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'I' ITEM NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Permanent Representatives Committee

No. prev. doc.: 11364/20 + ADD 1

Subject: Draft Council conclusions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies

- Approval
- Decision to use the written procedure

1. On 23 September 2020, the Commission submitted to the Council the third single Report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies¹.
2. The Presidency convened the Friends of the Presidency (FoP) Macro-regional strategies Working Party² to examine the Report and elaborate draft Council conclusions to reflect the views of the Council and give political guidance for the further development of the strategies.

¹ Doc. 11364/20 + ADD 1.

² Doc. 11765/20.

3. The FoP Macro-regional strategies Working Party examined the draft Council conclusions at its meetings of 23 October and 16 November 2020. Delegations agreed to the draft Council conclusions as set out in the Annex to this note.
 4. Given the current exceptional circumstances, in which no Council meetings are scheduled to take place, the Permanent Representatives Committee is invited to:
 - confirm its agreement on the Council conclusions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, as set out in the Annex to this document, and
 - to decide, in accordance with the first subparagraph of Article 12(1) of the Council's Rules of Procedure and Article 1 of Council Decision (EU) 2020/430, as extended by Council Decision (EU) 2020/1659, that the Council uses the written procedure for the approval of the Council conclusions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, as set out in the Annex to this document.
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DRAFT**Council conclusions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- (1) WELCOMES the third report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies submitted by the Commission on 23 September 2020¹ and, on this basis:
- a) RECALLS the Council conclusions of 21 May 2019 on the second Commission report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies from 29 January 2019², the Council Conclusions on the added value of macro-regional strategies from 22 October 2013³ as well as the previous Council conclusions relating to the four EU macro-regional strategies (MRS)⁴, namely the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)⁵, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)⁶, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)⁷ and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)⁸;
- b) RECOGNISES the findings of the Commission report and the achievements of the participating countries/regions in the implementation of the MRS, with the support of the Commission, notably the revision of the EUSBSR and EUSDR Action Plans, the encouraging progress made in the embedding process of the MRS priorities in EU funding programmes 2021-2027, adoption of the EUSALP Manifesto for sustainable and resilient Alpine region, the organisation of the first MRS week in Brussels and the Republic of North Macedonia joining the EUSAIR;

¹ Doc. 11364/20 + ADD 1.

² Doc. 9895/19.

³ Doc. 14926/13 + ADD 1.

⁴ Doc. 8461/17.

⁵ Doc. 13744/09.

⁶ Doc. 8388/11 + ADD 1 REV 1.

⁷ Doc. 13503/14.

⁸ Doc. 14613/15.

- c) **ACKNOWLEDGES**, in order for the MRS to fully contribute to the implementation of EU policies, Europe's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and to the social, economic and territorial cohesion of the EU, the need to use the momentum for more ambitious actions on the (2) funding, (3) governance, (4) post-pandemic resilience and recovery aspects of the MRS and (5) on EU neighbourhood relations and integration;
- (2) **EMPHASISES** the urgency to further embed the priorities of the MRS in relevant EU funding programmes 2021-2027 and, to that end:
- a) **REAFFIRMS** the need for optimal use of existing financial resources, better use of existing institutions, better implementation of existing legislation; based on the principle of no new EU legislation, no new EU institutions and no new EU funds;
- b) **APPRECIATES** ongoing efforts to align relevant 2021-2027 national/regional EU funding programmes under shared management with relevant MRS priorities and objectives; **CALLS** on MRS key implementers and authorities responsible for 2021-2027 national/regional EU funding programmes under shared management to continue these efforts on the basis of the respective MRS Action Plans before programming documents are finalised;
- c) **CALLS** on all participating countries/regions, with the support of the Commission and as soon as possible, to establish networks of (managing) authorities of relevant 2021-2027 EU funding programmes (Cohesion Policy Funds, EAFRD, EMFF, IPA, NDICI); **CALLS** on these (managing) authorities to actively participate in such networks in order to ensure a coordinated implementation of the MRS Action Plan priorities and projects shortlisted by MRS, across the macro-region, in their respective programmes;
- d) **CALLS** on the Commission to facilitate this embedding process throughout the whole programming and funding period;

- e) CALLS on the Commission and the participating countries/regions to jointly assess, by 2022, the outcomes of the embedding process in the relevant national/regional EU funding programmes 2021-2027 and reflect the results of this assessment in the next report on the implementation of the MRS;
 - f) CALLS on the Commission to promote the embedding of MRS priorities in the relevant IPA and NDICI national and regional programmes which are managed directly or indirectly by the Commission in the non-EU participating countries/regions;
 - g) INVITES the Commission and participating countries/regions to promote the participation of project promoters in relevant EU funding programmes directly and indirectly managed by the Commission. To this aim:
 - i. CALLS on MRS key implementers to organise, by the end of 2021, with the support of the Commission, workshops for project promoters in order to encourage participation in the calls for projects within the relevant directly and indirectly managed programmes,
 - ii. CALLS on the Commission to designate contact points for the MRS in the Commission services responsible for the relevant directly managed programmes,
 - iii. CALLS on the Commission and participating countries/regions to review and implement further measures to strengthen the alignment of relevant directly and indirectly managed EU funding programmes 2021-2027, while respecting the objectives and integrity of such programmes, with MRS Action Plan priorities and shortlisted projects, with special attention to the areas listed in section (4), and to provide a stock-taking of these measures in the next report on the implementation of MRS;
- (3) UNDERLINES the importance of capacity-building, clear-cut and results-oriented governance of the MRS and, in that context, CALLS on the Commission to continue to play a leading role in the coordination of MRS and CALLS on participating countries/regions to:

- a) optimise governance aspects according to best practices across all MRS as appropriate for the geographical and institutional context of each macro-region and participating countries/regions;
 - b) ensure effective involvement of national/regional/local stakeholders, citizens and civil society, including young people, in the implementation of the MRS;
 - c) ensure that MRS key implementers are duly empowered and provided with a clear mandate to fulfil their tasks in a continuous way;
 - d) establish and continue a fixed rotating order of presidencies for the MRS in order to strengthen predictability and ownership;
 - e) enhance continuity in the implementation of the MRS by establishing and continuing a trio format of consecutive presidencies (predecessor / incumbent / successor) for each MRS;
 - f) enhance MRS governance through regular ministerial meetings, for example in the context of the MRS' Annual Fora, as appropriate;
 - g) enhance coordination, exchange of experience and transfer of best practices between MRS through continued cooperation between MRS trio presidencies;
 - h) ensure stable functioning of MRS governance support and coordination structures during the whole programme period 2021-2027 especially through the relevant Interreg Transnational Cooperation programme covering the respective MRS territory;
 - i) increase the visibility of the results achieved by the MRS through strategic communication;
- (4) CONSIDERS the COVID-19 crisis a crucial challenge to cooperation in the macro-regions, ACKNOWLEDGES the role of MRS in the territorial implementation of post-pandemic resilience and recovery and thus

- a) CALLS on the participating countries/regions to contribute to the resilience and recovery of macro-regions by temporarily accelerating appropriate actions based on the respective MRS Action Plans until 2023;
 - b) CALLS on participating countries/regions to particularly accelerate actions from the Action Plans in line with the European Green Deal⁹ across the macro-regions;
 - c) CALLS on participating countries/regions to particularly accelerate actions from the Action Plans related to digitalisation in line with the EU Digital Strategy¹⁰ across the macro-regions;
 - d) CALLS on the participating countries/regions to continue adapting their MRS activities to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as appropriate;
 - e) CALLS on participating countries/regions to take into account the priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030 in the implementation of the MRS;
- (5) RECOGNISES the contribution of the MRS to European Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies as well as to cross-border relations with non-EU participating countries/regions and, while recalling the ownership of the MRS by all participating countries/regions:
- a) CALLS on participating countries/regions and the Commission to strengthen synergies between the relevant MRS and the EU enlargement process in the Western Balkans region;
 - b) RECOGNISES the contributing role of the MRS in the dissemination of EU policies and values in Eastern Partnership and EU Neighbourhood countries;
 - c) APPRECIATES the participation of Switzerland in the EUSALP as an integral part of the Alpine macro-region and a contribution to EU relations with the Swiss Confederation and against this background INVITES the Swiss Confederation to continue its involvement in EUSALP on all levels;

⁹ Doc. 15051/19 + ADD 1.

¹⁰ Doc. 6237/20.

- d) INVITES the participating countries/regions to actively explore synergies, encourage complementarities and avoid overlap with other relevant regional initiatives and sea-basin strategies and in that view CALLS on the Commission to provide a platform for this discussion, for example at the next MRS week in 2021;
- (6) REMAINS open to examine commonly agreed initiatives of Member States facing the same challenges in a defined geographic area, aimed at setting up new macro-regional strategies¹¹;
- (7) CALLS on the Commission to review progress on the strategic and operational objectives outlined above in the next report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies by the end of 2022.
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¹¹ See also doc. 14926/13 + ADD 1 and doc. 9895/19.