Implementation of EU macro-regional strategies

2017/2040(INI) - 16/01/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 580 votes to 62, with 34 abstentions, a resolution on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies (MRS).

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.

Macro-regional strategies as platforms for co-operation and co-ordination: Parliament stressed that the 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. It noted, however, that access to EU funds for MRS projects remains a challenge. It also noted that 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.

Parliament therefore insisted on the need to:

- develop appropriate governance structures and working arrangements to facilitate cooperation, including joint planning, boosting funding opportunities and a bottom-up approach;
- improve coordination and better partnerships, both vertical and horizontal, between the different public and private actors, academia and NGOs, as well as international organisations operating in this field, and the various policies at EU, national, regional and local level in order to facilitate and improve the implementation of the MRS and cross-border cooperation;
- ensure that relevant national or regional bodies have sufficient human resources and administrative capacity;
- ensure that MRS are flexible enough to be adjusted and respond effectively to unforeseen events and needs.

The resolution examined 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): Parliament 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): Parliament 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: Members stressed that the implementation of shall be based on a long-term common political commitment between the institutional levels concerned, and be provided with appropriate financial means. They therefore stressed the need to:

- establish synergies and complementarities between regional and national funding and Union financing instruments and to simplify the use of funds and procedures;
- encourage participating countries to make clear commitments in terms of human and financial resources from the outset;
- adopt a more results-oriented approach and concrete challenges, including in the area of ??environmental protection; MRSs are encouraged to make use of green public procurement in order to boost to eco-innovation.

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