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Subject: European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)
- Council conclusions (27 November 2015)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), adopted by the Council at its 3430th meeting held on 27 November 2015.

**Council conclusions
on the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- (1) RECALLING the European Council Conclusions of 19-20 December 2013¹ inviting the Commission, in cooperation with Member States, to elaborate an EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (hereinafter: "EUSALP" or the "Strategy");
- (2) ACKNOWLEDGING the Commission's Communication concerning the EUSALP², and COMMENDING the Commission on its extensive consultation process conducted when preparing the Communication;

General considerations

- (3) RECALLING the Council Conclusions of 22 October 2013 on the added value of macro-regional strategies³, and that the Council recommended when considering the creation of new macro-regional strategies to ensure that: a) there are particular needs of strategic importance for the macro-regions for improved high level cooperation in solving common challenges as well as using opportunities, b) involvement of the EU is appropriate and existing EU horizontal policies would be reinforced, c) the appraisal of the added value at the EU and macro-regional level is evidence-based, d) there is clearly expressed political will from both the Member States concerned and their involved regions for such an approach;

¹ EUCO 217/13.

² COM (2015) 366 final, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning a European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region.

³ Doc. 14926/13 ADD 1.

- (4) RECALLING the Council Conclusions of 21 October 2014 on the governance of macro-regional strategies⁴;
- (5) RECOGNISING the potential of macro-regional strategies, as an integrated framework relating to Member States and non-EU countries in the same geographical area in order to address common challenges and to benefit from strengthened cooperation, to contribute to Treaty-based objectives including economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU, therefore supporting the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives and in particular the promotion of growth and jobs;
- (6) NOTING in particular that existing and future macro-regional strategies provide an important instrument to pursue the objective of territorial cohesion in the areas concerned, because of their integrated and place-based approach;
- (7) STRESSING that macro-regional strategies are based on the principles of no new EU funds, no additional EU formal structures and no new EU legislation, and are an instrument for optimal use of existing financial resources, better use of existing institutions and better implementation of existing legislation;
- (8) REITERATING the need for coordination between relevant EU policies as well as between EU and national, regional and local policies having an impact on territorial cohesion, respecting the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality;
- (9) STRESSING the need for macro-regional strategies to be result-oriented, promote concrete achievements and ensure accountability;

⁴ Doc. 13374/14.

The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region

- (10) RECALLS that the Strategy will affect around 80 million people living in 48 regions in seven States, of which five are EU Member States (Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia) and two are non-EU countries (Liechtenstein and Switzerland);
- (11) ENDORSES the Strategy, as set out by the Commission's communication, and TAKES NOTE of the annexed Action Plan elaborated by the Commission, in cooperation with Member States, and on the basis of a public consultation with the participating States and Regions, involving all relevant partners and stakeholders at national, regional and local level;
- (12) RECOGNISES the common challenges and the particular needs of strategic importance of the territories concerned as identified in the Strategy. RECOMMENDS that the EUSALP enhances solidarities and synergies between mountainous and, non-mountainous areas, urban and rural areas and peripheral regions surrounding the Alps. ACKNOWLEDGES its added value in line with the Council Conclusions of 22 October 2013 on the added value of macro-regional strategies⁵;
- (13) WELCOMES the active cooperation of all interested international, national and regional and local organisations and communities in areas where actions of mutual interest can be identified, taking into account the initiatives of the civil society; STRESSES that the Strategy is the expression of a clear political will, and the result of a long political, administrative and technical process among the seven States and 48 Regions participating in the Strategy, and, TAKING NOTE that the macro-regional strategies are dynamic processes, ACKNOWLEDGES that the Strategy remains open to future developments;
- (14) APPRECIATES that the Strategy addresses the challenges of the Alpine Region by selecting 3 Thematic Policy Areas focusing on topics with the highest macro-regional relevance, such as 1) economic growth and innovation, 2) mobility and connectivity and 3) environment and energy, as well as Governance and institutional capacity as a cross-cutting policy area;

- (15) RECOGNISES, as described in the Action Plan of the Strategy, the challenges of the Alpine Region facing demographic trends, characterised particularly by the combined effects of ageing, low population density in the mountain areas and new migration models, the high vulnerability to climate change and its foreseeable effects on the environment, biodiversity and the living conditions of its inhabitants;
- (16) STRESSES that the Alpine Region, due to its central location in Europe, is of interest to all EU Member States for a number of EU policies, in particular in the following fields:
- a. the Region, which comprises some of the most dynamic European regions, can build on its high competitiveness and enhance the already existing opportunities, such as its innovation capacity or its strong potential in tourism, based on the preservation and valorisation of cultural and natural heritage, to increase employment;
 - b. improving sustainable transport infrastructure, its intermodal connectivity and interoperability in the region with a clear trend to reduce emissions, hence supporting a balanced development between North and South as well as East and West;
 - c. the safeguarding of the alpine biodiversity by preserving its integrity and its ecological connectivity. Actions and projects to be implemented under this Strategy should contribute towards the targets to be agreed at COP21, including supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy as well as promoting climate change mitigation and adaptation, efficient disaster risk management including prevention.
- (17) UNDERLINES the importance of ensuring mutually beneficial interaction between the core area and the metropolises with regard to the need to establish sustainable and balanced models in the field of energy as well as of preserving and valorising natural resources in view of the particular vulnerability of the environment of the Alpine Region;
- (18) REITERATES that the Strategy is financially neutral, in the sense that, through its coordinated approach, it aims at a more efficient and effective use of existing instruments and funds;

(19) ACKNOWLEDGES that the Strategy builds on:

- d. long experience of a large number of cooperation structures already operating in the area such as: Alpine Convention⁶, Alpine Space INTERREG Programme, and other ad hoc structures;
- e. the lessons learnt from the existing macro-regional strategies: need to focus on a limited number of challenges and/or opportunities, and to secure ownership, commitment and leadership from the participating States, regional and local authorities, need to establish, at an early stage, a sound governance and management system with a clear division of tasks and roles;
- f. the Grenoble "*Political resolution* towards a European Union Strategy for the Alpine region" of 18 October 2013, stressing the joint will of the States and Regions of the Alpine region to support the elaboration of a macro-region for the Alpine region;
- g. the "Milan Declaration of the Alpine States and Regions" of 1 December 2014, emphasising the importance of the future EUSALP in constituting a tailor-made contribution to the growth of the region in line with Europe 2020 Strategy objectives and building on its cultural and natural heritage;
- h. the extensive public online consultation from July to October 2014 with close to 400 contributions and its outcomes.

(20) UNDERLINES that the timing of the Strategy's launch coincides with the start of the implementation of the European Structural Investment Funds 2014-2020 programming period, which helps mobilising relevant policies and programmes in support of the Strategy; RECALLS that the 2014-2020 legislative package paves the way for better embedding macro-regional strategies in the programming and implementation of relevant EU policies where appropriate;

⁶ The Alpine Convention is an international treaty, entered into force in 1995 for the sustainable development and the protection of the Alps, ratified by the alpine countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia and Switzerland) and the European Union.

Internal Governance

- (21) WELCOMES the Milan Declaration and the commitment "to carry out the necessary actions to improve the coordination of funds available at the EU, state, regional or local level, based on the awareness that tangible results for citizens can only be achieved by enabling the development of synergies between the various planning levels. The participating States and Regions put all efforts in using the potential of the existing 2014-2020 financial framework.";
- (22) INVITES the Commission to:
- a. keep playing a leading role in strategic coordination of the Strategy, where its involvement brings a clear added value, in partnership with the participating States, regional and local authorities, and in accordance with the subsidiarity and proportionality principles; and ensure that the Strategy is taken into account in relevant EU policy initiatives and programme planning;
 - b. support, in cooperation with the participating States, regional and local authorities, the aims of the Strategy and the implementation of the agreed actions by promoting the coordination of existing EU funds and instruments, and by cooperating closely with the relevant financial institutions necessary for the realisation and funding of the Strategy;
 - c. promote the full and effective involvement of the non-EU countries participating in the Strategy;
 - d. promote the involvement of the Alpine Convention in the implementation of the Strategy, with a view to building on the Convention's expertise in the protection and sustainable development of the Alps, and exploring synergies;
 - e. promote, also with the support of Eurostat, the collection of reliable and comparable data concerning the Region, at the adequate statistical level, and support the development of adequate monitoring and evaluation tools also making recourse, as appropriate, to technical assistance funds directly managed by the Commission;

- f. promote active participation of all relevant partners and stakeholders, including relevant cooperation structures, non-governmental organisations and institutions, social and economic partners, the civil society and the private sector, in all steps of the Strategy's implementation.
- (23) INVITES all actors in their different roles in the implementation of the Strategy to ensure the most effective use of existing national and EU resources, including:
- a. the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds and programmes supporting Treaty-based objectives, according to the specific nature, objectives and governance, fully respecting the content of the already adopted programmes; in particular, the Alpine Space programme should support the implementation and governance of the Strategy through the priorities and funding foreseen for this purpose;
 - b. the opportunities provided in the context of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI).
- (24) INVITES all actors in their different roles to ensure adequate visibility, communication and awareness raising about the Strategy's objectives and results;
- (25) CALLS upon the Member States participating in the Strategy to:
- a. establish in their respective countries key conditions for good implementation and exploitation of the EU added value of the Strategy, including political support, ownership, leadership and responsibility, taking into account the views of the Council on the governance of macro-regional strategies;

- b. safeguard the alignment of relevant policies and funds at national, regional and local level, including, where appropriate and in line with the Regulations, the embedding of the Strategy into the programmes co-financed by the ESI Funds for the 2014-2020 period and other EU relevant programmes, and ensure that the Strategy's objectives and actions are appropriately considered in the design and implementation of relevant national, regional and local policies and programmes, and *vice versa*;
- c. set up, in partnership with the Commission and the non-EU countries participating in the Strategy, an effective multilevel governance system and effective and efficient procedures and modalities enhancing continuity, ownership and visibility for the implementation of the Strategy, in accordance with the Milan Declaration of 1 December 2014, in line with the views of the Council on the governance of macro-regional strategies, fully respecting the institutional and constitutional architecture of the participating States, and the specificities and competences of their administrative structures, in order to ensure a timely start of the Strategy;
- d. encourage and facilitate the full and effective involvement of non-EU countries participating in the Strategy at all levels and in all steps of the implementation of the Strategy, in particular in the definition of concrete actions and projects;
- e. ensure that the partnership principle is respected and fully made operational, by promoting active participation of relevant partners and stakeholders, including the relevant cooperation structures, the existing regional governmental and non-governmental organisations, social and economic partners, the civil society, including through national and regional parliaments, and the private sector, in all steps of the Strategy's implementation, thus creating synergies and enabling knowledge-sharing;

- f. safeguard the involvement of the stakeholders concerned from all levels in the region, evaluate results, consult on revised actions and, where appropriate, develop new approaches.

EU-wide Governance

- (26) STRESSES the importance of due involvement of all EU Member States and all interested stakeholders on transnational, regional and local level, as appropriate, in the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region;
- (27) INVITES the Commission and the Member States to ensure that adequate coordination is established among macro-regional strategies, in particular to ensure that projects and partnerships can be developed across macro-regional strategies as appropriate and where relevant;
- (28) APPRECIATES the engagement of the States and relevant partners participating in the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region to exchange knowledge and good practices with other mountainous regions and areas in Europe and INVITES these mountainous areas to actively engage in these exchanges;
- (29) INVITES the Commission to ensure the exchange of best practices between the Strategy and other existing and future ones, as well as to include the Strategy within the competences and activities of the High-Level Group on macro-regional strategies and to reflect on how to improve the effectiveness of this Group in the light of the evolution of the EU macro-regional strategies from 2009 onwards;
- (30) STRESSES the importance to ensure that the EU Institutions are regularly involved in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy, based on a regular reporting by the Commission;

- (31) STRESSES its commitment to take into account the implementation of the Strategy, and to that scope, INTENDS to reflect, at the level of its relevant preparatory bodies, on the progress of the implementation of the Strategy with the view to reporting as appropriate;
- (32) ASKS the Commission to draft a report every two years, starting end 2016, on the implementation of the EUSALP and TAKES NOTE of the Commission's intention to draft a single report every two years, starting end 2016, describing the progress made towards the implementation of all macro-regional strategies, presenting recommendations on possible developments of the Strategies and their Action Plans and/or on how to improve or optimise their implementation, taking into account the particularities of the different strategies.
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