EU strategy for the Alpine region

SUMMARY

Launched in January 2016, the European Union strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) is the fourth and most recent macro-regional strategy to be set up by the European Union. One of the biggest challenges facing the seven countries and 48 regions involved in the EUSALP is that of securing sustainable development in the macro-region, especially in its resource-rich, but highly vulnerable core mountain area. The Alps are home to a vast array of animal and plant species and constitute a major water reservoir for Europe. At the same time, they are one of Europe's prime tourist destinations, and are crossed by busy European transport routes. Both tourism and transport play a key role in climate change, which is putting Alpine natural resources at risk.

The European Parliament considers that the experience of the EUSALP to date proves that the macro-regional concept can be successfully applied to more developed regions. The Alpine strategy provides a good example of a template strategy for territorial cohesion; as it simultaneously incorporates productive areas, mountainous and rural areas, and some of the most important and highly developed cities in the EU.

Although there is a marked gap between urban and rural mountainous areas, the macro-region shows a high level of socio-economic interdependence, confirmed by recent research. Disparities (in terms of funding and capacity) between participating countries, a feature that has caused challenges for other EU macro-regional strategies, are less of an issue in the Alpine region, but improvements are needed and efforts should be made in view of the new 2021-2027 programming period. Furthermore, the strong bottom-up approach behind the development of the EUSALP ensures local ownership of the strategy, a key element for success.

This is an update of a Briefing by Vivienne Halleux, from August 2016.
Background

The European Union (EU) strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) is the fourth EU macro-regional strategy, following those for the Baltic Sea region (EUSBSR, adopted in 2009), the Danube region (EUSDR, 2011) and the Adriatic and Ionian region (EUSAIR, 2014). The EUSALP is unique in that the initial impetus for a macro-regional strategy came from the regions themselves. This first trigger came as early as 2010, with the Mittenwald declaration, signed by German, Italian, Austrian and Swiss representatives in 2010. Fuelled by the work and input of various stakeholders, the elaboration process then ran its course, following the same pattern as previous strategies: request from the European Council to the Commission (19-20 December 2013); preparation, by the European Commission, of a communication and an action plan; adoption of both documents by the College of Commissioners (28 July 2015); endorsement of the strategy by the Council of the EU (27 November 2015); and official launch event (25-26 January 2016).

The macro-regional concept

Responding to the objective of achieving territorial cohesion, macro-regional strategies provide an integrated framework for cooperation, across EU and non-EU borders, in a specific area known as a ‘macro-region’. This space, usually defined on the basis of a significant geographical or physical feature (a river basin, a maritime area or, in the EUSALP’s case, a mountain range), includes territory from a number of different countries or regions faced with common cross-border challenges and opportunities for which joint action is necessary. The macro-regional concept thus has both a territorial and a functional dimension.

The implementation of macro-regional strategies is governed by what is referred to as the ‘three no’s rule’, meaning that no new EU funds, no additional EU formal structures and no new EU legislation can be mobilised; the idea being rather to better align existing funds and policies at EU, national and regional levels, and to rely upon existing structures, in short, to do more with what is available. The concept includes five key principles, namely: integration within existing policy frameworks, programmes and funding instruments; coordination between sectorial policies, actors or tiers of government; cooperation, between both countries and sectors; multi-level governance (involvement of policy-makers at different levels) and partnership between EU and non-EU countries.

Challenges facing the Alpine Region

The key issue of sustainability

The Alpine Region is a large economic and productive region in Europe, covering almost 10 % of the EU’s surface, representing a territory of 80 million inhabitants (16 % of the EU’s total population), and generating 20 % of EU GDP. The dominant challenges the region faces are demographic trends, economic globalisation, climate and energy challenges, and geographical features. The Alps represent one of the largest continuous natural areas in Europe and are also home to some 30 000 animal species and 13 000 plant species, many of which are today endangered. With their rivers, lakes and glaciers providing a natural storage mechanism, the Alps act as Europe’s ‘water tower’. Every year, Alpine rivers convey on average 216 km³ of water to the nearby regions. In some seasons, the Alps provide up to 90 % of water to lowland Europe, in particular to arid areas in summer.

These rich natural resources are under threat, as a result of human activity and climate change. In the last hundred years, temperatures in the Alps have increased by nearly 2°C, almost twice as much as the global average, and this trend is set to continue. Alpine glaciers provide the most tangible evidence of global warming. They have lost about half of their ice volume since 1850, and loss rates have accelerated strongly in the last decades. Climate scenarios indicate that in less than 100 years, the eastern Alps, and large parts of the western Alps, will be completely free of ice. Besides receding
glaciers, implications of climate change include melting permafrost (increasing the risk of rock falls and landslides) and changing precipitation patterns, with less snow. Winter rain is expected to be increasingly frequent in regions currently receiving snowfall, leading to a shorter snow cover period. All this will have significant consequences, not only for the water cycle and resources (and subsequently, for households, agriculture and hydropower production), but also obviously for the winter tourism sector (see box).

Winter sports and climate change
For many Alpine mountain areas, winter sports represent a vital source of income, but climate change is faster in the Alps than elsewhere. Since the late 19th century temperatures have risen by almost 2°C, a rate about twice that of the northern hemisphere average according to the Alpine Convention and the European Environment Agency.

Ski resorts in Switzerland, Austria and Germany might consequently have trouble attracting winter-sports enthusiasts in the future. Snow cover will drastically decrease below an altitude of 1,500-2,000 m, and natural hazards related to glacier and permafrost retreat are expected to become more frequent. If climate-damaging emissions are not reduced, the natural snowpack could shrink by up to 70% by the end of the century, and enough natural snow for profitable ski resorts will only be found above 2,500 m.

Artificial snowmaking is one of the strategies developed to compensate for the lack of natural snow and help regions maintain their winter tourism industry. This is, however, a resource-consuming practice.

Tourism and transport play a crucial role in relation to climate change. The Alps are one of Europe’s prime tourist destinations, attracting about 120 million guests every year. Cars are used for 84% of holiday travel to the Alps, while motorised road traffic accounts for a high proportion of transport-related greenhouse gas emissions. Transport is responsible for nearly 30% of all greenhouse gases in the EU. Alpine valleys and passes are highly affected by transport-related noise and air pollution and the impacts of engineered infrastructure on the landscape, with considerable consequences both for flora and fauna, and for people’s quality of life.

At the same time, the region constitutes a key transport node. It is crossed by traffic flows linking the south to the north, and the east to the west of Europe. Five of the nine European transport corridors extend through the Alps, including the Rhine-Alpine Core Network Corridor – one of the busiest freight routes in Europe. From all of the above, it is clear that sustainable development takes on its full meaning and is a major policy challenge in the Alpine region, with far-reaching implications for Europe as a whole.

Contrasting realities and territorial imbalances
Mountains represent a challenge to homogenous development, and there is a strong contrast between the various territories in the region, in particular between cities and rural mountainous areas. Remote mountain areas still experience difficulties in accessing social services and economic services of general interest; face less favourable labour market conditions; often lag behind as regards e-connection possibilities; and suffer from ageing and depopulation. Lowland metropolitan areas, meanwhile have constantly growing populations, high levels of information and communication technology provision, and are extremely well-served in terms of infrastructure and connections. The contrast is also sharp in the fields of innovation, competitiveness and entrepreneurship support, for instance.

EU strategy for the Alpine Region
Territorial coverage
The strategy involves:
- five EU Member States: Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia;
- two non-EU states: Switzerland and Liechtenstein;
- and covers a total of 48 regions.
The EUSALP is established in a region where cooperation schemes with different spatial perimeters are already in place (see Figure 1).

Concluded between the eight countries of the Alpine arc (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia and Switzerland), as well as the EU, the [Alpine Convention](http://example.com) aims at securing the protection and sustainable development of the Alps. It came into force in 1995, and is binding under international law. This marks the first time a transnational mountain area has been considered a common territory facing common challenges. The convention acts through a fixed structure, including decision-making and executive bodies, a permanent secretariat and several working groups, one of them dedicated to the EU Alpine strategy.

Countries with regions in the Carpathian Mountains were inspired to sign a similar convention in 2003 to foster sustainable development in the Carpathian area, aspiring also to launch a macro-regional strategy. The Interreg [Alpine space](http://example.com) transnational cooperation programme, which provides funding for projects under the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) objective, has a much broader territorial reach than the Alpine Convention. It covers an area almost twice as large and five times as populous, i.e. 390 000 km², with 70 million inhabitants, and includes major metropolitan areas such as Milan, Lyon, Munich and Vienna. Launched for the first time from 2000 to 2006, the programme is endowed, for the current period, with a budget of [€139 million](http://example.com), of which some €116 million comes from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This programme is expected to contribute directly to the implementation of the EUSALP through the alignment of its thematic priority axes with the strategy’s priorities, and its support for the strategy’s governance structures and mechanisms, as will the dedicated strategic [AlpGov](http://example.com) project.

The EUSALP’s territorial scope was much debated, the issue being whether to align it with the perimeter of the Alpine Convention, or to go beyond that and include regions with major cities located outside the ‘core Alpine area’. The latter option, corresponding to the approach taken in the Alpine space programme, was upheld. Indeed, the EUSALP’s philosophy is to ensure mutually beneficial interaction between the mountain regions at its core and the surrounding lowlands and urban areas, taking into account, in a flexible way, the functional relationships existing between them.

**Thematic scope**

The strategy covers three thematic policy areas (or pillars), i.e. (1) economic growth and innovation; (2) mobility and connectivity; and (3) environment and energy; as well as a cross-cutting policy area addressing governance and institutional capacity. They translate into thematic objectives, implemented by various actions (see Table 1), which will themselves be supported by projects.
Table 1 – The EUSALP’s thematic policy areas, objectives and actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy areas and corresponding objectives</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Actions groups (AG)</th>
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| 1st thematic policy area: Economic growth and innovation  
Objective: Fair access to job opportunities, building on the high competitiveness of the region | (1) Developing an effective research and innovation ecosystem  
(2) Increasing the economic potential of strategic sectors  
(3) Improving the adequacy of the labour market, education and training in these strategic sectors | AG1 Research & Innovation  
AG2 Economic development  
AG3 Labour Market, Training and Education |
| 2nd thematic policy area: Mobility and connectivity  
Objective: Sustainable internal and external accessibility to all | (4) Promoting inter-modality and interoperability in passenger and freight transport  
(5) Connecting people electronically and promoting accessibility to public services | AG4 Mobility  
AG Accessibility |
| 3rd thematic policy area: Environment and energy  
Objective: A more inclusive environmental framework for all and renewable and reliable energy solutions for the future | (6) Preserving and valorising natural resources, including water and cultural resources  
(7) Developing ecological connectivity throughout the EUSALP region  
(8) Improving risk management and climate change management, including major natural risks prevention  
(9) Making the territory a model region for energy efficiency and renewable energy | AG6 Resources  
AG7 Green Infrastructure  
AG8 Risk Governance  
AG9 Energy |
| Cross-cutting policy area: Governance  
Objective: A sound macro-regional governance model for the region (to improve cooperation and coordination of action) | | EUSALP Board of Action Group Leaders (BAGL) within AlpGov  
- Horizontal coherence among AGs tackling all policy fields.  
- Thematically steering the EUSALP implementation process |

Source: **EU strategy for the Alpine Region**, 2019

**Governance**

A **General Assembly**, a standing **Executive Board** and implementing bodies form the basis of the EUSALP governance structure. The **General Assembly**, responsible for laying down general political guidelines, includes high-level political representatives from the participating states and regions; the Commission; and the Alpine Convention as observer. The **Executive Board** is made up of representatives of states and regions, and includes representatives from the Commission, and the Alpine Convention and Alpine space transnational programme as **observers**. The board oversees the implementation of the EUSALP and provides strategic guidance as regards management and implementation of the strategy and its action plan. The nine **Action Groups** and a Board of Action Group leaders (AGL) form the core of the implementation level. As AGLs are meant to be the drivers of day-to-day implementation, their capacities, resources and engagement are key factors in the success of the Alpine strategy. The Commission, for its part, acts as an independent facilitator and participates in the overall coordination of the strategy, while there are also national **coordinators** in place and a yearly rotating **Presidency**. All these structures were swiftly initiated during the first year when the actions groups began work, meeting several times per year.
Funding

In line with the ‘three ‘no's rule’, the EUSALP does not imply any extra EU financing. Actors must mobilise existing EU and national funding instruments of relevance to the strategy’s thematic objectives and actions.

Significant financial resources are available through the relevant country-specific, cross-border and transnational programmes under the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds. The regulatory framework for 2014-2020 (in particular Articles 15(2), 27 and 96 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) governing the five ESI Funds) provides for more systematic integration of macro-regional strategies in programming. The mainstreaming of the EUSALP into the relevant 2014-2020 operational programmes (the plans detailing how money from the ESI Funds will be spent) took place before the launch, but more should be done, according to recent assessment detailed below. The AlpGov project aims to better align EUSALP and the ESI funds.

As highlighted in the previous section, the strategy benefits from the ERDF co-financed Alpine space programme, whose priority axis 4 ('Well-governed Alpine space') is designed specifically to support EUSALP governance.

Other EU funds and programmes, such as Horizon 2020, the COSME programme, the Connecting Europe Facility, or the LIFE programme are also available to the region, as well as the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI). Budgetary resources at national and regional level also come into play, in particular in the non-EU countries that are not entitled to EU funding. The blending of grants and loans from financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank is also encouraged.

Implementation and assessment

In the Council conclusions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies of May 2019, the Member States consider that macro-regional strategies' implementation should be targeted and result-driven, with clear European added value and defined results. Regular monitoring and review exercises should be ensured by the Commission, with the support of various tools. Some institutional and academic assessments of the strategy’s achievements have already been published (see below).

European Commission appraisal

In its first report in 2016, on the implementation of macro-regional strategies, the Commission noted that the quick start raised expectations and interest among Members of the European Parliament (e.g., the creation of Friends of EUSALP), stakeholders and civil society. The majority of the seven EUSALP countries proved to be not only involved with national/federal, but also with regional administrations. In addition, the Commission underlined the importance of involving other pre-existing cooperation structures and networks. According to the Commission’s assessment, the EUSALP had gradually been taken into account in several EU policy areas as well as in national policies, despite uneven levels of integration of strategic priorities in national or regional programmes, especially those supported by the ESIF. Bridging this gap between the strategy and funding opportunities was deemed vital. EUSALP countries were therefore required to build consensus to avoid conflicts between different interests within countries at national and regional level as well as between countries. The need to draw up a communication strategy was also mentioned.

In its more recent report of January 2019, the Commission notes that the Alpine Region Preparatory Action Fund 20 (ARPAF) has boosted the implementation of the strategy. The Commission also notes that on the margins of the first EUSALP Conference of Environmental Ministers in 2017, mayors of Alpine cities (Munich, Vienna, Turin, Trento, and Grenoble) created a network within the 'LOS_DAMA' project, on deploying green infrastructure in Alpine urban areas, as a first step at municipality level, thereby adding a level of governance. The Commission is listing several other
environmental initiatives launched at macro-regional level in the Alps, such as the forest summit 'Protection.Forest.Climate', mobility conferences, 'CirculAlps' (promoting innovation, sustainability and the circular economy in forestry) and AlpLinkBioECO (linking bio-based industry value chains across the Alpine region). Apart from the very broad Alpine space programme, few other programmes have so far considered the EUSALPs priorities in the selection of their projects. A better embedding of the EUSALP into other funding programmes remains a challenge, given the relative youth of the strategy. In June 2018, 'EuroAccess', a gateway to EU funding with key data from more than 200 EU funding programmes, was updated to cover the EUSALP, along with the other EU macro-regional strategies.

Regarding governance, there is a general concern that the varying stages of advance between action groups' work makes it difficult to synchronise the selection of indicators and the development of a joint monitoring system. A Board of Action Groups Leaders has been established to ensure that knowledge and experience are permanently exchanged among the groups. It sometimes remains challenging however to motivate members of action groups and provide them with the necessary decision-making capacity and technical competence. In addition, the Commission recommends further developing the stakeholder platform (as proposed in the EUSALP action plan), to involve interested stakeholders, including civil society at large, and strengthen their participation.

As for most of the macro-regional strategies, the Commission considers that more should also be done within EUSALP on communication to enhance visibility.

European Parliament perspective

In a May 2016 resolution on EU mountainous regions, the European Parliament welcomed the idea of including non-mountainous regions strongly linked with the Alpine core mountain area in the EUSALP, as a good example of an integrated approach to territorial development. Later, in September 2016, in its resolution on the EU strategy for the Alpine Region, the European Parliament welcomed the strategy, while recalling the importance of the Alpine Convention and the need to respect the agreements reached in that framework. It made some recommendations on governance and took the view that local and regional authorities should play a leading role in decision-making procedures within the managing and implementing bodies of the strategy. It insisted on a holistic approach to the design and implementation of Alpine transport and environment policy, stressing the need to prioritise modal transfers in order to promote a shift from road to rail, particularly for freight. It also requested that better transport and digital connections be facilitated at local and regional level, and insisted on the importance of public investment to ensure digital connectivity in mountain areas. Finally, regarding environment and energy, the report called for the further diversification of energy supply sources and the development of the renewable sources available, as well as for new measures to preserve biodiversity and combat air pollution. It proposed the adoption of a wide-ranging transnational plan to tackle the melting of the glaciers and respond to climate change throughout the Alps.

In January 2018, Parliament adopted a resolution on the implementation of the four EU macro-regional strategies, where it noted that the Commission should in particular assess aspects pertaining to the environment, as one of the pillars of sustainable development. It emphasised the importance of administrative capacity to translate political commitments into implementation and that all strategies should strengthen their multilevel governance and enhance communication mechanisms, to gain acceptance in local and regional communities.

More specifically, Parliament called on EUSALP stakeholders to promote environment-related investments that address the consequences of climate change in a region that is both an important regional transport hub and a unique natural and recreational area that should be protected. Parliament stressed that sustainable and interrelated transport strategies need to be sought. According to Parliament, the EUSALP already proves that the macro-regional concept can be
successfully applied to more developed regions. EUSALP is held to be a good example of a template strategy for **territorial cohesion**; simultaneously incorporating productive areas, mountainous and rural areas and some of the most important and highly developed cities in the EU. The strategy offers a platform for jointly addressing challenges like climate change, demography, biodiversity, migration, globalisation, sustainable tourism and agriculture, energy supply, transport and mobility, and the digital divide. The participating countries and regions were invited to pay due attention to the use of the Interreg Alpine space programme and other relevant **funds** when addressing common priorities. Parliament also insists that removing barriers is a prerequisite for such cooperation to function, especially for the labour market and economic activities related to SMEs.

**Experts' and other institutions' views**

While the **territorial scope** of the EUSALP was much debated before the launch – should the strategy go beyond the scope of the Alpine Convention and also include regions with major cities located outside the mountainous area? – recent studies confirm mutually beneficial interaction between the mountain regions and the surrounding lowlands and urban areas. In 'Interrelational space? The spatial logic of the macro-regional strategy for the Alps and its potential', German researchers, Tobias Chill and Thomas Streifeneder explain, with examples from eco-systems services and transport policies, how the inner Alpine situation has important implications for neighbouring metropolitan regions and vice versa, regardless of national background. They believe that addressing the relations between inner-and outer Alpine areas is a 'common challenge'. A series of articles on ‘Métropoles alpines. Vers une nouvelle alliance entre villes et montagnes ?' introduced by French academic Marie-Christine Fourny, also conclude that there has been a reconfiguration in territorial relations ending the centre-periphery model. Energy supply, water resources, food, and recreational activities show elements of reciprocity and bi-directional flows, and thus form eco-system services.

Italian researchers Alberto Bramanti and Francesca Teston analyse multi-level governance in 'EUSALP and the challenge of multi-level governance policies in the Alps', concluding that 'pre-existing, intricate and overlapping frame of a dozen or more networking organisations, institutions and communities have been positively affected' by the macro-regional strategy, and they praise the **bottom-up approach**. These researchers also find 'a high degree of coherence among the nine points in the EUSALP action plan and the contents of the Interreg Alpine space programme 2014-2020 without crowding-out effects'. They stress the importance of a strategic context for projects to exploit their full potential and insist on **consistency** between the macro-regional strategy and upcoming projects as well as on an equal and homogenous degree of national participation, which has tended to vary to date. Political ownership is indeed important for all the macro-regional strategies. The researchers recommend that the EUSALP should mainly address 'projects with a clear transnational dimension in which the direct component of infrastructural investments is large enough to require a macro-area response' and 'horizontal projects focused at servicing territorial stakeholders and their networks'. Like the Commission, the Parliament and the Council, Bramanti and Teston also raise the question of sufficient **communication** and project capitalisation levels, if relevant information is not disseminated.

When it comes to **funding**, the Italian researchers think that 'the complex framework allows for a strategic move to pool funds.' Until now, the Alpine region has benefited from Interreg programmes, but these programmes do not finance infrastructural investments. The researchers hope that the macro-regional strategy will bridge the gap between strategies and funding opportunities. The Interreg AlpGov project will, among other actions, help to establish a dialogue with financing and funding instruments to boost implementation initiatives and develop tailor-made governance.

A CEPS ‘Comparative study on the governance structure and energy policies in EU macro-regional strategies’ also raises the issue of funding. It states that the ‘assimilation of EUSALP within the existing EU funding programmes has proven to be challenging, considering the frequent incompatibility of timeframes and structures with the needs of EUSALP’, which was created when
the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework already existed. The researchers see 'a need for a better embedding of the strategy into future funding programmes, according to the principle that funding follows policies'. Furthermore, they think that 'political decisions taken at the EUSALP level should be reflected in future funding programmes of any type, either shared funds (i.e. ERDF, social fund, agricultural fund etc.) or centralised funds of the European Commission (i.e. Horizon2020, LIFE etc.).' When it comes to local cross-border operations, the authors are of the opinion that 'the common interests of the regions involved are at a disadvantage compared to national and local interests. EU regional policy structures, as well as national financial structures, are ill-suited for more complex cross-border projects'. Indeed, the reason the Commission asked for consensus-building was to avoid conflict between different interests within countries at national and regional level, as well as between countries.

The European Committee of the Regions nevertheless states that macro-regional strategies 'have become an excellent tool for bottom-up territorial cooperation'. On the theme of funding, the Committee's opinion emphasises that the macro-regional strategies should be further integrated with EU funding programmes, such as Horizon 2020, Erasmus +, Creative Europe, COSME, LIFE and the Connecting Europe Facility and the European Fund for Strategic Investments.

The Council of the European Union also underlines the importance of continuing to use macro-regional strategies as a strategic framework promoting more coherence and synergy in the implementation of EU policies, programmes and funds. The need for political commitment is also highlighted by the Council in its conclusions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies of May 2019.

**Outlook**

The EU strategy for the Alpine Region remains the newest macro-regional strategy launched by the EU, but a macro-regional strategy for the Carpathian region may follow, if deemed relevant by the European Council in spite of its overlap with the Danube strategy. Some of the countries participating in the EUSALP (Germany, Austria, Slovenia and Italy) are indeed already involved in other macro-regional strategies, and Austria could also be covered by a Carpathian strategy.

Moreover, the Commission suggests that cooperation between strategies could result in added value and should therefore be explored further. Its various reports on the implementation of macro-regional strategies stress the positive impact achieved in terms of projects and more integrated policy-making, but they also identify some significant challenges, including political commitment and ownership; funding; and organisation and governance.

Compared to the other macro-regional strategies, the EUSALP appears to be fairly well-off as the Alpine region has a dense institutional fabric and a long tradition of cooperation, with the Alpine Convention, and other initiatives, such as Arge Alp, Euromontana, Alliance in the Alps (local authorities), Alparc (network of protected areas) and the International Scientific Committee on Research in the Alps, and other organisations operating in the area. Although there is a marked gap between urban and rural mountainous areas, the macro-region shows strong socio-economic interdependence. The two non-EU countries, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, have high institutional and administrative capacity, enabling them to cooperate with the EU Member States at the same level.

The European Parliament wants EUSALP stakeholders to promote environment-related investment, aiming at addressing the consequences of climate change and underlines that the environment is one of the pillars of sustainable development. For the Parliament, EUSALP offers a platform to address challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, sustainable tourism and agriculture, a reliable energy supply, and transport and mobility solutions.
Next programming period

In view of the next multiannual financial framework 2021-2027, the European Parliament and other EU institutions are keen that links are strengthened between the macro-regional objectives and EU policies and priorities. Parliament reiterates the EU’s commitment to implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and stresses the importance of aligning macro-regional objectives with EU flagship initiatives, such as the Energy Union and the Paris Agreement. Parliament believes that strategy implementation requires a long-term vision, efficient coordination and cooperation structures with the necessary administrative capacity, as well as a shared long-term political commitment between the institutional levels concerned. This must also be backed by adequate funding. To increase the effectiveness of the investments, Parliament invites stakeholders to seek alignment, synergies and complementarities between regional and national funding and existing EU funding instruments. Enhancing the ETC programmes, promoting cross-border projects within the ESI funds and EFSI, and through direct funding and simplified funds and procedures when used within the macro-regional strategies, would increase their effectiveness.

The 2019 Italian EUSALP presidency actively encourages all involved actors to embed the macro-regional strategies in the legal framework of EU 2021-2027 cohesion policy.

MAIN REFERENCES


New role of macro-regions in European territorial cooperation, study (with annex), Policy Department on Structural and Cohesion Policies, European Parliament, January 2015.

FURTHER READING

ENDNOTES

1 For a comprehensive overview of each of these strategies, see the following briefings prepared by the European Parliamentary Research Service: The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (May 2015); EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (October 2015); and EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (June 2016).

2 See in particular the Bad Ragaz Decision and the Initiative Paper of the Conference of Alpine Regions of 29 June 2012; the European Parliament resolution of 23 May 2013 on a macro-regional strategy for the Alps; the Grenoble ‘Political resolution towards a European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region’ of 18 October 2013; the public consultation on the EUSALP (July–October 2014); the high-level Stakeholder Conference on the EUSALP and the Milan Declaration of the Alpine States and Regions (1–2 December 2014).

3 During winter, water is collected and stored as snow and ice in glaciers, lakes, groundwater bodies and soil in the Alps. It is then slowly released as the ice and snow melt throughout spring and summer, feeding rivers such as the Danube, Rhine, Po and Rhone, which have headwaters in the mountains. Water is thus made available when supply drops in the lowlands, and when demand is highest (Source: European Environment Agency).


6 Information in this paragraph is drawn from 'Macro-regional strategies in preparation: Strengths and weaknesses of the strategies for the Adriatic and Ionian Region and Alpine Region', in 'New role of macro-regions in European territorial cooperation', p. 67 ff.