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One of the EU's main instruments for promoting European territorial cooperation, macro-regional strategies bring together regions from Member States and third countries which face a common set of challenges. Often defined on the basis of geography, these strategies aim to ensure greater territorial cohesion of regions such as the Baltic or the Alps through a coordinated approach that makes use of existing resources without the need to create new EU funds, administrative structures or legislation. This topical digest discusses the four macro-regional strategies established to date, and also includes briefings on European Territorial Cooperation and on the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), another key mechanism for EU territorial cooperation.

European Territorial Cooperation

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, September 2016

As one of the two main goals of cohesion policy today, the three strands of European territorial cooperation (cross-border, trans-national and inter-regional cooperation) have brought Europeans closer together, and improved both connectivity and the environment. This briefing considers the key EU cooperation mechanisms, including macro-regional strategies and EGTCs, and examines the remaining obstacles to such cooperation. It also discusses recent initiatives to strengthen cross-border cooperation, including the proposal for a European convention for cross-border regions, and details the EP's recent report on European Territorial Cooperation.

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, June 2016

Concerns over the deteriorating state of the Baltic Sea and a desire to iron out developmental differences in the Baltic region were among the main driving forces behind the launch of the EU's first macro-regional strategy in 2009. This document examines the structure, governance and funding of this Strategy, which covers eight EU Member States and involves cooperation with the neighbouring countries of Russia, Belarus, Norway and Iceland, and contains an assessment of the main challenges it faces which include complex governance, poor knowledge about the strategy and a lack of political engagement.

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Briefing by Vivienne Halleux, May 2015

The Danube micro-region covers a group of 14 countries which differ widely in terms of their development level and status in relation to the EU. As well as providing an overview of the strategy's structure and how it works in practice, this briefing assesses the first years of its activity. In particular, it examines the Commission's implementation reports, which have highlighted the need for stronger political backing from participating countries, and the views of stakeholders, who have called for more streamlined governance, focusing also on the impact of the wide disparities between the strategy's partners on its operations.

EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region (EUSAIR)

Briefing by Vasileios Margaras, October 2015

Covering a region whose challenges include environmental degradation, poor transport links and a lack of strong trans-border cooperation, the EUSAIR is the third EU macro-regional strategy to be set up. Encompassing eight countries, four of which are non-EU countries, it has the potential to play an important role in promoting the EU integration of the Western Balkans. This document discusses the strategy's governance and structure, based on four main pillars of blue growth, connecting the region, environmental quality and sustainable tourism, and considers how the EUSAIR will address its challenges by promoting economic growth and prosperity in the region through improved competitiveness and connectivity.

EU Strategy for the Alpine Region

Briefing by Vivienne Halleux, September 2016

The EU’s most recent macro-regional strategy covers seven countries in the Alps, a region that is not only rich in biodiversity but also a prime tourist destination traversed by key European transport routes. This briefing examines the challenges facing the Alpine region, such as climate change and global warming, which are threatening both the region’s water supply and winter tourism, a key source of income in many Alpine regions. It points to the area’s high level of socio-economic cohesion and strong bottom-up approach as key elements for the success of this new initiative and discusses the EP’s 2016 report on the EU Alpine Strategy.

European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, October 2015

EGTCs allow entities from two or more Member States to work together under a common structure with legal personality, with a total of 63 established to date, covering such areas of cooperation as tourism development, the protection of natural heritage or joint cross-border facilities. This document considers the legislative background and evolution of EGTCs and the challenges to cross-border cooperation such as a lack of compatibility between national administrative systems, and recent initiatives to address obstacles in this area, including work by the 2015 Luxembourg Presidency and the Commission’s public consultation on this topic.

Further reading

How the EU budget is spent: the European Structural and Investment Funds

Briefing by Magdalena Sapata, July 2015

The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region

Keysource by Sorina Ionescu, August 2015

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Table 2 – EUSAIR pillar themes

Main pillars	Blue Growth	Connecting the Region	Environmental Quality	Sustainable Tourism
Lead countries	Greece and Montenegro	Italy and Serbia	Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina	Croatia and Albania
Main themes covered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blue technologies Fisheries and aquaculture Maritime and marine governance and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maritime transport Intermodal connections to the hinterland Energy networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The marine environment Pollution of the sea Transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A diversified tourism offer Sustainable and responsible tourism management

Members' Hotline | Tel 88100 or 00 32 2 284 8100 | eprs@europarl.europa.eu
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