

Studies in European Political Space

The Macro-Regional Strategies of the European Union: Between European Territorial Cooperation and Multi-Level Governance

Dimitris Liakopoulos¹

Abstract: The EU territorial cohesion policy with the Lisbon reform has been enriched with an additional tool: macro-regional strategies. They represent an integrated framework that allows the Union and the Member States to identify needs and respond to them using available resources in such a way that the macro-region can benefit from a sustainable environment and optimal socio-economic development. In essence, the Member States and third countries that share a certain natural asset (sea, river, mountain range, etc.) can coordinate their resources to address common challenges and achieve shared objectives, according to a multi-level governance approach. The aim of our work is to reconstruct the concept of multi-level governance and the process of creating a macro-regional strategy by analyzing existing strategies and taking stock of future ones. Finally, we will look at the prospects of these instruments, taking into account the possible evolutionary scenarios of the EU.

Keywords: MLG; European cohesion; EUSDR; EUSALP; EUSAIR; DSP; European integration

1. Introduction

The evolution of the process of European integration has brought out two interconnected problematic issues in the pluralist systems, *rectius* European-with regard to the political choice concerning the distribution and ways of exercising power: a regional question in the European legal system and a European question in the constitutional arrangements of the federal and regional Member States. In both issues under the attention of legislators, jurists and judges are the relevant

¹ Professor, European Union Law at the Fletcher School-Tufts University (MA in international law and MA of Arts in Law and diplomacy), International and European Criminal and Procedural Law at the De Haagse Hogeschool-The Hague. Attorney at Law a New York and Bruxelles, USA, Address: Tufts University, 160 Packard Ave., Medford, MA 02155 USA, Corresponding author: d.liakopoulos.lawtufts@gmail.com.

legal profiles in the relations between regional autonomies, state authorities and EU Institutions.

In speciem, in recent years the EU has envisaged a new form of territorial cooperation between Member States and third countries, ie macro-regional strategies. With the first strategy created in 2009, for the Baltic Sea region, the process of enhancing cross-border, interregional and above all transnational cooperation has been further defined: the Union¹ with the important contribution of the Council of Europe-already from different years had started and encouraged with the establishment of the Euroregions², the Working Communities and the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) (Caesar, 2017, p. 249ss)³. Although the launch of the macro-regional strategies is quite recent, they appear to be an instrument appreciated by the Member States (and others) to achieve specific objectives in certain strategic sectors such as economic and employment growth, improved transport and energy supply, protecting the environment, increasing tourist attractiveness, increasing safety in the affected area, supporting research and innovation, trying to understand if the European Union can and will take a path of macro-regionalization with greater conviction or he will prefer to slow down this trend and concentrate on consolidating and improving the functioning of already operational strategies (Salageanu, 2016, p. 57ss).

2. What is Multi-Level Governance?

The concept of multi-level governance (MLG)⁴ arose within the framework of the theories elaborated to give an explanation to two phenomena: the process of

¹ B. Wassenberg & B. Reitel, *Territorial cooperation in Europe: A historical perspective*, Publication coordinated by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2015. M. Haus, Governance-Theorien und Governance-Probleme. Diesseits und jenseits des Steuerungsparadigmas, in *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 51(3), 2010, pp. 458ss. M. Zürn, Global governance as multi-level governance, in D. Levi-Faur (ed.), *Oxford handbook of governance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012.

² V. Biot, The European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC): An asset for territorial governance towards territorial integration?, in G. Gorzelak, K. Zawalińska (eds), *European territories: From cooperation to integration?* ESPON & EUROREG-Centre for European Regional and Local Studies, University of Warsaw, 2013.

³ E. Evrard & A. Engl (2018). *Taking stock of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC): From policy formulation to policy implementation*. In E. Medeiros (eds) *European territorial cooperation*. The Urban Book Series, ed. Springer, Berlin, 2018.

⁴ See, E.U. Petersmann, *Multilevel constitutionalism for multilevel governance of public goods*, Hart Publishing, Oxford & Oregon, Portland, 2017. N. Cwodhury, R.A. Wessel, *Conceptualising* 6

European integration and the functioning of a complex and composite system like that of the European Union. A theory that presented itself as a sort of “third way” to explain these two realities and which “challenged” the two classic approaches, namely intergovernmental and neo-functionalist approaches. This theory, although not exempt from criticism (Jordan, 2001, pp. 193-208; Bache, 2012), on the one hand tried to make a synthesis of the two approaches, on the other hand it advanced a relatively new interpretive scheme that subsequently had a good fortune. The MLG has had the merit of asking fundamental questions about the mechanisms through which the various actors present in a given political-institutional arena make the decisions and the implications that they entail for democratic accountability.¹ MLG “has made a significant contribution to understanding the nature of governance in the EU”.²

That an empirical case such as that of the European Union could be a source of inspiration for approaches of this kind is highlighted, reflecting on the legal nature of the Union that “(...) is transforming politics and government at the European and national levels into a system of multi-level, non-hierarchical, deliberative and apolitical governance, via a complex web of public/private networks and quasi-autonomous agencies, which is primarily concerned with the re-regulation and de-regulation of the market” (Hix, 1998, p. 54ss.). A multi-level governance, therefore, understood as a system of continuous negotiation between governments located at different territorial-supranational, national, regional and local levels-as the result of a broad process of institutional creation and decision-making reallocation that has made so that some functions previously centralized in the State, became the preserve of other levels of government, specifically the supranational level and the regional and local levels.

multilevel regulation in the European Union: A legal translation of multilevel governance? In *European Law Journal*, 18(3), 2012. H.J. Bieling, M. Lerch, *Theories der europäischen integration*, ed. Springer, 2012, pp. 188ss.

¹ G. Marks, *Structural policy in the European Community*, in A. Sbragia (ed.), *Euro-Politics: Institutions and policymaking in the “new” European Community*, Washington D.C., 1992, pp. 191-224, C. Panara & R. Varney, *Multi level governance in the European Union and European Union democracy: Democratic legitimacy, democratic accountability and transparency of the european offices of the english authorities in Brussels*, in *Regional & Federal Studies*, 27(2), 2017, pp. 154ss.

² I. Bache, *Multi-level governance in the European Union*, in D. Levi-Faur (edited by), *The oxford handbook of governance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. 638ss.

The MLG model had brought out a new reality, summarized: the skills within the decision-making are shared by actors distributed at different levels rather than monopolized by national governments; collective decision-making between states implies a significant loss of control over it by individual national governments; the MLG model foresees that the political arenas are interconnected and that in this framework sub-national actors do not operate by interfacing only with the national arenas, but also directly with the supranational ones (Marks, Hooghe, & Blank, 1996, pp. 342-378). The state does not monopolize the connections between domestic (sub-national) and European (supranational) actors, but it represents one among the various subjects in the field that actively participate in the decision-making process.

If by MLG we mean that particular process in which there are negotiated and non-hierarchical exchanges between institutions at transnational, national, regional and local levels where there is a stratification of governance processes at these different levels (Peters & Pierre, 2001, pp. 131-132). Thus, we can speak of “flexible governance”¹ as a system that allows policy-makers to regulate the scale of governance to reflect the heterogeneity of a complex political and legal system (such as, among others, the Union). (Hooghe & Marks, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2003, p. 234ss) The MLG whose theoretical foundation is federalism, is characterized by the presence of few jurisdictional levels that pursue general aims. There are no overlaps between levels, which, even if communicating, remain separate and indeed arranged on a pyramidal and hierarchical basis. The MLG that derives its theoretical root mainly from neoclassical political economy and from the theory of public choice, has opposite characteristics. It does not place particular emphasis on the institutional structure, but is oriented towards problem solving and therefore has a rather flexible and policy-oriented design. The political-institutional framework and the public and private entities that operate within it appear to be composite and fragmented, and this poses no small challenges to a central supranational institution in the European regulatory framework such as the Court of Justice of the European Union (Tatham, 2015). To this type of MLG,

¹ See the Charter for multilevel governance in Europe adopted by the Committee of Regions on 3 April 2014 and supported by the Congress of local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe. CEMP 2018 work programme. Political and thematic priorities of Council of European Municipalities and Regions. European section of United cities and local governments, 18-19 January, Zaragoza, 2018. M. Lebrun, Multilevel governance as way towards a more involved, in *European View*, 13 (1), 2014.

Conzelmann records the policy-making of the European Union¹, while *Skelcher* points out that it also fits well in a wider arena such as the international one (Skelcher, 2005, p. 14ss). Another convincing definition of multi-level governance was provided by *Schmitter* who, highlighting the equal importance of all the actors and their close interconnection aimed at the adoption of binding decisions for all, defined it as “an arrangement for making binding decisions that engages a multiplicity of politically independent but otherwise interdependent public-private and public-at different levels of territorial aggregation in more or less continuous negotiation/deliberation/implementation, a stable hierarchy of political authority”². In turn, *Piattoni* spoke of multi-level governance as a diversified set of agreements, an intertwining of systems of coordination and negotiation between formally independent but functionally interdependent subjects that stand out in complex relationships between them and that through the coordination el in negotiation, they redefine these relationships each time. Adding, among other things, that on the one

¹ T. Conzelmann, Towards a new concept of multi-level governance?, in Committee of the Regions, The Contributions to the 2008 Ateliers, Brussels, Forward Studies/Cellule de Prospective, 10 September 2008 also with reference to problematic aspects linked, for example, to the territorial dimension, which is relevant to MLG and which is in contradiction with the more general concept of governance. In fact, in the latter case, the most important issues are functional interdependence and the solution of common problems, rather than geographical interdependence. The author in the final paragraph dedicated to the recommendations to improve the MLG at the European level, called for a further strengthening of the Committee of the Regions and in general of the regions and cities to propose themselves as “subnational networks” of which the EU urgently needs for the definition and implementation of its policies. It also encouraged the respect and follow-up of the protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality annexed to the Lisbon Treaty, which specifies that regional and local actors must be consulted before the Commission proposes the acts to be adopted by the European legislator, European Parliament and Council.

² **Invalid source specified.**, which would later be back on the subject and, after specifying that the European Union can not be considered a federation or a confederation, but a sui generis system based on multilevel and polycentric governance, asserts that it, more precisely, is a unique combination properties such as governance, multi-layered governance and poly-centric governance. The former is defined as a method/mechanism for dealing with a wide range of problems and conflicts in which the actors regularly arrive at mutually satisfying and binding decisions negotiating and deliberating with each of the parties involved and cooperating in the implementation of the decisions themselves. The second, multi-layered governance, in essence multi-level governance but with other words, takes up the definition already illustrated, while the third, poly-centric governance, is an agreement aimed at making binding decisions for a multiplicity of actors. delegating authority on certain tasks to a number of relatively autonomous agencies that are controlled - de jure or de facto - by a single collective institution.

hand the MLG represents a theory of political mobilization (politics)¹, the adoption of a decision following a specific policy-making (policy) and the structuring of a political system (polity), on the other hand that the levels connected to it are on the other hand, the levels linked to it are territorial (supranational, national and sub-national) and jurisdictional².

So the MLG is a system of adoption of a decision that takes into account all government bodies, even and above all sub-national, which in many EU Member States and in the same Union have acquired greater powers and prerogatives following the institutional and constitutional reforms implemented in the twenty years 1990-2000³. The MLG has been descriptive as a division of the authoritative powers on several levels of the territory and, in the specific case of European integration, indicative of a model of relationship between the subnational level of government of the member states and the European institutions. Basically, on the one hand the power dissolves between “central and institutions” above and “below”, on the other the ML “is not a division of powers, but rather a process of power sharing”⁴. For this reason, a model of this kind, according to our opinion, is

¹ S. Hix & B. Høyland, *The political system of the European Union*, ed. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011. S. Piattoni, *Multi-level governance in the EU. Does it work? Globalization and Politics: A Conference in Honor of Suzanne Berger*, MIT, May 8 and 9, 2009, pp. 12ss.

² S. Piattoni, *Multi-level governance in the EU. Does it work? Globalization and Politics: A Conference in Honor of Suzanne Berger*, op. cit.

³ In this regard, let us bear in mind, for example, the activism of sub-national governing bodies, such as Regions, Provinces and Municipalities, in that particular area of European territorial cooperation which is cross-border cooperation. If political-administrative entities and in some legal cases such as the Euroregions, the European associations between territorial bodies and the working communities can not be considered real levels to be introduced in the European governance (with reference to the EU) and internationally (with reference to the Council of Europe), it is also true that some of them play a minor role in the distribution of Community funds, acting as managing authorities, and in any case, having representation offices in Brussels, try to fit in some way in the choices of Union policies and to lobby for gains and rewards. Moreover, in the specific case of the European Territorial Cooperation Groups (EGTCs), which always belong to cross-border cooperation, the Committee of the Regions expressed itself in unequivocal terms, speaking of “a real laboratory of multilevel governance” (Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Develop a European culture of multilevel governance: initiatives to follow up the White Paper of the Committee of the Regions, 2012/C 113/1 of 18.4.2012, par. 51).

⁴ D. Gal & I. Horga, *Multilevel Governance from the Lisbon Treaty to the White Paper of Multilevel Governance*, in *Revista de Estudios Jurídicos*, Universidad de Jaén (España), n. 10, 2010 (Segunda Época). The authors, moreover, emphasize the role played by multi-level governance mechanisms in achieving the goal of territorial cohesion in the EU, the importance of cooperation between national parliaments of the Member States for the democratic system of the Union, in accordance also the enhanced role reserved to them by the Treaty of Lisbon in controlling the effective respect of the principle of subsidiarity, and, finally, the centrality of the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and partnership, as well as the open method of coordination

particularly suitable to reduce the manifestations of a complex system to unity in which no level of government assumes an exclusive centrality and excluding the other levels, in which participation, flexibility, cooperation are the keys time for the construction of political decisions.

For MLG it is meant “a specification of the concept of governance that emphasizes the creation (structural aspect) of government levels of supra- or sub-national jurisdictional amplitude and their involvement (procedural aspect) in the decisional and implementation processes generated by challenges internal and external to the power of control and government of the nation-states, so it could be used to describe relations between national states and international organizations as well as relations between national governments and sub-national governments”¹. In this sense, we mean that sub-national levels of government interface directly with the supranational level represented by the European Union and they do so both in the ascending phase of definition and regulation, and in the downward phase of implementation of these and of policies in the territories easily verifiable if one goes to investigate the ever higher propensity subnational agencies (regions in the first place) to open representative offices and offices in Brussels and to practice a real paradiplomacy through which to make their voices heard more (Cugusi & Stocchiero, 2010, p. 5ss)². This allows these actors to exert pressure on the European decision maker. Consider, for example, the question of the European Structural and Investment Funds and the negotiation that oversees their discipline in which actors of different nature participate in accordance with the principles of partnership, subsidiarity and proportionality.

3. Macro-Regional Strategy and the “Role” of Macro-Region.

“Macro-region” and “macroregional strategy” being relatively recent concepts must necessarily be defined as precisely as possible. A first important definition of the two concepts was given by the EU itself-by the European Commission (EC) in particular-because the supranational entity intended to provide a framework for structured cooperation between Member States and non-regions, local authorities

¹ M. Tatham, With or without you? Revisiting territorial state-bypassing in EU interest representation, in P. Mair & J. Thomassen (eds), *Political Representation and European Union Governance*, ed. Routledge, London, 2011, pp. 78ss.

and bearers of public and private interests in the same area who face common challenges, experience similar problems and intend to achieve the same objectives. Although some have adopted a prudent approach in their doctrine, pointing out that “macro-regions appear to be many things in one” (Stead, 2014, pp. 680-693; Stead, 2014, p. 326ss.), speaking of macroregion as “soft policy space” (Dubois, Hedin, Schmitt, & Sterling, 2009) and going back to the term used for international relations, the EC has specified that for macroregion an area consisting of a number of administrative regions should be understood, but these present sufficient common problems to justify the adoption of a single strategic approach or, in other words, “an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges (...) it is not essential that the limits of the region be precisely defined”¹. The now consolidated definition has not been “fabricated in vitro”, but has been built on the basis of the proposals and challenges that emerged during the preparation of the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region (Dubois, Hedin, Schmitt, & Sterling, 2009)². The macro-region is not a classically understood administrative region. If the latter is a territorial governing body provided for by the Constitution of a State, the macro-region is not covered by the Treaties of the European Union, those which, not without some difficulty, can be defined as the constitutional rules of the Union. The macro-region does not have autonomous political, administrative and financial characteristics, but represents a political-territorial unit based on the criterion of functionality, which supports a perspective oriented towards the achievement of precise results set by the subjects that are part of it (Dubois, Hedin, Schmitt, & Sterling, 2009)³. Hettne, for example, has framed them in the broader context of the erosion of the monopoly role played on the international chessboard by the nation-states² and has pointed out that some strongly periodizing historical factors—above all the end of the so-called Cold War—helped to create a new global scenario that led to a particular form of new regionalism³, highlighting the overcoming of the state-microregional paradigm and the landing at a macro-regional level placed

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, COM (2009)248 final, p. 6.

² B. Hettne, *Globalization and the new regionalism: The second great transformation*. In B. Hettne, A. Inotai, O. Sunkel (a cura di), *Globalism and New Regionalism*, ed. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstone, 1999.

³ F. Söderbaum, *Exploring the links between micro-regionalism and macro-regionalism*. In M. Farrell, B. Hettne & L. Van Langenhove (eds), *Global politics of regionalism. Theory and practice*. Pluto Press, London, 2005, pp. 88ss.

between the state and the global model¹. Macro-regional strategies can make a contribution to the redefinition of geographic and political relationships inside the EU according to natural, social and economic functionalities, beyond administrative borders, and also through the development of a “macro-regional consciousness”, based on identity and solidarity elements”².

On the other hand, with regard to the macro-regional strategy, it is firstly necessary to refer to the official definition provided by the EU, where the EC states that a macro-regional strategy should be understood as “an integrated framework allowing the European Union and the Member States, thanks to the coordination of relevant policies, identify needs and respond to them using available resources (...) enjoy a sustainable environment and optimal socio-economic development”³. Indicative is the fact that, faced with the launch of the first macro-regional strategy—that for the Baltic Sea—which took place in 2009, again in 2011 the Council asked the EC to clarify the notion of macro-regional strategy⁴. The EC responded to this request by specifying that the macro-regional strategy is an integrated framework for Member States and third countries in the same geographical area which faces common challenges and benefits from enhanced cooperation for economic, social and territorial cohesion⁵ and takes into and feeds on principles of integration, coordination, cooperation, multilevel governance and partnership⁶. Furthermore, he explained that “(...) the macro-regional approach offers an integrated framework to tackle challenges that are too large to manage on a national scale but are too

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, COM (2009) 248 final, pp. 5.

² Conclusions of the General Affairs Council of 13 April 2011, par. 20.

³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, COM (2009) 248 final, pp. 5.

⁴ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the added value of macro-regional strategies, COM (2013) 468 final p. 3.

⁵ H. Heinelt & M. Knodt (Hrsg.) Policies within the EU multi-level systems. Instruments and strategies of european governance, ed. Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2011.

⁶ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, COM (2012) 128 final, 23.3.2012, p. 3. As is well known, the European Union at that time consisted of 27 States, as Croatia would have joined the following year, precisely on 1 July 2013.

specific for the EU (...)”¹. The concept is even more specific contained in the regulation on the European Structural and Investment Funds for the new programming period (2014-2020)².

The essential elements that can be found in a macro-regional strategy are: the multi-level and multi-actor approach, the place-based approach and the integrated approach³. The multi-level approach means that in the elaboration and implementation of strategies a whole series of actors, Europeans, nationals, sub-nationals, public and private, including civil society organizations and other stakeholders. It is evident that the multi-actor consists in strategies that must take into consideration the interests, needs and challenges of the territory around which they come to organize themselves and on the basis of these arrange for the agreed solutions to achieve common objectives. The integrated approach concerns a common response of all the actors who, in pursuing the same interests and pursuing the same objectives, integrate the actions, policies and funding programs in order to improve their effectiveness in reacting to transnational challenges and problems. and cross-border difficult to solve on their own. The macro-regional strategies of the Union make it possible to test a new type of cooperation operating from the perspective that prefers common challenges to a plurality of specific regions, in an environmental, economic or security key, by virtue of the theory that provides joint programming and actions to address common problems through the effective use of available funds. Precisely because the macro-region is an entity that acts according to the principle of functionality⁴, it is essential to understand which and how many actors involved in the strategy and which criteria to use for their identification. So there is a problem of delimitation of the geographical scale of macro-regions that must lead to the choice of which countries and territories to include in the strategy.

The Lisbon Treaty introduced the territorial cohesion dimension⁵ to the already existing economic and social cohesion, the Union has the legal basis for the establishment of these new political instruments contributing to the implementation

¹ Regulation (EU) n. 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 Fund, and fisheries and general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, on the European Social Fund, on the Cohesion Fund and on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, and repealing Regulation (EC) 1083/2006 of the Council.

² See in particular art. 2.

³ E. Medeiros (eds), *European territorial cooperation*, op. cit.

⁴ See in particular **Invalid source specified.**

⁵ E. Medeiros (eds) *European territorial cooperation*, op. cit.

of the European cohesion policy. In fact, by entering this framework, macro-regional strategies become a tool for achieving the EU's most important goals, starting with the Europe 2020 strategy, and at the same time supporting the multi-level governance of the Union, since macroregions can derive a new way of conceiving multilevel governance and subsidiarity. A macro-regional strategy "represents a political governance experiment for creating an integrated framework of multilevel and multi-sector actions and actors (...) it is a political innovation because it is a new multilevel governance mechanism."¹ The macro-regional approach is nourished by all forms of territorial cooperation and has even allowed transnational cooperation to be removed from the scope of mere intergovernmental cooperation and in some way led to the multi-level governance of the EU by providing a stronger role for institutions supranationals, in particular EC (Duhr, 2011). If the macro-regional approach can not be considered trivially a different name for territorial cohesion, it is clear that there are points of contact between the two concepts, because "each is place-based, inclusive and, in principle, prepared and implemented on a multi-level basis"².

4. Towards a political, practical and flexible process: The case of a macro-regional strategy of the European Union

There is no codified procedure established at the level of the EU. There is still (and perhaps there will never be) a Regulation or an operating manual or guidelines to follow to create a macro-regional strategy. In fact, for the Baltic Sea, the creation of a macro-regional strategy has qualified as a distinctly political process that sees the necessary intervention of the EU, but which is substantially undertaken by public and private, institutional and civil society actors, who they are interested in preparing such a tool, presented and approved. This political process does not take place outside the law and in the absence of rules, but develops in an institutional context established by the treaties and which involves the intervention of the political institutions of the Union at certain moments of the institute process. The European Council invites the EC to present a strategy for a given macro-region,

¹ A. Stocchiero, *The geopolitical game of the European Union strategy for macro-regions: Where does the Mediterranean Stand?* in CeSPI, Working Papers, 74/2010, July 2010, pp. 7.

² P. Samecki, *Macro-regional strategies in the EU-A Discussion Paper*, Stockholm, September 2009, p. 3.

generally also indicating the time limit within which this step must be fulfilled. It should also be emphasized that, before this step, both the territorial actors of the areas involved and the European Parliament (EP) can provide input for the preparation of a macro-regional Union strategy. With regard to the former, according to a typical bottom-up, multi-level and multi-actor approach, public and private stakeholders promote various initiatives to promote the widest possible participation in order to boost the strategy¹. As for the EP, it can adopt a formal act-for example a resolution-that encourages the creation of a macro-regional strategy. The EP intervention takes place following the moral suasion² activity or real lobbying put in place by the MEPs coming from the different Member States interested in the macro-region and self-organizing in a parliamentary intergroup³.

In the launch of a macro-regional strategy, the pre-existing instruments and mechanisms of transnational and cross-border cooperation that the States and the regional bodies involved play a major role. In fact, at the time of their establishment, all the current macro-regional strategies had more than one. On the one hand they represented a goad for the Union to recognize the need to establish a macro-region for that determined area, on the other hand they have become instruments for implementing strategies, either by incorporating them into the strategy or by keeping them outside but by establishing them a relationship of mutual collaboration for the achievement of the respective objectives. Among the most relevant results of the consultation, it emerged that no new institutions should be created, as cooperation instruments were already in place in the region, without considering that new structures could result in “additional administrative overheads

¹ Recall that the European Council “gives the Union the impetus necessary for its development and defines its general political orientations and priorities” (Article 15, paragraph 1 of the TEU) and also “identifies the strategic interests and objectives of the Union” (Article 22, paragraph 1 of the TEU).

² Here again the story of the macro-regional Baltic Sea Strategy (EUSBSR) has been paradigmatic and has been constantly and obstinately encouraged and advocated by the action of the Euro-Baltic Intergroup created in 2004 by members of the European Parliament from the Baltic countries.

³ The consultation process promoted and coordinated by the Commission in the case of the Baltic macro-regional strategy is emblematic. There were three ways in which stakeholders of the area were involved, namely: the presentation of informal documents prepared by governments and other official bodies in the region; events and public events that brought together stakeholders and allowed authorities, NGOs and the private sector to bring their point of view and expertise; public consultation on the Europa website, which has registered a wide and widespread participation. See Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, COM (2009) 248 final, p. 11.

without contributing to greater effectiveness of the action”¹. Furthermore, the EC specified that good political coordination (hence NO to new Institutions), a more effective application of Community legislation (thus NO to new rules) and a better co-ordination of funding instruments (ie NO to new financing). This circumstance has corroborated the idea that macro-regions have a soft and functionally oriented nature², but has also attracted considerable criticism: the thorniest issue concerns the prohibition to foresee new financing, it has been pointed out, in fact, as a tool. Such cooperation projects, which have very ambitious objectives, should be supported with autonomous financial allocations within the EU budget and should be included in the multiannual financial framework³.

Although the rule of the three NO is a constant of the macro-regional strategies, both the Council and the European Council have tried to soften their rigidities by introducing the so-called rule of the three YES. Indeed, the Council reiterated that the strategy largely depends on a coordinated approach, on synergistic effects, on more effective use and on the alignment of EU instruments and funds from another source⁴. The European Council, on the other hand, has called for constant research into the complementarity of funding, the coordination of the institutions involved and their tools and the definition of new projects. It is clear that the three “bans” are much heavier than the three “concessions”, which do not add anything but a general encouragement to make the most of what the EU and the Member States make available for the success of a strategy. On the one hand, however, the situation remains the same for the future, in particular for the next multiannual financial framework; on the other hand, in the meantime, the dialectic between “prohibitions” and “concessions” could be aimed at finding a balance to be defined in the regulations relating to the territorial cohesion policy⁵.

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, COM (2009) 248 final, pp. 11.

² E. Medeiros (eds) *European territorial cooperation*, op. cit.

³ Conclusions of the General Affairs Council of 13 April 2011, worded in the conclusions of 15 November 2011, which, inter alia, invited the Commission and the Member States concerned to better match the existing financial resources in the macro-region with the objectives of the macro-regional strategies (in this case, the Baltic strategy was explicitly referred to).

⁴ European Parliament report of 27 June 2012 on the evolution of EU macro-regional strategies: current practices and future prospects, in particular in the Mediterranean, Committee on Regional Development, rapporteur: François Alfonsi (A7-0219/2012), p. 14.

⁵ Conclusions of the European Council of 23-24 June 2011, EUCO 23/1/11 REV 1.

5. A Macro-Regional Strategy: The Fundamental Elements

In fact, in the Communication and in the 2009 action plan, the EC specified what the fundamental and basic features should be around which to organize, develop and implement the Baltic strategy¹. The starting point is the definition of the challenges that the macro-region is facing. Closely related to the challenges, the opportunities presented by the macro-region must be selected, ie the potential to be exploited to respond in a concrete and effective way to the challenges and achieve the objectives set by the strategy. Both the challenges and the opportunities generally emerge from public consultations. After that, the other essential element is the answer we want to give to face the challenges and make the most of opportunities. In this regard, the action plan is presented, an operational tool for every action taken by the actors in the framework of the strategy. Bearing witness to the operational, necessarily pragmatic and flexible nature of this document, the plan is periodically assessed and possibly modified to adapt it to any new situations created in the macro-region and to the results achieved or missed by the strategy².

A fundamental element of a macro-regional strategy is obviously governance, that is, the organizational and procedural structure that it is given in order to function. Being a multilevel governance model, all the parties are required to make their contribution both in the planning phase and in the implementation phase. Except

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, COM (2009) 248 final, pp. 12.

² On the basis of the indications coming from the strategic communication and the action plan, the general objectives, the priority areas of intervention, the horizontal/transversal actions/policies and the overall governance of the strategy are defined in detail. The general objectives represent the c.d. pillars of the strategy (pillars), each of which is coordinated by at least two States and/or Regions which within their governance structures assign to an already existing body or to an ad hoc one the function of monitoring, facilitating and harmonizing the action of all the players in the strategy. The general objectives are linked to the general objectives (priority areas or policy areas), the implementation of which contributes to the implementation of the strategy as a whole. The priority sectors are the internal joints of the pillars to which flagship projects must refer. For example, in the existing strategies, for the pillar related to the links in the macro-region the two priority sectors are essentially about transport and energy, for the pillar on environmental protection the biodiversity, the reduction of pollutants, sustainability, while for the pillar on sustainable economic growth, the main areas are support for innovation, research, businesses and employment. Furthermore, some strategies also identify horizontal actions, ie transversal policies which, due to their importance, must always be taken into account in the implementation of the pillars, priority areas for intervention and flagship projects. Think of the value of spatial planning in a semi-enclosed, relatively small and very busy sea like the Baltic. Or, with reference to the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region, consideration should be given to the centrality of capacity-building and research and innovation to stimulate the growth of skilled jobs and competitiveness in an area where strong imbalances in the labor market persist.

for the variations that will be better explained in the next paragraph, all the strategies are based on multilevel governance distributed on three levels: (a) the political level, composed of the EC, the States and a High Level Group, which have the task of include the strategy in relevant policy initiatives, promote dialogue among stakeholders and contribute to the review and update of the action plan; (b) the level of coordination, which according to the strategies is made up of the coordinators of the priority areas of intervention and the coordinators of the horizontal actions (EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), by a Governing Board of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR), national coordinators in partnership with the European Commission and very light bodies set up ad hoc and hosted in Brussels by already existing government bodies) this is the case of the Danube Strategy Point developed by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) or by an Executive Board together with the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) national coordinators; (c) finally the operational level, characterized by the presence of Thematic Steering Groups EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR), leader of the flagship projects and the managing authorities for funding instruments and programs (EUSBSR), the Action Groups (EUSALP) or the sector coordinators priority intervention (EUSDR).

Multilevel governance of strategies may seem fairly straightforward, with a clear division of labor and skills, in reality the EC, at the precise request of the Council¹, intervened to clarify which points should be treated with more attention by the different actors involved in the strategies². First of all, the EC highlighted a dual need: on the one hand, the strengthening of political leadership and decision-making in the States and Regions involved, and on the other hand the increase in transparency in the organization of work³. He also highlighted the dimensions to be improved to refine the governance of the strategies and make sure that all the parties work in synergy to achieve the objectives. The first dimension concerns the political leadership and ownership, that is the identification of the subject (or subjects) guarantor of the strategic direction. From the point of view of political

¹ Conclusions of the Council of General Affairs of 22 October 2013, 11729/13.

² Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the governance of macro-regional strategies, COM (2014) 284 final, Brussels, 20.5.2014.

³ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the governance of macro-regional strategies, op. cit.

leadership, the EC has called for greater commitment by the States and the regions involved in the process. On the side of ownership, on the other hand, no more intervention by interested parties, starting with national parliaments, regional governments and civil society, can no longer be postponed. To improve the situation and remedy these shortcomings, the EC has indicated a series of measures to be taken as soon as possible, such as the establishment of a rotating presidency of the strategy, the appointment of a special representative, a greater presence competent sectoral ministries, better communication of results and activity, etc.

Another dimension to be improved in the governance of strategies is the link between political leadership and implementation. Given that so far has been substantially neglected, it must begin to be treated with professional criteria, both at national and macro-regional level. For this, an example, the EC report urged the contact points placed within the ministries to play a leading role in coordination and operational leadership, first of all starting to hold regular meetings. The third and last aspect to be completed concerns the implementation of the strategies. To this end, it is necessary to facilitate the development and implementation of initiatives and projects, to define indicators and objectives, to strengthen connections with the corresponding European funding programs (both structural funds and directly managed funds) and to improve their alignment with the objectives of strategies. Furthermore, synergies should be sought and established with the EU's external instruments, in particular the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) and the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI)¹. To have a successful implementation of the strategy it is important that sectoral ministers are fully responsible for the work done in the thematic areas, the thematic experts and steering groups guide the daily implementation of the strategy, third countries are truly integrated, existing institutions cooperate with loyalty and commitment and transnational cooperation programs are exploited effectively.

The common features of the macro-regional strategies are: (a) an inclusive process of consultation with stakeholders; (b) the development of new policy principles; (c) a flexible and result-oriented membership; (d) the clear definition of responsibilities and the division of labor between the parties²; (e) political

¹ For details see: **Invalid source specified.**

² It has not been possible to analyze all the programs since 2009 as some of them, which could have some interest from the point of view of the topic in question, are not available online. However, the programs analyzed refer to a group of Member States sufficiently representative to make the phenomenon's dimension understand. In this regard we see v. Program of the Lithuanian Presidency 20

experimentation (the annual forum of the members of the strategies, the annual report of the Commission on the basis of the coordinators' reports, etc.); (f) coordinated policy interventions at the territorial level, taking into account the fact that the success of a strategy is largely due to better coordination, efficient and effective use of available resources and a strategic use of EU funding (Mirwaldt, McMaster, & Bachtler, 2010, p. 9 ss).

6. The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

The EUSBSR was the first macro-regional strategy launched by the EU and, unlike all others that will follow it, is an "internal" strategy of the Union, as it is only part of EU Member States, namely Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden¹. The challenges were: creating a sustainable environment, improving the prosperity of the region, improving accessibility and attractiveness, and ultimately ensuring safety, while opportunities stemmed from a workforce with a high level of education, from high skills in the field of innovation and research, from a vast and relatively uncontaminated territory, rich in natural resources and a long and consolidated tradition of interregional cooperation and,

of the Council of the European Union (1st July-31st December 2013), For a Credible, Growing and Open Europe, p. 9; Program of the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Europe, a new beginning, 1 July-31 December 2014, p. 19; Program of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 January-30 June 2015, p. 7; Program of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 July-31 December 2016, p. 13.

¹ The public consultation process initiated and stimulated by the Commission took place between August 2008 and February 2009. During this time there were more than one hundred interventions in the form of position papers, opinions presented following two stakeholder conferences (Stockholm August 2008 and Rostock February 2009), four round tables in Kaunas, Gdansk, Copenhagen and Helsinki, a youth conference held in Hamburg and an online consultation forum opened in November and December 2008. Report of the European Parliament on a Northern Dimension Strategy focused on the Baltic Sea area (2006/2171 (INI)), Committee on Foreign Affairs, Rapporteur: Alexander Stubb, 10.18.2006 (A6-0367 / 2006), point 2. Regarding other aspects related to the first steps of the strategy and especially to its founding path. See for details: R. BENGTTSSON, An EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: Good intentions meet complex challenges, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), European Policy Analysis, 9/2009. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, COM (2009) 248 final. Point 59 of its conclusions stated: "Without prejudice to the integrated maritime policy, the European Council invites the Commission to present by June 2009 an EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region which should, inter alia, help to address the urgent environmental challenges associated with the Baltic Sea. The Northern Dimension framework provides the basis for the external aspects of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region (...)".

finally, from the advantage of being a totally “internal” strategy to the Union. An impelling challenge for the Baltic region is undoubtedly that of creating a sustainable environment, given the critical conditions of the sea, aggravated by its semi-closed nature: difficult and slow change of water, eutrophication due in particular to the introduction in the water of nutrients (nitrates and phosphates) coming mainly from agriculture, water pollution caused by the practice harmful to throw in the sea the ballast water of the ships, fishing at massive levels that has depleted fish stocks, etc. Based on the above challenges and opportunities, the EC has structured the strategy around four pillars: environmental sustainability; prosperity; accessibility and attractiveness; security and protection. There were fifteen priority areas of intervention identified “which represent the main areas where the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region can contribute to improvements”¹, each coordinated by one or more States, Regions or other entities participating in the EUSBSR. Furthermore, ten horizontal actions were indicated. In 2012, the strategy was changed² and the number of pillars reduced to three, namely sea protection, connections in the region and increased prosperity. Furthermore, for each objective, indicators and intermediate objectives have been envisaged, which were then implemented and concretely declined in the subsequent action plans³. In particular, the 2013 action plan marked a turning point, which, by gathering the indications from the previous year's review, consolidated the new three-pillar structure, for each of them identified sub-objectives, has determined new priority areas of intervention (which are increased to seventeen) and has halved the number of horizontal actions to five. If the 2013 action plan profoundly revised the Baltic macro-regional strategy, bearing in mind the lessons learned from the mistakes made previously, in 2015 the parties to EUSBSR adopted a new action plan which is currently in force⁴. The coordination of the horizontal actions is entrusted to an audience of very different subjects demonstrating the particular form of multilevel governance on which EUSBSR is founded, but in general a European macro-

¹ Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Action Plan, SEC(2009) 712, 10.6.2009, p. 3.

² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, COM(2012) 128 final del 23.3.2012.

³ For the list and explanation of the various indicators and intermediate objectives see COM(2012) 128 finale, pp. 7-12.

⁴ Commission Staff Working Document, European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Action Plan 2015, SWD(2015) 177 final, 10.9.2015.

regional strategy. Specifically, capacity building is coordinated by the network of NGOs active in the Baltic area, the Union of the Baltic Cities¹ and the Swedish Institute², the response to climate change by the Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat, cooperation with the countries and neighborhood regions from the Finnish city of Turku and the Council.

7. (Follows) The European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR).

The EUSDR, largely influenced by the experience of the Baltic Sea Region and was launched by the EC in December 2010 and accompanied by a specific action plan, both approved by the Council on 13 April 2011³. Previously other bodies and institutions of the Union intervened to solicit the intervention of EC⁴. The European Council of 18-19 June 2009 had invited her to submit an EU strategy for the Danube region by the end of 2010⁵, the Committee of the Regions had issued an opinion at the end of 2009 and the EP in January 2010 had urged the Commission “to launch, as soon as possible, extensive consultations with all countries wetted by the Danube, in order to cover the various aspects of regional

¹ The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is a global political forum for regional intergovernmental cooperation founded in 1992 by the Foreign Ministers of the States of the region as a response to geopolitical changes after the end of the Cold War. The CBSS identifies policy objectives, creates action plans, launches projects, acts as a forum for the exchange of ideas on issues of regional interest and is responsible for the overall coordination of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat and finally spatial planning and development. a common approach to cross-border cooperation from VASAB and HELCOM, two decades-long cooperation tools in these fields.

² R. Bengtsson, An EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: Good Intentions Meet Complex Challenges, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), European Policy Analysis, 9/2009.

³ The member States are fourteen, nine EU Member States namely Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, three accession candidate countries, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, and two Neighborhood countries, Ukraine and Moldova. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU Strategy for the Danube Region, Brussels, 8.12.2010, COM (2010) 715 final.

⁴ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, Bruxelles, 8.4.2013, COM(2013) 181 final.

⁵ Commission Staff Working Document Action Plan, Accompanying document to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, European Union Strategy for the Danube Region, Brussels 8.12.2010, SEC(2010) 1489.

cooperation and to present the EU Strategy for the Danube Region at the latest by the end of 2010”¹.

The EUSDR is characterized by a series of challenges relating to the issues of mobility, energy, the environment, risks of natural or man-made disasters, strong socio-economic disparities, security and transnational organized crime. The governance of EUSDR, while presenting some specificities, essentially follows the model of the macro-regional Baltic strategy and is therefore organized in three different levels: the level of coordination, made up of the national coordinators, the EC and the Danube Transnational Program (DSP); the political level, in which the States Parties to the Strategy are present at ministerial level and in which the EC also plays a role; the operational level, characterized by the coordinators of the eleven priority areas of intervention previously exposed, connected to the pillars and with a role also assigned to the SDR. Not disregarding what has been done and what has been achieved, the EC, however, specifies that the strategy aims to improve the results achieved and to increase the impact by aligning the existing funds and policies at European, national and regional levels, making the most of mistakes and of the lessons learned².

The latter relate to the areas concerned to the implementation of the strategy, to political support, to the financing of concrete actions, to the strengthening of existing initiatives, to the orientation of results and objectives, to the integration of policies and funds, to the integration of third countries and to communication. Finally, the EC lists a series of recommendations that the States and the parts of the EUSDR should follow, such as, to name the most significant, the creation of sustainable leadership and strategic planning for EUSDR, the constant monitoring of the implementation of all priority areas for action, ensuring greater results orientation taking into account both the objectives to be pursued and the quantitative indicators, both the roadmaps, the systematic integration of EUSDR into the EU national and regional programs for the period 2014-2020, both with

¹ Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region, 3083rd GENERAL AFFAIRS Council meeting, Brussels 13.4.2011, which the Council: “(...) endorses the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and takes note of the annexed Action Plan that was elaborated by the Commission on the basis of a consultation with the Member States, third countries and other stakeholders (...)” (par. 11).

² Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, Bruxelles, op. cit.

reference to the Structural and Investment Funds and directly managed funds; the increase in communication activities to reach an even wider audience¹.

7. (Follows) The European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

The third EU strategy, which builds on pre-existing cooperation frameworks such as the Adriatic-Ionian Euroregion², the Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian seas and the Adriatic Ionian Initiative (IAI)³, was the EUSAIR presented by the EC in June 2014 (together with the Action Plan)⁴ on input from the December 2012 European Council and born “following the tragedy of the former Yugoslavia”⁵. Subsequently, both the Council (29 September 2014)⁶ and the

¹ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, op. cit.

² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, Bruxelles, 30.11.2012, COM(2012) 713 final.

³ The IAI was established in Ancona on 19-20 May 2000 at the summit for development and security on the Adriatic and Ionian seas, attended by the Heads of State and Government of Italy, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece and Slovenia. At the end of the conference, the Foreign Ministers of the participating countries signed the Ancona Declaration, in the presence of the President of the European Commission on regional cooperation as an instrument to promote economic and political stability and the process of European integration. The six original members were joined by the Union of Serbia-Montenegro in 2002 and, following the demerger, in 2006, both Serbia and Montenegro maintained membership in the initiative, thus constituted by eight countries: Albania, Bosnia- Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia. The IAI operates mainly on four themes: small and medium-sized businesses; transport and maritime cooperation; tourism, culture and inter-university cooperation (eg: Uni Adriatic University Network, established on December 15th 2000 following the Ravenna Declaration); environment and fire protection. It should be noted that the Ionian Adriatic Council of the IIA with a declaration of 5 May 2010 had taken a pioneering position by formalizing its support for the EU strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian region and declaring itself available to “play an active role, engage public and private sectors”. and encourage stakeholders, especially regional authorities, companies, universities and civil society for the successful preparation of a future EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region”. IAI continues to play a significant role within EUSAIR.

⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, Bruxelles, 17.6.2014, COM(2014) 357 final.

⁵ European Council 13-14.12.2012 Conclusions, EUCO 205/12.

⁶ Commission Staff Working Document, Action Plan accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, Brussels, 17.6.2014, SWD(2014) 190 final.

European Council (24 October 2014)¹ approved the strategy, guaranteeing their commitment in carrying it forward as far as their responsibility is concerned. Before the official launch of EUSAIR, the Adriatic and Ionian Interregional Group of the Committee of the Regions also intervened with its own contribution during the consultation with the stakeholders (13 December 2013), the European Economic and Social Committee with an exploratory opinion on the document consultation (21 January 2014)² and the European Investment Bank (6-7 February 2014)³.

The reasons behind the establishment of EUSAIR have been many, starting from the geographical element (the sea as a unifying factor), from the geopolitical evolution (dissolution of the former Yugoslavia) and from the attempt to extend the standards of the European Union to third parties and candidates for accession⁴. On the Union action side, however, not unlike what has been done for other macro-regional strategies, the EC's proposals for the establishment of EUSAIR start from the identification of the common challenges and opportunities that the area presents. With regards to the challenges, these are largely connected to the strong socio-economic disparities that characterize the area and which create a heterogeneous and unbalanced environment among the countries concerned. There are also several sectoral domains to be taken into account to understand the usefulness of EUSAIR and the difficulties it finds and will face. Just think about

¹ Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), General Affairs Council meeting Brussels, 29 September 2014.

² European Council Conclusions (23 and 24 October 2014), EUCO 169/14.

³ The Committee provided a substantially positive assessment of the strategy and the manner in which it was being prepared, but it also did not spare critical opinions, which were also physiological and constructive in this preparatory phase. For example, he stressed that the consultation document made no mention of the strategic value of Mediterranean cooperation, noted the total absence of the private sector from the consultation document, stressed that the strategy should have shown a stronger social characterization, so to better support inclusive growth in the region concerned, regretted that the consultation paper did not deal adequately with issues concerning irregular and illegal migration flows.

⁴ The EIB has recalled the efforts it has made over the years that have enabled investment in strategic sectors of several billions of euros to be activated. Just to give an example: in the period 2010-2013, it granted loans to the countries involved in the strategy for an amount of more than EUR 45 billion. The loans were also used to support the Italian ports included in the TEN-T network in their modernization and expansion process, such as the port of Ravenna. Or, as regards Slovenia, it should be noted the investments made for the port of Koper and the construction of transmission networks for energy and gas which had a clear relevance for the Western Balkans. Or the first EUR 80 million loan for the Zagreb airport (Croatia), the investment support made by FIAT in Kragujevac (Serbia) for a total of about half a billion euros and a first tranche of EUR 350 million to the Greece for the relaunch of four stalled motorway concessions included in the TEN-T networks.

the lack of transport infrastructure and in particular the shortcomings affecting road and rail connections between and in the countries involved. Or to the congestion of the maritime traffic in two relatively small seas, one of which, the Adriatic, marked by its semi-enclosed sea nature. Other challenges are related to the low level of development of multimodal transport, to the weaknesses in the energy sector due to the inadequacy of the electricity grids and the consequent impossibility of developing an integrated energy market, including as regards renewable energy sources. On the environmental level, the situation is certainly not much more rosy given that there is a clear need to intervene to safeguard ecosystems, to move towards forms of sustainable tourism, to undertake a serious and integrated fight against marine pollution, to increase the sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture. Other problems are the treatment of wastewater and discharges of agricultural activities, the reduction of emissions that damage air quality, the fight against illegal hunting, the completion of protected areas such as NATURA 2000 and Emerald¹, networks, the strategies aimed at to face risks such as sea rise, floods, drought, soil erosion, forest fires. Particularly pernicious to achieve the objectives of the strategy are revealed the institutional and administrative limits that are substantiated in the presence of phenomena such as corruption, organized cross-border crime and migratory pressures that in certain situations have proved to be unmanageable.

The EC focuses on four aspects, namely the blue economy, connectivity, cultural and natural heritage and biodiversity, and finally tourism. These four potential strengths are the four pillars of EUSAIR around which the action plan is structured: on blue growth; on connections in the region; on environmental quality; on sustainable tourism. Each of the indicated pillars is entrusted to the coordination of two countries involved in the strategy. The blue growth pillar, entrusted to the coordination of Greece and Montenegro, aims to promote innovative marine and maritime growth in the region through the development of blue technologies, increasing the profitability and sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture, improving the governance and marine and maritime services. Italy and Serbia coordinate the pillar on links in the region whose objective is to improve connectivity in transport and energy within the region and with the rest of Europe by implementing cooperation in the fields of maritime transport, intermodal

¹ Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), General Affairs Council meeting, op. cit.

connections with the hinterland and the electricity and gas networks. The environmental quality pillar, coordinated by Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, aims to contribute to improving the environmental conditions of marine and coastal ecosystems by reducing marine pollution, reducing soil sealing, reducing pollution of the air and halting the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems. The pillar on sustainable tourism, managed by Croatia and Albania, aims to develop the region's potential for innovative, sustainable, responsible and quality tourism, in particular through the diversification of tourism products and services and the overcoming of the phenomenon of seasonality. As has been opportunely highlighted, however, the objectives of EUSAIR are consistent with the call for cooperation and coordination contained in art. 123 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and addressed to coastal States of closed or semi-enclosed seas (Tanaka, 2012, p. 248ss).

The governance of EUSAIR is of particular interest as it is aligned with the most recent reflections on the theme.¹ EC, looking at the experiences made, identifies three main needs: the strengthening of political leadership; an effective decision-making process; a good organization. The architecture of EUSAIR's governance is also divided into three levels. The political one does not present substantial differences compared to that indicated on the general plan. As regards the level of coordination, a Governing Board was co-chaired by the country that presides pro-tempore the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative and the EC. They are part of it: two national coordinators for each country; the coordinators of the four thematic pillars; the members of the Commission DGs concerned; a representative of the EP; a representative of the Committee of the Regions; a representative of the European Economic and Social Committee; the Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative; a representative of the Managing Authority of ADRION and the EUSAIR Facility Point. The Governing Board acts as a strategic guide to the direction and implementation of the strategy and its action plan. Again with regard to the level of coordination, the four Thematic Steering Groups should be noted, which are chaired for a period of three years, on a rotating basis, by countries that have the responsibility for coordinating the individual thematic pillars. Finally, the operational level focuses essentially on the ADRION program which supports the governance and implementation of the strategy.

¹ The reference is clearly in the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the governance of macro-regional strategies, Bruxelles, 20.5.2014, COM(2014) 284 final.

EUSAIR held its first annual forum in 2016 with the participation of relevant ministers from all Member States, regional and local authorities and many stakeholders involved in the implementation of the strategy. The forum, organized by the Government of Croatia and the EC, was held on 12-13 May 2016 in Dubrovnik with the adoption of a document in twenty-one points that did not hide the difficulties of the process under construction but also indicated a series of new tasks for the future. The device can be divided into four macro-topics: crisis of refugees and migrants; future commitments to react to current gaps; integration of the Western Balkan countries into the EU; role and involvement of stakeholders. Regarding the issue of refugees, the Declaration recalled the principle of solidarity that should move the Union, expressed its deep concern about the refugee and migrant crisis, invited the Governing Board of EUSAIR to outline concrete paths of action to the support that EUSAIR can provide to the countries parties to the strategy (especially to Italy and Greece) and finally encouraged all national and regional programs and forms of cooperation financed by the EU, as well as pre-accession assistance programs (IPA), to consider how they can be addressed in coping with these humanitarian crises, also through a possible rebalancing of the resources assigned to them. With regard to future commitments, they will have to deal quickly and effectively with the problems posed by some implementation vacuums, and therefore: (a) the representatives of the administrations of the countries parties to the Governing Board and the thematic Steering Groups will have an adequate power to make decisions; (b) financial, administrative and technical resources should be made available to the respective national or regional administrations to the pillar coordinators and members of the thematic steering groups to ensure that they can effectively fulfill their functions; (c) sub-state levels of government will need to be involved in the implementation of EUSAIR to reflect the multi-level governance approach. With reference to the integration process of the Western Balkan countries in the EU, the document recognizes that several processes, organizations and initiatives have the ultimate goal of accelerating the integration in the Union of the Balkan countries currently excluded and that are potential candidates or for accession candidates¹. In this framework the device underlines the importance of the so-called “Berlin Process”, ie the

¹ The reference is clearly in the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the governance of macro-regional strategies, op. cit.

Conference of Western Balkan States held for the first time in the German capital on 28 August 2014 which was attended by all the non-EU countries of EUSAIR, then Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, plus Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well as Slovenia, Croatia, Germany, Austria and representatives of the Union. The main purpose of this high-level dialogue is particularly ambitious and concerns the very future of the enlargement of the Union and the related processes of integration of the Balkan countries not yet members. In this regard, the process aims to take stock of the situation on the small progress of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, to provide an additional political framework for the development of cooperation in the field of economic investments and infrastructure in South-Eastern Europe and to evaluate the state of Serbia's relations with Russia in the light of international sanctions decided in 2014 following the crisis in Ukraine. Finally, with regard to the role and involvement of all actors in the strategy, the Dubrovnik Declaration calls on the governance structures of EUSAIR to take into account all the activities undertaken by the participating countries to identify projects of common interest that will improve regional cooperation in general and, in particular, regional interconnectivity, the link between young people, the advancement of economic development and the strengthening of participation of the civil society.

The second forum was held on 11-12 May 2017 in Ioannina (Greece), organized jointly by the EC and the Greek government with the support of the Strategy Facility Point. With the final declaration¹, the States Parties of EUSAIR stressed their willingness to maintain a strong political commitment and thus increase the sense of ownership of the ministers involved, while strengthening the empowerment of key strategy actuators, ie the national coordinators and the four pillars and members of the thematic steering groups. The document then reviewed each single pillar and instructed all the countries involved to enhance mutual cooperation to support sustainable economic growth and job creation in the marine and maritime sectors, to reduce the risk of accidents at sea, pollution deriving from the activities of ships and loss of life in the area, to improve the status of ports and intermodality and to increase transport interconnections, for example by completing the Trieste-Patras sea highway. Lastly, the passage in which the need to examine ways of including macro-regional strategies in EU policies in the post-2020 programming period is also significant.

¹ Ioannina Declaration, 11 May 2017, Adriatic and Ionian Council/EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting, 2nd Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

The third forum took place in Catania on 24-25 May 2018 and represented the final stage of the Italian presidency of EUSAIR and of the Adriatic-Ionian initiative which lasted from 1 June 2017 to 31 May 2018. In the preamble of the final declaration,¹ the role played by EUSAIR in the progressive strengthening of regional cooperation is recognized and it is noted that the system of multi-level governance of the strategy, actions and projects structured according to the four pillars “are having a positive impact on the process of EU integration of the Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries in the Adriatic and Ionian Region”². The declaration endorses the request made by the government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to become the ninth party of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, inviting the Council of the European Union and the Commission to take all necessary steps to include the country in EUSAIR. This move, moreover, is part of the initiative implemented by Skopije to speed up the process of joining the EU, together with the conclusion of the dispute with Greece concerning the name of the Macedonian State, officially renamed the Republic of Northern Macedonia.³ In essence, the EUSAIR's role in promoting the EU's enlargement policy to the Western Balkans, as already noted by the EP in January 2018,⁴ is even more important after the strategic document on the Western Balkans presented by the EC in February 2018⁵ and the Final Declaration adopted at the Western EU-Balkans summit held in Sofia (Bulgaria) in May 2018⁶. Finally, the declaration recalls the

¹ Catania Declaration, 24 May 2018, Adriatic and Ionian Council/EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting, 3rd Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

² Catania Declaration, 24 May 2018, Adriatic and Ionian Council/EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting, 3rd Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

³ Agreement signed on 17 June 2018 by the foreign ministers of the two countries.

⁴ Resolution of the European Parliament of 16 January 2018 on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies (2017/2040 (INI)), which, at paragraph 18, asserts that “this model of cooperation can be a great opportunity for the whole region; (...) EUSAIR could give a boost to enlargement and the process of integration (...)”.

⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A credible enlargement perspective and a greater EU commitment to the Western Balkans (COM (2018) 65 final), Strasbourg, 06/02/2018. The document clearly suggests that only Serbia and Montenegro could complete their accession to the EU by 2025, but on condition that they demonstrate a strong political will, realize real and structural reforms and reach definitive solutions for disputes with neighboring countries (p. 18).

⁶ Sofia Declaration, EU-Western Balkans Summit, 17 May 2018. The Sofia Priorities Program identifies six macro-areas to support in order to facilitate convergence in the Balkan region and to facilitate the accession path to the Union of the countries involved. These macro-areas are: support for the rule of law and good governance; the commitment to security and migration; support for socio-

need to provide for the establishment of a multi-annual financial framework 2021-2027 a territorial cooperation program with adequate and balanced financial resources that has the same geographical coverage as EUSAIR and is in line with it.

8. (Follows) The European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)

The EUSALP, officially launched by the EC in July 2015¹ with the related Action Plan² and was approved by the Council in the meeting of 27 November 2015, thus giving effect to the conclusions of the European Council of 19 and 20 December 2013.³ Supranational recognition comes later decades of effective cooperation between the actors involved and after several stages that have better defined the outlines, such as the Bad Ragaz Decision (29 June 2012), the resolution of the EP of May 2013 on the macro-regional strategy for the Alps,⁴ the political resolution towards a European Union strategy for the Alpine region (Grenoble, October 2013), the results of the public consultation (October 2014), the Milan Declaration of Representatives of the States and Regions (December 2014) and the 2014 opinions of the Committee of the Regions⁵ of the European Economic and Social

economic development processes, with particular attention to young people; the enhancement of connectivity; the digital agenda for the Western Balkans; support for reconciliation efforts and good neighborly relations in the region.

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning a European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region, Brussels, 28.7.2015, COM(2015) 366 final.

² Commission Staff Working Document, Action Plan accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region, Brussels, 28.7.2015, SWD(2015) 147 final.

³ Conclusions of the European Council of 19-20.12.2013, EUCO 217/13

⁴ European Parliament resolution of 23 May 2013 on a macro-regional strategy for the Alps, P7_TA (2013) 0229, in which, among other things, the positive role played by EU legislative instruments such as EGTCs in relation to macro-regions is underlined because provide structural support for the implementation of the more concrete aspects of cooperation and exchange of good practices, as well as for the development and implementation of territorial development strategies to facilitate the cooperation of authorities located at different levels (par. 3).

⁵ Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on an Alpine macro-regional strategy for the European Union, Rapporteur: Herwig Van Staa (AT/EPP), President of the Parliament of the Land of Tyrol, presented at the 109th plenary session of 3 and 4 December 2014.

Committee.¹ These intermediate stages of rapprochement were possible thanks to some already existing cooperation tools, such as the Alpine Convention and Alpine Space.²

EUSALP is structured around three pillars: (a) economic growth and innovation, which aims to achieve equal access to job opportunities and to make the macro-region highly competitive; (b) mobility and connectivity, that is to guarantee an internal and external accessibility to the sustainable macro-region and careful to combine the needs of moving people and goods with the environmental ones; (c) environment and energy, aimed at making available to the citizens of the area an inclusive environmental context and renewable and reliable energy solutions. The governance of EUSALP, therefore, is entrusted to various subjects and ad hoc bodies. The decision-making process and the general political direction is a prerogative of the General Assembly, composed of high-level representatives of the States and the regions involved, the European Commission and the Alpine Convention as an observer member. The Assembly, among other things, organizes the annual forum of the parties and makes decisions by consensus, while the internal Commission acts as a facilitator and coordinator and is co-chair of the body without voting rights. The parties to EUSALP intended to provide a central role in the coordination of the various levels of the strategy as, as explained in the action plan, “(...) the governance of a macro-regional strategy requires greater dialogue and substantial coordination across all decision-making levels, and sectors inside each state and region as well as between participating States and Regions”.³ This is why on the one hand the national co-ordinators have been foreseen, guaranteeing the leveling of the individual States parties, and on the other the coordinators of the general objectives of EUSALP, acting at macro-regional level and representing only the interest of the macro-region. In addition, an Executive Board was formed consisting of representatives of the States and Regions and the

¹ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on An EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (exploratory opinion), Rapporteur: Palmieri, Brussels, 10 December 2014, ECO/368.

² The second edition, Interreg IVB from 2007 to 2013, and the third, Interreg VB was launched in 2014 and is currently underway. As for the partners of the program, Italy, France and Germany participate with the regions of the Alpine arc, while Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland and Liechtenstein adhere in their entirety. Four priorities have been identified: i) to improve the opportunities and conditions for increasing innovation, ii) to promote the transition to a community and a low carbon area, iii) to protect and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the region, iv) increase and refine the application of multilevel and transnational governance in the Alpine area.

³ SWD(2015) 147 final, p. 49.

Alpine Convention and Alpine Space as observers and in charge of overseeing the implementation of the strategy action plan.¹ Finally, Action Group Leaders have been identified, experts in the sector who will be called to ensure the effective implementation of projects and actions in the various priority areas of intervention linked to the three pillars.²

9. The Question of (Multi-Level) Governance as a Fundamental Aspect for the Effective and Efficient Functioning of Macro-Regional Strategies

In December 2016 the EC outlined an initial assessment of the experience of this instrument of territorial cooperation.³ The most recent strategies show some difficulties, certainly due to the physiological start-up problems, so they still need time to be reliably evaluated. With reference to governance, it is clear that it is a central point for the proper functioning of regional strategies and for the relative achievement of their objectives. It is equally peaceful, moreover, that the paradigm that best fits the macro-regional strategies is that of multi-level governance. Since many actors are involved, it is very important to establish clearly how the work should be organized and how responsibility for the tasks to be implemented should be shared. The governance of the strategies, in reality, also highlights another fact, namely the existence of a multilevel governance system that both internally and externally identifies the strategies. In other words, under the first profile the intervention of the regional and local authorities is very important both in the “ascending phase”⁴ of defining the strategy and in the “descending phase”⁵ of

¹ Its decisions, if any, are passed to the scrutiny of the European Commission, which must ensure their compliance with EU legislation. Other important tasks of the Board are to be the body responsible for the overall horizontal and vertical coordination of the strategy and to prepare the meetings of the General Assembly.

² In addition to following the implementation process of the flagship projects, they will have to constantly take care of the transnational approach, in order to avoid fragmentation and ensure that the actions taken by the project participants are coherent and do not lose sight of the important objective of territorial cohesion.

³ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, Brussels, 16.12.2016, COM (2016) 805 final.

⁴ European Commission, White Paper on the Future of Europe, Reflections and Scenarios for the EU-27 towards 2025, COM (2017) 2025, 1 March 2017.

⁵ European Commission, White Paper on the Future of Europe, Reflections and Scenarios for the EU-27 towards 2025, op. cit.

concrete implementation of the same; on the other hand, under the second profile, the macro-region that is created could be a further layer of the already stratified EU structure. From this last point of view there are many doubts about the correctness of this approach, but it is not wise to think that if these instruments of territorial cooperation should continue to proliferate, to become structural in the Union's territorial cohesion policy and to better define their political autonomy (from the point of view of legal personality, for example), then they could really become further levels of government involved in defining the rules and policies of the Union. A fortiori in the fluid phase in which the EU stands out, among other things, by a reflection on its future that leaves open the possibility to a scenario focused on enhanced cooperation, ie on that "multi-speed Europe" that for many it is a hypothesis to be discarded (primarily for the EC), for others it is a means to save the European project by taking note of the current situation¹.

In recent years the EC has insisted a lot on the question of the governance of strategies, aware of the fact that a good part of their success depends precisely on it. For this reason, in 2014 he presented a report expressly dedicated to governance.² If the report on the governance of macro-regional strategies has already been said, it is interesting to examine what has recently been established by the European institutions on this important aspect. For this reason, first of all, he notes the EC report on the implementation of the strategies presented in December 2016 that returns to the topic, once again underlining the indispensability of effective and efficient governance for a correct implementation of the strategies.³ The document, in fact, underlines that the strategies bring a significant added value to the cohesion policy because they "offer a platform for multi-sector, multinational and multilevel governance, also open to third countries" and that for

¹ European Commission, White Paper on the Future of Europe, Reflections and Scenarios for the EU-27 towards 2025, op. cit.

² Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, op. cit. The report is accompanied by a working document prepared by the Commission which goes into every single strategy detail. See v. Commission Staff Working Document Documentation from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Committee on the implementation of the EU macro-regional strategies (SWD (2016) 443 final). The Commission has decided that from now on it will present an evaluation report for each of the four strategies every two years. The next is therefore scheduled for December 2018.

³ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the governance of macro-regional strategies, Brussels, 20.5.2014, COM (2014) 284 final.

good governance it is first and foremost indispensable to optimize the use of existing sources of funding (structural funds and funds managed by the EC), improve the implementation of existing legislation and make better use of existing institutions. In essence, the EC reiterates and re-launches the so-called “rule of the three no”, mentioned above.¹ Furthermore, the report highlights the question of ownership of strategies and the role of the chairman of the macro-regional strategies, but also highlights the persistence of common challenges to all four macro-regional strategies, ie the presence or absence of efficient coordination and cooperation structures, the granting of powers to the main executives, the effective availability of adequate human and financial resources, the representation and commitment of all participating countries, the existence of the necessary skills and the continuity and stability of the management groups. Finally, the document outlines the prospects for the future and in this regard recognizes that, although some results have been achieved, much remains to be done in particular in the field of results orientation, funding, relations with third countries, part of the strategies and note of the effectiveness of governance systems. Under this last profile further efforts are needed to make progress through: -the regular evaluation by each strategy of the effectiveness of its governance system, in line with the 2014 Commission report on governance; (b) a greater commitment by the relevant ministries *ratione materiae* in pursuing the objectives of the macro-regional strategies also through a periodic rotation of the coordinators of the thematic areas; (c) close cooperation between the members of the steering groups and the program management authorities supported by the Structural and Investment Funds and European investment or other instruments; (d) strengthening, wherever possible and practicable, links between the various macro-regional strategies for exploiting synergies and mutual learning with the support of INTERACT.²

The Ministers of the EU Member States reaffirmed the fact that all four strategies are facing individual challenges and problems and that the governance of the strategies could be further strengthened to improve their effectiveness and therefore invite the partner countries and their Regions to engage in multiple directions to: (a) maintain a strong common political commitment with a high sense of ownership for the implementation of strategies; (b) increase coordination and

¹ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the governance of macro-regional strategies, Brussels, 20.5.2014, COM (2014) 284 final.

² Council conclusions on the implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies, 25 April 2017.

cooperation in order to improve the commitment to the effective implementation of the strategies; (c) building the necessary administrative capacity to ensure that political engagement is translated into effective and concrete implementation; (d) enhance key actuators such as national co-ordinators, priority area coordinators or Steering Groups members and increase ownership of relevant ministries; (e) mobilize regions, cities, agencies, institutions, universities, companies and civil society by encouraging them to cooperate, create networks and participate actively in the implementation and development of macro-regional strategies.

10. Future EU Macro-Regional Strategies: A Further Development of the EU Macro-Regionalization Or Setback?

Given the moderate success of the macro-regional strategies and the contribution they give (and even more could give) to the achievement of the EU objectives, the EC intends to continue on this path and launch other strategies. At present it is not easy to identify with certainty what strategies could be set up in the future, even if the document presented in 2015 by the EP's Directorate General for Internal Policies represents a useful and authoritative orientation.¹ It illustrates the macro-regional strategies examined by the EU for their possible future creation and concern the regions of the Carpathians, the North Sea, the Black Sea, the Atlantic Arc and the western and eastern quadrants of the Mediterranean Sea. As regards the EU strategy for the Carpathian region, the countries involved should be Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia (EU Member States) and Ukraine (third country of the Eastern neighborhood).² Cooperation between these countries is not a year of zero, as there are already multilateral instruments to foster cooperation in certain sectors, namely the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (the Carpathian Convention)³ and the

¹ AA.VV., *New role of macro-regions in European Territorial Cooperation*, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Regional Development, January 2015, pp. 73ss.

² B. Tescasiu, *Toward A Macro-Regional Strategy For The Carpathians*, Series V: Economic Sciences, Vol. 8 (57) No. 1, 2015. A.-C. Popoviciu (Editor), *Cross-Border Cooperation: Models Of Good Practice In Carpathian Region*, Bucarest, 2014. Z. Gál, S. Rácz, *Introduction-The Carpathians: A European Macroregion*, In Z. Gál, S. Rácz (Eds), *Socio-Economic Analysis Of The Carpathian Area*, Discussion Papers 2008-Special Issue, Pp. 9-20.

³ Signed in May 2003 and entered into force in January 2006, it is currently the only multilevel governance mechanism covering the entire Carpathian area and, together with the Alpine Convention,

Euroregion of Carpazi.¹ In addition, there are other transnational structures to support the constituent strategy: the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighborhood Instrument, the Carpathian Region Business Network, the Karpacki Horizont 2020² Association and other structured and well-established bilateral or multilateral cross-border cooperation schemes.³ As regards the EU strategy for the Black Sea region⁴ its elaboration is made problematic, above all due to conflicts and geopolitical instabilities in some countries that should be part of it.⁵

However, cooperation in the area is rather long-standing and at European level it was sanctioned by the Black Sea Synergy launched by the Commission in 2007⁶, which included, among other things, the main areas of cooperation, namely

is the only sub-regional treaty in the world to protect and the sustainable development of a mountain area. Its organs are the Conference of the Parties, where all the member countries are represented at ministerial level (mostly environmental ministers), the subsidiary bodies set up by the Implementation Committee of the Convention and the Work Groups organized on a thematic basis, a Secretariat and the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas initiative (CNPA). Its general objectives are the improvement of the quality of life, the strengthening of local economies and communities and the preservation of natural values and cultural heritage (Article 2, paragraph 1) and could prefigure the three pillars of the future strategy.

¹ It is an international cross-border association founded on 14 February 1993 by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Ukraine and Hungary, to which Romania and Slovakia were subsequently added and formed by representatives of regional and local administrations. The Euroregion considers the macro-regional strategy as the most ambitious of its outcomes which, in order to be concrete, requires first of all effective lobbying and joint representation at European level and then of adequate support and funding.

² G. Abels; A. Eppler & M. Anegret (Hrsg) *Die Eu-Reflexionsgruppe "Horizonte 2020-2030". Herausforderungen Und Reformoptionen Für Das Mehrebenensystem*, ed. Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2010.

³ The Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Program, the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Program, the Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova Program, the Hungary-Romania Program, the Poland-Slovakia Program and the Hungary-Slovakia Program.

⁴ F. Garcés De Los Fayos, *The EU's Black Sea policy: Where do we stand?*, Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union- Policy Department, European Union, 2013. K. Henderson, C. Weaver (edited by), *The Black Sea Region and EU policy. The challenge of divergent Agendas*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2010. A. Pop, D. Manoleli, *Towards a european strategy in the black sea area: The territorial cooperation*, in *Strategy and Policy Studies (SPOS)*, No. 2007, pp. 5ss. Z. Ritter, *EU engagement in the Black Sea Region: Challenges and opportunities for the EU*, Working Paper, Berlin, 2006.

⁵ Think of the c.d. "Frozen conflicts" concerning Transnistria and the Republic of Moldova, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Georgia, Nagorno Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan, until the recent Ukrainian case with the referendum on the self-determination of Crimea which joined the Russian Federation and the special status transitory of the eastern Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk and Lugansk.

⁶ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, *Black Sea Synergy-A new regional cooperation initiative*, COM (2007) 160 final, 11.04.2007.

democracy, respect for human rights and good governance, management of the movement of people and goods and improvement of security, "frozen" conflicts, energy, transport, environment, maritime policy, fisheries, trade, networks in the fields of research and education, science and technology, employment and social affairs and finally regional development¹ which, highlighting the inadequacy of the Synergy, invited "the EC and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to elaborate a strategy for the Black Sea region" in order to "strengthen the coherence and visibility of the EU action in the region" (Liakopoulos, 2016).

The EU strategy for the North Sea region, however, unlike the previous one, is a strategy almost entirely within the Union, as it involves eight countries of which six Member States, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, and two third countries, Norway and the United Kingdom (looking at the end of the withdrawal procedure scheduled probably in the spring of 2019). The two main priority areas of the possible strategy should be maritime cooperation and energy networks, while other key areas indicated by the North Sea Region 2020 strategy paper are maritime spatial management, increased accessibility and clean transport, adaptation and mitigation of climate change, improvement of attractiveness and sustainability of communities, promotion of innovation, regional excellence and sustainability as a whole. The transnational support structures are mainly the North Sea Commission founded in 1989 and the Interreg cooperation program.

Another important step was the opinion adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee in May 2012 called EU Strategy for the Atlantic Region², while the following year the EC invited the EP and Council to approve the strategy action plan maritime area in the Atlantic area.³ The countries parties should be Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Portugal, while stronger forms of cooperation

¹ European Parliament resolution of 20 January 2011 on a European Union Black Sea Strategy (2010/2087 (INI)), P7_TA (2011) 0025. cooperation, namely security and good governance, energy, transport and the environment, and finally economy, social and human development. To conclude, the financial instruments to support the strategy are the same, for example, of the Danube strategy: the EU's structural and direct funds, Horizon 2020, the Pre-accession Assistance Instrument (IPA) and the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI).

² ECO/306-CESE 1298/2012, Brussels, 24.5.2012.

³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning Action Plan for a Maritime Strategy in the Atlantic area. Delivering smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Brussels, 13.5.2013, COM(2013) 279 final.

should be established with Iceland, Norway, Greenland and Faeroe Islands. The profiles to be exploited obviously refer to the maritime dimension around which the strategy is set, while the shared economic, technological and cultural heritage includes activities such as fishing, shipbuilding, the metallurgical industry, engineering, research and science, ports, trade and maritime transport.

The EU strategy for western and eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea builds on the request made in May 2012 to the European Economic and Social Committee by the Vice-Minister for European Affairs of Cyprus, on behalf of the incoming Presidency of his EU Council country, to draw up an exploratory opinion called “Developing a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean-the benefits for island Member States”. The request was promptly accepted by the EESC which adopted this act in December of the same year.¹ Despite initial enthusiasm, however, the strategy is struggling to take off, mainly due to political instability and armed conflicts affecting the area. Just think of all the events developed by the so-called “Arab Springs” on (2011), the war in Syria that has been fighting for seven years and the many and varied countries that should participate in the strategy, focusing on the development and implementation of policies that can help the Mediterranean countries to strengthen their economic and social relations, the development of the economy, the productive realities and enterprises to make the region more competitive on the international scene and, finally, the implementation of a mechanism aimed at sustainable regional development. Lastly, as regards the prospects of the new macro-regional strategies, it is important to report the EP opinion expressed with the aforementioned resolution of 16 January 2018.² To the question “A macro-regional Europe after 2020?” contained in the document-at first glance would have led to a positive response-the EP has responded in an elusive manner, focusing primarily on a better implementation and strengthening of the already existing macro-regional strategies.³

¹ ECO/332 A macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean, Brussels, 12.12.2012 “OPINION of the European Economic and Social Committee on Developing a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean-the benefits for island Member States (exploratory opinion for the Cyprus Presidency)”.

² European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2018 on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies (2017/2040 (INI)).

³ European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2018 on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies (2017/2040 (INI)) which states in paragraph 37 that ‘the call for new strategies, such as the Carpathians, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean or the Iberian regions should not divert attention from the primary objective of deepening the implementation of existing RMS

11. Concluding Remarks

Macro-regional strategies are an important tool in achieving the strategic objectives of the European Union, as well as an indispensable part of the Union's multi-level governance.¹ The establishment of four strategies in just six years (EUSBSR the first in 2009, EUSALP the latest in 2015) testifies to the favor enjoyed by these instruments of territorial cooperation in the European Union, first and foremost in the EC. In recent times, however, we are witnessing a sort of fogging of the process, due to a multiplicity of motivations among which the most important seem to be, at least in the opinion of the writer: (a) the implementation problems of existing strategies, which, as illustrated above, they are convincing the European Institutions to “freeze” the launch of new strategies to aim at consolidating those already in operation; (b) the difficulties that the European Union as a whole is experiencing and which prevent it from giving impetus to other policies and the reference is obviously to epochal challenges which are undermining its foundations, such as the mismanagement of migratory flows and the relative disagreements between Member States, tensions concerning the definition of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, the complexity of the negotiations on the Brexit, the rising tide of populist and euro-skeptic parties and movements, the increased centrality of intergovernmental institutions, starting from the European Council, without considering the crises that seem quite dormant but which could re-emerge at any moment, such as the euro and that of security (terrorism); (c) complications that have in the meantime arisen in some quadrants potentially integrated into EU macro-regional strategies, such as the southern neighborhood (Maghreb and the Middle East) and the eastern neighborhood (Ukraine and the Black Sea basin in general), in which they are deflagrated crisis and in some cases real wars that have made it impossible to cooperate between states in view of the establishment of a macro-regional strategy. To all this add that in 2019 there will be elections for the renewal of the European Parliament.

Since the result of the vote is decisive for the election of the president of the EC²[131](#) (and therefore for the composition of the Commission itself, given the powers of its

¹ Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on the implementation of macro-regional strategies adopted at the Plenary Session of 30 November-1 December 2017.

² As established by art. 17, par. 7 TEU: “Having regard to the elections to the European Parliament and after having carried out the appropriate consultations, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission. This

president in the appointment of the commissioners), it will be interesting to see what kind of commission will leave this meeting and assess its impact on current and future macro-regional strategies, given that the EC plays a major role in the establishment and operation of strategies, both from a political and a technical point of view. An EC deeply influenced by the expansion of populist and Eurosceptic parties and movements, could it also have repercussions on these particular instruments of territorial cooperation? And what kind? Plausibly, the scenarios could be two. The first one, characterized by a substantial indifference of the Commission that would lead to manage the existing strategies without giving an impulse to their further development. Basically, it would continue to provide technical support through its more relevant Directorates-General but without giving political input. The second scenario, on the contrary, could push the Commission to act, but for two diametrically opposed reasons. The first reason-which we could label as progressive-would see the improvement of the implementation of existing strategies and the creation of new ones to (a) favor and encourage the convergence between unbalanced territories from the socio-economic, infrastructural and technological point of view, (b) support the Union's enlargement policy and (c) contribute to the achievement of the general objectives of the European Union. The second reason-this time regressive-depends on the desire to break down in macro-territories a European Union already less united, cohesive and supportive and crossed by tendencies to fragmentation, the return to the nation-states and the intergovernmental method and the attempt to "Renationalise" policies. In this sense, to proliferate macro-regional strategies, "balancing" the European Union in many macro-regions, perhaps endowing them with legal personality so as to make them weigh, for example, in the allocation of structural funds, in the formation of the norms and policies of Union (upward phase) and in the implementation of the obligations deriving from the European legal system (descending phase), could further undermine the pro-European project and decree the collapse of the "European common house". (Bache, 2012, pp. 638ss).

candidate is elected by the European Parliament by a majority of its component members. If the candidate does not obtain a majority, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, proposes within one month a new candidate, who is elected by the European Parliament according to the same procedure (...)"

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