



TEXTS ADOPTED

Provisional edition

P8_TA-PROV(2018)0002

Implementation of EU macro-regional strategies

European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2018 on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies (2017/2040(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and in particular Title XVIII thereof,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006¹ (hereinafter ‘the CPR’),
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal²,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings³,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 25 April 2017 on the implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies,
- having regard to the Commission report of 16 December 2016 on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies (COM(2016)0805) and the accompanying Commission staff working document (SWD(2016)0443),

¹ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.

² OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 259.

³ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 303.

- having regard to the Commission communication of 10 June 2009 concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (COM(2009)0248),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 8 December 2010 entitled ‘European Union Strategy for Danube Region’ (COM(2010)0715),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 17 June 2014 concerning the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (COM(2014)0357),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 28 July 2015 concerning a European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (COM(2015)0366),
- having regard to the Commission report of 20 May 2014 concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies (COM(2014)0284),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 14 December 2015 entitled ‘Investing in jobs and growth – maximising the contribution of European Structural and Investment Funds’ (COM(2015)0639),
- having regard to its resolution of 17 February 2011 on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 3 July 2012 on the evolution of EU macro-regional strategies: present practice and future prospects, especially in the Mediterranean²,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 September 2012 on the EU Cohesion Policy Strategy for the Atlantic Area³,
- having regard to its resolution of 28 October 2015 on an EU strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 September 2016 on an EU Strategy for the Alpine region⁵,
- having regard to the study of January 2015 entitled ‘New role of macro-regions in European Territorial Cooperation’, published by its Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies,
- having regard to the Interact report of February 2017 entitled ‘Added value of macro-regional strategies – programme and project perspective’,
- having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure, and Article 1(1)(e) of, and Annex 3 to, the decision of the Conference of Presidents of 12 December 2002 on the procedure for granting authorisation to draw up own-initiative reports,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinion

¹ OJ C 188 E, 28.6.2012, p. 30.

² OJ C 349 E, 29.11.2013, p. 1.

³ OJ C 353 E, 3.12.2013, p. 122.

⁴ OJ C 355, 20.10.2017, p. 23.

⁵ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0336.

of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (A8-0389/2017),

- A. whereas a macro-region can be defined as a geographical area including regions from a number of different countries associated with one or more common features or challenges⁶;
- B. whereas macro-regional strategies (MRS) have been established in areas representing the natural evolution of the EU in terms of cross-border cooperation; whereas they are important, as they are able to mobilise public and private actors, civil society and academia, and to mobilise resources towards achieving common EU policy goals;
- C. whereas MRS provide a platform for deeper and wider interaction at cross-sectoral, regional and cross-border level between EU Member States and neighbouring countries for the purposes of addressing common challenges, joint planning and fostering cooperation between and improving the integration of different partners and policy sectors, including in the areas of environment and biodiversity protection, climate mitigation and adaptation strategies, waste treatment and water supply, maritime spatial planning, and integrated coastal management systems; welcomes, in this context, the efforts made to promote cooperation between the ESI funds and the IPA;
- D. whereas macro-regions are involved in the implementation of relevant long-term, interconnected, cross-cutting political activities, as these macro-regions are linked to cohesion policy through the MRS objectives embedded in their OPs and set up projects through smart synergies; whereas macro-regions thereby contribute more effectively to achieving MRS goals, attracting private investment, demonstrating trust, and engaging in dialogue, cross-border cooperation and solidarity;
- E. whereas MRS are based on the ‘three no’s’ principle of no new funding, no new structures and no new legislation within the existing EU political framework;
- F. whereas pre-existing cooperation mechanisms at EU level and between Member States and regions facilitate the implementation of MRS, particularly in the early phases;
- G. whereas the Commission adopts a single report on the implementation of all four existing EU MRS every two years, mentioning their successes, as well as where further improvements need to be made, with the next report due by the end of 2018; whereas Parliament considers, in this framework, that an assessment is needed of the aspects pertaining to the environment, as one of the pillars of sustainable development;

Macro-regional strategies as platforms for cooperation and coordination

1. Notes that the relevance of the MRS has been underlined by the globalisation process, which has rendered individual countries interdependent and necessitates solutions to the cross-border problems involved;
2. Recognises 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;
3. Stresses that MRS continue to make an invaluable and innovative contribution to cross-

⁶ Schmitt et al. (2009), ‘EU macro-regions and macro-regional strategies – A scoping study’, Nordregio electronic working paper 2009:4.

border, cross-sectoral and multi-level cooperation in Europe, the potential of which has not yet been sufficiently explored, with a view to boosting connectivity and consolidating the economic ties and knowledge transfer between regions and countries; notes, 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;

4. Considers that the MRS and associated environmental programmes are useful instruments for making the benefits of European cooperation visible to citizens, and therefore urges all parties to fully commit to the strategies and play their part in their implementation;
5. Is of the opinion that multi-level governance with a proper role for the regions within its framework should be a cornerstone of any macro-regional strategy from its inception, involving regional and local communities and public-, private- and 3rd-sector stakeholders in the process; encourages the Member States and regions involved therefore to develop appropriate governance structures and working arrangements to facilitate cooperation, including joint planning, boosting funding opportunities and a bottom-up approach;
6. Encourages improved 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; calls on the Commission to encourage the participation of these stakeholders, inter alia, in the MRS governing boards, while respecting the general application of EU principles;
7. Emphasises the importance of sufficient human resources and administrative capacity for the competent national and regional authorities in order to ensure that the political commitment translates into effective implementation of the strategies; highlights, in this regard, the value of the Structural Reform Support Programme, which can provide assistance in capacity building and effective support for the development and financing of MRS projects upon the request of a Member State; calls, furthermore, on the Commission and the Member States to actively promote the dissemination and application of good administrative practice and experience from the successful implementation of MRS;
8. Underlines the fact that MRS must be flexible enough to be adjusted and respond effectively to unforeseen events and needs which may affect the regions involved, the Member States and the EU in general; considers that the implementation of MRS needs to take account of specific regional and local conditions; highlights the necessity of the Commission's coordinating role in this regard, also with a view to fine-tuning the specific objectives of each strategy;

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

9. Welcomes the results achieved since the launch of the strategy in 2009, particularly with regard to the cooperation mechanisms not only between (i.e. within the Council at the relevant ministerial meetings), but also within the regions and countries involved, such as within the parliament or government; notes that the EUSBSR is a stable cooperation framework with more than 100 flagship initiatives and new networks;
10. Underlines the remaining challenges, in particular those relating to the environment and

connectivity; urges the 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; notes that achieving a good environmental status by 2020 is one of the key objectives of policy actions here;

11. Attaches importance to the possibility of connecting the Baltic region to energy networks in order to reduce and eliminate energy poverty and to increase energy security and the security of supply;

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

12. Highlights the positive impact the strategy has had on cooperation between the participating countries and regions by improving mobility and interconnections for all modes of transport, promoting clean energy, culture and sustainable tourism and, in particular, enhancing direct contacts between people and achieving greater cohesion between the regions and countries participating in the strategy;
13. Considers the ‘Euro access’ project, the ‘Keep Danube clean’ initiative and the Danube Financing Dialogue clear positive examples of a way to overcome difficulties in financing the obstacles which projects of transnational and cross-border relevance often face; is of the opinion that, through this dialogue, the differences in development among regions in the Danube basin could be further reduced; considers, furthermore, that reopening a Danube Strategy Point could contribute to a smoother implementation of the strategy;
14. Stresses that preventing damage caused by severe flooding remains one of the great environmental challenges for the countries of the Danube macro-region; highlights that supplementary joint measures to prevent cross-border pollution should be considered;
15. Recalls the need for strategic projects and stresses that it is essential to maintain a high degree of political support and increase the resources and capacity of competent state authorities in order to tackle the remaining challenges; emphasises the need, therefore, to maintain the political momentum for the EUSDR and to ensure that the EUSDR Steering Group does good work;
16. Invites the participating countries, given the natural link between the Danube River and the Black Sea, to enhance coordination between the EUSDR and the Black Sea Cross Border Cooperation and to work closely to overcome shared socio-economic, environmental and transport challenges;
17. Stresses that a more integrated approach to mobility and multimodality in the Danube region would also be beneficial to the environment;

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)

18. Highlights the distinct nature of the EUSAIR on account of the number of potential and candidate participating countries, and considers that this format of cooperation can be a great opportunity for the entire region; takes the view that EUSAIR could give an impetus to the enlargement and integration process;
19. Notes with concern the persistent problems as regards the lack of effective linkage between the availability of resources, governance and ownership, which are preventing EUSAIR’s objectives from being fully achieved; calls on the participating countries to provide the competent authorities with support and tailored measures to implement the strategy;

20. Stresses that the region has been at the forefront of the migration crisis in recent years; considers that EUSAIR could help address such challenges with the necessary instruments and resources; welcomes, in this context, the Commission's efforts to find solutions for the mobilisation of financial resources for migration-related activities, including cooperation with third countries;
21. Considers the Sustainable Tourism pillar of the Adriatic and Ionian region to be a positive instrument to create sustainable economic growth in the region and raise awareness of environmental challenges and the MRS;
22. Calls on the countries concerned to give priority to capacity building for the EUSAIR key implementers and the programme authorities responsible for EUSAIR-related operational programmes;

The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)

23. Considers the EUSALP as proof that the macro-regional concept can also be applied successfully to more developed regions; calls on its stakeholders to promote environment-related investments that address the consequences of climate change; points out, furthermore, that the Alpine region is an important regional transport hub and, at the same time, one of the largest unique natural and recreational areas which needs to be preserved; stresses, therefore, that sustainable and interrelated transport strategies need to be sought after;
24. Welcomes 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; calls, therefore, on the participating countries to continue their commitment and support to EUSALP Action Group members;
25. Stresses that the EUSALP can 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 important and highly developed cities in the EU, and offers a platform for jointly addressing the challenges they face (climate change, demography, biodiversity, migration, globalisation, sustainable tourism and agriculture, energy supply, transport and mobility, and the digital divide); calls on the participating countries and regions to pay due attention to the use of the Interreg Alpine Space programme and other relevant funds in addressing common priorities;
26. Stresses that the Alpine region is delineated by many borders and that removing these barriers is a prerequisite for cooperation to work, especially for the labour market and economic activities related to SMEs; points out that the EUSALP can also provide the opportunity to strengthen transnational cross-border cooperation between adjacent regions, cities and local communities and to forge links and networks between people, also in terms of interconnections in transport and digital coverage; points, in addition, to the environmental fragility of this region;

Macro-regional Europe after 2020?

27. Points out that MRS bear fruit if they are rooted in a long-term political perspective and organised in such a way that all public, especially regional and local authorities, and private stakeholders and civil society are effectively represented from the outset, requiring an effective exchange of information, best practices, know-how and experience between macro-regions and their regional and local authorities; considers it

necessary to strengthen the multi-level governance of MRS, which should be transparent, with more effective coordination and public communication mechanisms in order to make MRS known and for them to gain acceptance in local and regional communities;

28. Believes that strategy implementation can only be successful if based on long-term vision and efficient coordination and cooperation structures with the necessary administrative capacity, as well as on shared long-term political commitment among the institutional levels concerned and if it is backed by adequate funding; highlights, therefore, the need to increase the effectiveness of the investments through seeking alignment, synergies and complementarities of regional and national funding with existing EU funding instruments, which, in addition to enhancing the ETC programmes, promote cross-border projects within the ESI funds and EFSI and also through direct funding;
29. Believes that simplifying the funds and the procedures for their use within the framework of the MRS would increase their effectiveness;
30. Proposes that the participating countries make clear commitments in terms of funding and human resources for the implementation of the MRS from the outset; calls on the Commission to help to better coordinate inside the MRS, to promote good practices and to develop incentives to encourage the active participation of and coordination between all parties concerned, also with a view to strengthening the link between EU policies and implementation of MRS; encourages, moreover, MRS to make use of green public procurement in order to boost eco-innovation, the bio-economy, the development of new business models and the use of secondary raw materials, such as in the circular economy, in order to achieve higher levels of environmental and health protection and to foster close links between producers and consumers;
31. Stresses that greater result-orientation is required and concrete challenges need to be met, including in the area of environmental protection, in order to develop plans which have a real impact on the territory, and to justify the investment of resources, which should, for its part, be commensurate with the objectives set, and relate to the true needs of the territories concerned;
32. Calls for any questions about the MRS, such as on ownership and the necessary political incentives, to be addressed in accordance with a modus operandi that is agreed upon in advance by all the regions concerned;
33. Is of the opinion that the visibility and public perception of the activities of the macro-regions in the regions targeted, as well as the results achieved, need to be enhanced by carrying out information campaigns and exchanges of best practices, including through online platforms and social networks, thus making them easily accessible to the general public;
34. Emphasises 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;
35. Calls on the Commission to submit, as part of its next revision of cohesion policy rules, proposals to promote a better implementation of MRS;
36. Calls on the Commission, as part of the next report on the implementation of MRS which is due in 2018, to undertake a more in-depth analysis, including in particular on:

- (a) the effectiveness of ETC transnational programmes in providing financing and strategic impetus to MRS;
 - (b) indicators which could be integrated in each MRS in order to allow better result-orientation, monitoring and evaluation;
 - (c) measures to strengthen the link with EU priorities;
 - (d) the simplification of the implementation and mainstreaming of funding schemes;
 - (e) the quality of the involvement of regional and local government in the implementation of MRS;
37. Emphasises that a call to develop new strategies such as for the Carpathians, the Atlantic, Mediterranean or Iberian regions should not divert attention from the primary objective of improved, deeper implementation of existing MRS;
38. Supports the ‘three no’s’ principle for the MRS (no new EU legislation, no new EU funding and no new EU structures); suggests, however, that the Commission evaluate the impact of these ‘no’s’ on programmes under the ESI funds in its next implementation report on MRS;
39. Highlights the need for a territorial approach in relation to cooperation activities on a case by case basis, as MRS are geared towards addressing territorial challenges that can be solved more effectively together; stresses the importance of bringing about synergies and convergence between the different components of territorial cooperation in ETC programmes and the macro-regions in order to strengthen the impact of transnational programmes, pool resources, simplify the financing of MRS and enhance the outcome of their implementation and efficiency of the resources invested;
40. Reiterates the EU’s commitment to the implementation of the SDGs; stresses the importance of aligning the MRS objectives with the EU flagship initiatives, such as the Energy Union, the Paris Agreement on climate change and blue growth in marine macro-regions; draws attention to the management of environmental risks, such as preserving nature, biodiversity, and fishing stocks and combating marine litter, as well as developing sustainable and green tourism; encourages cooperation in the field of renewable energy; encourages, in this context, the use of smart specialisation strategies (S3), the strengthening of SMEs and the creation of quality jobs;
41. Stresses that Parliament from the very outset supported the macro-regions through pilot projects and preparatory actions; points, furthermore, to the experience accumulated by the Baltic Sea region which shows that long-term thinking should remain the basis for macro-regional cooperation;
42. Calls on the Commission to invite the Parliament to participate as an observer in the work of the Macro-Regional Strategies High Level Group;

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43. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and the governments and national and regional parliaments of the Member States and third countries participating in MRS.