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# **DRAFT REPORT**

on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies  
(2017/2040(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

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## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT - SUMMARY OF FACTS AND FINDINGS.....	3
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION .....	5

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT - SUMMARY OF FACTS AND FINDINGS

### Background

Macro-regional strategies (MRS) have gained importance in recent years as a platform for transnational cooperation between Member States but also with third countries. They provide an integrated framework to address mutual challenges and exploit common potential. In the 2014-2020 programming period, MRS have been incorporated in the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) programmes.

Currently, four existing MRS (Baltic, Danube, Adriatic-Ionian and Alpine) are bringing together 19 Member States and 8 non-EU countries. Some Member States participate in more than one MRS.

MRS are set within the boundaries of the “three no’s” principle: no new EU funds, no additional EU formal structures and no new EU legislation.

Financial support does come in form of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) transnational cooperation programmes which are financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Four such programmes are supporting the implementation of MRS (total operational programme budget in brackets):

- Baltic Sea (EUR 333,414,456)
- Danube Area (EUR 262,989,839)
- Adriatic-Ionian (EUR 117,918,198)
- Alpine Space (EUR 139,751,456)

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.) to contribute to the common goals outlined in the MRS.

As the Commission states<sup>1</sup>, MRS are about more than just funding because they “bring citizens of different Member States together and improve their social and economic living conditions through trans-border cooperation.”

MRS have different governance structures and experience different challenges. Some problems are, to a varying degree, common, such as ensuring an adequate level of political commitment and making enough resources available.

The Commission has a coordination role in the implementation of MRS.

In 2010, the Commission, following requests from the Council, has set up a Macroregional strategies High Level Group with a mission “to assist it in the exercise of its powers and responsibilities concerning the operation of macro-regional strategies” and a specific task to

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<sup>1</sup> Commission communication of 14 December 2015 entitled ‘Investing in jobs and growth – maximising the contribution of European Structural and Investment Funds’ (COM(2015)0639 final)

“advise the Commission on the coordination and monitoring of macroregional strategies”<sup>1</sup>. Its members are representatives of Member States and non-EU countries participating in MRS. The representatives of the Committee of the Regions and European Investment Bank are also invited to attend the meetings as observers.

## **Future**

Discussions about the post-2020 cohesion policy are well underway and it is high time to discuss the future of MRS in the context of this policy.

Several questions should be answered in respect of the future of MRS:

- ownership and political commitment - how to ensure that all participating countries invest enough resources in the MRS?
- result-orientation - are there opportunities to make the results of MRS more measurable?
- scope - are there reasons to expand the MRS concept?

The Council, while recognising the importance of MRS and reaffirming the “three no’s” principle, “remains open to examine any commonly agreed and mature initiative of Member States facing the same challenges in a defined geographic area aimed at setting up a new macro-regional strategy”<sup>2</sup>.

The REGI committee will organise a workshop with experts on MRS in its meeting on 12-13 July 2017 in order to support the work on this implementation report. The findings will be reflected in the amendments to the draft report.

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<sup>1</sup> Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities - Macroregional strategies High Level Group <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2455>

<sup>2</sup> Council conclusions on the implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/cooperate/macro\\_region\\_strategy/pdf/concl\\_implementation\\_macro\\_region\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/cooperate/macro_region_strategy/pdf/concl_implementation_macro_region_strategy_en.pdf)

## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### 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 1083/2006 (hereinafter ‘the CPR’)<sup>1</sup>,
- 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 goal<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 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 groupings<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to 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),
- 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),

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 259.

<sup>3</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 303.

- 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 Region<sup>1</sup>,
  - 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 Mediterranean<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 13 September 2012 on the EU Cohesion Policy Strategy for the Atlantic Area<sup>3</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 28 October 2015 on an EU strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region<sup>4</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 13 September 2016 on an EU Strategy for the Alpine region<sup>5</sup>,
  - 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 of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (A8-0000/2017),
- A. whereas a macro-region can be defined as an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges<sup>6</sup>;
- B. whereas macro-regional strategies (MRS) are significant, as they are able to mobilise institutional actors and civil society towards EU policy goals;
- C. whereas MRS provide a platform for cooperation between EU Member States and

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<sup>1</sup> OJ CE 188, 28.6.2012, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2012)0269.

<sup>3</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2012)0341.

<sup>4</sup> Texts adopted, P8\_TA(2015)0383.

<sup>5</sup> Texts adopted, P8\_TA(2016)0336.

<sup>6</sup> Schmitt et al (2009), *EU macro-regions and macro-regional strategies – A scoping study*, NORDREGIO electronic working paper 2009:4.

among third countries for the purposes of addressing common challenges, and fostering cooperation between and improving the integration of different policy sectors;

- D. whereas macro-regions are involved in the implementation of long-term, interconnected, cross-cutting political issues;
- 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 facilitate the implementation of macro-regional strategies, particularly in the early phases;
- G. whereas the Commission adopts a single report on the implementation of all existing EU macro-regional strategies every two years, with the next report due by the end of 2018;

### ***Macro-regional strategies as platforms for cooperation and coordination***

1. 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 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 contribution to cross-border, cross-sector and multi-level cooperation in Europe;
4. Is of the opinion that multi-level governance should be embedded in all macro-regional strategy from its inception;
5. Encourages improved coordination and better partnerships between the different actors and policies at national and regional level in order to facilitate the implementation of the MRS;
6. Emphasises the importance of developing administrative capacity in order to ensure the effective implementation of the strategies;
7. Underlines the fact that MRS must be flexible enough to be adjusted and respond to unforeseen events which may affect the regions involved and the EU in general; highlights the necessity of the Commission’s coordinating role in this regard;

### ***The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)***

8. Welcomes the results achieved since the launch of the strategy in 2009, particularly with regard to the cooperation mechanisms not only between but also within the countries involved;
9. 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 of

the Baltic Sea;

10. Notes the good example of the EUSBSR communication strategy; highlights that support for communication strategies should also be pursued at national and regional levels in order to increase their impact;

#### ***The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)***

11. Highlights the positive impact the strategy has had on cooperation between the participating countries;
12. Considers the Danube Financing Dialogue as a clear positive example of a way to overcome difficulties in financing the obstacles which projects of transnational relevance often face;
13. Stresses that it is essential to maintain a high degree of political support and increase resources and capacity in order to tackle the remaining challenges;

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

14. 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;
15. Notes with concern the persistent problems of resources, governance and ownership, which are preventing the strategy's objectives from being fully achieved;
16. Stresses that the region has been at the forefront of the migration crisis in the recent years; considers that the EUSAIR could help alleviate such challenges;

#### ***The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)***

17. Considers the EUSALP as proof that the macro-regional concept can also be applied to more developed regions;
18. Welcomes the governance structure of the strategy which is being put in place presently;
19. Stresses that the EUSALP can be a good example of a template strategy for territorial cohesion, as it incorporates different specific areas, productive areas, mountains and rural areas and some of the most important cities in the EU;
20. Stresses that the Alpine region is delineated by many borders and that the EUSALP can also provide the opportunity to strengthen cross-border cooperation, to forge links and networks between people and to eliminate existing borders and barriers for workers and economic activities;

#### ***Macro-regional Europe after 2020?***

21. Points out that MRS bear fruit if they are rooted in a long-term political perspective and organised in such a way that all stakeholders are effectively represented from the outset;



22. Believes that strategy implementation can only be successful if based on efficient coordination and cooperation structures and backed by adequate funding; highlights the need, in this respect, to seek synergies and complementarities of regional, national funding with EU funding instruments;
23. Proposes that the participating countries make clear commitments in terms of funding from the outset;
24. Stresses that greater result-orientation is required in order to justify the investment of resources, which should, for its part, be commensurate with the objectives set;
25. Calls for any questions about the MRS, such as on ownership and the necessary political incentives, to be addressed in an appropriate manner;
26. Is of the opinion that the visibility of and awareness about the activities of the macro-regions need to be enhanced;
27. Emphasises that the planning and revision of the objectives should be aligned with the multiannual financial framework (MFF) programming periods in order to strengthen the link with EU priorities;
28. Calls on the Commission, as part of the next report on the implementation of macro-regional strategies which is due in 2018, to undertake a more in-depth analysis, including in particular on the:
  - a. 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 and monitoring;
  - c. measures to strengthen the link with EU priorities;
  - d. simplification of the implementation and mainstreaming of funding schemes;
29. Stresses that, in order to be able to tackle new upcoming challenges in a given geographic area, it is important to carefully examine initiatives aimed at creating new macro-regional strategies;
30. 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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31. 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.