

Implementation of EU macro-regional strategies

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted the own-initiative report by Andrea COZZOLINO (ALDE, IT) on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies (MRS).

It recalled that such strategies have been established in areas representing the natural evolution of the EU in terms of cross-border cooperation. They are based on the three nos principle of no new funding, no new structures and no new legislation within the existing EU political framework.

Members felt that MRS continue to make an innovative contribution to cross-border, cross-sectoral and multi-level cooperation in Europe, the potential of which has not yet been sufficiently explored. They noted, however, that as a result of the process of agreeing on joint actions at multi-level and multi-country/regional level access to EU funds for MRS projects remains a challenge. They also remarked that to a varying degree elements on which the quality of implementation depends, such as commitment, ownership, resources and governance, remain difficult to overcome in achieving the pre-determined goals.

The report encouraged Member States and regions involved, therefore, to develop appropriate structures to facilitate cooperation, including joint planning, boosting funding opportunities and a bottom-up approach. It stressed the importance of sufficient human resources and administrative capacity for the competent national and regional authorities.

The report examines the MRS currently in place:

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR): Members noted that this is a stable cooperation framework with more than 100 flagship initiatives and new networks. They urged participating countries to step up efforts to tackle the pollution (i.e. water and air quality, and eutrophication) of the Baltic Sea, as it is one of the most polluted seas in the world. They also pointed to the importance of connecting the Baltic region to energy networks.

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR): the report highlighted the positive impact of the strategy in improving mobility and interconnections for all modes of transport, and promoting clean energy. It pointed to the success of the Euro access project, the Keep Danube clean initiative and the Danube Financing Dialogue and emphasises the need, therefore, to maintain the political momentum for the EUSDR.

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR): Members felt that this format of cooperation could give an impetus to the enlargement and integration process. However, they were concerned about the lack of effective linkage between the availability of resources, governance and ownership, which are preventing EUSAIRs objectives from being fully achieved. EUSAIR could also help address migration challenges with the necessary instruments and resources.

The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP): the report welcomed the governance structure of the strategy which is currently being put in place, as the first steps in the implementation of the strategy have proven difficult and were governed by different structures, frameworks and timeframes. The EUSALP could be a good example of a template strategy for territorial cohesion, as it simultaneously incorporates different specific areas, productive areas, mountains and rural areas and some of the most highly developed cities in the EU.

Macro-regional Europe after 2020: currently, financial support comes in form of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) transnational cooperation programmes which are financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Countries are otherwise encouraged to use different funding sources (ESI Funds and other EU instruments, IPA, ENI, national, regional and local resources, private sources etc.) Members felt that simplifying the funds and the procedures for their use within the framework of the MRS would increase their effectiveness. They proposed that the participating countries make clear commitments in terms of funding and human resources for the implementation of the MRS from the outset.

Lastly, the report pointed out that the next revision of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) constitutes an opportunity to revise the MRS objectives in order to strengthen their link with EU priorities and consolidate associated financial commitments.