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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE  
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE  
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS  
concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies**

{COM(2013) 468 final}

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## **Introduction**

This document comes in support of report to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, on the added value of two existing macro-regional strategies (the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)), adopted in June 2013.

It aims at providing more detailed information concerning the evaluation of added value of macro-regional strategies. It collects the contributions the Commission has received from the key stakeholders of the EUSBSR and the EUSDR, independent external experts, as well as the relevant academic and policy-development literature.

More information on the Strategies can be found on the EUSBSR and the EUSDR websites:

<http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/>

<http://www.danube-region.eu/>

## **Chapter 1: an analysis of responses to questionnaire for the survey on the added value of macro-regional strategies**

Questionnaires in total:	104
EUSBSR:	52
EUSDR	52

### **Rationale**

Received the highest response rate in the both surveys

#### **1a)**

83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that objectives of the EUSBSR/EUSDR correctly addressed the main challenges faced by respective region. 11 % were neutral on this statement and only 2% disagreed.

When we examine the responses, we find that the EUSDR respondents are more in agreement than the EUSBSR respondents (3 percentage points difference).

#### **1b)**

60 % of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the number of priority areas/horizontal actions was reasonable in macro-regional strategies, even though 27% were neutral and 14% disagreed or disagreed strongly.

However, taking into account the difference of 13 percentage points, EUSDR respondents (70% agreed or agreed strongly) were more positive on this statement than the EUSBSR respondents (only 48 % agreed or agreed strongly, while 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed.)

#### **1c)**

54 % of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that some priority areas were more important than others. However, 18 % disagreed or disagreed strongly and 27 % were neutral.

We find after examination of the results that this agreement is stronger in the EUSBSR case (62% agreed or strongly agreed) than in the EUSDR (46% agreed or strongly agreed; 17 percentage points difference).

#### **1d)**

38% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that the political statements towards the macro regional strategies in participating countries were high. However, a nearly equal 30% agreed or agreed strongly and 32% were neutral.

Given the difference of 33%, we find that the opinions of the respondents of the two existing strategies differ in that case. While 54% of the EUSDR respondents agreed or fully agreed with the statement, EUSBSR respondents are less positive (21% agreed or strongly agreed).

The EUSBRS insider respondents were 43% neutral, while 38% rather disagreed and 19% rather or strongly agreed. Of the status categories the PAC respondents represented the most negative response and the managing authorities of EU programmes represented the most positive. The EUSBRS outsider respondents were 46% neutral, 27% rather or strongly agreed and 27% rather or strongly disagreed. The pan-regional and regional organizations represented the most positive response. The national institutions represented the most negative.

The EUSDR insider respondents were 46% rather or strongly agreed, 22% neutral and 32% rather disagreed. Of the status categories the NCP respondents represented the most positive response, while the PACs represented the most negative response. The EUSDR outsider respondents were 77% rather or strongly agreed and of the majority were national institution respondents.

**1e)**

63% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that if implemented effectively, the macro-regional strategies were contributing to social, economic and territorial cohesion. 28 % were neutral on this statement and 9% disagreed or disagreed strongly.

When we examine the responses, we find that the EUSDR respondents are more in agreement than the EUSBSR respondents (9 percentage points difference).

**2. Governance**

**2a)**

51% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the internal administrative, technical and institutional organisations in all participating countries were still not effective enough to implement the EUSBSR/EUSDR. However, 29% were neutral.

The EUSBSR respondents are more positive than the EUSDR respondents (7 percentage points difference).

The EUSBSR insider respondents were 55% rather or strongly disagreed, 19% neutral and 26% rather agreed. Of the status categories the managing authorities on EU programmes respondents represented the most negative response, while the PACs represented the most positive. The EUSBSR outsider respondents were 46% rather or strongly disagreed and 36% neutral. There are no outstanding groups in both response categories.

The EUSDR insider respondents were 49% rather or strongly disagreed, 37% neutral, 14% rather or strongly agreed. Of the status categories the PAC respondents represented the most negative response, the NCPs the most positive. The EUSDR outsider respondents were 50% rather or strongly disagree, split of 25% for neutral and rather agree. There were no majority status groups as most positive respondents; yet, the national institution respondents were most negative.

**2b)**

35% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed on the statement that the key stakeholders of the macro-regional strategy (NCP, PAC) effectively coordinated their activities with other stakeholders. However, 16 % disagreed or disagreed strongly and 50 % were neutral.

The EUSBSR respondents are less positive (23 % of the disagreed or strongly disagree with this statement) than the EUSDR respondents (46% agreed or strongly agreed), given the difference of 22percentage points.

**2c)**

31 % of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the multilevel governance dimension was fully taken into account in the actions and decisions taken for implementing projects, actions or policies at Member States level/at project level.

The stakeholders of the EUSBSR are less positive than the EUSDR (17 percentage points difference).

31% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that there is clear evidence that national, regional and EU governance systems have improved thanks to the EUSBSR/EUSDR. However, 26 % agreed or strongly agreed and 43% were neutral.

The EUSDR respondents are less positive (44% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement) than the EUSBSR respondents (33% agreed or strongly agreed).

### **3. Funding**

#### **3a)**

50 % of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that the alignment of national, regional and EU policies and funding with the objectives of the EUSBSR/EUSDR had been successfully achieved.

When we examine the responses, we find that the EUSBSR respondents were more in agreement than the EUSDR respondents (14 percentage points difference),

#### **3b)**

54.8% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that technical assistance provided by European Commission facilitated the implementation of the EUSBSR/EUSDR. 36% though were neutral.

The EUSDR respondents (62% agreed or strongly agreed) were more positive than the EUSDR respondents (14% difference), among whom 48% agreed or strongly agreed.

#### **3c)**

46% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that macro-regional strategies could contribute in mobilizing the existing funding, to use it in more efficient and coordinated manner.

When we examine the responses, we find that the EUSBSR respondents were more in agreement than the EUSDR respondents (23 percentage points difference: while 56% of the EUSBSR stakeholder agreed or strongly agreed, only 33% of the Danube respondents are of one of these opinions).

#### **3 d)**

According to 61% of the respondents (agreed or strongly agreed) there is a need for additional funding only for the project preparation stage and networking.

This is especially in case in the EUSDR: while 79% of the Danube respondents agreed or strongly agreed, 43% of the EUSBSR did so. This fact corresponds to a difference of 37 percentage points.

### **4. Cooperation**

#### **4a)**

37 % of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that at the absence of additional money favoured the reinforcement of cooperation among partners and the main core partners (NCP, PAC, HAL, and Commission). However, a nearly equal 33% agreed or agreed strongly and 30% were neutral.

#### **4b)**

64% agreed or strongly agreed that the cooperation mechanisms had improved thanks to the EUSBSR/EUSDR.

**4c)**

77% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the implementation of the EUSBSR/EUSDR strengthened the existing cooperation among and within participating countries, in particular among ministries.

**4d)**

54% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the cooperation between EU Member States with neighbouring non-EU countries expanded and improved thanks to the relevant macro-regional strategy.

However, the EUSDR respondents are more positive than the EUSBSR respondents, taking into account the difference of 37%. 79% among the Danube respondents agreed or fully agreed with the statement. In comparison to that, only 36% of the Baltic respondents agreed or fully agreed (25% disagreement or strong disagreement).

**4e)**

27% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that cooperation had led yet a tangible effect on national policies such as those on environment, energy and etc. However, a nearly equal 28% agreed or agreed strongly and 44.9% were neutral.

When we examine the responses, we find that the EUDSR respondents are less positive than the EUSDR respondents (8 percentage points difference regarding disagreement)

**5. Policy orientations**

**5a)**

60% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the implementation of the EUSBSR/EUSDR helped to move from a sectoral approach to a multi-sectoral, integrated one.

EUSDR respondents are more positive than the EUSBSR respondents (23 percentage points difference).

**5b)**

50% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that many successful projects and actions would not be implemented if the EUSBSR/EUSDR would not have been endorsed. However, 24% disagreed or disagreed strongly and nearly equal 25% were neutral.

EUSBSR respondents are in more agreement than the EUSDR respondents (24.2 percentage points difference).

**5c)**

62% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the macro-regional strategy helped to mobilize the existing policies and create more synergies.

EUSBSR respondents are in more positive than the EUSDR respondents (10 percentage points difference).

**5d)**

20% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that macro-regional strategies could lead changes in policy developments in several areas in respective country. However, 32% disagreed or disagreed strongly and 48% were neutral.

**5e)**

Only 14% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement new policy developments had improved the situation in the areas concerned, and that this improvement would be measurable or could be described. However, 30.2% disagreed or disagreed strongly and more than the half, that is 56%, were neutral.

**6. Next programming period**

**6a)**

94% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that the objectives of the macro-regional strategy must be firmly embedded in the 2014–2020 policy framework at EU, national and regional level (high agreement among both groups: EUSBSR as well as EUSDR respondents).

**6b)**

88% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the EUSBSR/EUSDR core partners (NCP, PAC, HAL) should be consulted in/associated to the discussions of the next programmes in their respective countries (high agreement among both groups: EUSBSR as well as EUSDR respondents).

The EUSBSR insider respondents were 89% rather or strongly agreed and the EUSBSR outsider respondents were 84% rather or strongly disagreed.

The EUSDR insider respondents were 92% rather or strongly agreed and the EUSDR outsider respondents were 100% rather or strongly agreed.

**6c)**

75% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that relevant, actions or projects of the macro-regional strategy should be clearly identified in the draft programmes submitted to the European Commission.

EUSDR respondents are more positive than the EUSBSR respondents (18 percentage points difference).

**6d)**

64% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that that for each priority area/horizontal action, a cooperation platform (where PAC/HAL, programmes authorities, projects managers, NGOs, etc. can exchange) and a Steering Committee should be set up.

EUSDR respondents are more positive than the EUSBSR respondents (20 percentage points difference).



## Chapter 2: independent assessments of external experts

### 2.1 Added value of macro regional strategies: a governance perspective

by Kai Böhme (Spatial Foresight GmbH)

08.03.2013

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#### Some selected key findings deriving from this paper

- **Too young.** Macro regional strategies are still rather new and have not been around long enough to allow for solid conclusions about their actual added value.
- **Transnationality.** Macro regional strategies offer a new governance framework for approaching development challenges and potentials, which cannot be solved by the states (independently from each other) and are too specific for the macro region to be approached at EU level. However, there is a risk that the focus on issues specific for a macro region is weakened by an increasing attention to more general policy priorities.
- **Multi-sector.** Macro regional strategies offer a new governance framework for bringing together various relevant sector policies to approach joint challenges or potentials. Bringing together resources (financial and non-financial) of relevant sectors can contribute to more efficiently approach development challenges and potentials. However, there is a risk that the focus is rather on contributions in terms of funding single projects that can be linked (vaguely) to the macro regional challenges or potentials.
- **Complexity.** The governance frameworks set up for macro regional strategies are rather complex and rely on a wide range of stakeholders. The challenge is to keep all stakeholders committed and motivated in the long-run.
- **Political backing.** The high political profile and backing of macro regional incl. attention at Council Level is an important asset with regard to their standing as a platform bringing together different policy sectors and levels.
- **Action.** Various flagship projects have been linked to macro regional strategies. Whereas some exist independently from the strategy, others show that stakeholders develop new activities inspired by macro regional strategies. A lot of the actual added value of macro regional strategies will be generated by their projects and their ability to stimulate projects which would not have come about otherwise.

#### **A governance perspective**

Macro regional strategies are integrated frameworks, which allow the EU and Member States to identify needs and match them to available resources through coordination of appropriate policies. The strategies shall contribute to better governance of large territories confronted with similar problems. The basic principle of macro regional strategies is therefore to rationalise existing resources and use them more efficiently.

The general objective of the strategies is to address macro regional challenges. The specific objective is to develop a framework for the individual challenges and address deficiencies in governance structures to ensure that a range of strategic

actions to deal with the challenges are implemented in the most efficient, effective and coherent way. (see COM 2009/REGIO/02)

**3 No's as framework conditions.** From the beginning, three No's have been spelled out clearly (COM (2009) 0248 final), partly to avoid the risk of a high-spending, ineffective and 'vast contraption' once the first enthusiasm over a new strategy has faded:

- **No new EU legislation.** The driving moments are Action Plans which also underline developments and regular updates and adaptations to new developments. No additional new legislation is envisaged for developing and implementing macro regional strategies.
- **No new EU funds.** There is no own budget for macro-regional strategies. "Though this aspect maybe seen as a weakness, it seems to constitute an innovative factor, given that all actors are stimulated towards a greater degree of coordination and synergies of the various financial resources available at different levels." (Stocchiero 2010) The aim is to use existing funds more effectively and in a more coordinated way.
- **No additional EU formal structures.** Instead of creating new institutions, the macro regional strategies are to be supported by a multi-level and multi-actor governance approach.

These three No's are however not uncontested, and there are even proposals for a 'three yeses rule': more complementary funding, more institutional coordination and more new projects. (European Parliament, Committee on Regional Development 2011)

**Integrated approach as potential.** The added value of the macro regional strategies is often seen in the integrated approach, i.e. a collective action that strives towards a common objective, providing a platform for bringing together various actors, policies and financial resources. Consequently, the potential to mobilise a broad range of stakeholders and create a broad and shared ownership is a key strength of macro regional strategies.

It is argued that macro regional strategies offer a new pragmatic approach to finding more efficient policy modalities and better coordination among existing institutions and resources. Macro regional strategies aim at providing integrated governance approaches addressing a pressing issue of policy making in Europe: the need for better policy coordination in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of policy making.

**Potential to reduce the costs of non-coordination?** Robert et. al (2001) pointed at the costs of non-coordination of European policies. The question whether the integrated governance approach used for the macro regional strategies can reduce these costs would need to be subject to a specific study. This could investigate whether the costs of non-coordination could be reduced and what are the costs of the coordination procedures introduced by macro regional studies.

Macro regional strategies often are considered as an example of integrated (territorial) governance, even advocating the idea of place based policy making. The governance structures for drafting and also implementing the strategies are rather complex and involve a wide range of different stakeholders. The review of existing documents shows, that macro regional strategies have good potentials to improve policy coordination in three different ways, i.e. transnational (coordination between countries), multi-sector (coordination between sectors), multi-level (coordination between levels). However, there are also a number of obstacles, which suggest that these potentials are not fully realised.

## Transnational coordination

**Broaden geographical perspective of sector policies.** Many development challenges and potentials cut across administrative boundaries and call therefore for joint approaches. There is an increasing demand for shared implementation mechanisms. Macro regional strategies stress the need to approach development challenges and potentials in a wider geographical context, as appropriate responses require joint approaches across national boundaries. This line of thought can enrich European and national policy developments and there are indications that the strategies function as ambassadors and manage to inspire other policy developments to transnational approaches. A few examples are mentioned in the below textbox as well as in other textboxes throughout this paper.

### Examples: Strengthening transnational solutions

The vision of the Clean Water project is to create a vital Baltic Sea Region Clean Water Cluster, a cooperation platform of different clusters for interaction of all triple helix sectors in the BSR. The purpose of this platform is to develop water protection with new and innovative technologies, products and services. The cluster combines competences of BSR countries' innovation milieus, clusters and SME-networks around water protection (wastewater treatment, hazardous chemical substitution), to bring business opportunities and boost competitiveness of the Baltic Sea Region. (Source: <http://www.bsrstars.se/project/clean-water/>)

“Develop and improve coordination and cooperation among Member States and stakeholders” on fisheries management in the Baltic Sea. A forum called Baltfish has been established to enhance collaboration among Baltic Sea Member States as a first step towards further regionalisation of fisheries management. The forum will elaborate with relevant Baltic Sea organisations including the BS RAC and HELCOM how integration of concerned stakeholders in fisheries management and policy implementation can be strengthened and the forum be developed further in this regard. (Source: SEC(2009) 712/2)

Dubois et al. (2009) go even one step further and suggest that macro regional strategies may help avoiding cannibalistic competition between regions, and rather foster competition on the basis of complementarities. To what degree this happens is hard to tell at present.

Despite the positive examples, one needs to remember that transnational and cross-border cooperation is not entirely new. Cooperation across national borders (not only in the meaning of Interreg) has been promoted for a long time in Europe and a range of institutions and platforms have been established during the past decades. In parts these sub-regional cooperation groups do also facilitate processes of European integration. In that sense macro regional strategies are nothing new, but rather offer a platform for improved cooperation between existing sub-regional groups or (as e.g. in the Alpine case) are perceived as giving new stimulus or momentum to existing cooperation areas.

**Contributing to working-level links with Third Countries.** With regard to cross-border coordination, the integration of Third countries is of particular interest (at least for macro regions going beyond the EU). Macro regional strategies are a flexible framework complementing existing EU and national policies. With relation to Third countries, they can be seen as a tool for bridging European Neighbourhood Policies and territorial development policies. The involvement of non-EU partners in macro regional strategies may facilitate (a) the collaboration between institutions and governments in and outside the EU, and (b) a gradually economic integration and make EU's external borders less of an obstacle to the flow of goods, services, capital and persons within a macro-region. (see Dubois et al. 2009).

### Examples: Cooperation with Third countries

“Implement fully the EU – Russia Energy Efficiency Initiative”, particularly the annual work programmes of the Joint EU – Russia Thematic Group on Energy Efficiency of the EU – Russia Energy Dialogue, to be implemented jointly by the EU and Russian side.

“Assessment of regional nutrient pollution load and identification of priority projects to reduce nutrient inputs from Belarus to the Baltic Sea”, in particular in the context of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership. The aim of this project is to reduce the nutrient inputs from Belarus to the Baltic Sea in the context of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership, with particular consideration given to such key sectors and areas as agriculture, municipal waste water, industry, and the production and use of detergents containing phosphorus. So far, the terms of reference for an assessment and identification study have been developed by the Central Research Institute for Complex Use of Water Resources, the Ministry of the Environment, Finland, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and HELCOM, and agreed with the Belarusian Ministries of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Housing and Communal Services. (Source: SEC(2011) 1071 final)

“Monitor implementation of the priorities of the EU-Russia Strategic Framework for Customs Cooperation” for ensuring trade facilitation and the protection of citizens, and combating fraud. The Strategic Framework is based on three broad priorities: a) Safe and fluid trade lanes; b) Risk management and fight against fraud; c) Investment in customs modernisation. (Source: SEC(2009) 712/2)

At the same time, the Baltic Sea Strategy has been developed with focus on internal dynamics of EU integration and only little attention has been paid to external relations. Although Russia is an important player for various development in the Baltic Sea Region it is not part of the Strategy. The involvement of Russia runs via the involvement of Russian partners in flagship projects and existing frameworks such as the Northern Dimension. This imbalanced involvement of EU and non-EU Member State may weaken the Baltic Sea Strategy (see Dühr 2009 and Borg 2009). The situation is somewhat different in the case of the Danube Strategy. Also here non EU Member States are not part of the strategy, but play a larger role in the implementation activities, e.g. as priority coordinators and by involving funding sources targeting non-EU areas, e.g. WBIF<sup>1</sup> and ENPI CBC<sup>2</sup>.

Overall, macro regional strategies seem to increase the transnational dimension in various policy sectors. They contribute to a better integration of countries covered by a macro region as well as on developing joint approaches which are more efficient than approaches taken by single countries independently.

With regard to the involvement of Third countries, there are a series of flagship projects that address Third countries. The exact success is however hard to tell from available information. In any case, approaches to integrating Third countries in the work on macro regional strategies need to be detached from sensitive diplomatic issues.

### Cross-sector coordination

**Platform for stakeholders from different EU and national policy sectors.** Macro regional strategies aim at bringing together a wide range of different policy sectors and underline the necessity that different policy sectors need to cooperate in order to firstly define the most pressing issues for a macro region and thereafter develop and implement a suitable strategy. In that sense macro regional strategies are a valuable platform.

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<sup>1</sup> Western Balkan Investment Framework

<sup>2</sup> European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes

To a certain degree this approach has been successful as it has brought new stakeholders to the table and made them thinking about the development of the macro region outside their usual institutional context. Indeed, both at EU level and in some Member States, the elaboration of the macro-regional strategies implied major efforts of bringing together representatives from a wide range of different policy sectors. For the Baltic Sea Strategy, DG Regio coordinated the input of about 20 other DGs just at EU level, let alone the wide range of national ministries involved in various consultations.

However, it would be naïve to believe that this goes without any conflicts between different policy sectors and their ambitions to be the integrating or coordinating body. Borg (2009) points at the challenge of how to achieve more efficient cooperation in the case of overlapping policy agendas. One example from the Baltic Sea Strategy is the Integrated Maritime Policy, which – similar to macro regional strategies – aims at a better coordination of different policy areas, albeit with focus on a more coherent approach to maritime issues. Another example from the Danube Strategy concerns the work towards a more integrated approach to the Danube river taking into account both the Danube as transport axis and the environmental concerns related to the Danube river.

Overall, the multi-faceted policy platform provided by macro regional strategies facilitates dialogue and mutual influence between different policy sector policies. In the ideal case this may even go beyond their respective contribution to the development and implementation of a strategy and even result in mutual learning or dialogue with regard to other policy developments.

Next to the wide governance arrangements used to develop and implement macro regional strategies, also the non-existence of specific funds may play a crucial role for keeping different sectors on board and in dialogue with each other in order to continuously work on the implementation of the strategies.

**Macro regional projects funded by a large number of sector instruments.** Macro regional strategies have been successful in bringing on board other sector policies. This been illustrated e.g. with regard to the funding sources used financing flagship projects of the strategies. The Action Plans provide examples of different financing sources that are used, and illustrates the potential of the strategies to contribute to a better coordination and alignment of funding. Next to ERDF<sup>3</sup> programmes a wide range of other funding sources from other European sector policies as well as non EU sources contribute to funding flagship projects of macro regional strategies, e.g. ESF<sup>4</sup>, CPFI<sup>5</sup>, EIB<sup>6</sup> & EIF<sup>7</sup>, TEN-T<sup>8</sup>, JRC<sup>9</sup>, FP7<sup>10</sup> as well as national, regional and Nordic sources fund projects. The below box provides some examples on project funded via schemes from different EU sector policies. This shows that a wide range of different EU sector policies contribute with their respective funding instruments to implementing the macro regional strategy.

At the same time, experience from the Baltic Sea Strategy also shows that the contribution of the different financing sources differs widely. SWECO (2011) underlines, that there is a concentration to a few of over 100 (theoretically) available funding opportunities: “The five most mentioned sources of funding were the following, starting with the most mentioned; Baltic Sea Region Programme, South Baltic Programme, TEN-T (different schemes), Central Baltic Programme, Nordic Council of Ministers (different schemes).“ (SWECO 2011, p. 12).

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<sup>3</sup> European Regional Development Funds

<sup>4</sup> European Social Funds

<sup>5</sup> Civil Protection Framework Programme

<sup>6</sup> European Investment Bank

<sup>7</sup> European Investment Fund

<sup>8</sup> Trans-European Transport Networks

<sup>9</sup> Joint Research Centre

<sup>10</sup> Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development

### Examples: Sector policies strengthening macro regional approach

**ESF.** The Managing Authority for the European Social Fund (ESF) in Sweden, will the coming years strengthen the transnational cooperation between projects funded by the ESF in the Member States. A particular focus will be on the cooperation between projects and stakeholders in the Member States in the Baltic Sea Region. The Baltic Sea Network ESF project will serve that purpose, for Sweden as well as for the other Member States concerned. The intention is also to analyse the relation and linkage between the ESF and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). Subsequently actions will be taken to encourage projects to be better prepared to support the implementation of the social dimension in the EUSBSR. A network of the Managing Authorities for the ESF between the Member States concerned – Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Germany - has been consolidated and a number of joint activities will be carried out: conferences, partner search forums and learning seminars in Sweden as well as in the other Member States. (Source: <http://www.inclusiveeurope.se>)

**CPFI.** The project 14.3 is financed with support from the European Commission through the EU Civil Protection Financial Instrument. The project aims to develop scenarios and identify gaps for all main hazards and the potential of such hazards in the Baltic Sea Region, in order to anticipate disasters, thus enabling a rapid and effective EU response through the Community Civil Protection Mechanism. The work will reinforce disaster prevention and response capacity as well as coherence and coordination between different institutions. (Source: <http://www.14point3.eu>)

**TEN-T.** The flagship project conducted a feasibility study on LNG infrastructure for short sea shipping was financed via TEN-T. The purpose of the project was to develop recommendations for how to establish an infrastructure facilitating the use of LNG as a ships' fuel. However, other important areas have also been identified. The project's recommendations concentrate on five main areas: Bunkering of ships with LNG, Economic and financial conditions, Safety, Technical and operational conditions and finally Permits for an infrastructure ashore. (Source: SEC (2009) 712/2 – status February 2013).

**JRC.** The Joint Research Centre has launched an initiative to provide scientific support to the Danube Strategy, in cooperation with key partners from the Region. Work has already started on the setting-up of Danube-wide reference scientific data sets, which will allow policy makers and other stakeholders to access comparable and **harmonised data on common challenges, such as water and soil quality, or landscapes.**

**FP7.** The 7th Framework Programme for Research, has launched three calls specifically addressing Danube Region challenges.

**Regional Example.** The state of Baden Württemberg has set aside funds to support the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, with a special focus on providing support for the initial phase of projects with an explicit macro-regional impact.

Whereas the strategies as such are multi-sectoral the implement projects usually focus on a specific issue within a specific policy sector in order to make progress on concrete implementation tasks. To what degree single projects influence other sectors than their own is hard to tell. In that sense one may conclude that although the strategies set out to integrate different (sector) processes, their orientation (in terms of projects) tends to remain rather sectoral. More attention could be paid to sector-integrating or cross-cutting tools and instruments. Nevertheless, going beyond single projects, macro regional strategies provide a platform where resources from different sectors are used to achieve common macro regional objectives.

## Multi-level coordination

**European and national level key players.** Macro regional strategies aim also at bringing together stakeholders from different policy levels. The work with macro regional strategies relies on the capacity to bring together different policy levels and funds from different policy levels in a transnational approach. When it comes to strategy development, mainly the European level and the Member States are involved. Overall, closer and better coordinated action at various levels of governance is seen as a positive step towards further deepening of EU integration process. (see Katsarova 2009, and Cugusi & Stocchiero 2010).

**“Bottom-up” development of priorities.** One important aspect of the multi-level coordination is the development of thematic orientations of a macro regional strategy. Macro regional strategies focus on themes identified in a “bottom-up” process, where various consultations process and in particular national representatives play an important role. The basic idea is that, macro regional strategies work on themes which are perceived as common and important to the participating countries.

The “bottom-up” approach may generate thematic orientations which are not (as highly ranked) on European or national policy agendas, but which address actual challenges of the region. It might even offer opportunities to become more concrete and address pressing issues (incl. conflicts of interest) which in EU-wide strategies might be covered by rhetoric because of the diversity of the EU. (see Böhme & Zillmer 2010)

**Regional and local level important implementers.** There is a certain criticism that the local and regional level is not sufficiently taken on board when it comes to the development of the strategies. At the same time stakeholders from the local and regional level can play a substantial role when it comes to the implementation of the strategies, although not all are interested. On the one hand regional stakeholders are e.g. involved in the implementation structures of macro regional strategies, e.g. by taking on responsibilities as priority area coordinators. On the other hand, a regional stakeholders are involved in concrete projects. A wide range of projects bridges local or regional action/responses with national policies in the countries involved and development challenges or potentials at macro-regional level or even EU wide policy approaches.

**Facilitating the implementation of EU policies.** Macro regional strategies comprise among others flagship projects with a focus on improving or furthering the implementation of EU policies in the countries or regions covered by the strategy. There are e.g. projects linked to the EU chemicals regulation REACH (1907/2006/EC), European Transport Networks (TEN-T), the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EG), as well as to the agreements within the Helsinki Convention on the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP).

**Informing European, national and regional policy processes.** A wide range of projects also aim at providing new evidence relevant for improving policy making at various levels of decision making. Examples can be found with regard to many different policy fields and the envisaged actions roughly be grouped in three categories (a) providing new information through studies or monitoring exercise, (b) informing relevant stakeholder, and (c) setting up transnational networks for increasing information flows and efficiency by sharing resources.

### Examples: Implementing and improving EU policies

The project “Reduce the Use of the Substances of Very High Concern in the Baltic Sea Region” aims at including substances relevant for the environment in the Baltic Sea region, such as the recommendations made through the Baltic Sea Action Plan

(BSAP), to the REACH candidate list. Selected substances will be assessed to see whether they fulfil the REACH criteria of SVHCs. If that is the case, the substances will be incorporated into an extended SIN-list and work for their later inclusion in the candidate list will be carried out. (Source: <http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu>)

The project “Implementing European space for maritime transport without barriers in the Baltic Sea Region” addresses several legislative measures, including a proposal aimed at simplifying administrative formalities based on Community regulations and recommendations to the Member States for reducing the administrative burden imposed on shipping companies. (Source: SEC(2009) 712/2)

The project “Complement the agreed priority transport infrastructure” addresses a number of TEN-T priority projects in the Baltic Sea Region. To the target group to be addressed by the project belong national long-term infrastructures planners in the Baltic Sea region, national, regional and local politicians, governments and governmental agencies, public and private stakeholders in the transport sector and transport networks in the Baltic Sea Region (Sources: SEC(2009) 712/2 and <http://www.baltictransportoutlook.eu>)

Overall, macro regional strategies strengthen multi-level coordination in different ways. When it comes to strategy development a key aspect is the interaction between the European and national level and potential to identify genuine priority areas that require transnational cooperation but are not suitable for EU-wide policies. Looking at single project, there is a large variety of specific project activities focusing on multi-level aspects of policy design and implementation in different policy areas. At this stage also the regional and local level is included.

### **Specific & focused or broad & inclusive?**

There are a number of aspects which may hamper a clearer added value of macro regional strategies. Overall, macro regional strategies have a tendency to focus very broadly at a better coordination between sectors, levels and across countries. This integrated approach to providing a new governance platform for better policy coordination comes at a cost: complexity.

**Complex structures and risks of fading ownership.** Given the broad nature of the strategies and the absence of single institutions for their implementation, they develop rather complex implementation mechanisms. These rely on a wide range of organisations that take over responsibilities and carry through coordination tasks. The multiplicity of actors brings the risk that a strategy could lose (a) focus and (b) the ownership and responsibility felt by the single stakeholders. If the feeling of ownership and subsequently commitment and responsibility towards the strategy declines, the entire strategy is weakened. This leads ultimately to the question whether the complexity needed for the elaboration and in particular for the implementation of the strategies is too high to actually being able to make use of the manifold potentials for better coordination offered by them.

### **Potential stronger links between macro regional strategies and ETC or EGTC**

Both cases are rather risky. Many involved stakeholders may see them as opportunities to be freed from their responsibility and obligations to contribute to the (implementation of) macro regional strategies. Consequently macro regional strategies would be downgraded to the level of the spatial strategies which were elaborated as guiding documents of transnational cooperation 10 to 15 years ago. (see also Zilmer et al. 2012)

**“Interreg solution”.** The transnational dimension of macro regional strategies implies that transnational cooperation programmes often are seen as the most natural funding opportunity. Such a development risks, that many other funding actors will reduce (their partially already low) engagement / contribution to implementing macro regional strategies and leave it all



for transnational cooperation programmes. This in turn will weaken the cross-sector coordination dimension of the strategies as the implementation will be dominated by the Interreg Community. Furthermore, territorial cooperation programmes might not be financially strong enough to support all kinds of activities (e.g. infrastructure investments) needed to achieve the aims of the strategies, nor is it guaranteed that all themes of the macro regional strategies are eligible for territorial cooperation. Instead of giving the impression that transnational programmes will be the main implementer of macro regional strategies, efforts are needed to increase the ownership and contribution of other sectors and their funding sources (incl. other Structural Funds programmes). (see also Zillmer et al. 2012)

**“EGTC solution”.** The idea to set up an EGTC for implementing a macro regional strategy has been aired in some informal discussions. Indeed, it may have the charm that there would be finally a clear responsible for driving the processes and could possibly keep the momentum in the implementation. However, this would be a clear deviation from the announced “No” to new institutions. Furthermore, it would bring about multiple questions as concerns the financing of such an EGTC, as well as the membership and its implications for the broad governance approach on which the strategies are currently based.

There are signs that the commitment is not always as high as might be desirable or needed. SWECO (2011) points for the Baltic Sea case towards the need for increased support and commitment by the Member States including a strengthening of their National Contact Points and the Priority Area Coordinator. Along a similar line stakeholders involved in the Danube case point out that they need further political support from the European Commission to activate relevant national or regional stakeholders (see e.g. Summary of the 3rd meeting of the EUSDR Contact Points and Area Coordinators, or EUSDR Report June 2012 Priority Area 10 Institutional capacity and cooperation).

**High-level political backing.** In comparison to other policy fields, macro regional strategies can refer to a strong political backing. They are not just agreed and dealt with at informal ministerial meetings, or meetings of transnational monitoring and steering committees. They do have the attention and backing at the level of the European General Affairs Council. This is an important asset with regard to their standing as a platform bringing together different policy sectors and levels. What ever is to be done in future, it should be ensured that this high-level political backing remains and is not downgraded.

**Between unique focus and collecting pond.** There is a constant criticism that the strategies are thematically too broad and not focused enough. Whereas a broad thematic approach is seen as an advantage with regard to the possibility to involve a wide range of different sectors, it may also be a hinder when it comes to actually developing into a powerful tool. As outlined above, one strength of the strategies is seen in the fact that they manage to point towards real development challenges (which require joint action) in the respective geographical area. At the same time there are also expectations that these strategies reflect better the Europe 2020 aims and targets and cover most aspects which are perceived as policy relevant. The question is to what degree this suits a clear focus of the strategies on specific needs of the region.

Overall, the governance approach used for macro regional strategies focuses on a broad involvement. This comes with a number of challenges and not all of them seem to be solved at present. However, a quick fix and simple solution to solving these governance challenges risks to become the beginning of the end of macro regional strategies.

## Conclusions

The task of this paper was to provide input to a discussion on the added value of macro regional strategies from a governance perspective. The following will shortly summarise some key points.

**Main achievements.** Macro regional strategies have the potential to contribute to improved coordination between different policy sectors and policy levels and they also do allow for increasing the efficiency of policy implementation by strengthening transnational solutions.

Whereas macro regional strategies have potential at the level of the strategy itself the main contributions are made at project level. As the strategies are still rather young it is too early for counterfactual assessments. At present it is difficult to tell to what degree various projects would have been implemented even without the existence of macro regional strategies.

Dubois et al. 2009 argue even that macro regional strategies may also be used to accelerate the ‘catching up’ phase between the “new” and “old” Member States.

To further strengthen the role of macro regional strategies, it is necessary to continue encouraging all EU funding sources in their geographical areas to contribute to them. Otherwise, there is a risk that it will be mainly EU Cohesion Policy and in particular territorial cooperation programmes that take the strategies on board. This would certainly weaken the potential to contribute to a better coordination of different policy sectors.

**Influence on EU and national policy development.** Macro regional strategies have a potential to influence both EU and national policies. EU policies could be influenced e.g. by the macro regional themes which are identified bottom-up and therefore could also inform EU policy making with fresh ideas. At the same time various flagship projects of the strategies focus on EU policies and on informing policy design or improving policy implementation.

As for national policies it seems the main power of influence comes with the various flagship projects which inform and improve policy development and implementation in the countries and regions involved. This is done using different types of funding. Furthermore, the strategies encourage stakeholders in sector policies which usually operate at national or regional scale to consider a transnational approach and investigate whether there are efficiency gains by cooperating transnationally (see examples in textbox).

#### **Examples: Influencing national policy making**

The MIMIC project has comprehensive, holistic approach to risks related to maritime oil transportation in the Baltic Sea. The final task of this project will be carried out in order to consider, how the scientific findings of the other WP's and tasks could be implemented, in practice, in the society. Possible new elements to legislation or international agreements are recommended. Also the potential improvements of both safety and security related monitoring systems (hard data, interviews, etc.) are suggested. In practice, a comprehensive seminar for all managing organisations will be held during the project. In addition, workshops will be organised: possible improvements to risk communication will be discussed between managers. The risk model will also be discussed in a workshop with the related actors (e.g. universities, Finnish Environment Institute, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Transport and Communications, and maritime safety authorities). (Source: <http://www.merikotka.fi>)

BRISK, a flagship project under Priority Area Major Emergencies and co-financed by the Baltic Sea Region programme, made headlines in both leading newspapers and TV news programs in Denmark in late September. The project findings addressed the lack of response capacity in case of, for instance, oil spills in the Baltic Sea. In this respect, the Danish Defense Minister Nick Hækkerup has promised that this topic gets top priority in discussions on the future Danish defense. (Source: EUBSR News November 2012)

**Coordination between different actors.** Macro regional strategies stress and support increased cooperation between different stakeholders in order to increase the efficiency of public policy making. In some cases this makes use of existing cooperation patterns and ways, and in others new cooperation patterns emerge. Again, the strategies are too young to engage in a counterfactual debate allowing to pinpoint details.

With regard to Third countries, macro regional strategies offer platforms for increasing cooperation and reducing barriers at working level.

**Improving governance structures.** Given the high complexity it also appears that the governance approach for macro regional strategies does not necessarily serve as role model for integrated policy making. At the same time, macro regional strategies are a first step to improving the coordination of policy development and implementation and may in the long-run also contribute to developing improved governance structures going beyond single projects.

There are a range of projects that for concrete purposes and tasks work on establishing joint solution across countries (and sometimes even across sectors). Some of them may result in stable new governance structures.

**Main drivers.** At the level of the strategy the main driver – next to the need to collaborate at macro-regional level in order to solve certain challenges – seems the enthusiasm for something new, at least in the beginning. In the long-run however, it appears that the main drivers are the European Commission and a few stakeholders in some Member States. There is a risk that the interest and engagement of many national and regional stakeholders declines over time.

The projects create added value driven by single project partners. At large, three different types of projects can be identified (a) strategic policy development projects with rather broad and intangible impacts, (b) explorative pilot projects often focusing on developing and testing new approaches and tools, and (c) policy implementation projects e.g. focusing on how EU policies can be better implemented in EU Member States.

Overall, challenges that only can be solved jointly at macro regional level are the key driver.

## **Recommendations**

### **Contributing to EU2020 objectives as part of the hierarchy of policies**

Following the above, macro regional strategies can work as a catalyst for improving the implementation of European policies, directives and regulations in an area. This can certainly also be true with regard to the Europe 2020 Strategy.

However, at the same time the text argues for a stronger focus of macro regional strategies towards issues that require cooperation at macro regional level, as they cannot be solved by each Member State individually and are too specific to be solved by a EU-wide approach. Putting too much emphasis on macro regional strategies as an instrument for achieving the Europe 2020 objectives might contradict the need for a stronger focus.

### **Building blocks in reaching European objectives**

Macro regional strategies can fill a vacuum between the Member State level and the European level which is perceived by some people as the EU has grown large and distant with its soon 28 Member States.

There are various different ways in which macro regional strategies can function as building blocks in reaching European objectives:

- Macro regional strategies can be important platforms for solving challenges and utilising developing potentials more effectively than could be done individually by each Member State or at EU level.
- Macro regional strategies can function for increasing European integration, by increasing the number of stakeholders and policy sectors that work at a geographically wider scale than their usual national or regional level.
- Macro regional strategies can also facilitate the implementation of European policies, directives and regulations in the Member States.

### **Levels of intensity in macro regional cooperation**

The overall question is whether different levels of intensity in macro regional cooperation are a problem, or not. Given the broad and inclusive character of macro regional strategies and their implementation work there will always be variations as concerns intensity and commitment.

This becomes problematic if the intensity and commitment for important parts of a strategy decline to a degree that the implementation is at risk. To minimize this risk, a stronger leadership and/or a stronger focus of the strategies may help. A stronger leadership can help to keep a minimum of intensity and commitment for all parts of a strategy, while a stronger focus may help to reduce the complexity of the implementation mechanisms (as less it might require the involvement of fewer stakeholders).

### **Leadership question and improving resilience**

To increase leadership and reduce the fragility of the currently complex implementation structures of macro regional strategies, two different options can be imagined:

- **Parametric Governance Power.** Keeping the wide range of themes and stakeholders involved it seems necessary to point out one “coordinating organisation” which gets a clear mandate to push stakeholders that have taken over responsibilities where necessary. To do this a clear and simple monitoring system would be needed at two levels:
  - **Priority area level.** For all priority areas targets and related indicators need to be developed into realistic and easily measurable targets (e.g. comparable to the Europe 2020 headline targets or ERDF programme indicators). The indicators presently used are only partially suitable as clear measures on what progress has been made. The development with regard to these targets needs to be monitored on annual basis and the results need to be presented to the general public in an easily understandable and communicative way.
  - **Stakeholder level.** To strengthen the leadership and individual responsibility of every stakeholder involved, there should be clear and measurable targets what each stakeholder should achieve in each reporting period (e.g. year). These targets have to be agreed upon with the stakeholders and should be developed based on each stakeholder’s specific role in the implementation process (see e.g. document such as one on rules and responsibilities developed for the Baltic Sea Strategy).

For both monitoring levels, the “coordinating organisation” should regularly collect information on the progress made to achieving the set targets, and remind or encourage stakeholders to work towards their targets. By regularly publishing the progress made on the website and pin pointing who has made good progress and who not (naming, shaming and blaming), there would be a certain pressure / incentive for everybody to try to work towards their targets. One may even consider particular actions /penalties for stakeholders who have not achieved their targets. This approach would follow the idea of parametric governance or the open method of coordination.

- **Exclusivity Driver.** Alternatively, one might consider to reduce the number of stakeholders included in the implementation, and make it a rather exclusive club. The rationale behind this would be that if it is difficult and exclusive (honourable) to become part of the club of stakeholders directly working with the implementation, this might motivate as well as ensure commitment and efforts in the long-run.

### **Recommendations for future work**

Overall, there are three main recommendations for future work that can arrive from the above:

- **Focus.** As mentioned several times, it might be wise to focus the strategies towards issues where there is a genuine need or added value to cooperation at macro regional level (instead of any other level). If it is necessary for political reasons to also include other, broader policy fields, efforts should be undertaken to identify within these policy fields particular actions with a clear macro regional rationale.
- **Coordination & monitoring.** Given the complex implementation mechanisms, it might be wise to appoint for each strategy one stakeholder with a stronger coordination and monitoring responsibility and the necessary resources, i.e. a “coordination organisation”. The monitoring should also involve the activities carried out by the various stakeholders, and the “coordinating organisation” need to have the standing to publicly present which stakeholders have achieved a lot and which did not.
- **Political backing.** The high political profile and backing of macro regional incl. attention at Council Level is an important asset with regard to their standing as a platform bringing together different policy sectors and levels. The high level political backing should be maintained.

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## 2.2 The added value of macro-regional strategies from the perspective of spatial planning

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### Background and introduction

This discussion paper was prepared as an input for the assessment of the added-value of European Union (EU) macro-regional strategies from the perspective of spatial planning. The European Council (Council 2011a) has invited the European Commission to ‘clarify the concept of macro-regional strategies, to evaluate their value added and submit the outcomes to the Council and the European Parliament by June 2013’. The assessment of existing macro-regional strategies should provide information on their effects to date and provide input for the further development of the macro-regional strategies.

Since its inception, there has been considerable interest in the concept of EU macro-regional strategies. The first macro-regional strategy – the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) – was adopted in 2009 (CEC 2009a, 2010a, b), followed by the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in 2011 (CEC 2010c, d). Others are under discussion, e.g. for the Adriatic – Ionian region. Of a somewhat different status, but relevant in a discussion on EU macro-regional strategies, are other integrated policy frameworks of a transnational dimension, such as the existing EU policy frameworks for the Northern Dimension<sup>11</sup> and the EU’s Integrated Maritime Policy<sup>12</sup>.

The focus of macro-regional strategies has from the beginning been on making more effective use of existing funds, institutions / structures, and policies (local, regional, national, EU). No new funding, legislation or institutions were supposed to be created. A macro-regional strategy has been described as ‘an integrated framework’ (Samecki 2009: para 2.1), which is expected to allow ‘the European Union and Member States to identify needs and match them to the available resources through co-ordination of appropriate policies’ (CEC 2010a: 2). This formulation places the spotlight on the key ingredients of the EU macro-regional approach: the key actors (primarily the EU institutions and the EU member states, as EU decisions don’t cover other countries), a joint approach to identifying issues that require transnational cooperation, and the role of the strategy as a framework for coordinating policies and resources (including its governance arrangements for implementation).

Although EU macro-regional strategies have not been presented as spatial planning instruments (or as integrated *spatial development* frameworks), reflecting the long-standing debate over an EU competence in this field, their coordination objective and spatially-relevant goals and actions warrant this paper’s focus on their added-value from the perspective of spatial planning. The argument for considering whether macro-regional strategies offer added-value for spatial planning in the Baltic Sea Region and Danube Region derives from the core of their rationale, i.e. that large-scale landscape features (the Baltic Sea, the Danube corridor), which each have their own very specific characteristics and challenges, require a coordinated approach. Coordination for such large-scale functional regions that cut across administrative boundaries implies considerable political and governance challenges, however, because of the great number of actors involved and because each issue addressed at this level

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<sup>11</sup> [http://eeas.europa.eu/north\\_dim/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/north_dim/index_en.htm)

<sup>12</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/publications\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/publications_en.html)



of scale may have a different functional ‘reach’ and therefore the boundaries of the macro-regions should be flexible in response to the issue addressed. From a spatial planning perspective, and respecting the principle of subsidiarity, this implies on the one hand that macro-regional strategies should focus on ‘transnational issues’ only, i.e. issues that countries or regions cannot address satisfactorily by acting alone. On the other hand, it means that numerous actors at different levels of scale will be involved in transnational spatial planning initiatives, and in different geographical compositions depending on the issue considered. This implies great complexity for governance arrangements in any policy area, but especially for an area such as spatial planning which is in many countries not strongly institutionalized at national level and where the argument for ‘upscaling’ a spatial planning perspective to the transnational level may therefore not gain much support. As this paper will show, indeed progress on injecting a spatial planning perspective into the macro-regional strategies has been modest to date, and the actual and potential added-value of macro-regional strategies for spatial planning therefore requires further discussion.

### Objective of study and approach

The objective of this study is to assess the added value of macro regional strategies from the perspective of spatial planning. This is done through a review of publicly available documents such as action plans, communications from the European Council and the European Commission as well as other documents available on the EUSBSR and the EUSDR websites. The assessment also refers to the impact assessments that were completed prior to the launch of the two strategies.

The questions addressed in this paper are the following:

- What are the main achievements in implementing the macro-regional strategies and what contribution have they made to EU policies and targets; national, regional, sectoral policies? The question of the relevance of macro-regional strategies to EU Cohesion Policy<sup>13</sup> and Europe 2020 Strategy objectives<sup>14</sup> particularly should be addressed;

<sup>13</sup> The EU Cohesion Policy for the programming period 2007-13 responded to the EU objectives as set out in the Lisbon-Gothenburg Agenda (2000/2001) and the relaunched Agenda in 2005, which put emphasis on directing EU funding programmes (including the Structural Funds) towards growth and jobs. For the 2007-2013 programming period, EU Cohesion Policy is organised in three ‘objectives’: the ‘convergence’ objective (for regions with a GDP per inhabitant of less than 75% of Community average), the ‘regional competitiveness and employment’ objective (for all other regions), and the ‘European territorial cooperation’ objective. The European territorial cooperation objective includes the former INTERREG Community Initiative programmes and has three strands: cross-border cooperation, transnational cooperation and interregional cooperation. **According to the *Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion 2007-2013*, all programmes had to earmark a certain proportion of the resources for investments linked to the Lisbon strategy for Growth and Jobs, such as research and innovation, infrastructures of European importance, industrial competitiveness, renewable energies, energy efficiency, eco-innovations, entrepreneurship and human resources.**

<sup>14</sup> ‘Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ was adopted in March 2010 by the European Council (CEC 2010e), and was prepared in response to the economic crisis. It is the successor of the ‘Growth and Jobs Agenda’ and focuses on three key areas:

- **Smart growth:** developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation
- **Sustainable growth:** promoting a more efficient, greener and more competitive economy
- **Inclusive growth:** fostering a high-employment economy, where all communities and regions participate and flourish.

The EU 2020 strategy sets out five goals, which are to be broken down into national targets:

- 75% of the population aged 20-64 in employment
- 3% of the EU’s GDP invested in research and development
- Successful implementation of the EU’s environmental goals, i.e. a 20% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and a 20% increase in renewable energies
- A minimum of 40% of the younger generation to obtain a tertiary degree, and 10% fewer early school leavers
- 20 million fewer people should be at risk of poverty

In the European Council conclusions (June 2010), it was expressed that ‘all common policies, including the common agricultural policy and cohesion policy, will need to support the strategy’. The EU Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 will be focused on the EU 2020 objectives.

- What concrete progress has been made in the priority areas/horizontal actions/actions and flagship projects?
- Do Macro regional strategies have the potential to influence EU and national policy developments, e.g. through mobilization of existing funding, and alignment of funding and policies with EU 2020 priorities and programmes, and what evidence supports this?
- What is the added value of macro regional strategies in terms of coordination of activities between different actors; for example via cooperation between EU Member States and Third countries, through improved cooperation structures, development of new ways of cooperation or strengthening existing ones?
- What is the added value of the macro regional strategies in terms of improving governance structures for the achievement of overall objectives including interaction/links with other EU initiatives (such as the Northern Dimension, Eastern Partnership, etc.)?
- What are the main drivers to increase the added value of macro-regional strategies for spatial planning in their establishment and in their implementation?

The approach to this assessment requires setting out a few provisos. First, macro-regional strategies are still very young and therefore ‘work in progress’. The progress that has been made so far should be seen in this context, especially considering the complexity of the task. Cooperation structures need time to mature, so any assessment after a relatively short period of time can only attempt to point out areas which may require further attention in future, rather than allowing a comprehensive evaluation. Second, this study relies on published sources (action plans, reports etc) that were prepared by actors involved in the macro-regional strategies. While some critical issues come to the fore in these papers, they are nonetheless by definition to a certain extent self-referential and not based on external evaluation. Moreover, macro-regional strategies were not presented as *spatial* strategies, so the assessment of their added-value for spatial planning remains somewhat hypothetical as evidence is scarce (and indeed there are relatively few explicit references to spatial planning in the documents analysed).

### **Definitions and conceptual framework**

For a discussion of the added value of EU macro-regional strategies from the perspective of spatial planning, it is important to provide some definitions and a conceptual framework. The traditionally land-based focus of spatial planning of EU member states has over the past years been complemented by EU initiatives in the field of maritime spatial planning (CEC 2008a). Maritime spatial planning is defined as ‘planning and regulating all human uses of the sea, while protecting marine ecosystems. It focuses on marine waters under national jurisdiction and is concerned only with planning activities at sea’ (DG Mare website), thus it does not cover management of coastal zones or spatial planning of sea-land interface. While ‘maritime spatial planning remains a prerogative of individual EU countries’ (ibid.), agreement at EU level should help to ensure that national, regional and local maritime spatial plans are compatible and that conflicts can be avoided and cross-border cooperation and investments are better coordinated. While EU competences for maritime spatial planning are as weak as for land-based spatial planning, the EU policy field has developed quickly and with considerable support from the member states. In contrast to the fierce debates over an EU involvement in land-based spatial planning since the end of the 1990s, seen as violating the sovereignty of nation-states and the subsidiarity principle, the interest of EU member states and regions in coordinated approaches to maritime spatial planning may at least be partly explained by the novelty of this approach and the fact that domestic institutions had not been well established (thus that resistance to change, as can be found in established policy communities, is low).

Reflecting the discussions about the role of the EU in land-based spatial planning, in the academic literature a distinction is now made between spatial planning at the supra-national scale (e.g. for transnational spaces) and spatial planning within nation-states, mirroring the distinction made between ‘spatial planning *for* Europe’, and ‘spatial planning *in* Europe’ (Böhme and Waterhout 2008). Spatial planning at a scale above the nation-state relies on different mechanisms for achieving its goals than spatial planning within countries and regions. Within nation-states, spatial planning is a sector of government activity alongside others such as transport, agriculture and environment, and seeks to manage and regulate spatial development and land uses in pursuit of agreed objectives. At European level, spatial planning refers to creating strategies and policies for the development of (parts of) the European territory. What has been called the ‘European spatial planning approach’ concentrates ‘on establishing better co-ordination of spatial policy: horizontally across different sectors; vertically among different levels of government; and geographically across administrative boundaries’ (Dühr et al. 2010: 32). As there is no explicit competence for spatial planning in the EU Treaties, and reflecting the subsidiarity principle, spatial planning *for* Europe focuses on the strategic dimension of spatial planning (as opposed to detailed land use planning), and has relied on intergovernmental cooperation and unanimous support of the participating governments for agreement on policy objectives and to achieve the common goals.

Spatial strategies for the EU (such as the ESDP, TAEU or TA2020) or for transnational territories (such as INTERREG IIC/IIIB transnational spatial visions) are thus by definition very different instruments than ‘spatial plans’ prepared within the established governance systems of sovereign nation-states. The scale, scope and range of interests involved are much more diverse at the transnational level than for the preparation of plans and strategies within member states. There is no law or guidance that specifies the characteristics or content of transnational strategies, nor are there clearly defined processes that would ensure their implementation. Given their usually non-binding nature, transnational spatial strategies are thus understood to function by ‘framing’ the understanding of actors involved (e.g. sectoral actors who may have much stronger powers of implementation) to particular problems and possible approaches, rather than prescribing solutions. Such a shared understanding about the need for collective action should then provide a lasting basis to ensure that the strategy and its principles are applied in policy- and decision-making processes (Dühr et al. 2010).

Given the lack of strong instruments, the communicative potential of transnational spatial strategies requires particular attention. To ensure their continuing support and use, transnational spatial strategies need to provide a vision ‘so powerful and attractive that all those whose support is needed willingly range up behind it’ (Needham et al. 1997). Given the multitude of actors and interests involved and the consensus-led process of preparing spatial development frameworks for the European territory, this implies that spatial concepts are needed which are ‘capable of papering over the cracks between the various views prevailing’ (Faludi 2002: 904).

Identifying issues for cooperation at the supra-national scale inevitably involves struggles about the prioritising of interests, rights and claims for policy attention. Yet the filtering is a crucial process, because if strategies are to inspire and motivate a range of actors over a long period of time, they need to be more than merely an aggregation of issues. Moreover, the experience with the transnational INTERREG programmes has shown that broad frameworks with largely generic funding priorities rarely result in projects of real significance for the transnational region (Panteia et al. 2010). It is therefore important that policy priorities and actions are specific to the macro-region, and not merely replicate EU policy objectives. Two types of truly transnational issues can be identified, which offer real value for an ‘upscaling’ of policy responses:

- Issues that are currently not dealt with appropriately within a country and by nation-states acting alone, and

- Issues that may in future not be dealt with satisfactorily by nation-states acting alone as a consequence of changing framework conditions (political, economic, environmental, social, or else).

There are likely considerably fewer issues that are usefully addressed at transnational level than the long lists of actions and projects in the Baltic Sea or the Danube Region strategies would suggest. At present, both the action plans for the Baltic Sea Region and for the Danube Region list several issues that are of common concern or are not specific to the region.

The need for cooperation among countries to achieve effective coordination of all sea-related as well as land-based spatial planning policies at the different decision-making levels when preparing comprehensive and integrated plans is evident, and so is the link to the activities of EU macro-regional strategies. While EU involvement in spatial planning – certainly for the land-based component – has been critically viewed by some member states, the inclusion of the objective of territorial cohesion as a shared competence in the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 has generally been interpreted as providing an alternative approach to bringing the spatial dimension into sectoral policy. However, there is to date no clear or politically agreed definition of the objective of territorial cohesion which would allow an assessment of whether the concept will be interpreted as a form of European spatial planning (in the meaning presented above) in EU Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 (cf. CEC 2008b).

### **The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and spatial planning**

Littoral countries of the Baltic Sea are eight EU member states (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Belarus and Russia. Since the 1990s, the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea have been cooperating at the transnational level. Besides the political forum of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS, also involving Norway and Iceland next to the littoral states), there are other well-established forums of cooperation with influence on policy- and decision-making, such as HELCOM<sup>15</sup> in the field of environmental policy and VASAB<sup>16</sup> for transnational spatial planning. Indeed, the ‘model’ for transnational spatial visions prepared in the context of the transnational INTERREG IIC and IIIB Community Initiative is commonly acknowledged to be the ‘Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010’ (VASAB2010 1994) document (Dühr 2011b). It was prepared by the ministries for spatial planning and development of countries around the Baltic Sea Region even before the INTERREG IIC initiative (which envisaged the preparation of ‘transnational spatial visions’) was launched. The VASAB vision sought to address shared concerns over environmental pollution of the shallow sea and to consider policy responses for the somewhat peripheral transnational region after the fall of the ‘Iron Curtain’. An action programme, entitled ‘From vision to action’ (VASAB2010 1996) proposed measures for the application of the spatial vision. In 1997, INTERREG funding supported the process of updating of the VASAB 2010 strategy (VASAB2010+ 2001). In 2009, the ‘VASAB Long-term perspective for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region’ (VASAB LTP 2009) was adopted and is intended to provide strategic direction until 2030.

#### *Main achievements of the EUSBSR and contribution to EU, national and regional policies*

It seems widely accepted that the EU macro-regional strategy has at least partly succeeded in overcoming the ‘stalemate’ of intergovernmental cooperation, given the high political profile and EU involvement in many activities covered by the EUSBSR (CEC 2010f). A report by the Commission (CEC 2011a: 1) identified ‘commitment of partners at national, regional, and civil society levels’. It

<sup>15</sup> The Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) is an intergovernmental organization (Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden) working to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea.

<sup>16</sup> VASAB - Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea - is an intergovernmental network of 11 countries of the Baltic Sea Region promoting cooperation on spatial planning and development in the Baltic Sea Region.

further noted as main achievements that ‘the Strategy has led to concrete action, with a more streamlined use of resources. New working methods and networks have been established, and many initiatives developed’, including the setting up of new projects (such as the designation of marine protected areas in the Baltic Sea) and providing new momentum to existing projects. The Commission report further finds that ‘the Strategy ... provides a common reference point for the many organisations in the Baltic Sea Region’. Examples given to support this observation are the new framework for the maritime community, which has brought together actors and initiatives around the EUSBSR; and that ‘transport ministries in the Region now plan infrastructure investments in a coordinated way’ (CEC 2011a).

Despite such positive signs, the Commission (CEC 2011a, b; CEC 2012a) highlights areas for improvement, including: the need to reinforce the integrated nature of the Strategy through closer alignment with the themes and flagships of Europe 2020; to assure the European nature of the Strategy through regular discussions of the Strategy at policy Councils; to establish targets to make the Strategy more focused; to maximise efforts to align Cohesion Policy and other funding sources in the Region with the objectives of the Strategy; to strengthen implementation structures both financially and in terms of staff; and to develop a “Communication initiative” to ensure broader participation in the Strategy, as well as understanding of its overall achievements.

A review of the Action Plan was published in late February 2013. The horizontal action on spatial planning (‘HA Spatial’) was maintained, although with a more explicit focus on maritime spatial planning. In comparison to the previous version, the new Action Plan has been broadened to include more actions that are not directly spatial in focus, nor specific for the macro-region. This implies a risk of watering down the initial intentions of the macro-regional approach, and will certainly present further challenges to applying a more explicit spatial planning perspective to the strategy, should this be envisaged in future.

#### *Progress on the priority areas/horizontal actions/actions and flagship projects*

While most of the priority areas in the Action Plan are not *explicitly* spatial in focus, many can be expected to either have direct, or at least indirect, spatial effects. There are isolated examples where a reference to spatial planning is being made under individual actions or flagship projects (e.g. Flagship project 2.1. (Fast Track) “Create marine protected areas” (Lead: Germany)’) (CEC 2012b: 14). To date, progress on land-based spatial planning within the EUSBSR in particular has been very slow, however. The implementation report (CEC 2011b) refers to the LTP process and ministerial and stakeholder meetings, and some relevant INTERREG IVB projects such as BaltSeaPlan, Eco-Region, New Bridges, Baltmet Promo, TransBaltic and Rail Baltica Growth Corridor. There is no clear evidence that these actions would not have taken place also without the EUSBSR, and the current added-value of the EUSBSR for land-based spatial planning is therefore doubtful. Furthermore, the question could be asked whether such largely ‘soft measures’ will be sufficient to achieve the ambition of providing horizontal coordination for the EUSBSR priority actions and projects through spatial planning. There has been some progress in the field of maritime spatial planning, with some projects (e.g. projects ‘Plan Bothnia’, ‘BaltSeaPlan Vision 2030’) completed, although only involving EU member countries besides some international and transnational organisations (CEC 2010f; CEC 2011b; Gee et al. 2011). The emphasis is on sharing data, establishing joint principles and setting cooperation platforms, and on supporting progress on national and regional maritime spatial plans.

In the most recent action plan (February 2013), the 17 priority areas (PAs) and 6 horizontal areas (HAs) are shown as contributing (in various degrees) to achieving the three objectives (‘to save the sea’, ‘to connect the region’, ‘to increase prosperity’) with related sub-objectives, thus seeking to communicate the integrated approach. Indeed, Annex II of the Action Plan (CEC 2013: 191) shows that most priority areas that are presented as contributing to achieving the defined sub-objectives are either explicitly or indirectly spatial in focus (e.g. PA Ship, PA Transport, PA Energy, PA Nutri). This

would suggest that the HA on spatial planning would receive a more prominent role in coordinating these PA's and thus contributing to the objectives of the EUSBSR. On the contrary, however, 'HA Spatial' is only shown to contribute directly to sub-objective 'Connecting People' and to a lesser degree to the sub-objectives of 'Rich and healthy wildlife' and 'better cooperation'. In terms of contributing to the EU2020 strategy, almost all PA's and HA's are shown to have a relation. A notable exception is 'HA Spatial' which is not envisaged to make a contribution to any sub-objectives of objective 3 to 'Increase Prosperity', including the EU2020 strategy.

In comparison to the previous version of the Action Plan, which sought to give equal attention to maritime and land-based spatial planning, the 'HA Spatial' in the Action Plan of February 2013 almost exclusively focuses on maritime spatial planning. Land-based spatial planning is mentioned in relation to the work of VASAB, noting that 'the VASAB Long Term Perspective for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region (LTP) ... should be taken into account by the coordinators of other priority areas when they address spatial objectives, conditions and impacts of their actions' (CEC 2013: 170). It is doubtful that this reference will have the desired effect of better coordinating land-based spatial planning around the Baltic Sea, nor that it will achieve the overall goal of the horizontal action, stated as 'to achieve territorial cohesion perspective in the BSR by 2030, i.e. the region is a well-integrated and coherent macro-region, and it has overcome the socio-economic development divides between its individual parts and turned the global challenges into assets' (CEC 2013: 171). In the new Action Plan, targets are only defined for the drawing up of maritime spatial plans, whereas there are no indicators for land-based spatial planning. Accordingly, only one flagship project is identified, 'PartiSEApate – Multi-level Governance in MSP (Maritime Spatial Planning) throughout the Baltic Sea Region', led by the Maritime Institute in Gdańsk, Poland.

The updated action plan seems to illustrate a trend of marginalizing spatial planning further, rather than giving it a more prominent role by identifying the added-value for the macro-regional strategy by seeking also spatial coordination. This may be a flaw in the architecture, with allocating spatial planning to a 'horizontal action', which seems added-on to the main priority areas rather than being integrated throughout (something which would seem important to achieve the HA's ambitious goals). It may also be a problem of leadership and prioritisation, despite the existence of VASAB in the BSR, which prevents considering the role of transnational spatial planning for the BSR more explicitly, and especially so for the land-based dimension.

#### *Evidence of the potential of the EUSBSR to influence EU and national policy developments*

In terms of policy development and coherence in areas of relevance to this paper, the Commission report (CEC 2011a) takes positive notice of the link between the regional implementation of the EU Integrated Maritime Policy, and the progress on integration of maritime surveillance systems which has been made in the BSR. There is no evidence that the macro-regional strategy to date has provided any impetus for the review and coordination of land-based spatial plans in the countries and regions around the BSR, as it has for the development of maritime spatial plans. Indeed, the EUSBSR does not seem to have made any substantial contribution to the ongoing work of VASAB, nor does it seem to have revived the discussion on the role and objectives for transnational spatial planning in the BSR.

The need for a better alignment of funding remains a key concern, and this is also of relevance to the HA on spatial planning which may have fewer dedicated funding sources to draw on, given the integrated nature of spatial planning and the increasingly thematic orientation of many EU funding programmes (in pursuit of the EU's Growth and Jobs agenda). A recent study of 'needs for financial instruments in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region' (Savbäck et al. 2011: 3) concluded that 'the implementation of the EUSBSR is perceived as a major undertaking by the stakeholders. The development of partnerships and projects is time demanding and real implementation requires financial resources. There is still a certain hesitation regarding how the implementation is structured. Many activities are in the start-up or early implementation phase and have a preparatory or planning

character rather than “real” implementation. However, the implementation differs considerably between sectors as there are differences of maturity in transnational cooperation. Currently, more than 20 different funding instruments are used as sources of financing, not including national and regional co-financing sources. The implementation of most Priority Areas is to a large extent dependent on EU Structural Funds... Despite the large amount of available instruments it is clear that various financial and non-financial needs are not sufficiently met.’

The European territorial cooperation programmes, and especially the INTERREG IVB Baltic Sea Region programme, are of particular relevance for the EUSBSR. The transnational Baltic Sea Region Programme (INTERREG IVB) has contributed EUR 88 million to Flagship Projects, and targeted its fourth call specifically to promoting the Strategy (CEC 2011a). Yet, ‘when moving beyond projects covered by ETC programmes, all other available instruments are perceived as difficult and non-accommodating for transnational activities. This problem of funding is mainly related to structural challenges, as many programmes (EU-funded, national and regional alike) have difficulties to support transnational activities’ (Savbäck et al. 2011: 4)

In the Commission report (2011a), several improvements to better align funding to the EUSBSR are mentioned, including new selection criteria for several ERDF programmes in the BSR. The recent review of the strategy has clarified the availability of financial instruments for the main objectives (available as overview table on the EUSBSR website). The main focus is on Cohesion Policy programmes, but ‘other programmes, funds and institutions’ are also listed. The ‘fit’ of financial instruments with the EUSBSR has only been assessed in this table for the main priority areas, however, and not for the horizontal actions which have the most explicit focus on spatial planning. Yet, achieving spatial coordination through a horizontal action as in the EUSBSR would clearly benefit from some transparency about available funding.

*Added value of macro regional strategies in terms of coordination of activities between different actors and links with other EU initiatives*

Perhaps inevitably given its ambition, the EUSBSR is characterized by a complex governance structure, and in earlier reviews this prompted calls for an improved organization structure. Recently, the roles and responsibilities of the different actors have been clarified (Council 2012), and an overview made available on the website of the EUSBSR. However, the focus has been on listing contacts for (thematic) priority actions and flagship projects, rather than the cross-cutting, ‘horizontal’, actions, where arguably a stronger lead and visibility would be desirable.

Moreover, the governance arrangements are EU-centred, with scope for involving non-EU members and other EU initiatives at the operational level (programmes, Flagship project leaders) and the coordination level (Priority Area Coordinators, Priority Area Focal Points, Horizontal Action Leaders), but not at the policy level (Council, Commission, High Level Group). As an EU initiative, the Strategy does not commit non-Member States. Existing transnational bodies in the BSR, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Nordic Council of Ministers or the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) or VASAB, have well-established (intergovernmental) forms of cooperation between EU and non-EU countries. The fact that the macro-regions are strategies of the European Union has from the beginning put much weight on the need to establish constructive cooperation with the external partners in the region, and in particular Russia (CEC 2012b). The Northern Dimension, a common policy of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland, provides the basis for these external aspects of the strategy. However, Russia continues to seem to have limited involvement in the implementation of the Strategy, either through specific projects or existing regional frameworks such as the Northern Dimension.

The implementation of the Strategy through actions and projects is predominantly the task of national ministries, national public agencies or transnational bodies, as Annexe 1 shows. The Commission report notes efforts to involve more sub-national actors and existing cooperative structures in the

EUSBSR (CEC 2011a). Moreover, differences in the level of ambition (and achievements) across the priority areas, depending on existing networks and the maturity of cooperation arrangements on which the implementation could draw, has been noted before (CEC 2010f). This may at least partly explain the differences in achievements in relation to maritime spatial planning on the one hand, and land-based spatial planning on the other.

*Main drivers to increase the added value of macro-regional strategies in their establishment and in their implementation*

The Commission Communication (CEC 2012a, later adopted by Council (2012)) proposed the following key areas for improvement:

- Improvements to the strategic focus, by defining three key objectives for the EUSBSR and by aligning the Strategy more clearly to the Europe 2020 objectives.
- Alignment of policies and funding, with a better coordination through the Common Strategic Framework 2014-2020. 'There must be a stronger transnational dimension to national and regional programmes, as relying on territorial cooperation programmes alone will not suffice.... When developing partnership contracts and operational programmes, at the regional, national, cross-border and transnational levels, macro-regional objectives and priorities must be present' (CEC 2012a).
- Clarification of responsibilities of different actors and improved governance arrangements. The Strategy should be included on the agenda of the Council of Ministers in its different formations as appropriate. Strategy considerations should be reflected in budget and other discussions. Regional and municipal actors must be more involved. Political commitment must be translated into administrative commitment, with sufficient staffing and continuity of personnel. Involvement of other stakeholders, including the private sector, and of third countries should be improved.
- Better communication by promoting awareness of the Strategy and its results. Setting indicators and targets and evaluating progress will be given increasing attention.

While all of these suggestions are sensible, they will arguably do little to strengthen the coordination role of the horizontal action on spatial planning, given the apparent focus on the main priority areas in clarifying the governance arrangements and aligning funding. A closer connection to the EU2020 objectives, which are very thematic and largely non-spatial, will provide further challenges for making sure the horizontal action on spatial planning can live up to its stated goals.

Overall, the added-value of macro-regional strategies for spatial planning has been modest and variable to date. An added-value is apparent for the area of maritime spatial planning: as a new policy field both at EU level and in most countries, and with a clear transnational focus on the maritime environment of the Baltic Sea, the EUSBSR appears to have supported a constructive and cooperative process for joint databases and cooperation on maritime spatial plans. These may not be groundbreaking results yet, and have mostly been agreed between EU member states only, but given the novelty of the EUSBSR they are a promising start. This is especially so given what appears wide support by many actors in the region (even if at present mostly from the EU), which may provide a lasting basis for future (and more far-reaching) action. The same cannot be said for land-based spatial planning, however. Indeed, the EUSBSR so far does not seem to have brought any added-value to the work of VASAB. Given the EU-focus of macro-regional strategies on the one hand and lack of EU competence for spatial planning on the other, an intergovernmental approach such as pursued by VASAB may seem more appropriate than a macro-regional strategy focused on spatial planning. However, there are strong arguments for reconciling the maritime spatial planning approach and the land-based dimension to a more comprehensive and integrated approach, and the current trends in the



BSR suggest that there may be a danger of their lasting separation into different policy communities. Spatial planning should be given a much more central role in the EUSBSR if such cross-sectoral and multi-level governance coordination is to be achieved. The coordination ambitions of the EUSBSR would make a case for more closely involving VASAB and national and regional spatial planning ministries in the actions and projects of the EUSBSR. Political commitment and appropriate administrative capacity will be important to ensure EUSBSR initiatives on spatial planning are well coordinated with those within the countries. First, however, a clear definition of spatial planning (land-based and maritime, also in relation to the EU objective of territorial cohesion) is required for a discussion on the role of spatial planning in the BSR.

### **The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and spatial planning**

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region covers eight EU countries (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania) and six non-EU countries (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Ukraine and Moldova). While international cooperation bodies exist for river basin management (e.g. the Danube Commission and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River), there is no transnational spatial planning institution for the Danube comparable to VASAB for the BSR.

The EUSDR (CEC 2010c: 6) places ‘emphasis on an integrated place-based approach. Good links between urban and rural areas, fair access to infrastructures and services, and comparable living conditions will promote territorial cohesion’. Based on the many suggestions from the initial consultation (cf. CEC 2010g), four pillars were defined to address the key issues for the region, with together eleven thematic priority areas (see Annexe 2). There is no dedicated priority or action for spatial planning, but it is mentioned in relation to some initiatives such as the river basins management plan for the Danube (prepared under the Water Framework Directive).

#### *Main achievements of the EUSDR and contribution to EU, national and regional policies*

In the First Annual Forum on the EUSDR in November 2012 (Bayrische Staatsregierung 2012), it was emphasised that the Strategy has strengthened cooperation in the region and at all levels, and that numerous meetings and conferences were held. To date, over seventy new projects have been recommended for funding, and several other projects have been identified by the Priority Action Coordinators (PACs) as contributing to achieving the targets of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (see EUSDR PA reports 2012). The reports note achievements in terms of facilitating cooperation on concrete infrastructure investments (e.g. finalisation of the Calafat-Vidin Bridge, Bulgaria-Serbia gas interconnector project), and other spatially-relevant projects. For example, the DANUBE FLOODRISK project is listed as having produced a ‘Manual of harmonized requirements on the flood mapping procedures for the Danube River’, which should provide the basis for a shared database.

#### *Progress on the priority areas/horizontal actions/actions and flagship projects*

In the Impact Assessment, albeit in a footnote, the European Commission referred to spatial planning as an important means to achieve the objective of territorial cohesion within the EUSDR. The report argued that ‘given the wide scope of these objectives [of territorial cohesion], it requires a framework of multi level governance for the integrated development of the area (namely through spatial planning), horizontal coordination between sectoral plans and agendas (so as to assure a coherence of sectoral policies); and vertical coordination between levels (European Union, Member States and regional and local authorities)’ (CEC 2010g).

While this consideration given to territorial cohesion and spatial planning has not resulted in a dedicated priority (or horizontal action, as for the EUSBSR), there are several actions with a spatial planning component (both maritime and land-based) listed in the Action Plan under different priorities (CEC 2010d). These are:

- Priority 4) TO RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF WATERS: Action - “To further strengthen Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) practices on the Western shores of the Black Sea”  
In the PA 4 progress report (EUSDR PA4 2012: 17), progress in the implementation of the action was reported as follows:
  - Development of specific project regarding the improvement of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Black Sea Region: in progress, waiting for approval.
  - Provide contribution to the development of the ICZM Strategy for the Black Sea coordinating with the Permanent Secretariat of the Black Sea Commission and its Advisory: by 30 November 2013.
  - Development of a project proposal concerning Black Sea marine environment protection including the planning of fishery, energy and transport activities: by 30 March 2013.
- Priority 5) TO MANAGE ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS: Action - “To develop spatial planning and construction activities in the context of climate change and increased threats of floods”, covering both coordination and data exchange as well as coordination of land uses (also taking account of expected climate change impacts).  
In the progress report on PA5, it is reported that ‘No progress has been made under this Action. We are looking for an organisation that can execute this Action.’ (EUSDR PA5 2012: 12)
- Priority 6) TO PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY, LANDSCAPES AND THE QUALITY OF AIR AND SOILS: Action - “To develop green infrastructure in order to connect different biogeographic regions and habitats (incl. Natura 2000 sites)”.
- Priority 6) TO PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY, LANDSCAPES AND THE QUALITY OF AIR AND SOILS: Action - “To prepare and implement transnational spatial planning and development policies for functional geographical areas (river basins, mountain ranges etc.)”.  
An example of a project for this action is: “To implement the VASICA - Visions and Strategies in the Carpathian area” (led by Carpathian Convention UNEP Office).
- Priority 10) TO STEP UP INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND COOPERATION: Action - “To ensure sufficient information flow and exchange at all levels”, including cooperation between planning institutes through the development and implementation of cross-border cooperation in settlement and regional planning. An example of a project that could be developed under this action is mentioned: ‘To establish common guidelines for improving spatial planning’ in order to ‘advise the local authorities on best practices for the human settlements in the Danube Region and on the way to prioritise infrastructure and other investments’ (CEC 2010d).

This overview shows that consideration of spatial planning as a coordination instrument is rather selective under individual priorities, rather than consistently across the EUSDR, and that progress have been variable to date. The approach taken does not appear to lend itself to comprehensive spatial coordination and remains partial. Indeed, the potential value of a stronger spatial planning dimension in the EUSDR, or in any case the need for better coordination of the spatial impacts of actions under different priorities, shines through in several of the PAC progress review reports. Here it is acknowledged that ‘the cross-sectoral cooperation between the different Priority Areas (e.g. transport

and environment) has just started in the first year of the EUSDR's implementation, but .... a more comprehensive cooperation form between the PACs still needs to be developed' (EUSDR PA1a 2012). Moreover, a need for 'reliable and comprehensive data overview about planned, on-going and existing projects along the Danube which .... allow to identify the implementation status of the EUSDR's PA 1a actions (including gaps)' has been identified (ibid.). For PA 1b, it is noted that 'the most important lesson so far is a general understanding of the contribution of the EUSDR. It is important to coordinate activities beyond the actual activities on the ground which has been initiated within different national policies. As a critical element for the further work a need for the common picture on the transport system in the region (common transport vision) was identified. This picture should give a basis to the group to identify critical projects for the region and to assure coordination with other priority Areas' (EUSDR PA1b 2012: 3). Already work has begun on mapping the transport infrastructure system of the Danube region (EU and non-EU Member States) in order to identify bottlenecks and missing links (ibid.).

*Evidence of the potential of the EUSDR to influence EU and national policy developments*

The alignment of funding has also appeared to be difficult for the EUSDR, and may have been even more complicated by the later start of the Strategy, when 'most of the main funding programmes are exhausted or were undergoing or preparing their last calls for projects, for which in many cases it was too late for new project developments. .... As a consequence, main attention to align funding to labelled projects had been given to the well known EU funding programmes, mostly the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes in general and here the South East Europe Programme as the most prominent one' (EUSDR PA6 2012: 13; see also EUSDR PA5 2012: 5-6). Moreover, 'national budget restrictions in several EUSDR countries' have been identified for some priority areas as presenting considerably challenges (EUSDR PA1a 2012).

In the Annual Forum (Bayrische Staatsregierung 2012), several initiatives to better align existing funding to the EUSDR were reported. For example, the two transnational cooperation programmes, South East Europe and Central Europe, have financed five new Danube Strategy projects, with an overall budget of over EUR 10 million. The Danube River is considered in its full length in the revised guidelines for the Trans-European Transport Networks, allowing for funding in the TEN-T programmes. However, it is emphasized that EU funding for the 2014-2020 should be better aligned with the Danube Strategy (Bayrische Staatsregierung 2012). The Commission proposals to modify the current geography of transnational cooperation programmes within the Structural Funds, in order to create a future transnational cooperation programme for the Danube Region (rather than two INTERREG 'B' programmes as currently) is welcomed in the region, as it promises added value through 'concrete financing of Danube Region projects, as well as in providing technical assistance to the governance structure of the Strategy' (Bayrische Staatsregierung 2012).

*Added value of macro regional strategies in terms of coordination of activities between different actors including interaction/links with other EU initiatives*

In the Action Plan for the Danube Region Strategy, non-EU countries are listed as co-coordinators for several of the priorities (see Annexe 2), suggesting a more equal involvement of all countries along the Danube than is currently the case for the EUSBSR. Yet, also the EUSDR is faced with governance challenges. The reports from the PACs highlight that participation in the Steering Groups varies considerably and has not been satisfactory in several PAs, and that more political and administrative support will be needed to ensure a representative and stable cooperation (Bayrische Staatsregierung 2012). Moreover, it is rarely senior-level administrators from the responsible ministries, able to take important decisions, who participate in the meetings (EUSDR PA8 2012). The embedding of the EUSDR in national settings reportedly varies considerably and it has been noted that 'national coordination works better in those eight countries which have installed an inter-ministerial working

group for coordinating Danube work at the national level. An even stronger support is assured in those three countries that have introduced an additional coordination platform at the highest political level, with a technical secretariat supporting this work' (ibid.). The implementation of the Strategy requires 'ownership on national and regional level' although it remains a challenge 'to motivate stakeholders to taking over responsibilities' (EUSDR PA10 2012). This seems to be also a particular problem for actions in the field of spatial planning. The level of international and transnational cooperation has been reportedly difficult to increase also in some priority areas related to spatial planning, including the field of biodiversity and nature protection (cf. EUSDR PA6 2012). Partly this may be a consequence of the lack of political support in some countries, and resulting weak capacity to strengthen cooperation in the required areas related to spatial planning.

*Main drivers to increase the added value of macro-regional strategies in their establishment and in their implementation*

The main barriers that stand in the way of a better implementation of the EUSDR seem to be in relation to better alignment of funding, and to ensure better political support for the EUSDR in general and more coherently across all priority areas. In terms of the role of spatial planning, while there are several relevant actions in the Strategy across different priorities, these are rather dispersed, progress has been modest to date and especially slow for land-based spatial planning initiatives. A debate on the role of spatial planning in the context of the EUSDR would therefore be useful, on which basis the various calls for a better and more integrated and coordinated 'spatial vision' may be considered.

**EU macro-regional strategies and spatial planning: concluding reflections and recommendations**

The EU macro-regional approach appears to have helped to revitalise the process of transnational cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, and offered a platform for coordinated action in the Danube Region. It has provided a forum for EU and national actors to discuss those actions that groups of countries in both regions need to jointly undertake, though this may have come at the expense of closely involving non-EU members. Yet tensions and challenges remain, and these will also determine the potential role of spatial planning in these regions which remains strongly dependent on the support of nation-states and regions. The challenge of reconciling the ambitions of the strategies to address functional relations with the reality of the political commitment of actors that often remains focused on their administrative territories may not easily be resolved. Given the long time-scale of spatial developments and the need for continuing political support, further institutionalisation at the transnational level might be required to ensure that macro-regional strategies can offer an added-value for spatial planning in future. Prioritisation is another test for consensus-led processes, as will be the identification of spatial impacts of different sector policies and at different levels of scale in the macro-regions, which would benefit from spatial planning coordination.

So far, thus, the added-value of macro-regional strategies for spatial planning has overall been limited. It has been almost non-existent for land-based spatial planning, although there has been more enthusiasm and progress for maritime spatial planning for the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. There are hardly any maps available for the two strategies, neither to show an analysis of the current situation and trends or to map proposed actions (e.g. transport infrastructure investments), nor in the sense of policy proposals or seeking to provide a coordinated view on the spatial effects of all the actions and projects envisaged under the MRS's. The strategies, thus, are at present largely non-spatial, which seems to be a shortcoming given the evident spatial dimension of many of the proposed initiatives.

In the EUSBSR, the understanding of spatial planning seems to be increasingly that of maritime spatial planning alone, while the consideration of land-based spatial planning is overall weak and seems to be diminishing. Indeed, there is no evidence of added-value of the EUSBSR to the ongoing initiatives under VASAB. Also for the EUSDR, although more recent and therefore more difficult to

assess its progress, the spatial planning contribution in the EUSDR seems to be understood largely in terms of data sharing and soft coordination. Especially for land-based spatial planning initiatives it has been difficult to find relevant lead organizations that would be able to coordinate at transnational level. The slow progress on spatial planning in both strategies stands in contrast to their rhetoric that attaches great value to the coordinating powers of spatial planning, but it may suggest that there is not currently a clear and shared understanding in the two regions of what the role of transnational spatial planning could be, and in particular within the context of the macro-regional strategies.

Yet while at the moment the added-value is limited for spatial planning (possibly because so far most energy went into setting up the more thematic actions in the macro-regional strategies, where also better established policy communities are able to drive progress), it may be useful to consider whether there could not be a stronger added-value for spatial planning from the macro-regional strategies in future. After all, many proposed actions and projects have either explicit or at least indirect spatial impacts. The considerable energy that goes into setting up coordination mechanisms and multi-level governance arrangements for the two strategies suggests that there would be synergies in applying a spatial perspective to the actions pursued, and to prioritise the transnational spatial issues that would benefit from cooperation in the future. Before this may be achieved, a number of key questions need to be addressed, however. Besides a clear prioritisation (and political agreement) on transnational spatial issues, these refer to the understanding of spatial planning at this level of scale; the architecture of macro-regional strategies and the role of spatial planning within; and the question of leadership on transnational spatial planning (both land-based and maritime).

In the first instance, a discussion on the added-value of macro-regional cooperation for spatial planning is needed among the actors in the regions, which should result in an identification of the issues that require spatial coordination at the transnational level. Despite the work of VASAB in the region, it is not clear from the documents reviewed whether there is indeed a shared understanding of what transnational spatial planning in the BSR, and in the context of the EUSBSR in particular, should deal with. While the spatial impacts of EU sector policies seem to be widely recognized, and are indeed a key driver for many actions in the two macro-regional strategies, this does not seem to have led to clear action on how to better coordinate spatial planning activities of the involved countries.

In terms of the role of spatial planning within the MRS's, for the EUSBSR there is a cross-cutting action on spatial planning, but arguably this does not result in more attention to spatially-relevant coordination within the different priority areas than in the EUSDR, where spatial planning is considered under individual priorities. While placing spatial planning in a 'horizontal action' may have great appeal as it suggests a more cross-cutting approach, in practice it seems to increase the coordination burden and (in the case of the EUSBSR) seems to effectively marginalise spatial planning.

The question of leadership on spatial planning action is a challenge which will be difficult to address, as even intergovernmental bodies (such as VASAB) still rely on the support of the cooperating nation-states and require the backing of powerful sectoral ministries, while in many countries national spatial planning is not strongly developed. After identifying the key issues for transnational spatial planning in the regions (e.g. inter-regional transport and energy connections, large-scale agricultural and environmental issues – including those where pollution sources have distant effects; large-scale economic effects through trade corridors, R&D networks etc) and identifying the need for spatial coordination on these issues, it may be useful to identify strong lead actors (possibly from sectoral ministries) who can pursue such coordination in a more integrated way throughout the strategy. Other governance arrangements, e.g. a central coordination unit which can ensure dialogue with key actors on spatial impacts and across different priorities, may be worth considering (although this would imply a departure from the 'no new institutions' rule of EU macro-regional strategies).

For both existing strategies, it would be important to give a stronger focus to land-based spatial planning, alongside maritime and coastal zone management, in order to provide a more comprehensive

spatial development perspective for the entire region. After all, many land-based activities also have an impact on the marine or fluvial environments (e.g. run-offs from agricultural land uses or transport links), and spatial planning activities on the territories of the countries around the Baltic Sea and along the Danube should thus also be coordinated and the maritime and land-based dimensions of spatial planning be reconciled. While the added-value of a maritime spatial planning approach for the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea seems to be more widely accepted, and progress may be facilitated by the fact that this is a new policy area and therefore not yet firmly institutionalized in most countries, there would also be value in coordinating the spatial impacts of sector policies across different levels of governance and across administrative borders on land. Mapping the proposals under the different priorities may be a first start to better understand the spatial implications of all activities and projects proposed under the macro-regional strategies, and to identify the areas that would require or benefit from better spatial coordination.

For new EU macro-regional strategies, it should be recommended that they are selective in their choice of joint actions at the macro-regional scale, and that they prioritise those that clearly require transnational cooperation and are specific to the particular region. Identifying key actors who would be able to ensure coordination from a spatial planning perspective, and to preferably do so for the maritime and land-based spatial planning aspects in an integrated way, will be important. It would be useful to 'build in' spatial planning as a central consideration in future strategies from the beginning, as retrofitting such an important coordination task to ongoing actions and projects seems to be a major challenge. For future macro-regional strategies it could even be considered to start arranging macro-regional strategies from a spatial planning perspective, by identifying the large-scale spatial development trends and transnational spatial impacts of sector policies, and agreeing on joint action on this basis. This would ensure a stronger focus and clearer prioritization of the actions and projects, and ensure that the transnational spatial dimension is the key driving force.

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**Table 1:** Priority areas (PA's) and Horizontal Actions (HA's) of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Priority areas	Coordinator(s)	Number of actions	Number of flagship projects (incl. Potentials)
PA Agri – Reinforcing sustainability of agriculture, forestry and fisheries	Finland / Lithuania / Sweden	7	11
PA Bio – Preserving natural zones and biodiversity, including fisheries	Germany	2	4
PA Crime – Fighting cross-border crime	Finland / Lithuania	2	4
PA Culture – Developing and promoting the common culture and cultural identity	Schleswig-Holstein (Germany) / Poland	5	13
PA Education – Developing innovative education and youth	Hamburg (Germany) / Norden Association (in Sweden)	7	11
PA Energy – Improving the access to, and the efficiency and security of the energy markets	Denmark / Latvia	2	9
PA Hazards – Reducing the use and impact of hazardous substances	Sweden	4	6
PA Health – Improving and promoting people's health, including its social aspects	Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being	3	6
PA Innovation – Exploiting the full potential of the region in research and innovation	Sweden / Poland	1	6
PA Internal Market – Removing hindrances to the internal market	Estonia	3	4
PA Nutri – Reducing nutrient inputs to the sea to acceptable levels	Finland / Poland	6	7
PA Safe – To become a leading region in maritime safety and security	Denmark / Finland	7	8
PA Secure – Protection from emergencies and accidents on land	Sweden / the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Secretariat	3	6
PA Ship – Becoming a model region for clean shipping	Denmark	1	6
PA SME – Promote entrepreneurship and strengthen the growth of SMEs	Denmark	4	9
PA Tourism – Reinforcing cohesiveness of the macro-region through tourism	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	2	5

	(Germany)		
PA Transport – Improving internal and external transport links	Lithuania / Sweden	4	5
<b>Horizontal Actions</b>			
HA Involve – Strengthening multi-level governance including involving civil society, business and academia	Region Västerbotten and Kalmar / the Baltic Sea NGO Network	8	5
HA Neighbours – To increase the co-operation with neighbouring countries to tackle joint challenges in the Baltic Sea Region	City of Turku (Finland) / the Council of Baltic Sea States Secretariat	8	14
HA Promo – Boosting joint promotion and regional identity building actions	Baltic Metropolises Network / Baltic Development Forum	2	2
HA Spatial Planning – Encouraging the use of Maritime and Land-based Spatial Planning in all Member States around the Baltic Sea and develop a common approach for cross-border cooperation	VASAB / HELCOM	(not further specified)	1
HA Sustainable development and bio-economy	Council of Baltic Sea States Secretariat for sustainable development / Nordic Council of Ministers for bio-economy	3 for sustainable development, none further specified for bio-economy	10 for sustainable development, 3 for bio-economy

Source: based on CEC 2013

**Table 2:** Pillars and priority areas of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Pillar/priority area	Coordinating country/-ies	Number of actions	Number of projects
<b><i>Pillar A: Connecting the Danube Region</i></b>			
1. To improve mobility and multimodality	Inland waterways transport: Austria, Romania	10	9
	Rail, road and air transport: Slovenia, Serbia, (Interest: Ukraine)	7	6
2. To encourage more sustainable energy	Hungary, Czech Republic	17	10
3. To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts	Bulgaria, Romania	14	20
<b>Pillar B: Protecting the environment in the Danube Region</b>			
4. To restore and maintain the quality of waters	Hungary, Slovakia	14	7
5. To manage environmental risks	Hungary, Romania	8	11
6. To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils	Germany (Bavaria), Croatia	16	13
<b>Pillar C: Building prosperity in the Danube Region</b>			
7. To develop the knowledge society through research, education and information technologies	Slovakia, Serbia	8	12
8. To support the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development	Germany (Baden-Württemberg), Croatia	7	10
9. To invest in people and skills	Austria, Moldova	8	7
<b>Pillar D: Strengthening the Danube Region</b>			
10. To step up institutional capacity and cooperation	Austria (Vienna), Slovenia	9	8
11. To work together to promote security and tackle organised and serious crime	Germany, Bulgaria	11	10

Source: Dühr 2011b, based on CEC 2010d

## 2.3 Assessing the added value of macro-regional strategies – Environment Discussion paper

Ágnes Kelemen

### Introduction

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) do not provide for new funding or new legislation, and build to the extent possible on existing institutional frameworks. This does not, however mean that macroregional strategies have no added value.

Macroregional strategies have a general role in improving coordination among different actors, countries and regions and priorities, decreasing the likelihood of duplication of efforts, and increasing the likelihood that agreed actions will be implemented due to increased political commitment and visibility.

The Impact Assessment of the EUSBSR states that “[i]ssues which have spillover effects into parts or the whole of the macroregion and which are not already dealt with in the context of EU policies are deemed to be of strategic relevance to the [macroregion]. For issues which are of common concern (e.g. countries are facing similar problems without spillover effects such as an ageing population) the relevance of the macroregion is mainly limited to coordination and exchange of information regarding experience gained from policy implementation.”<sup>17</sup> This also reflects the extent to which a macroregional strategy can have an added value: the potential for added value is greater for issues of strategic relevance than for issues of common concern.

Macroregional strategies can have added value for actions specifically related to environmental issues, despite the expansive volume of EU legislation in the field of environment, as well as already existing EU funding sources for this purpose. Examples of environmental issues where macroregional strategies can be of greatest added value, i.e. issues where these strategies are of strategic relevance are:

1. Addressing issues relating to *a shared approach to a particular ecosystem/landscape/ecological corridor/other environmental feature reaching across borders which is specific to a number of regions/MS but not the entire EU*. This is the case for both the EUSBSR and EUSDR, where due to the specific environmental, ecological, geological features of the Danube and Baltic Sea, the issues affecting them can be best addressed by surrounding MS and regions.
2. *Coordinating action/policy response needed to achieve results in relation to cross-border externalities at a macroregional level*, especially if these externalities are not sufficiently addressed by EU legislation because of the sensitivity of the area, because there is ambition on the part of a few MS to go beyond what is required by EU legislation, or because not all countries producing the externality are EU Member States and therefore EU legislation does not apply to them, but nonetheless causes external impacts in the EU. This is the case with e.g. the Baltic Sea, where the MARE Nest Model has shown that implementing the Water Framework Directive will not achieve good environmental status of the sea. The Baltic Sea was also declared a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area by the International Maritime Organisation. In such cases, action by a group of countries (MS and non-MS) may be needed which goes beyond EU legislation. Another example is the waste water discharge from ships representing 15% of the world’s maritime traffic, taking place on a sea which is a designated

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<sup>17</sup> SEC(2009) 702 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 Impact Assessment.

as a particularly sensitive area; here also, EU legislation is insufficient to achieve the required results. With respect to the Danube region, cross-border externalities include environmental risks posed by flooding, where upstream management options influence downstream outcomes, as well as externalities relating to water pollution and biodiversity.

3. *Promoting the integration of environment into other activities resulting from the integrated approach* of macroregional strategies. For example, the EUSBSR has enabled a cross-sectoral approach to environmental issues. This has helped address problems where previously HELCOM, which has an environmental focus, has not been able to curb many of the sectoral interests (e.g. agricultural) which drive environmental issues (eutrophication).

Within the scope of this paper, resources and time are scarce for an evaluation of the outputs or results of the macroregional strategies in comparison with a counterfactual scenario. Although e.g. the January 2012 version of the EUSBSR Action Plan contains a number of targets and related indicators for measuring progress in creating an environmentally sustainable region, there is a lack of monitoring data. Often projects and actions are in the first phases of implementation. Therefore the focus of the assessment is often on the aims and planned activities of the actions and projects rather than outputs and results. In addition, due to the 'soft' nature of macroregional strategies, it is difficult to establish a counterfactual scenario, i.e. to know what would have happened in the absence of the strategies, and to understand exactly to what extent the strategies have given new impetus to cooperation. Within the scope of this paper time and resources are also insufficient for an approach which assesses every priority area and project. The assessment is further constrained by the fact that it relies on publicly available information only. The approach taken in this assessment is therefore to demonstrate the added value of macroregional strategies through examples of positive developments in the widest sense. This is similar to the approach taken by the Commission in its report of June 2011 on the implementation of the EUSBSR<sup>18</sup>, where project examples demonstrating the added value of the strategy were identified under the following headings:

- new activity generated (new projects)
- momentum given to existing activity (more visibility, clustering of existing projects)
- new networks, better cooperation
- policy development and coherence
- alignment of funding with other instruments
- cooperation with non-EU states

The focus of the assessment is on a number of guiding questions provided by the Commission Services.

Within the scope of this paper, due to the information, timing and resource constraints of the current assessment, a thorough assessment of the added value of macroregional strategies was not possible. In future, there is need for a true evaluation of the outputs and results of macroregional strategies, the use of resources and methodologies which go beyond a synthesis of publicly available information.

## **Achievements and contribution to EU policies and targets, national, regional and sectoral policies**

There is evidence to support that both strategies are contributing to the sustainable growth pillar of the EU 2020 Strategy, promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy, as well as to the smart growth and inclusive growth pillars. The EUSDR was already formulated with the aim to contribute to the EU 2020 Strategy. The original EUSBSR was formulated before the Europe

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<sup>18</sup> COM(2011) 381 final Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

2020 Strategy. The Council called on the European Commission to review the strategy at the end of 2011, and the review process came to its conclusion at the end of 2012 when the Commission presented the new EUSBSR, which now has several references to the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The Sustainable Growth pillar of the Europe 2020 Strategy has a very strong focus on the issues of the low carbon economy, resource-efficiency and green growth, with targets of the Sustainable Growth Pillar relating to renewable energy, energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Of these issues, not all lend themselves equally well to be addressed within the scope of a macroregional strategy, as e.g. climate change mitigation is generally not macroregionally specific. This fact has been recognised by the review process of the EUSBSR. While the first version of the strategy contained many references to renewable energy and energy efficiency, the Communication on the EUSBSR adopted in December 2012 does not contain a reference to these issues.

However, in a wider sense the macroregional strategies both have a strong focus on sustainable growth. Examples include:

- The BONUS joint Baltic Sea Research and Development Programme developed within the context of the Strategy has a budget of EUR 100 million. It is a joint research effort by 8 MS to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Baltic Sea Region's environmental research programming.
- The CleanShip and InnoShip projects both transform innovations into operations to reduce emissions at sea while retaining the competitiveness of Baltic shipping.
- The Blue Danube project aims at providing improved framework conditions for fast track eco-innovation in waste water treatment.

Both macroregional strategies have as their stated aims to contribute to the implementation of EU environmental acquis, and sometimes going beyond what is required by EU legislation. This is supported by evidence from several projects:

- The strategic action “Implement actions to reduce nutrients” of the EUSBSR concerns the full implementation of key directives<sup>19</sup> related to reducing eutrophication and the “Baltic Sea Action Plan” of HELCOM.
- Flagship Project 2.1. “Create marine protected areas” has, in accordance with the Birds<sup>20</sup> and Habitats Directives<sup>21</sup> called on MS to designate a network of marine protected areas in the Baltic Sea. As a result an area of 10.3% of the Baltic Sea has been designated as protected;
- The Flagship project “Development of HELCOM Core Set Indicators” aims to develop core indicators to monitor Good Ecological Status (GES) as defined in the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Evidence of the contribution of macroregional strategies to achieving targets of existing national, regional and sectoral policies is less clear. One example is the CLISP project, which has helped Italian provinces to ensure the coherence of territorial planning, which by law is their responsibility. Due to the involvement of the Mountain Community “Appennino Aleramico Obertengo” in the project, it was able to transfer the main results of the project directly to different institutions and associations which operate at different levels within the model region.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Water Framework Directive, Nitrate Directive and the Urban Waste Water Directive

<sup>20</sup> Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds.

<sup>21</sup> Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

<sup>22</sup> Final Results Booklet CLISP

[www.clisp.eu/%2Fcontent/%2Fsites/%2Fdefault/%2Ffiles/%2FCLISP\\_Model%2520Region%2520Report\\_Alessandria.pdf](http://www.clisp.eu/%2Fcontent/%2Fsites/%2Fdefault/%2Ffiles/%2FCLISP_Model%2520Region%2520Report_Alessandria.pdf)

### **Potential to influence EU and national policy developments (e.g. through mobilization and alignment of funding and policy priorities with Europe 2020)**

Generally actions and projects aim at influencing national policies. Examples of macroregional projects wishing to influence EU policies exist, but are much more scarce.

The way that projects have tried influence national and regional policies differs. Practices include:

- Ensuring involvement of policymakers: In the project: In the “CC WaterS - Climate Change and Impacts on Water Supply” project government bodies are working with other stakeholders which will make policy uptake of the recommendations more probable.
- Preparation of draft legislation: Action 7 of Priority Action 4 of the EUSDR “To legislate at the appropriate level to limit the presence of phosphates in detergents”. Similarly, in relation to phosphates, the EUSBSR Flagship project 1.1 “Remove phosphates in detergents in countries where this is not yet the case” prepared a draft proposal for a harmonised regulation regarding the use of phosphates and other phosphorus compounds in households.
- Preparation of concepts and strategies: the WANDA project elaborated [national ship waste concepts](#) in all partner countries. The focus of BaltAdapt is on preparing a regional climate change adaptation plan. The EUSDR project “CC-Ware – Mitigating Vulnerability of Water Resources” aims to facilitate the development of national action plans for assuring sustainable drinking water supply by setting up a transnational strategy. The SMIWASTRES project elaborates guidelines and recommendations for policy level in relation to waste disposal.

For the EUSDR, according to the implementation reports of June 2012, the funding for approved projects was EUR 26 million for PA 4, 44.3 million for PA5 and 27.1 million for PA6. Most of the funding came from EU funds (especially ERDF, but also IPA, ENPI and LIFE) with a small amount of funding coming from private companies and foundations. For the EUSBSR Priority Areas 1-5 which concern the environment, the total budget was EUR 43.6 million according to a survey of projects in June 2012.<sup>23</sup>

However, lack of cohesion policy funding is an issue for the EUSBSR. “It should be noted that due to the end of the current programming period (2007-2013), most of the financial resources of the programmes have been already allocated. Therefore, it is difficult to find open calls for territorial cooperation projects. However, financial support for projects is provided by some organisations such as CBSS, Nordic Council of Ministers or BONUS.”<sup>24</sup>

Evidence from the EUSDR suggests that there have generally been difficulties in mobilising funding, and this has caused a widespread problem. Therefore actors are currently focused on preparing projects for the 2014-2020 period and have put implementation on hold. This is mentioned in several places in the implementation reports of Priority Areas 4-6 of the EUSDR.

The current level of funding is of the magnitude which can sustain projects which promote best practices, share information, conduct research, prepare guidelines, etc. However, in both macroregions, addressing environmental issues will require a substantial volume of physical investment.

Reasons for lack of funding are the timing of the strategies has meant that funds have already been committed. This issue is therefore not a long-term challenge for the two macroregional strategies, and will be addressed from 2014 onwards by the new programmes.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://eu.baltic.net/redaktion/download.php?type=file&id=1298>

<sup>24</sup> EUSBSR Newsletter November 2012



### **Added value for coordination of activities between actors**

Macroregional strategies, through their territorial scope and integrated approach, have the potential to ensure coordination of activities between different regions and MS and between representatives of different sectors and interests. For environmental issues this is particularly important due to the existence of cross-border externalities, and the need to integrate environmental considerations into all activities. To avoid duplication with the assessment on governance, this assessment focuses on the value of coordination between actors at the level of projects.

Different projects realised within the scope of the strategies take advantage of the possibilities for coordination in different ways and to a varying degrees. Examples of different types and levels of coordination include:

- Coordination of actors within a sector: The EUSDR Green Danube Network and Bavarian Network projects both focus on building a network of environmental NGOs.
- Coordination between different sectors: The EUSBSR Flagship project “Develop and improve coordination and cooperation among Member States and stakeholders” on fisheries management in the Baltic Sea has established the Baltfish forum to investigate how integration of concerned stakeholders in fisheries management and policy implementation can be strengthened. This is viewed as a first step towards regional management of fisheries.

Various tools are used in different projects to increase coordination and cooperation. Some projects focus on bringing together different stakeholders, others on developing strategies, action plans and legislation common to the entire area of the macroregion.

The effort to increase coordination and cooperation is not a finished process but is ongoing. The implementation report of Priority Action 6 of the EUSDR notes that “In dialogue with stakeholders it was detected that the level of international/transnational cooperation and the setting of existing networks in the field of biodiversity and nature protection is quite weak, which is a precondition for EUSDR-related activities and a big challenge to steer the process of capacity building.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Added value for improving governance structures, including interlinkages with EU initiatives (Northern Dimension, Eastern Partnership)**

The Northern Dimension has benefited from additional funding of EUR 20 million in 2010. The total funding made available to environmental projects financed under the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership from its establishment in 2001 until end of 2012 was EUR 121.81 million, with the total cost of projects at EUR 3338.9 million.<sup>26</sup> The additional funding of EUR 20 million makes up a sixth of the funding available to the NDEP and is therefore significant.

The funding is aimed at environmental projects primarily. Project with Russia in water, wastewater, solid waste and energy efficiency are implemented in the framework of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership.<sup>27</sup> The Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership has also contributed to activities in Belarus under Flagship Project 1.5. “Assessment of regional nutrient pollution load and identification of priority projects to reduce nutrient inputs from Belarus to the Baltic Sea”.

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<sup>25</sup> Report to the European Commission Implementation of the EUSDR Priority Area 6 to preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils Reporting period 13 April 2011 – 30 June 2012 Final

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.ndep.org/projects.asp?type=nh&cont=prjh&pageid=4>

<sup>27</sup> SEC(2009) 712/2 Januaz 2012 version Commission Staff Working Document Accompaning 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

There is little evidence of the contribution of the two macroregional strategies to the Eastern Partnership, despite initial intentions.

### **Main drivers to increase the added value of macro-regional strategies**

Although the added value of macroregional strategies for the environment can be clearly demonstrated, there is scope for further increasing added value.

Due to the ‘soft’ nature of macroregional strategies (especially the no new funding provision) it can be expected that there will be some weaknesses in implementation. E.g. the EUSBSR “Cleaner waste water” Flagship project includes information gathering, prioritisation related to waste water treatment plants, and an identification of countries’ difficulties. It also aims to build/upgrade priority Waste Water Treatment Plants around the Baltic Sea. However, as environmental infrastructure is investment heavy and several countries around the Baltic Sea cannot finance this type of infrastructure either from government revenues or from user fees to the extent necessary, it is unlikely that this project alone, or even the EUSBSR as a whole can lead to real results. Lack of is an even bigger issue for the EUSDR. Here the implementation reports of the priority areas of the EUSDR mention in several places the lack of funding and the missed opportunity to align the strategy with EU funding due to the timing of the strategy. For the added value of macroregional strategies to be truly realised, stronger integration into cohesion policy programming is needed to ensure the necessary funds for implementation will become available. The closer alignment of cohesion policy programming with macroregional strategies in 2014-2020 is therefore welcome, and will help to deliver results. Such funding will be needed for upscaling of demonstration projects (e.g. delivered by the Baltic Deal project in relation to best agricultural practices) or for implementing guidelines (e.g. those delivered by SMOCS for the management of contaminated sediments) as well as carrying out planned investments (e.g. Cleaner waste water flagship project).

In some cases, to ensure that there is some kind of benefit to all MS and regions participating in a macroregional strategy, actions and projects which seem to have less added value for the macroregion as a whole, but are of high importance to a small group of regions and MS have also been included in the strategies. However, a stronger focus on actions and projects with true macroregional significance should be encouraged. This means that the focus should be primarily on issues within the environmental theme which the EUSBSR Impact Assessment refers to as being of strategic relevance. Projects which are relevant to a smaller territory within the macroregion or address issues which are not specific to the macroregion only but to the EU in general should have lower priority, as these can be addressed through other approaches. This would also ensure stronger focus and avoid fragmentation of efforts. The process of refocusing the EUSBSR on issues of strategic relevance has already taken place through the review of the strategy. However, the EUSDR is still very much an umbrella strategy for all activities which take place in the Danube region and require cooperation, and is focused on addressing many issues which are not of strategic relevance to the Danube region. It is therefore not clear for every project how the EUSDR is complementary to other territorial cooperation initiatives in the region, and what the added value is.

For certain project types, particularly those that do not produce tangible results on their own, such as those focused on gathering information, increasing scientific knowledge, preparing guidance documents, etc., there should be an attempt to ensure that they feed into the policy making process in some way. This does not always seem to be the case.

Transitory governance structures are less likely to follow-up activities, and provide feedback, and are therefore less suited for projects which aim to provide long term results. Although the macroregional strategies have, out of consideration for existing institutions at the request of participating MS, focused on an approach which does not hinge on new structures, these may in some cases be necessary, where

they do not exist already. The need for new structures is an issue addressed by the Danubeparks II project.

For future macroregional strategies and for possible further reviews of the existing strategies a top-down determination of specific targets related to the strategy should be avoided as this may hinder ownership of the strategy in the macroregion. The EUSDR has set specific targets related to the navigability of the river which does not have the support of all MS and environmental organisations in the macroregion and may prevent constructive discussions on trade-offs between transport and environment between stakeholders and hinder progress by entrenching views on the issue.

An example of a project which is of true added value in all respects and can be considered as a project which addresses issues of strategic relevance to the macroregion is the Danubeparks II project. It addresses an issue specific to the macroregion, is aimed at a direct contribution to the goals of the macroregional strategy, in terms of governance sets out to establish formal links between actors, ensures that results are translated into action at the policy level, has an integrated approach across different areas and themes, focuses also on implementation by building on previous project results. According to the implementation report of PA6 of the EUSDR, “[t]he project focuses on networking and cooperation processes of protected areas alongside the Danube river. The activities stretch over eight countries in the Danube Region and include member states and non-member states, Lead Partner is Donau-Auen National Park, Orth a.d. Donau, Austria. Whereas the first DANUBEPARKS project basically formed the network of relevant actors, the follow-up projects aims to further anchor the network on international and political level with the aim of a long-term and stable organisation as a binding link between the policy level, the NGOs and the citizens. A direct contribution to the implementation of the EUSDR is envisaged. Beside these policy oriented activities, content-oriented activities focus on flagship species (Black Poplar, White-tailed Eagle), River Morphology (cooperation with the ICPDR) and Tourism.” The EUSBSR “Cleaner waste water” Flagship project similarly addresses a true macroregional challenge and ensures that its findings are translated into action by not only gathering information and prioritising investment in waste water treatment plants, but by aiming to build/upgrade priority Waste Water Treatment Plants around the Baltic Sea.

### **Recommendations on future work on macroregional strategies**

The added value of macroregional strategies depends in part on how the strategy is initially conceived and also on how it is implemented. The issues that macroregional strategies focus on is already largely decided when these strategies are formulated, through the identification of objectives, priority areas, a list of actions in the action plans, etc. Other areas where decisions at EU level have a strong impact is the no new funding and no new institutions concept in relation to these strategies. A lot of other issues (such as the extent to which all relevant stakeholders are involved in projects or how the results of the projects are fed into the policy process in the relevant MS and regions) can be influenced during the implementation phase of macroregional strategies rather than at EU level during the formulation of the strategy.

The following recommendations can be made for policy makers at the EU level:

- Focusing macroregional strategies on areas within the environmental theme which are of strategic relevance to the particular macroregion and which are specific to the macroregion would increase added value of these strategies. In the field of environment these are easily identifiable and relate in particular to macroregional level externalities and ecosystems common to the entire macroregion.
- Focusing macroregional strategies on areas which are priorities for the EU, e.g. on issues which are contained in the Europe 2020 Strategy, in the Environmental Action Programme of the EU, or relate to addressing obligations contained in the EU environmental Acquis where

implementation is lagging behind could promote macro-regional strategies as a link between the EU policy level and implementation.

- The rule of no new institutions should not be applied too strictly. New institutions have the potential to fill gaps where institutions do not currently exist, which may be important for future macroregional strategies which do not have the same kind of history of cooperation as e.g. the Baltic Sea region. New institutions may also be necessary to ensure sustained results after projects have been implemented.
- It is important to ensure that EU funding can be made available also for new macroregional strategies which are developed during a programming period, and that there are sufficient incentives to make funding available. It is also important to ensure sufficient funding for the implementation of macroregional strategies, either by increased the level of funding for these strategies, or through ensuring that funding is made available from national and regional programmes even if programming has taken place already.
- Identify good practices for projects (e.g. regarding involvement of stakeholders, producing policy-relevant results, etc.) and encouraging/ensuring that these are applied when projects are selected and implemented may promote added value at the level of implementation, help minimise the number of projects which do not have true macroregional added value due to less than optimal implementation, and avoid an umbrella effect of macroregional strategies where all projects taking place within the macroregion are sold under the banner of the strategy without an examination of added value for the macroregion as a whole.
- The potential of macroregional strategies to involve non-MS should be further strengthened, as this can improve relations with these countries and regions, and also improve outcomes for the macroregion as a whole.

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## 2.4 Do macro-regional strategies boost innovation and competitiveness?

Alasdair Reid

### Introduction

This paper was drafted at the request of Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, Unit D1, Competence Centre for macro-regions and European territorial cooperation. The paper forms part of the European Commission's response to the European Council's request (April 2011) to "clarify the concept of macro-regional strategies, to evaluate their value added and submit the outcomes to the Council and the European Parliament by June 2013". Based on available documentation, the paper considers the value added of macro-regional strategies for business competitiveness, research and innovation policies addressing the following questions

1. What are the main achievements in implementing the macro-regional strategies and what contribution have they made to EU policies and targets; national, regional, sectoral policies? The question of the relevance of macro-regional strategies to EU Cohesion Policy and Europe 2020 Strategy objectives particularly should be addressed;
2. Do Macro regional strategies have the potential to influence EU and national policy developments, e.g. through mobilisation of existing funding, and alignment of funding and policies with EU 2020 priorities and programmes, and what evidence supports this?
3. What is the added value of macro regional strategies in terms of coordination of activities between different actors; for example via cooperation between EU Member States and Third countries, through improved cooperation structures, development of new ways of cooperation or strengthening existing ones?
4. What is the added value of the macro regional strategies in terms of improving governance structures for the achievement of overall objectives including interaction/links with other EU initiatives (such as the Northern Dimension, Eastern Partnership, etc), and what concrete progress has been made in the priority areas/horizontal actions/actions and flagship projects assessed?.
5. What are the main drivers to increase the added value of macro-regional strategies in their establishment and in their implementation?

The European Commission defines a macro-region as "*an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges*".<sup>28</sup> A macro-regional strategy (MRS) does not provide additional funding or create new policy, legal and institutional frameworks; rather the aim is to foster a better and more effective use of existing funds, institutions/structures, (local, regional, national, EU) policies, etc. Hence, the added value of a MRS is principally through more effective trans-national coordination and creation of synergies between national and regional policies.

Two macro-regional strategies have been approved:

- the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) in 2009
- the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in 2011.

Moreover, the December 2012 Council conclusions invited the Commission to present a EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region before the end of 2014.

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<sup>28</sup> See: [http://www.interact-eu.net/macro\\_regional\\_strategies/macro\\_regional\\_strategies/283/3921](http://www.interact-eu.net/macro_regional_strategies/macro_regional_strategies/283/3921)

## 1. The main achievements of macro-regional strategies in the field of innovation

It is still early to draw robust, evidence-based, conclusions on the extent to which the existence of a MRS creates *added value* (in the simplest terms, was the intervention additional to what would otherwise have taken place?) with respect to existing regional, national and EU policies. Two approaches are adopted towards assessing the potential achievements and added value of the two existing MRS:

- A comparison of the expected impact of the two strategies on innovation and competitiveness to what has been actually achieved to date. On this basis, it may be possible to extrapolate the added value of the MRS in the future programming period (2014-20) and the contribution to Europe 2020.
- A logical impact assessment, examining areas where concerted action at a macro-regional level could have a greater added value than action at either regional/national or European levels.

### 1.1 The expected impact of the macro-regional strategies

This section reviews the intervention logic in the strategies and action plans and the expected impact on business competitiveness, research and innovation.

#### 1.1.1 The EUSBSR: intervention logic in favour of innovation and competitiveness

The EUSBSR (European Commission, 2009) identified both a number of economic challenges (notably wide disparities in R&D and innovation and practical obstacles to trade in goods and services despite the internal market) as well as significant potential that may be better used (very well-educated workforce, expertise in innovation, a strong tradition of intra-regional cooperation, etc.). The strategy noted that there was networking among research funding agencies from all EU Baltic States, supported by the EU's Research Framework Programme (FP7 currently, Horizon 2020 from 2014), which provides a sound basis for collaboration in research and knowledge transfer.

The 2009 strategy and action plan were structured in 15 priority areas grouped into four thematic pillars plus a number of horizontal actions. The Action Plan underlined that this structure was 'only for ease of analysis' since each pillar relates to a wider range of inter-linked and interdependent policies and will hence impact on other pillars. The 2012 review and revised EUSBSR led to the adoption of three overall objectives: to Save the Sea; to Connect the Regions; and to Increase Prosperity. However, this has not changed the structure of the priority areas and pillars in the updated Action Plan. Under the second pillar, 'To make the Baltic Sea a Prosperous Place', two priority areas tackle the 'innovation divide' and 'competitiveness' challenges: Priority Area 7 (PA7) To exploit the full potential of research and innovation and Priority Area 8 (PA8) Implementing the Small Business Act: Entrepreneurship, SMEs and human resources<sup>29</sup>. In the Baltic Sea Region the general conditions for growth need to be strengthened.

Hence, on a 'macro-level, the EUSBSR intervention logic seeks to reduce "*the East–West division*" in innovation capacity across the Baltic Sea. The assumption is that "*transfer of knowledge and competence and deepened cooperation from the Nordic countries and Germany as innovation top-performers can help Poland and the Baltic States to continue catching up*". Similarly, the strategy argues that the obstacles to competitiveness<sup>30</sup> and hindrances to the single market require more effective support for entrepreneurship and SME development, as well as strengthened cooperation between business support institutions.

#### 1.1.2 The EUSDR: intervention logic in favour of innovation and competitiveness

The Communication establishing the EUSDR (European Commission 2010a) argues that by '*building on considerable research and innovation perspectives, the Region can be at the forefront of EU trade*

<sup>29</sup> The other two priority areas in this pillar are PA6 To remove hindrances to the internal market in the Baltic Sea Region and PA9 To reinforce sustainable agriculture, forestry and fishing.

<sup>30</sup> For an up to date overview, see the 2012 Competitiveness in BSR report [http://www.bsr2012.eu/wp-content/uploads/BDF\\_SoRR\\_2012.pdf](http://www.bsr2012.eu/wp-content/uploads/BDF_SoRR_2012.pdf)

and enterprise.’ However, the DR is also characterised by very wide disparities, with ‘*some of the most successful but also the poorest regions in the EU*’. In particular, the following weaknesses were pinpointed:

- contacts and cooperation are often lacking, both financially and institutionally.
- enterprises do not sufficiently exploit the international dimension of marketing, innovation or research.
- The share of highly educated people is lower than the EU27 average.
- internal market bottlenecks and a need to improve the business environment.

The intervention logic assumes that innovation performance and the intra-macro-region ‘*polarisation*’ can be tackled by ‘targeted support for research infrastructure that will stimulate excellence and deepen networking between knowledge providers, companies and policy-makers’. In contrast to the BSR, the level of current co-operation in the fields of R&I appears to start from a lower level of intensity with the strategy noting that “*existing bilateral agreements should lead to multilateral coordination*”, driven either by geographic proximity or by fields of excellence. Indeed, the strategy argues, “*developing regions downstream can benefit from the leading - indeed world-class - innovative regions upstream*”. Moreover, there is an expectation that the EUSDR will help to “*use national and regional funds better, and benefit fully from the European Research Area*”.

In terms of business development, the divide across the macro-region between ‘top-performing’ and ‘lagging’ region is also the focus of attention. The latter are expected to benefit from connections between innovation and business supporting institutions. In particular, the strategy assumes that ‘*Clusters and links between centres of excellence, binding them into existing education and research networks, will extend the competitiveness of upstream enterprises to the whole region*’.

The accompanying actions plan sets out a total of 11 priorities grouped under four pillars. The third pillar, entitled ‘Building Prosperity in the Danube Region’, includes two priority areas (PA): PA7 To develop the Knowledge Society through Research, Education and Information Technologies; and PA8: To support the Competitiveness of Enterprises, including Cluster Development. In terms of cross PA linkages, under the priority for energy, there is an identified need for exchange of experience notably on smart grids, smart cities and eco-innovation.

## 1.2 State of play: implementing the Baltic Sea and Danube strategies

The concrete implementation of the two current macro-region strategies is pursued essentially via a number of flagship projects summarised in

Figure 1. The evidence on progress available in the published implementation reports underlines that there is a rather variable degree of progress both between the EUSBSR and the EUSDR (which is logical given launch dates) but also between the various projects in each strategy. It is also clear, that a large number of the flagship projects build on pre-existing co-operation or networks supported under both the European Territorial Co-operation (Interreg) programmes or supported under other EU funding programmes (e.g. CIP, FP7: ERANETS, joint programming, etc.).

In short, the value added of the macro-region strategies at this initial phase appear to be more about structuring and combining efforts than radically new initiatives.



Figure 1 Flagship projects of the EU Strategies for the Baltic Sea and Danube regions

Priority area	EUSBSR	EUSDR
<b>Research and Innovation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7.1 BSR Stars (leader: Sweden and Lithuania)</li> <li>• 7.2 A Baltic Sea Fund for Innovation and Research (leader: Swedish Region Skåne)</li> <li>• 7.3 Baltic Sea Region strategy to promote services innovation (leader: Lithuania and Finland)</li> <li>• 7.4 ScanBalt Health Region (leader: Lithuania and Germany)</li> <li>• 7.5 Baltic Science Link (leader: Swedish Research Council)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund (DRRIF)</li> <li>• Danube River Research and Management (DREAM)</li> </ul>
<b>Competitiveness &amp; entrepreneurship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• •8.1 Promote young entrepreneurs</li> <li>• 8.2 Develop deeper cooperation on environmental technology to create new business opportunities</li> <li>• 8.3 Implement the project Sustainable Production through Innovation in Small and Medium sized Enterprises</li> <li>• 8.4 Make the Baltic Sea an Eco-efficient region</li> <li>• 8.5 Baltic Supply</li> <li>• 8.6 Make the Baltic Sea region a leader in design</li> <li>• 8.7 Implement the Baltic Sea Labour Network project</li> <li>• 8.8 Cooperation between Public Employment services</li> </ul>	<p>Seven flagship projects (as of June 2012):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cluster Atlas</li> <li>• South East Europe Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (SEECCEL)</li> <li>• SEE Management Forum</li> <li>• Centres of Excellence</li> <li>• Centres of Competence Smart and Innovative Rural Areas (SIRA DANUBE)</li> <li>• Blue Danube</li> <li>• Vocational Training (Seeged+Innoinfo and SEeDual)</li> </ul>

### 1.2.1 The EUSBSR: achievements to date in field of innovation and competitiveness

Based on the 2011 EUSBSR progress report, the projects that have made notable progress are:

- BSR Stars (7.1)<sup>31</sup> which supports a programmed approach for innovation, clusters and SME-networks increasing the joint innovation capacity in the region, significantly extending existing networks and clusters, and creating new networks of innovation specialists, companies, R&D organisations and policy makers
- ScanBalt Health Region<sup>32</sup> which aims to structure co-operation between the Baltic Sea Health and Life science community,
- Baltic Science Link<sup>33</sup> which aims to ‘pool’ and facilitate access to research facilities in the field of material science.

In addition, there are strong cross PA links between the Bonus<sup>34</sup> programme (under priority area 1) and BSR Stars leading to the former to include clean tech innovation and eco-innovation<sup>35</sup>. The 2011 progress report argues that “*without the EUSBSR this would not have been possible*”, although it is not entirely clear why co-operation could not have been generated in the absence of the macro-region strategy.

The Baltic Sea Region Programme is funding elements of each the flagship projects although the 2011 report also underlines that national funds have been mobilised to support specific actions. Moreover, a

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.bsrstars.se/>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.scanbalt.org/>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.science-link.eu/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.bonusportal.org>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.bsrstars.se/project/bonus-call-2012-innovation/>

‘cluster’ of SME innovation related actions has been created with a view to fostering exchange and learning<sup>36</sup> that could help to develop more structured future co-operation.

### **1.2.2 The EUSDR: achievements to date in field of innovation and competitiveness**

The June 2012 progress report for PA7 outlines progress to date, including:

- a main focus on the policy level recognition of the PA7 targets, actions and possible funding, as well as on the networking with the most relevant stakeholders able to support progress towards defined targets
- discussions on the creation of the Danube Region Research and Innovation Fund (DRRIF), drawing on the ‘best practice of the BONUS programme’. The Conference of the Ministers of the Danube Region agreed, in July 2012<sup>37</sup>, on the principles of a DRRIF with at least 10 million Euros: half coming from national sources, half from the EU. Before launching the DRRIF, a feasibility study will be carried out to consider the legal, administrative and financial pre-conditions. It is expected that the feasibility study will be completed by end 2013, allowing the launch of DRRIF by mid 2014.

Other actions are still in a preliminary phase and reportedly face difficulties in mobilising actors in the absence of additional dedicated funds from the EUSDR. Aside from the two approved flagship projects, the PA7 progress report summarises actions taken towards meeting other ‘milestones’ such as: the co-ordination of ‘Smart Specialisation’ strategies; identifying centres of excellence, creation of a Danube Region Reference-Data and Services Infrastructure (Danube RDSI), etc. Actions under broadband, e-government, research infrastructure, etc. are still at the stage of project design. Access to funding is a critical issue, notably in south-East European countries where national funds for research and innovation are extremely limited<sup>38</sup>.

Under PA8, the seven flagship projects listed in

Figure 1 are reported to be making progress. In order to structure discussions across a wide range of stakeholders, four working groups (WG) have been established: clusters of excellence, vocational training, innovation and technology transfer and competitiveness in rural and urban areas. These working groups have drawn up road-maps and have begun to identify possible future actions (e.g. the WG clusters of excellence is investigating the idea of an innovation voucher that would give companies access to expertise in universities in the more advanced parts of the region).

### **1.3 A conceptual framework for assessing the added value of macro-regional strategies for competitiveness and innovation**

As can be seen from the previous sections, the intervention logic of the two MRS are broadly similar and there is also a degree of commonality between the types of actions pursued. In order to consider the value added of a MRS for innovation and competitiveness it is important to understand what the expected result and the relationship (intervention logic) between the activities supported and the targets set. Both the strategies have set a number of broad targets.

The EUSBSR targets were revised in 2012 (European Commission, 2012x) and detailed in the annex to the Council Conclusions on the review of the EUSBSR. Two overall ‘policy indicators’ are

<sup>36</sup> <http://eu.baltic.net/Innovation.21800.html> and <http://www.bsr-innovation.eu/>

<sup>37</sup> <http://bit.ly/VFyHtg>

<sup>38</sup> See the annual ERAWATCH country reports available at <http://erawatch.jrc.ec.europa.eu/erawatch/opencms/information/reports/>

proposed: increasing (by 15%) the volume of intra-regional trade and cross-border services by 2020; increasing (by 20%) the number of people participating in programmes of cultural, educational, scientific exchange and co-operation by 2020. In addition, a number of context indicators were set including that Gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) should be at least 3% of GDP (in line with the Europe 2020 target) across the BSR. The detailed table annexed to the Council conclusions proposes a broader range of indicators and details the baselines, which is useful. However, it is not clear to what extent and how directly the EUSBSR is expected to influence these context indicators. Although, the GERD/GDP target is defined as both an average improvement and as a narrowing of the ‘divide’ between the most and least R&D intensive regions in the macro-region, it remains a very ‘blunt’ measure of innovation activity, since it fails to take account of differences in industrial structure, level of development, etc.

It would appear that the EUSDR targets in the field of R&I were set without any real analysis of their relevance or realism (in numerical or temporal terms<sup>39</sup>). The issue seems to be that the strategy is aligned in a ‘mechanistic’ way with the Europe 2020 headline targets without due consideration of their ‘bottom-up’ realism. For instance, for PA7, the target of spending 3% of GDP on R&D is not coherent with the average of the national targets (currently 2.23%). Even if the targets were achievable, they are not necessarily directly related to the intervention logic nor do they contribute per se to the expected impact. For example, the target of increasing patents by 50% in the macro-region is a) not guaranteed to reduce polarisation b) not directly linked to any priority action c) nonsensical unless there is a proven causality between increased patenting and increased competitiveness (which there is not<sup>40</sup>, rather the commercial value of a limited number of patents plays a role in restructuring economies).

In contrast, PA8 of the EUSDR proposed a set of targets that describe the outcome of a ‘process’ rather than a set of quantified targets. These ‘targets’ include: establishing a cluster network for the EUSDR (identification of the founded institutions in this connection, as well as the existing networks) by 2014; or improvement of technological transfer through establishing measures like consulting services by chambers and other institutions or organisations.

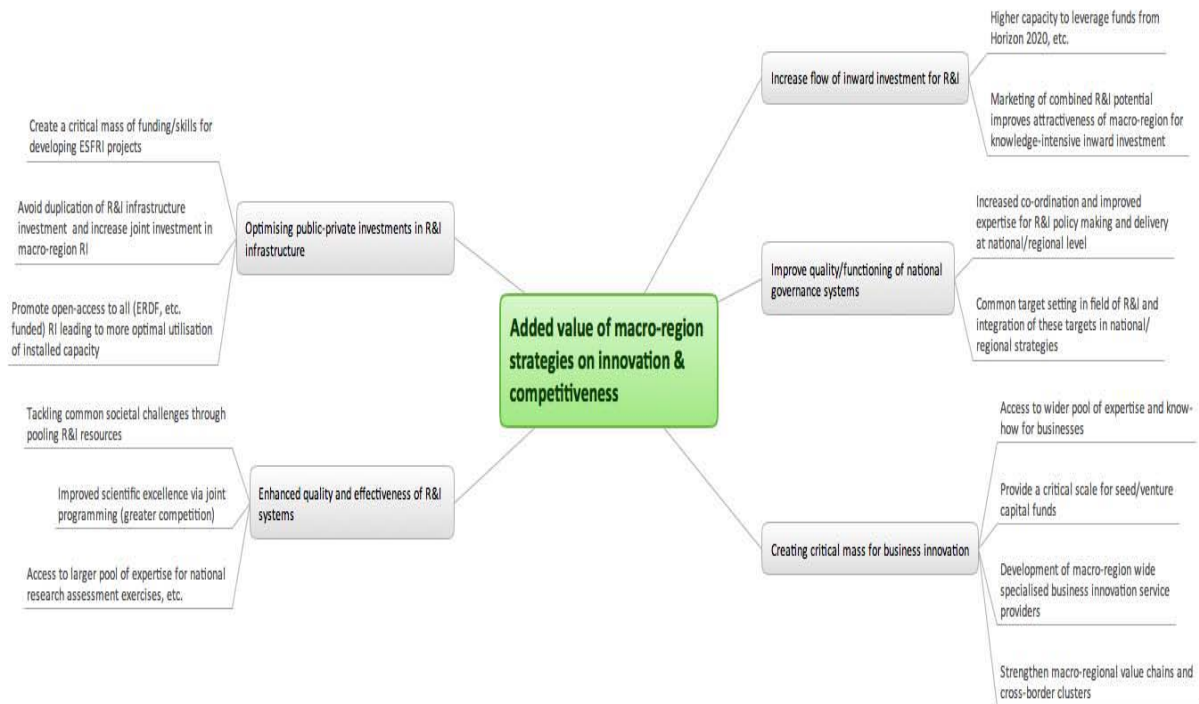
In order to set realistic targets, that consider the value added from a formative as well as a summative perspective, there is a need for a clearer intervention logic where the MRS objectives are more closely related to the expected results of the flagship projects. To this end, sets out a range of possible ‘added value’ effects of a macro-regional strategy on innovation and competitiveness.

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<sup>39</sup> For instance, how could a macro-region strategy adopted in 2010 possibly contribute to the target of “Broadband access for all EU citizens in the Region by 2013”.

<sup>40</sup> See for instance: <http://research.stlouisfed.org/wp/2012/2012-035.pdf> for a survey of the literature on the link between patenting, innovation and productivity.

Figure 2 Potential types of value added of macro-region strategies on innovation



Accordingly, it is recommended to further refine the indicators used to measure progress and assess the value added of the MRS. Whilst the indicator framework for the EUSBSR is not perfect, it is recommended, firstly, that a similar process of contextualising the indicators should take place for the EUSDR. This should lead to the adjustment of specific targets (e.g. lowering the 3% of GDP on R&D target to the average national targets for all Danube region countries) but also to the introduction of targets that measure the reduction of differentials in performance between the regions/countries that make up the macro-region.

Secondly, for both the current MRS and any future strategies, more operational targets and accompanying indicators directly linked to the intervention logic should be set. As an example, considering the impact of MRS on ‘optimising public-private investments in R&I infrastructure’, the expected outcomes could be an increase in joint investments by several countries/regions in research infrastructure facilities (either new or investment by one or more countries in existing facilities in another) labelled as ‘strategic’ for macro-region development priorities. The target could be that a minimum percentage (taking account of the baseline situation but realistically no less than 10% if the target is to be meaningful) of national research infrastructure funds invested during 2014-20 are jointly invested in ‘macro-region’ research facilities.

## 2. Influence of macro-regional strategies on EU and national policy

Given the absence of a dedicated financial envelope for the implementation of the MRS, it is clear that a main element of ‘added value’ is the extent to which such a strategic framework helps to align and mobilise existing funds or leverage additional public (but also potentially private) funding. Aside from the Structural Funds (and notably the transnational co-operation programmes), the Member States are expected “to examine funding projects and actions aligned with the Strategy priorities from their own

resources” (EUSBSR). Moreover, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and regional financial institutions, such as the Nordic Investment Bank, are also expected to be involved.

From an innovation and competitiveness perspective, the potential influence of MRS on both national (regional) and EU policies is significant. Hypothetically, MRS could help fill the ‘missing middle’ between broad European objectives (such as those set out in European Research Area (ERA) or Innovation Union (IU) communications), funding programme and partnerships (such as the new European Innovation Partnerships<sup>41</sup>) and the diverse national and regional policies. This is particularly the case as the “polarisation” in capacities and performance implies that the potential to participate in European level programmes and initiatives is equally variable.

In the field of innovation and competitiveness, the most relevant EU instruments are:

- The Structural Funds programmes, both national operational programmes and European Territorial Co-operation programmes, which provide a significant opportunity for funding the types of initiatives identified in the strategies.
- The European Commission’s research and innovation programmes and initiatives including notably, the Research Framework Programme (currently FP7, Horizon 2020 from 2014) but also joint-programming and joint investment planning such as through the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI).
- Financial institutions and funds, notably those managed through the European Investment Bank (EIB), but also the EBRD in the Danube Region.

In addition, within the BSR, the Nordic Council institutions have historically played a major role in structuring and funding, to some extent, co-operation between the Nordic Countries, including in the fields of research and innovation (NordForsk, Nordic Innovation Centre, etc.). Nothing similar exists in the Danube Region.

**Error! Reference source not found.** explores the potential role of MRS as ‘alignment’ mechanisms with respect to multi-national/inter-regional policy co-operation and EU level policies. Five broad areas of potential influence are suggested through which the MRS may help align both national/regional policies and contribute to influencing EU level policies

- Enhancing participation in European partnerships for research and innovation
- Contributing to joint R&I programming and investment
- Optimising the effectiveness of Structural Fund operational programmes
- More effective use of funds available through the ETC programmes
- Leveraging finance in and into the macro-region

It is clear that there remains considerable room for further ‘gains’ to be made.

Considering the first two themes, the real or potential influence of the macro-region strategies needs to be judged in terms of the additional structuring effect on R&D activities, cluster programmes, etc. with respect to what can be achieved through other EU instruments. Following the adoption of the ERA concept the Commission introduced a number of instruments including ERA-NET, ERA-NET Plus and Article 185<sup>42</sup> initiatives to help develop the ERA. In 2008 the Commission introduced the Joint Programming<sup>43</sup> approach in order to make better use of public R&D funds through enhanced

<sup>41</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index\\_en.cfm?pg=eip](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=eip)

<sup>42</sup> See: [http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/art185/about-185\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/art185/about-185_en.html)

<sup>43</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions “Towards Joint Programming in Research”. COM(2008) 468. Brussels, 15.7.2008

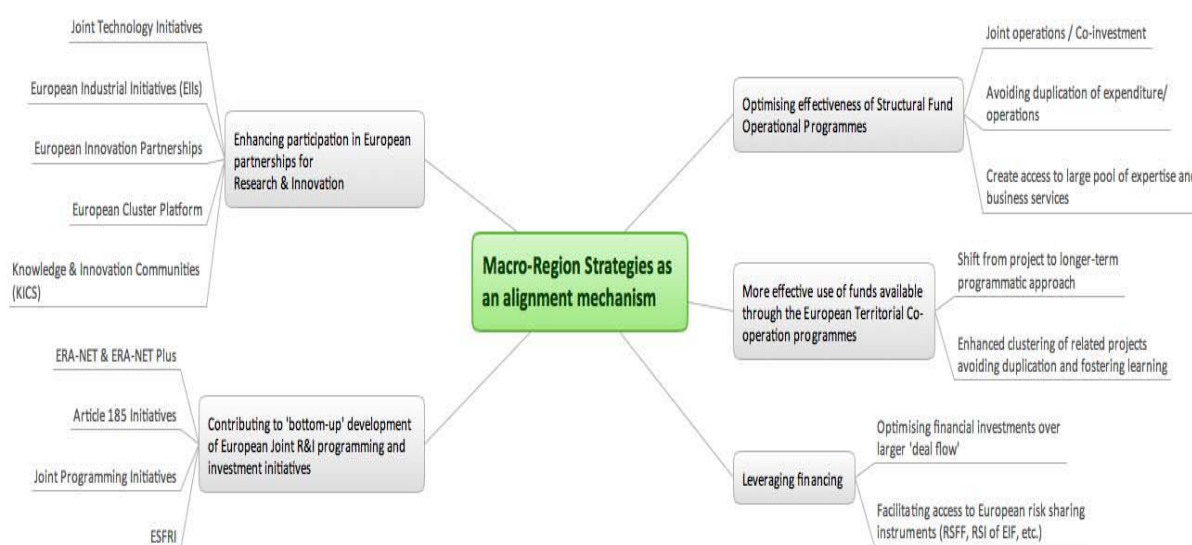
cooperation. The expected benefits include: eliminating wasteful duplication, developing scale and scope, promoting scientific excellence, and pooling data and expertise scattered across Member States.

Both of the macro-regions have common interests and potential in specific fields of research and innovation which create scope for a more (cost-)effective mobilisation of available human, infrastructural and financial resources for research. A mapping of innovation policy priorities in the Baltic Sea region (Technopolis Group, 2011) identified a number of common areas where national funding is focused, including: ICT, Life science (notably biotechnology), Healthcare (and ‘wellness’) services, Agro-food, ‘cleantech’ (notably in Denmark and Finland); Energy (notably renewables), materials (ranging from nanotech, through plasma to more traditional materials).

Similarly, in the Danube region, the potential for research cooperation in a joint programming framework appears to be particularly strong in the field of renewable energy: geothermal energy in the Pannonian basin, renewable energy for mobility, smart grids, energy efficient cities and regional planning, biomass, environmentally and socially compatible development of the energy system

The BSR has been a precursor in the EU’s joint programming initiative through the BONUS programme<sup>44</sup> which can be viewed as a ‘best-practice’ for other macro-regions, It serves as a model for the DRRIF, which intends to build on “*existing European network projects, such as the INCO.NET for the Western Balkan countries (WBC-INCO.NET)...and in the near future the INCO-NET Danube Region*”.

Figure 3 Potential links between macro-region strategies, national and EU policies



However, the achievements to date are still sub-optimal despite a multitude of projects that have sought to explore various fields of R&D and innovation co-operation in fields such as life science, energy, environment, mobility, etc. The current co-operation is too often a response to calls for project from EU funded programmes rather than being driven by ‘demand’ (public or private) for R&D and innovation within the macro-region. Hence, there is a need to move beyond project-based co-ordination of research activities to more structured co-operation over a longer time-frame.

<sup>44</sup> The BONUS Programme was established under Article 185 in September 2010, with a budget of €100m. Its objective is to support joint programming and targeted research to tackle the most important issues facing the Baltic Sea. Its full implementation phase began in November 2011.



There is also significant scope, in a time of restricted public budgets, to optimise investments in the field of research infrastructure. The ESFRI agenda is ‘top down’ and focused on a number of single site major European research infrastructures or distributed infrastructures. There is a need to structure research infrastructures of an intermediary level in the macro-regions that are coherent with the societal challenges and socio-economic development factors specific to the macro-region. A macro-region road-map for research infrastructure that built on, but that is more than the sum of, national road-maps would be a major step forward in informing investment decisions during the up-coming 2014-20 period. Despite the efforts of initiatives like Science Link in the BSR, there is still no significant co-ordination of research infrastructure investments or mechanism to facilitate ‘open access’ for researchers to facilities in neighbouring regions. This leads to a duplication of research infrastructure (equipment) and a non-optimal utilisation intensity of installed equipment (often co-funded by the ERDF).

In the field of clusters policy, the BSR has also been a precursor with an initial project funded under the CIP (Europe Innova/Pro-Inno Europe) leading to the development of BSR Stars and the Star Dust project. A key element of the BSR Stars approach is the adoption of a longer-term strategic programming approach that should help to foster a greater sustainability of the cluster co-operation.

Concerning the main stream Structural Funds, the two MRS were launched well after SF programmes adopted and too late in the programming cycle to have scope for significant leverage or mobilisation of existing funding. When the EUSBSR was adopted, programming authorities were invited to review the allocation criteria and facilitate the selection of projects aligned with the strategy. The Commission also indicated that it would welcome appropriate modifications of the programmes where necessary. However, in the Baltic Sea Region, this did not occur to any significant extent, at least in the field of innovation policy (see Technopolis Group, 2011). Indeed, INTERACT (2010) concluded that *“many programmes are concerned about the timing for implementation of upcoming macro-regional strategies – too late for the current programming period and still too early for the next one”*.

Hence, to date, partly due to the lack of additional finance, the macro regional strategies have had limited influence on national (regional) innovation and competitiveness policies. The progress reports do underline that non Cohesion Policy countries like Sweden or Finland in the BSR or the region of Baden-Württemberg in the DR have mobilised own resources to implement initiatives in the framework of the macro-region strategies. However, this remains the exception rather than rule. Given the limited mobilisation of national funds to support MRS, the ETC programmes are the main source of funding for implementation of flagship projects.

There is not yet a clear break with past practice of cross-border and inter-regional programmes to fund ‘soft’ projects, only rarely combined with physical investments, with little significant effect on territorial development. Indeed, Panteia (2010) found that *“substantial trans-national co-operation in the fields of R&D and innovation was rare and focussed mostly on furthering polycentric and urban development or on improving access to information society”*. INTERACT (2010) found a resistance to use cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes for co-financing MRS, as this neglects *‘the achievements so far and the value of bilateral co-operation at smaller scale’*. INTERACT suggest a danger of a macro-regional ‘labelling virus’, whereby promoters sell their projects as ‘macro-regional’ without sound justification.

*On the other hand, macro-regional strategies are seen to offer new opportunities and perspectives for successful ideas on a larger scale, as well as providing the impetus for know-how transfer beyond the respective programme areas.* This conclusion is particularly relevant for research and innovation initiatives where either scale of investment, range of know-required or skills and expertise in business value chains increasingly can be found only at the level of a wide group of countries. In this context, the MRS may provide a framework for more sustainable transnational public-private innovation partnerships, that are accessible by macro-region participants from ‘weaker innovation performing countries’; and that can provide a stepping stone to participation in European level partnerships.

Finally, in terms of financial engineering, the scope for creating seed/early-stage and venture funds in the macro-regions is considerable, since few countries (even the Nordic countries) have a sufficient ‘deal flow’ of viable start-ups to sustain specialised funds. Indeed, NICE (2010) argued that much was to be gained by benchmarking and sharing best practices among Nordic public investors and financiers. Hence, the macro-region may provide a sufficient critical mass through pooling national early stage investment resources. For example, the three Baltic States have joined forces with the support of the EIB to create the Baltic Innovation Fund<sup>45</sup>. This example could be extended to early-stage co-investment funds at macro-region level that support the growth of specific emerging clusters or technology based sectors.

### 3. Added value of macro-regional strategies on co-ordination

In both the BSR<sup>46</sup> and Danube Region<sup>47</sup>, a range of existing transnational or multi-country (e.g. the Nordic Council in the BSR) co-ordination structures existed prior to the launch of the MRS. Indeed, in the BSR, there are so many structures that some experts have called for a rationalisation<sup>48</sup>. Both the strategies underline that the need to build on existing co-operation structures and the 2011 EUSBSR review noted, “as a result of the Strategy, the Nordic Council of Ministers has extended its networks to cover the entire Baltic Sea Region”.

In the field of innovation and competitiveness, a number of specific co-ordination structures exist, most notably in the BSR<sup>49</sup> (see Technopolis Group, 2011) but also in the Danube Region, such as the Danube Rectors conference or the INCO-NETs. However, while the EUSBSR 2011 implementation report argued that the strategy “*provides a common reference point for the many organisations in the Baltic Sea Region. Increasingly, people and structures are basing their work on the priorities set out in the Action Plan*”, there is little evidence backing up this view in the field of innovation and competitiveness policies. Moreover, in comparison to the public sector networks, the business sectors, seems however to be less organised and represented in the macro-region cooperation landscape (Technopolis Group, 2011).

Few if any of the national or regional strategies in the BSR refer in more than a fleeting way to co-ordinating policies or investments. This may change as the Member States draft ‘smart specialisation’ strategies in the run up to the 2014-20 period and there is some anecdotal evidence of an increased awareness of the need to adopt a more ‘open’ approach to policy design and planning leading to joint initiatives (e.g. the Latvian proposal for a Baltic Innovative Research and Technology Infrastructure<sup>50</sup>). However, at national level, the macro-region dimensions of innovation policy remain very much a secondary consideration even in countries playing a leading role in flagship projects.

Secondly, in the absence of additional financial resources, the question of the extent to which the macro-regional strategies can effectively influence existing transnational co-ordination networks needs to be raised. Again the EUSBSR 2011 report argued “*there are many examples of new networks emerging to promote green public procurement, to cooperate on the full implementation of the Internal Market, to boost research and innovation, and even in areas of traditional rivalry like*

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.eif.org/what\\_we\\_do/resources/BIF/index.htm](http://www.eif.org/what_we_do/resources/BIF/index.htm)

<sup>46</sup> Technopolis Group (2011) stated “it is striking to see the significant number of inter-intergovernmental forums and political networks established in the BSR.

<sup>47</sup> The International Convention for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the Danube Commission, the Regional Cooperation Council, the Danube Cooperation Process (DCP), the Council of Danube Cities and Regions, the Danube Tourism Commission, etc.

<sup>48</sup> The NB8 Wise Men report (2010) noted ‘there is no need for new regional structures; indeed, there are voices advocating the dissolution of many of the existing ones which some find to be redundant or inefficient’.

<sup>49</sup> Such as the Baltic Development Forum (BDF) which publishes a competitiveness report, The Baltic Metropolises Network (BaltMet), the Nordic Innovation Centre, etc.

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.birti.eu/en/about-birti>



*tourism*”. However, aside from the specific activities of the flagship projects, there is little evidence of enhanced co-ordination between different actors.

This may be because the potential scope of co-operation partners and funding source for universities, technology based firms, innovation centres, etc. is much wider than the macro-region. Considering co-ordination of research activities, assuming excellence or complementary skills of partners is the main criteria for project selection, it is not self-evident that a partner from the macro-region will be the best choice when bidding into European programmes. Indeed, the EUSDR PA7 progress report (June 2012) argued that “...for some countries and stakeholders the “Three No” of the EUSDR, mainly the one in connection with the financing of the activities within the Danube Strategy, has raised doubt on the subject of the assets of the Strategy and evoked questions due to the facts ***that even without*** the Strategy scientific-research projects did apply for support (more or less successfully) from existing European grant schemes. To overcome these issues the strong support and understanding of the Strategy on behalf of national policymakers are precondition for better utilization of the present legislative, existing supportive institutions as well as the available (and not always utilized) financial mechanism”.

Indeed, if national (or regional) programmes do not amend selection criteria to allow macro-region partners to be involved in projects, then despite the best intentions stated in strategies, intra-macro-region co-operation may remain limited.

Hence, to enhance the added value of the MRS on co-ordination of innovation and competitiveness policies there is a need to introduce considerably more ‘incentives’ to co-operate. The existing flagship projects in the BSR do suggest that there is a value added in the enhanced co-ordination on specific research fields, clusters and life science policies or research infrastructures. However, the co-ordination remains fragile, dependent on ETC project funding and poorly linked to national policies.

#### **4. Added value of macro-regional strategies on governance**

Strategic governance in a macro-region formed of countries of different scale and constitutional structures (from ‘single region’ to highly federal countries) is clearly a significant challenge. The experience of the EUSBSR has led to changes being made in the overall governance procedures for the macro-regions and this ‘learning by doing’ is available for other macro-regions as they develop.

The governance structures for research and innovation policies are becoming increasingly complex, involving public-private partnerships at all levels from the local/regional level up through Member States to European level. Potentially, the MRS support the creation for research, innovation and competitiveness policies of:

- a multi-partner - the so-called triple of public-business-academic sectors, recently extended to the ‘quadruple helix’ by adding civil society as users, and
- a multi-level governance (regional-national-European-International) framework.

Within a macro-region the potential range of actors that could be mobilised is large. Technopolis Group (2011) identified 490 main organisations active in the field of innovation or an average of 20 per BSR region. Similarly, the EUSDR PA7 progress report underlines that the steering group discussions on ‘project labelling’ led to the conclusion that the scale, number and possible funding sources of the projects is more extensive in the research and innovation field than in other infrastructure oriented priority areas. In particular, “*it became obvious that the list of stakeholders and possible project leaders includes not only relevant ministries and governmental institutions from the Danube Region countries, but the long list of education institutions, research organisations, clusters, civil society and business organisations from the entire region*”.

Hence, governance can be viewed at least in two dimensions:

- cross-organisational governance where various thematic (e.g. life science, environmental research, etc.) or organisational (e.g. clusters, science parks, incubators, early-stage funders, etc.) networks create or further develop longer-term ‘institutional’ arrangements to support pooling of resources, joint R&D, value chain management, etc. Such governance structures will only develop if they are based on a clear understanding of the core missions of each partner and of the ‘business case’ for sharing responsibilities and resources.
- Policy governance, where the co-management of strategies, flagship projects, funding programmes, etc. leads to a need to create linkages between national and regional governance structures towards the emerging macro-region management bodies and upwards to link to European level initiatives. This raises the issue of how to handle multi-level governance across Member States with varying levels of decentralisation.

In this context, the progress reports underline the difficulties of mobilising stakeholders, a lack of support for experts involved in the MRS from senior decision makers; as well as a variable geometry of involvement (some Member States/regions are heavily involved, others largely absent). At the current time, there is not a single governance forum for research, innovation or competitiveness policy discussions within the macro-regions that has enough power and influence to significantly. Both the current macro-regions have plans to develop an innovation strategy and the Danube Region has a specific action aimed at peer-reviewing smart specialisation strategies. Some countries, e.g. Finland and Estonia, have begun holding joint sessions of their high-level advisory councils on research and innovation. One option might be to extend such bilateral co-operation and formalise a macro-region research and innovation council, ideally supported by a secretariat (or at least by an existing organisation such as NICE in the BSR or the INCO-NET in the Danube Region). The experience of the Northern Dimension in developing partnerships for Public Health and Social Well-being and Transportation and Logistics Partnership could be usefully extended to a research and innovation partnership.

### **5. Drivers to increase the added value of macro-regional strategies**

A number of suggestions can be made in terms of the drivers that could increase the added value of macro-regional strategies both in terms of establishment and implementation. In our view, the following drivers could be exploited:

- The Commission should ensure the Member States to explain how the 2014-20 national strategies will contribute to implementing the macro region strategies; SF; either through specific strategic orientations but most importantly through investment plans in joint projects or initiatives. In particular, the European Commission should require the Member States and regions to explain in their smart specialisation strategy (an ex-ante conditionality for ERDF funding for research and innovation), how they will mobilise to the maximum extent possible the option to invest up to 10% Structural Funds in other regions (Article 60 of the new Structural Fund regulations for the 2014-20 period).<sup>51</sup>
- The Member States (and regions) should commission one or more studies on the possibility of extending the joint programming experience of BONUS to ‘pool’ available R&D and innovation funding in a broader range of fields.

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<sup>51</sup> Article 60

Eligibility of operations depending on location

1. Operations supported by the CSF Funds, subject to the derogations referred to in paragraphs 2 and 3, and the Fund-specific rules, shall be located in the area covered by the programme under which they are supported (the ‘programme area’).

2. The managing authority may accept that an operation is implemented outside the programme area but within the Union, provided that all the following conditions are satisfied:

(a) the operation is for the benefit of the programme area;

(b) the total amount allocated under the programme to operations located outside the programme area does not exceed 10 % of the support from the ERDF, Cohesion Fund and EMFF at the level of the priority, or 3% of the support from the EAFRD at the level of the programme.

- There is significant scope for enhancing critical mass and reducing overlap through improved co-ordination of national research infrastructures investments:
  - The Commission should ask Member States to include in their research infrastructure road maps, to be submitted as part of the ex-ante conditionality for future ERDF funding, to explicitly assess the extent to which the same facilities exist in other regions of the macro-region.
  - The Commission and Member States should support the development of ‘research pooling’ initiatives<sup>52</sup>, like Science Link, to draw up an inventory of infrastructure in the macro-region in their field, develop open access policies to available facilities and design a research road map for the scientific field.
  - The Member States should consider an ‘open-access’ grant scheme providing support for macro-region researchers to travel and conduct research in designated research infrastructures (notably, but not exclusively those which have received support under Structural Fund programmes).
- The Commission should consider focusing future ETC funding for research, innovation and clustering towards innovation platforms/partnerships and avoid funding ad hoc projects. The models of the European Innovation Partnerships, European Technology Platform, the Knowledge and Innovation Communities of the European Institute of Technology, etc. or the experience of the BSR Stars and Scan Balt projects are useful in this respect.
- The PA coordinators and steering groups should consider launching a macro-regions innovation voucher programme to enable companies from the ‘weaker’ innovation regions to access specialised expertise in universities and research and technology organisations in more advanced regions. Ideally the vouchers would be managed by a ‘neutral broker’ (e.g. the Enterprise Europe Network), which would assist companies to develop project ideas and identify the best source of expertise.
- In terms of governance and co-ordination, the macro regional dimension could be promoted more widely, since, despite claims to the contrary, the MRS exist mainly in the minds of a small circle of government and public officials and actors involved in the flagship projects. There is little resonance in the national research and innovation policy-making circles, to date. Without necessarily creating a formal new ‘institution’, a macro-region research and innovation council, could be formed by 2-3 representatives of similar national/regional councils, would reinforce the current disparate efforts to structure transnational research and innovation activities. Such a council could supported by a secretariat (a role that could be tendered out or allocated to an existing organisation such as NICE in the Baltic Sea region) that would commission supporting studies and evaluations

To conclude, this report has been based on documentary evidence and there is need for further analysis and stock-taking work, in order to:

- review in more depth the potential for macro-regional co-operation in specific economic sectors and enterprise related policies such as tourism, agro-food, etc.; as well as the potential synergies and ‘conflicting objectives’ between innovation and competitiveness policies and other strategic objectives such as in the environmental field or maritime policies.
- design a strategic approach to co-ordinating research and innovation investments and programmes in the macro-regions. This could include studies on technological and societal challenges, trends and drivers that are specific to, or have specific impacts on, the development of the macro-region;

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<sup>52</sup> For a national level example of research pooling see the Scottish Funding Council supported initiatives: <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/research/researchpools/researchpools.aspx>

the development of a mapping or inventory of available research and innovation equipment and infrastructures to inform national and macro-regional investment plans, etc.

- develop solutions to ensure that the MRS institutional structures are sufficiently robust to ensure a representative (both in terms of geographical spread but also range of actors) involvement in flagship project and co-ordination structures. As noted in this paper, the creation of macro-regional level ‘platforms’ or ‘partnerships’ could provide a better basis for both co-ordinating actions in the macro-region as well as providing a ‘building block’ or ‘stepping stone’ towards EU level objectives and platforms. The PA coordinators could consider both mapping relevant organisations for specific R&I themes but also commission a study to examine the potential for such macro-region innovation partnerships.
- enhance the operational linkages between the ‘non-funded’ MRS and the main streams of funding available at the European level. The ex-ante conditionalities for the 2014-20 programming period provide an opportunity for ensuring that regional and national strategies and funds are better aligned and focus on maximising joint investments and reducing duplication of effort. The Commission could consider establishing an expert group, or tender a study, to review the draft smart specialisation strategies and make recommendations to ensure maximum alignment and linkages.
- Ensure that non-EU countries and regions are fully integrated in the research and innovation activities of the MRS. The ‘unequal’ playing field in terms of access to funding for research and innovation activities and the less advanced ‘innovation systems’ of these countries require specific recognition and should be studied in more depth.

## **Appendix A References**

### **A.1 EU Baltic Sea Strategy**

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## **Chapter 4: key messages of literature review**

### **European Parliament, Committee on Regional Development, Report: Evolution of EU macro-regional strategies: present practice and future prospects, especially in the Mediterranean (2012)**

‘Importance to ensure the involvement of local and regional authorities and of the greatest possible number of partners and stakeholders, such as representatives of civil society, universities and research centres, in both the elaboration and the implementation of macro-regional strategies in order to increase their ownership at local and regional level’.

‘It necessary, if this strategy is to be fully successful, to retain the governance structure in the long term, extending it to include local and regional authorities, by including it in the upcoming programming period 2014–2020.’

‘Macro-regional strategy could steer the European Neighbourhood Policy and/or pre-accession policy towards being more effective.’

### **Drafting and implementing macro-regional and sea basin strategies (MRS and SBS), CPMR (March 2013)**

‘It is necessary for Regions to be involved in all stages of preparation and implementation of these Strategies so that the realities on the ground can be actually taken into account’.

‘The transnational strand of European Territorial Cooperation is the most obvious instrument for implementing MRS and SBS. However, given the limited budgets allocated to ETC it is crucial to utilise funds from other EU sectoral programmes such as Horizon 2020 for research, the Connecting Europe Facility for transport, as well as national, regional and local funding’.

‘Although the ‘Three Nos’ rule is currently accepted by most parties, it is necessary in the start-up phases of MRS to allocate a relatively small but specific initial budget, designed to help establish contacts and identify core projects’.

### **Guidelines for drafting and implementation of macro-regional strategies, CRPM, (September 2012)**

‘MRS as a new type of territorial cooperation at the interregional and transnational level to meet the European objectives defined in the Europe 2020 strategy, cohesion policy, the integrated maritime policy and external cooperation policies’.

‘MRS provide an integrated framework within which to facilitate and coordinate policies and resources within a defined area that is both geographical (going beyond national borders), horizontal (going beyond sectoral policies) and vertical (ranging through various levels of governance)’.

‘The other European funds should also be used to achieve macro-regional priorities. As an example, for transport, Connecting Europe Facility and the Trans-European Networks – Transport (TEN-T); For fisheries, the EMFF (European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, for neighbourhood and pre-accession, the new European neighbourhood instruments (ENI) and instruments for pre-accession assistance (IPA II) and etc.’



**What role for the Regions in the Baltic Sea Strategy? Summary of the Enquiry, CRPM (July 2010)**

‘The new approach of cooperation would allow a better use of each actor’s resources, including the civil society, local and regional authorities, in a cross-border and international context’.

‘Governance patterns should be clarified and allow for an effective association of regional and local authorities in terms of implementation, advice and expertise. Continued multi-level governance and dialogue are key factors for the success of the Strategy, especially in some policy areas’.

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on ‘Revised EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region’ (October 2012)**

‘The EUSBSR seeks to improve policy coordination and cohesion between the regions in the area with a view to solving common problems affecting the Baltic Sea region and strengthening the region's prosperity on a sustainable basis’.

‘There should also be ‘three yeses’: jointly agreed application and monitoring of existing rules in the macro-region; creation of a platform, network or territorial cluster of regional and local authorities and Member States which also brings in stakeholders; agreed use of existing Union funding for developing and implementing macro-regional strategies’.

‘In order to strengthen economic cohesion and competitiveness there must be stronger links between research, innovation and industry stakeholders’.

‘The success of macro-regional strategies across Europe depends largely on the commitment and contribution of local and regional stakeholders to meeting objectives. Getting the private sector involved is also crucial’.

**R. Bengtsson. An EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: Good Intentions Meet Complex Challenges. Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2009.**

The need for an integrated approach to ensure impact.

‘The strategy has the potential for success in the form of added value, both regarding concrete improvements of the current situation and development prospects of the Baltic Sea region and regarding the making of a new mechanism for functional cooperation elsewhere in the EU. the strategy will yield added value also in the form of an enhanced Baltic Sea identity.’

**A. Dubois, S. Hedin, P. Schmitt, J. Sterling. EU macro-regions and macro regional strategies – A scoping study. Nordregio, 2009.**

‘Macro-regional strategies may be seen as a tool of European integration and increased territorial cohesion. The elaboration of macro-regional strategies makes it possible to promote the territorial dimension of EU policies and cooperation. Tailor-made solutions for each macro-region are needed in order to ensure that the macro-regional approach delivers added-value and helps to release undeveloped potential within a macro-region’.

‘Organisational capacity and willingness to cooperate of the various stakeholders involved will play a crucial role in ensuring that the macro-regional approach can deliver a measure of ‘added-value’.

**M. Salines. Success Factors of Macro-Regional Cooperation: The Example of the Baltic Sea Region, 2010.**

‘Given the increasing heterogeneity within the EU due to the successive enlargements over the last years, such an empowerment of macro-regions might be an innovative and effective way to bring the European integration process forward’.

‘Macro-regions can offer a higher problem-solving capacity than the EU-27 in a number of fields such as innovation policy, environmental protection, etc., as it might be easier to achieve common understanding and mutual trust at this level’.

**State of the Region Report, 2012.**

‘The EUSBSR has significantly enhanced co-ordination across existing organisations, networks, projects, and financing tools. This has been achieved by ‘repurposing’ the existing structure of institutions and policies that were mostly developed in a different context. If the ambition is to accomplish more, more fundamental changes in this institutional architecture are needed’.

‘The Strategy provides the focal point for the relevant efforts in the Region, and all networks and organisations have found it the natural platform to coordinate their individual activities. This has led to more coherence and more effectiveness in the way available structures and resources are being utilized’.

**State of the Region Report, 2011.**

‘The EUSBSR has played a very positive role in enhancing the effectiveness of collaboration. It has so far been less impactful in introducing new participants, topics, or solutions to address regional issues’.

Private sector engagement remains limited.

‘The EUSBSR has proven effective in coordinating the efforts of many existing cross-regional organizations and networks’.

**Analysis of needs for financial instruments in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, SWECO, 2011**

‘The implementation of the EUSBSR is to a large extent dependent on EU Structural Funds, in particular European Territorial Cooperation Programmes are widely used. However, in total there are more than 100 programmes available plus a wide range of national and regional instruments’.

In the preparatory phase there is a widely perceived lack of funding (seed money is needed).

**S. Dühr. Baltic Sea, Danube and Macro-regional Strategies: A Model for Transnational Cooperation in the EU? 2011**

‘The expectation is that the added-value of macro-regional strategies lies in the coordination of actions across policy areas, which should lead to more effective outcomes and ensure a more efficient use of resources than individual initiatives’.

‘The potential added-value of an EU macro-regional strategy to existing cooperation arrangements should be carefully considered. For the Alpine Region, for example, actors in the region have emphasised that a macro-regional strategy should only be developed if it helps to reinforce, rather than replaces, existing agreements and instruments’.

‘Given the large number of actors involved at different levels this has led to rather complex governance arrangements’.

“The savings through better coordination will far exceed the coordination costs”.

There is a need of technical assistance for coordination activities.

**G. Braun, Z. L. Kovács. Macro-Regional Strategies: Experiment for the Renewal of Economic Policy of the EU.**

‘More tightened fiscal and sectoral coordination through macro-regions can give a new impulse to the cooperation on EU level and improve EU’s competitiveness’.

‘Macro-regional strategies can serve as an important instrument to deepen integration and strengthen territorial cohesion’.

‘The Union has not yet set a limit for the number of macro-regions, and there might even be overlaps between them’.

**A. Stocchiero. The geopolitical game of the European Union strategy for macro-regions: Where does the Mediterranean stand? CeSPI (Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale) Working Papers No. 74/2010, July 2010**

‘The macro-regional strategy added value is the integrated approach, namely the multi-level and trans-national governance for an effective coordination of EU, national and regional instruments and financing of flagship projects. The innovation concerns the building of a new governance for achieving more efficacy in facing common challenges and opportunities’.

**J. Metzger, P. Schmitt. When soft spaces harden: the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Environment and Planning A 2012, volume 44.**

‘The macro-regional concept, as elaborated in the EUSBSR, appears to build upon and promote ideas of territorial cohesion, coherence, and cooperation’.

**Policy Recommendations for Regional Co-operation, BDF, 2010**

‘With the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the EU countries of the region have a unique opportunity to link national and European growth initiatives to a regional context’.

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

‘The EU2020 Strategy, which is consistent with the goals set on the Baltic Sea Strategy, can act as an efficient framework for the implementation and strengthening of the Baltic Sea Strategy’.

‘Strategy’s territorial dimension will lead to the concrete development of the idea of territorial cohesion, which the Treaty of Lisbon places on an equal footing with economic and social cohesion’.

‘The European added value of macro-regions lies in greater cooperation between states and regions’.

**European Parliament, Committee on Regional Development: Report: on optimising the role of territorial development in cohesion policy (December 2012).**

‘Territorial cooperation and macro-regional strategies could be useful instruments for identifying and combating regional disparities, e.g. in access to education and employment, and for promoting convergence between European regions’.

**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)**

‘The approach to macro-regional strategies hitherto has been limited to implementing EU internal policies. However, to be effective, such a strategy in the Mediterranean where many non-EU countries are involved requires implementation of elements of external policy, obviously with the emphasis on EU ‘good neighbour’ policy’.

‘Funding is needed for technical assistance to collect data and promote the necessary structural projects’.

‘They [macro-regional] also 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’.

## Chapter 5: fact sheets of the EUSBSR and the EUSDR

### 5.1 The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) is the first macro-regional strategy in Europe. It aims at reinforcing cooperation within this large region in order to face several challenges by working together as well as promoting a more balanced development in the area. The Strategy also contributes to major EU policies and reinforces the integration within the area.

The Baltic Sea Region counts 85 million inhabitants (17 percent of EU population) and eight countries (Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) which share common features and challenges. Hence there is a clear need for joining forces and working in cooperation. Against this background, the Strategy intends to increase the levels of environmental sustainability, prosperity, accessibility and attractiveness and safety and security.

The Strategy was [approved by the European Council](#) in 2009 following a [communication from the European Commission](#). In this respect, it provides an integrated framework for improving the environmental condition of the sea, transport bottlenecks and energy interconnections as well as facilitating the development of competitive markets across borders and common networks for research and innovation.

#### Milestones

- December 2007: the European Council invites the European Commission to present an EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region no later than June 2009
- June 2009: European Commission presents the Action Plan and Communication for the EUSBSR
- October 2009: European Council endorses the EUSBSR
- June 2011: Commission publishes the first implementing report of the EUSBSR
- November 2011: Council Conclusions calls the European Commission to review the EUSBSR by early 2012
- March 2012: Commission publishes the Communication specifying the three overall objectives for the Strategy: *Save the Sea*, *Connect the Region* and *Increase Prosperity*
- June 2012: General Affairs Council endorses Commission's Communication and calls for the review of the EUSBSR Action Plan
- February 2013: the update Action Plan reflecting the three objectives of the Strategy is adopted

#### How does it work in practice?

The Strategy aims at bringing together initiatives in different sectors (growth, sustainable development etc.) as well as promoting cooperation between stakeholders in the Baltic Sea region.

The Strategy also promotes flagship projects and contributing projects funded in the Baltic Sea region. These projects have a macro-regional impact and start from joint initiatives involving partnership from different countries.

Implementation of the Strategy requires active participation by all the actors and stakeholders implicated in the process not only at a national level but at a macro-regional level.

## **Governance and actors in the strategy**

Each participating state in the strategy has a national contact point that is the main contact for implementing the strategy on the national level.

The objectives of the strategy are operationalized through priority areas and horizontal actions. Each of these are coordinated by one or more country or organisation in the macro-region. An overview of the 17 priority areas and 5 horizontal actions in the EUSBSR can be found below:

**Priority Area AGRI** (Finland, Sweden, Lithuania)

**Priority Area NUTRI** (Poland,

**Priority Area Hazards** (Sweden)

**Priority Area BIO** (Germany)

**Priority Area SHIP** (Denmark)

**Priority Area SAFE** (Denmark, Finland)

**Priority Area SECURE** (Sweden, Council of Baltic Sea States)

**Priority Area TRANSPORT** (Lithuania, Sweden)

**Priority Area ENERGY** (Denmark, Latvia)

**Priority Area CULTURE** (Schleswig-Holstein, Poland)

**Priority Area CRIME** (Finland, Lithuania)

**Priority Area TOURISM** (Mecklenburg Vorpommern, Germany)

**Priority Area INTERNAL MARKET** (Estonia)

**Priority Area INNOVATION** (Sweden, Poland)

**Priority Area SME** (Denmark)

**Priority Area EDUCATION** (Hamburg, Norden Association)

**Priority Area HEALTH** (Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being)

**Horizontal Action SPATIAL PLANNING** (VASAB and HELCOM)

**Horizontal Action NEIGHBOURS** (Council of Baltic Sea States and City of Turku)

**Horizontal Action INVOLVE** (Region Västerbotten, Kalmar, Baltic Sea NGO Network)

**Horizontal Action SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND BIOECONOMY** (Council of Baltic Sea States and Nordic Council of ministers)

**Horizontal Action PROMO** (Baltic Metropolises Network, Baltic Development Forum)

## 5.2 The EU Strategy for the Danube Region

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) is a second macro-regional strategy adopted by the European Commission in December 2010 and endorsed by the European Council in 2011. The Strategy was jointly developed by the Commission, together with the Danube Region countries and stakeholders, in order to address common challenges together. The EUSDR seeks to create synergies and coordination between existing policies and initiatives taking place across the Danube Region.

### Background and Objective

In 2009, the European Council formally asked the European Commission to prepare an EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). ‘The importance of the Danube Basin for the EU cannot be underestimated. Our policies and the investments we are making in the Basin through the EU's cohesion policy in particular have an impact on the livelihoods of 20 million citizens. The Danube needs a specific strategy comparable to the strategy we are developing for the Baltic Sea Region. A one-size-fits all approach doesn't work in an EU of 27 Member States and 271 regions. We need a targeted policy for the Danube that meets its ecological, transport and socio-economic needs,’ said Commissioner Hübner on the open day in October 2008.

### Governance – How does it work?

The priority area coordinators (PACs) ensure the implementation of the Action Plan by agreeing on planning, with targets, indicators and timetables, and by making sure there is effective cooperation between project promoters, programmes and funding sources. They also provide technical assistance and advice. The coordinators work in consultation with the Commission, and relevant EU agencies and national/regional bodies.

The national contact points (NCPs) coordinate and keep an overview of the participation of their country in the implementation of the EUSDR including all 11 Priority Areas. The role of the NCP is to promote the Strategy and inform relevant stakeholders on the national level of key developments. NCPs also assist the European Commission in its facilitation role.

### Milestones

- 19 June 2009: The European Council invites the European Commission to develop a strategy for the area around the Danube.
- July 2009-December 2010: Preparation of the Strategy by the European Commission, including public consultation and consultations with participating countries.
- 8 December 2010: European Commission adopts the Action Plan and Communication for the EUSDR.
- 3 February 2011: Commissioner Hahn designates the Priority Area Coordinators.
- 13 April 2011: Adoption of the Council Conclusions by the EU Council for General Affairs.
- 24 June 2011: Official endorsement of the EUSDR by the European Council and launch of the implementation phase.

### More information on the Strategy:

The Strategy is defined in a [Communication](#), accompanied by a detailed [Action Plan](#), which presents the operational objectives and concrete projects and actions of the EUSDR.

**Chapter 6: questionnaire for a survey on the added value of macro-regional strategies (the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and EU Strategy for the Danube Region)**

Who are you? (tick the right one)

- a) Priority Area Coordinator (PAC)

☐
- b) Horizontal Action Leader (HAL)

☐
- c) Project/Flagship Project Leader (FPL)

☐
- d) National Contact Point (NCP)

☐
- e) Priority Area/Horizontal Action Focal Point/ Steering Group Member

☐
- f) Private sector, economic and social partners

☐
- g) NGO

☐
- h) Managing Authority of EU programmes

☐
- i) National Institution

☐
- j) Pan-regional and regional organization

☐
- k) European institution

☐
- l) Other (please specify)

☐

**Overall assessment**

Question	Answer
What in your experience has the impact of the macro-regional strategy been? What concrete differences has the macro-regional strategy made? What is the added value of the EUSBSR/EUSDR?	



What positive processes / initiatives have been stimulated by the EUSBSR/EUSDR?	

Question	Yes	No	Comments
Are you aware that policy (local, national, regional, EU) has been aligned with the objectives / priorities of the macro-regional strategy? If yes, please specify.			

Are you aware that funding (national, regional, EU) has been aligned with the objectives / priorities of the macro-regional strategy? If yes, please specify.			

**1. Rationale**

Please evaluate the following statements on a scale from 1 to 5 and justify your choice or provide proposals in the column “comments”.

1	Strongly disagree
2	Rather disagree
3	Neutral
4	Rather agree
5	Strongly agree

Rationale	Scale					Comments
	1	2	3	4	5	
a) Objectives of the EUSBSR/EUSDR correctly address the main challenges faced by respective Region;						
b) The number of Priority Areas and Horizontal Actions is reasonable;						



effectively coordinate their activities within and with other stakeholders;									
c) The multilevel governance dimension is fully taken into account in the actions and decisions taken for implementing projects, actions or policies at Member States level/at project level;									
d) There is clear evidence that national, regional and EU governance systems have improved thanks to the EUSBSR/EUSDR.									

### 3. Funding

Funding	Scale					Comments
	1	2	3	4	5	
a) The alignment of national, regional and EU policies and funding with the objectives of the EUSBSR/EUSDR has been successfully achieved;						
b) The technical assistance provided by European Commission significantly facilitated the implementation of the EUSBSR/EUSDR;						

c) The EUSBSR/EUSDR helps to mobilize the existing funding, to use it in more efficient and coordinated manner;							
d) There is a need for additional funding only for the project preparation stage, networking.							

#### 4. Cooperation

Cooperation	Scale					Comments
	1	2	3	4	5	
a) The absence of additional money favours the reinforcement of cooperation among partners and the main core partners (NCP, PAC, HAL, Commission) fully play their role of cooperation and coordination with other key partners;						
b) There is a clear evidence that cooperation mechanisms have improved thanks to the EUSBSR/EUSDR;						
c) The implementation of the EUSBSR/EUSDR strengthened the existing cooperation among and within participating countries, in particular among ministries;						

d) The cooperation between EU Member States with neighbouring non-EU countries expanded and improved thanks to the macro-regional strategy;										
e) Cooperation has led a tangible effect on national policies such as those on environment, energy and etc.										

## 5. Policy orientations

Policy orientations	Scale					Comments
	1	2	3	4	5	
a) The implementation of the EUSBSR/EUSDR helps to move from sectoral approach to multi-sectoral, integrated one;						
b) Many successful projects and actions would not be implemented if the EUSBSR/EUSDR would not be endorsed;						
c) The macro-regional strategy helped to						

mobilize the existing policies and create more synergies;							
d) The implementation of the macro-regional strategy has led the new policy developments in several areas in your country;							
e) The new policy developments have improved the situation in the areas concerned, and this improvement is measurable or can be described (eg. a trend).							

#### 6. Next programming period

Next programming period	Scale					Comments
	1	2	3	4	5	
a) The objectives of the macro-regional strategy must be firmly embedded in the 2014-2020 policy framework at EU, national and regional level;						
b) The EUSBSR/EUSDR core partners (NCP, PAC, HAL) must be consulted in/associated to the discussions of the next programmes in their respective countries;						

