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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
On:	27 June 2023
To:	Delegations
No. prev. doc.:	10594/23
Subject:	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 EU macro-regional strategies - Council conclusions (27.06.2023)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the 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 EU macro-regional strategies, approved by the Council (General Affairs) at its 3962nd meeting on 27 June 2023.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS
on 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 EU macro-regional strategies

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:

- (1) WELCOMES the fourth report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies submitted by the Commission on 9 December 2022¹;
- (2) RECALLS the Council conclusions of 2 December 2020 on the third Commission report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies (“Strategies”) from 23 September 2020;
- (3) UNDERLINES the importance of participating countries’ continuous political commitment and ownership of the Strategies at all levels and of the Commission’s contribution as strategic advisor with its operational support, both technical and financial. REAFFIRMS the importance of stable governance support structures within the Strategies and the importance of continued support to the governance by the Commission and its relevant services. STRESSES the importance of resilience and flexibility of all stakeholders of the Strategies and of structures in answering the current political, economic and social challenges;
- (4) ENCOURAGES the Commission to continue supporting Member States and non-EU countries in their efforts to participate in Strategies;

¹ Doc. ST 15883/22 + ADD 1

- (5) RECOGNISES the findings of the report and the role of the Strategies in fostering cohesion through cross-sectorial, multilevel, and transnational collaboration with the aim of providing common solutions to shared challenges. ACKNOWLEDGES that the strategies are useful tools for the green, digital, and socially sustainable transition, as well as for regional development and growth. In view of a better implementation of the Strategies. REAFFIRMS the need for optimal use of existing financial resources, better use of existing institutions and better implementation of current legislation, based on the three prerequisites for these Strategies;
- (6) ENCOURAGES the structures offered by the Strategies in supporting Ukraine and in contributing to the reconstruction of Ukraine with no delay. In the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU is committed to supporting, along with partners, Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction. ACKNOWLEDGES the work done by Ukraine in 2022 chairing EUSDR while defending its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity against the Russian aggression. INVITES the Strategies' participating countries to look for possibilities for even closer cooperation with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova in practical terms;
- (7) POINTS TO the role the Strategies can play in the enlargement process. The Strategies are well suited to facilitate the understanding of the EU *acquis* while building administrative capacity on various EU policies, including cohesion policy and the principle of shared management. ENCOURAGES all key stakeholders to further explore the use of the Strategies in facilitating the enlargement process supporting economic, social, and territorial cohesion and resilience, as well as in building trust and confidence among neighbouring countries;
- (8) RECOGNISES the importance of Strategies in bridging local and regional actions with European political priorities, notably based on participatory planning in all Strategies. HIGHLIGHTS the importance to facilitate for civil society organisations, youth, academia and businesses to engage in the implementation of the Strategies;

- (9) UNDERLINES the importance of Strategy implementers to be empowered with clear mandates, effective decision-making capacity and a clear vision that places their work in the broader policy context in the Strategies' participating countries and in the EU. INVITES participating countries and regions to reinforce further the linking of Strategies to national, regional and local stakeholders, as well as to the political level;
- (10) WELCOMES the possibilities provided by embedding of Strategies in relevant cohesion policy programmes, which enables financing and implementation of the Strategies' priorities through existing funds in the Strategies' participating countries. CALLS on the Commission to facilitate this embedding process throughout the whole funding period. CALLS for the establishment of new, and the reinforcement of existing, managing authority networks in all four Strategies. ENCOURAGES managing authorities, with the support of the Commission, to facilitate funding from national and regional programmes in a coordinated way;
- (11) APPRECIATES the efforts of the Commission to enhance the support to Strategies through the Interreg programmes and the provisions in the Interreg regulation, as well as to stimulate further synergies with directly managed programmes through communication, workshops and Strategies' contact points across the Commission;
- (12) ACKNOWLEDGES the need for robust data on the impact of the Strategies, including mobilised funding for the implementation of the Strategies, strategic communication on impacts and results, and the appraisal of the added value at EU and macro-regional level as well as the need to improve the monitoring and evaluation and to increase the visibility of the results of the Strategies. RECOGNISES the shared responsibility between the Strategies participating countries and the Commission for comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms;

- (13) RECOGNISES the value, if appropriate, of reviewing the Strategies and of adjusting their action plans so as to reflect the changing environment and to adapt to new emerging needs and challenges in their respective areas;
- (14) CALLS on the Commission to review progress on the strategic and operational objectives outlined in these conclusions in the next report on the implementation of Strategies by the end of 2024.
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