds can be used to implement projects in the framework of the macro-regional and the sea basin strategies	Efficiency	EC	All	
Clarify the way in which funding from the different sources can be used in combination, and simplification of the procedures concerning the mobilisation of funds that operate with different management methods	Efficiency	EC	All	
Earmarking of transnational cooperation funds for MRS – the financing of day to day implementation – adjusted to degree of development of macro-region.	Efficiency	EC	All	
Alignment of transnational cooperation spaces and MRS	Efficiency	EC	All	
Budget for technical assistance to kick-start implementation process should be continued, but should be proportionate to financial need of Member States.	Efficiency	EP	All	
Examination of potential alignment of priorities of European Neighbourhood Instrument with MRS	Efficiency	EC	Foreign-oriented	
Allow the so-called "more developed regions" to use the ERDF to finance "basic infrastructure" in the framework of a major cross-border or interregional project carried out in partnership with one or more other Region (s) from a different category.	Efficiency	EC	Balance-oriented	EUSDR EUS BSR
National coordination of territorial cooperation and MRS should be done through centralized stakeholder platform on the model of INTERACT	Efficiency	National authorities	All	
Pre-financing for macro-regional structural projects rather than to countries.	Effectiveness	EC	All	

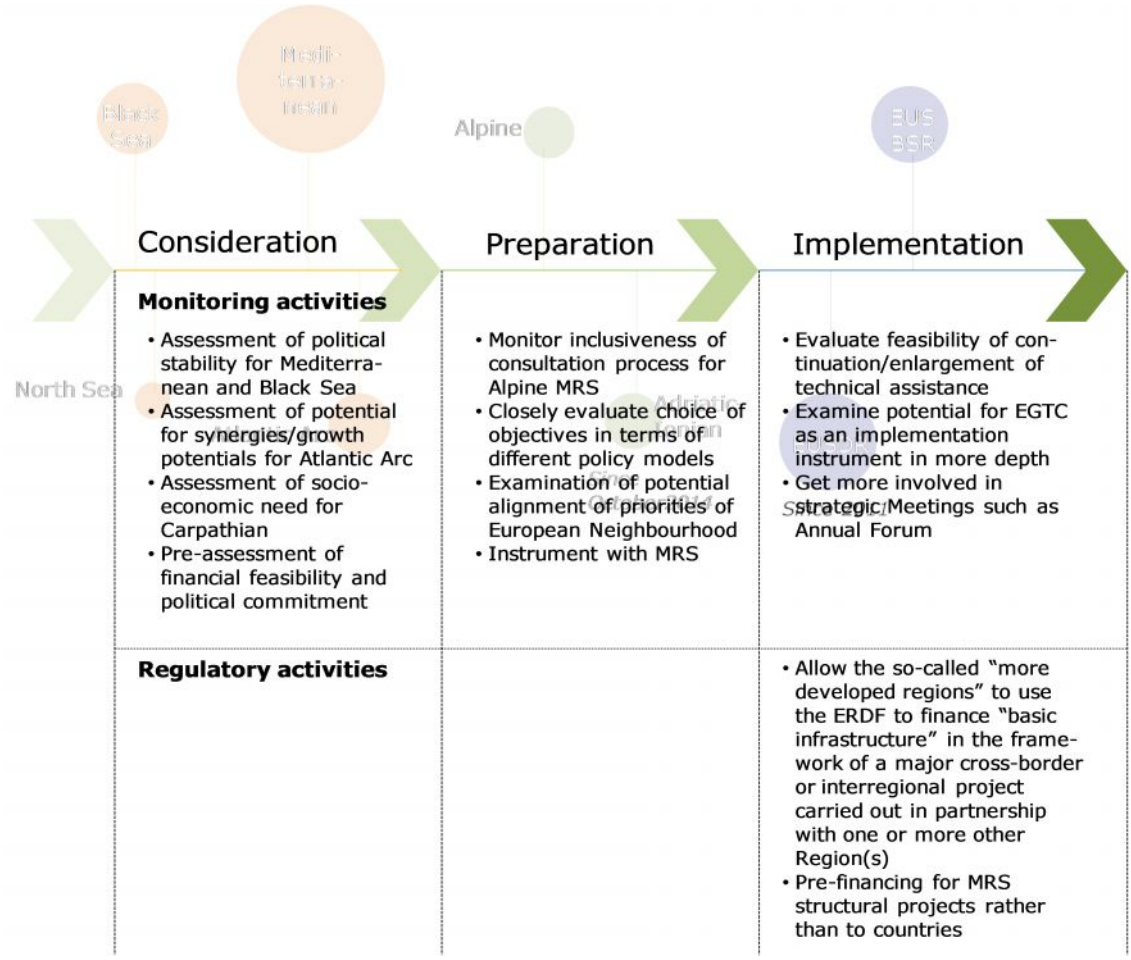
Source: ÖIR 2014

7.3. Recommended policy measures for the European Parliament to assist development of future macro-regional strategies

On the basis of the analysis provided in the report and the recommendations from chapter 7.2, a roadmap and advice for the EP can be designed to assist the effective implementation of new MRS in the next coming years.

In contrast to the EC, who has been largely driving existing macro-regional processes, the influence of the EP and of national parliaments on preparation and implementation of MRS has been less evident from the case studies. While in some strategies the Parliament has been a forerunner, with others it has been lagging behind. Some actors have expressed their regret concerning the limited involvement of the EP and national parliamentarians at meetings such as the Annual Forum. These findings suggest some general steps that could be taken by the EP in the upcoming years. These relate to the way that the EP formally intervenes **as an observer and commentator in the preparation and implementation of MRS.** For the new strategies that are currently under consideration, the EP could play an important role in some type of **pre-assessment of political and financial needs and abilities with regards to ETC** to form the basis for further investigation into the feasibility of a macro-regional approach. This could be performed for all strategies on the basis of a selective appropriation of the different criteria for added value existing.

Figure 12: Options for future regulatory and monitoring activities



Source: ÖIR 2014

At the same time, the provision of technical assistance to the PAs as well as the various pilot projects initiated by the EP have been marked out as highly significant for the development of the existing strategies. In the context of ever scarcer resources, the "three no's" provision and more MRS on the horizon, there remains a general uncertainty about the ability of the EP to deliver on the call for more substantial financial aid to emerging transnational structures out of this budget. In their communication on the governance of MRS, the Commission has expressed its wish to step back from the supervision of day-to-day implementation of macro-regional cooperation, leaving a gap that should at best be accommodated by national authorities. There is a risk that with the lesser involvement of the Commission, MRS will be even more vulnerable to the political fluctuations on the Member State side illustrated in the case studies on EUSDR and EUSBSR. This means that the strengthened support for the transnational cooperation structures in the implementation of MRS that the Parliament currently delivers becomes all the more crucial. In all evidence, this would justify a **closer investigation concerning the budgetary assistance to transnational cooperation that the Parliament can provide in the upcoming years.**

As a major defender of trans-nationalism and the interests of civil society in territorial policy, the REGI Committee has been arguing for a place-based, multi-level governance approach to post-2013 Cohesion Policy. As has been pointed out elsewhere, MLG in this context is not to be confused with the absence of top-down control functions related to the European added value that transnational cooperation could provide. The Parliament "envisages reinforced governance arrangements through stricter coordination and contractual relationships"[88]. The question that has been tried to be answered in this study is under what conditions the future of macro-regional cooperation can deliver upon the greater need for a territorialisation of EU2020, as well as the need for conditionality, incentives and minimum standards for Member States/regions, suggested by this approach[89]. As regards the Member States, there is a traditional resistance to stricter contractual relations and centralised control, preferring instead a less binding and more devolved governance frame. If NCPs and PAs interviewed frequently pointed to the little experience with the EGTC approach as a major justification for their small interest in using it with MRS, some transnational actors nevertheless see a greater need for a conditionality of some sort. This suggests that the notion of conditionality in trans-national cooperation as well as the usefulness of EGTC should be studied in closer detail in the coming years to reinforce the territorial contractualist view of Cohesion Policy supported by DG REGIO and the REGI Committee in the past.

[88] European Policies Research Centre (2011): *Comparative Study on the visions and options for Cohesion Policy after 2013*. pp. 29.
[89] European Policies Research Centre 2011, pp. 31.

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