Europe’s Macro-Regions
Integration through territorial co-operation

FORUM AT THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, BRUSSELS
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Conference Brochure
Foreword

Experimentation and cooperation is an everyday practice at the local and regional level in order to go further in the European integration project and to improve the living conditions of our citizens. With this spirit, the Committee of the Regions is pro-actively contributing to the open laboratory of the new EU macro-regional strategies.

The goals are those established by the Treaty: the development through a better economic, social and territorial cohesion. To achieve those goals, the macro-regional strategies are among the most interesting innovative instruments. They are focusing on the territory, trying to integrate sector-specific policies, offering the possibility of multi-level governance. They also can benefit from strategic proposals and the implementation of projects under the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

Success depends on us. It depends on the positive outcome of the pilot experience of the Baltic Sea Region strategy and the one expected on the Danube strategy. It depends on how the EU institutions together will deal with the expectations regarding the other proposals which are emerging in different EU regions. For the macro-regional strategies, the Committee of the Regions, as a political assembly, intends to be the carrier of the initiative, as a guardian of equal access and promoter of multi-level governance.

Mercedes Bresso
President of the Committee of the Regions

The European Union must make better use of territorial co-operation as a tool to foster cross-border and transnational integration. We should put in place an overall EU strategy to provide a framework for territorial cooperation activities of all kinds, including macro-regions. Approaches and objectives will vary from region to region, depending on the specific needs for strengthened cross-border cooperation.

The common principle should be to add value to existing activities. An integrated approach with coordination of actions across policy areas will usually achieve better results than individual initiatives, and where groups of countries and regions choose to come together to achieve common goals, this will also strengthen EU cohesion.

Johannes Hahn
Commissioner for Regional Policy
Debates about ‘territorial cohesion’, a term now endorsed by the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, and ‘multi-level governance’ have evolved in recent years. Most influential have been the adoption of a ‘Territorial Agenda’ by the Member States in 2007, the publication of a ‘Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion’ by the European Commission in 2008, and the adoption of the ‘White paper on Multilevel Governance’ by the Committee of the Regions in 2009. These documents have stressed the need for better coordination and enhanced cooperation across borders, policy areas and different levels of government. The EU strategies for macro-regions, still under experimentation, may represent one of the new instruments to achieve better EU cooperation and, thus, contribute to EU territorial cohesion.

With the development of the European Union’s Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, a new concept came into being in the European Union. The term “macro-regions” has been used in an international context to describe globally significant groups of nations or groupings of administrative regions within a country. But with the pilot EU Strategy of the Baltic Sea Region, the European Commission now describes a macro-region as “an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges”.

Macro-regions are imagined communities which have no independent political status or no institutions and which do not overshadow other regional or national identities. Although a macro-region can be identified by common features or challenges, its frontiers are not necessarily precisely defined. Physical boundaries may vary according to the type of problem being tackled at a macro-regional level. These regions might overlap, so a functioning region can be part of one or more macro-regions.

The creation of an EU macro-regional strategy stems from this definition. The Baltic Sea Strategy, launched in June 2009 by the European Commission and endorsed by the European Council in October 2009, is now regarded as a model for other potential strategies.

“Regional and local authorities in the European Union must be taken into account, since they represent 16% of the EU’s GDP, one third of public expenditure, two thirds of total public investment and 56% of public employment. Governance of the European Union should play a more active and leading role in local and regional entities at all stages of the policy cycle, from defining the requirements to drafting, applying, supervising and evaluating the measures.”

Manuel Chaves
Third Vice-President of the Spanish Government and Minister of Territorial Policy
“It is clear that this cooperation offers us many possibilities. It provides a valuable contribution to the EU’s Territorial Agenda, to the territorial cohesion of the Union, and to a more effective implementation of the EU’s Regional Policy.”

Danuta Hübner
Chairwoman of the European Parliament’s Committee on Regional Development

4 macro-regional approaches. For a second region, along the Danube, the European Council asked the European Commission in June 2009 to present an EU strategy before the end of 2010.

This development has inspired discussions in other regions too, such as the North-Sea-English Channel region, the Alpine region, the Adriatic and Ionian, and the Atlantic Arc. In addition, similar questions and approaches have been discussed with the Union for the Mediterranean.

According to present thinking about macro-regions, strategy implementation would not involve extra financial resources compared to what is already available in a region from various sources. Moreover, it would not involve setting up new institutions or extending the powers of existing administrative bodies. At the same time, it is important to establish responsibility and accountability at EU level and there are calls that the European Commission should play a facilitating role in EU macro-regional strategies.

Further reading

Committee of the Regions: www.cor.europa.eu

The role of local and regional authorities within the new Baltic Sea strategy, own-initiative opinion, CdR 381/2009; Rapporteur: Uno Aldegren
An EU strategy for the Danube area, Opinion, CdR 149/2009; Rapporteur: Wolfgang Reinhart
Website on EGTCs: www.cor.europa.eu/egtc
White Paper on Multilevel Governance (June 2009)
EU macro-regional strategies and European governance; seminar (26 November 2009)

European Parliament

European Union strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the role of macro-regions in the future cohesion policy
Draft report by the European Parliament’s Committee on Regional Development, (March 2010), REGI/01786: Rapporteur: Wojciech Michał Olejniczak

European Commission

Regional Policy DG: www.europa.eu/regional_policy
Macro-regional strategies in the EU – A discussion paper by the European Commission (2009)
Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion: Turning territorial diversity into strength, COM(2008) 616
Website on the Baltic Sea Region:
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic
Website on the Danube Region:
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/
DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries:
http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/index_en.html

European Council

Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 18/19 June 2009
Regional approaches to management of water and the marine environment, including implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region - Council conclusions, 17797/09, 22 December 2009
Activities of the Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions (CoR), the EU’s assembly of local and regional representatives, takes a special interest in the development of EU strategies for macro-regions. During the new political mandate 2010-2015, the CoR Commission for Territorial Cohesion (COTER) will analyse in depth and develop the horizontal political orientation on the overall macro-regional approach.

Furthermore, CoR members have demonstrated their political commitment by forming intergroups around emerging macro-regions in order to discuss issues of common interest and to feed their views into the policy-making process of the EU.

As its input into the Baltic Sea Region Strategy, the CoR assessed the role of local and regional authorities and is now in the process of formulating an opinion on the strategy itself, including recommendations for future development. The CoR also played an important role in pushing forward with a strategy for the Danube area, and it has already proposed concrete fields of action for the Danube Strategy, underlining the key role of regions and cities in its planning and implementation.

The CoR’s White Paper on Multilevel Governance, adopted in June 2009, argues that macro-regions must be supported by a form of multilevel governance. According to the CoR, this innovative approach to cross-border cooperation requires a high level of coherence in its design and integration within the European process. The lessons learnt from macro-regional strategies will be essential in the context of European governance, the development of territorial cooperation and the objective of territorial cohesion.

Cross-border cooperation is a fundamental element for the success of the EU strategies for macro-regions. The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is one of the most valuable tools to integrate the territories beyond national boundaries. Implemented by the Regulation (EC)1082/2006, the EGTC enables regional and local authorities from different Member States to set up cooperation groupings with a legal personality. An EGTC may organise and manage cross-border, transnational or interregional cooperation measures with or without a financial contribution from the EU. So far, ten EGTCs have been set up and more than 25 are under preparation:

- the Amphictyony EGTC (Greece, Cyprus, Italy and France)
- the Duero-Douro EGTC (Portugal and Spain)
- the Eurodistrict Straßbourg-Ortenau EGTC (France and Germany)
- the Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditéranée EGTC (Spain and France)
- the Galícia-Norte Portugual EGTC (Portugal and Spain)
- the Ister-Granum EGTC (Hungary and the Slovak Republic)
- the Karst-Bodva EGTC (Hungary and the Slovak Republic)
- the Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai EGTC (France and Belgium)
- the West-Vlaanderen/Flandre-Dunkerque-Côte d’Opale EGTC (Belgium and France)
- the Zasnet EGTC (Portugal and Spain).

The Committee of the Regions seeks to facilitate cooperation and networking among existing and emerging EGTCs through such means as a web-based platform, elaborates studies and contributes to the dissemination of information and the exchange of experiences. An own-initiative opinion on EGTC is currently under preparation.

“Macro-regional strategies raise stimulating questions. Would they provide us with strategic platforms to develop more efficient transport networks in between neighbouring countries and, at the same time, preserve fragile ecosystems across borders? Can we make better use of community funds which are allocated to a pre-defined area without falling into the trap of centralisation? Do we have to seek to cover the entire territory of Europe? Do we need to avoid overlaps of areas? How many strategies will consequently have to be adopted in this planning period? And what are the conditions of access? Do we have common understanding of the dynamics of territorial development of the Union? Answers are necessary for all these different questions that are very closely linked to the effectiveness of the strategy and the search for fair treatment of all territories.”

Mercedes Bresso
President of the Committee of the Regions
The Baltic Sea Region

In recent years, there has been increased interest in the concept of the Baltic Sea Region as a geographical entity with its own identity. This is generally taken to mean the eight EU Member States (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Germany) surrounding the Baltic together with Norway, Belarus and the north-western parts of the Russian Federation. These countries have always been trading partners. Between the 13th and 17th centuries, the area formed one of the strongest economic networks in Europe. But despite this common cultural and historical legacy, the region is characterised by significant demographic, economic and geographic disparities.

The growing importance of the Baltic Sea regional approach reflects the belief that the different states in the area are being confronted with a number of common challenges and developments, which can best be dealt with through new forms of regional cooperation. The most important common challenge lies in how to manage the Baltic Sea’s marine environment.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was launched by the European Commission in June 2009 and subsequently adopted by the European Council in October 2009. The European Commission consulted the different stakeholders involved while preparing the strategy. These stakeholders have now been given an ongoing opportunity to participate in the further development of the strategy, for example in the framework of an annual forum.

The strategy focuses on issues that cannot be solved by national or local means alone. The establishment of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region marked the first time that the EU had developed such a comprehensive strategy for a macro-region. Although the strategy itself does not have its own funding, between 2007 and 2013 projects will receive funds under the regional policy and other EU funding.

The strategy is centred on four main pillars and 80 flagship projects grouped into 15 priority areas, and has the following objectives:

**THE BALTRIC SEA REGION: FACTS AND FIGURES**

- **Total population:** 100 million
- **Sea surface area:** 377,000 km²
- **Drainage basin area:** 1.3 million km²
- **Coastline:** about 8,000 km
- **Average depth of sea:** 58 metres
- **Annual cargo traffic:** 822 million tons
- **Annual oil traffic:** 171 million tons
- **Largest city:** Saint Petersburg

Source: DG REGIO, Wikipedia
Creating a sustainable environment
Some ideas in the strategy build on actions already taken in the region to reduce the negative impact on the environment from different sources, for example by removing phosphates from detergents and by encouraging best practices that minimise fertiliser run-off. A total of €9.8 billion has been earmarked for this purpose, including €3.1 billion to process waste water.

Increasing prosperity
Actions include boosting trade and improving the quality of education services by encouraging people to move freely throughout the region in order to pursue knowledge or to teach. Available funding for this objective amounts to €6.7 billion, including €2.4 billion for stimulating innovation.

Making the region accessible and attractive
The strategy sets out ways in which to complete traffic and energy interconnections between the Baltic states and the wider region, and supports, for example, major improvements to the rail network. A total of €27.1 billion has been made available, of which €500 million will be invested in the region’s gas and electrical infrastructure, and €23.1 billion in transport networks.

Safety and security
The action plan suggests ways to coordinate the fight against organised crime by integrating existing organisations and stimulating cooperation, for example in the field of maritime law enforcement through an integrated network of surveillance systems for all maritime activities. To this end, €697 million has been earmarked.

The Committee of the Regions supported the creation of the Baltic Sea Strategy at EU level from the very start. In its opinion of April 2009, prepared by CoR member Uno Aldegren, it emphasised that the Baltic region is particularly well suited for being a pilot for the introduction of a macro-regional strategy, and that the strategy can serve as a model for other potential macro-regions. The opinion stresses the need to involve local and regional authorities at all stages of decision making. The CoR sees the trend towards macro-regions as a logical consequence of EU enlargement and a development that merits encouragement. It stresses that even though the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is essentially an internal affair amongst eight Member States, it is a development that can open the door to stepping up cooperation with non-EU countries, in this case the Russian Federation, Norway and Belarus. Since the need for cooperation in the areas of environmental issues, transport, logistics and national security issues transcends the EU’s external borders, the CoR therefore believes that significant consideration should be given to this external dimension when implementing the strategy.

The external dimension also features as an important element in the CoR’s draft report on the Baltic Sea Strategy. Prepared by CoR member Pauliina Haijanen and due to be adopted in April 2010, the report concludes that regions and local communities can have an important role to play in implementing this external dimension, because they are already involved in a large number of partnerships with their counterparts in non-EU countries. Generally, it is indispensable to give a prominent role to regional and local players, because these represent the levels closest to the citizens, and because these players have sound, first-hand knowledge of the conditions and needs in the Baltic Sea Region. This approach would improve the visibility of the strategy, which is a key requirement for its success. So far, however, responsibility for the implementation of priority areas and flagship projects has been allocated primarily to Member States and not to the regions. The Committee of the Regions recommends that regions and local authorities should be given the opportunity to play a more active part in the future.

For me the Baltic Sea is a unique macro-region in Europe for economic, environmental and emotional reasons. The economic dimension is clear: for most of the Member States around the Baltic Sea, this macro-region is the most important export market for goods produced in these countries and its regions. Therefore, a well functioning transport system on land and on sea as well as excellent communication facilities are vital. We have many common expectations for the future such as the rapid development of new energies on and off shore. The environmental situation is also a key: we need functioning ecosystems to preserve biodiversity as well as the basis for our fishing industry and the well being of our people. A “Clean Baltic Sea Area” could be a best practice example for all of Europe. And, like me, many love to live in the Baltic Sea area. The Baltic Sea links the different bordering regions. A continuous exchange of ideas, innovations and traditions has supported mutual understanding over the centuries. I want to go further along this line with my colleagues from the Committee of the Regions in the years to come.”

Uno Aldegren
Member of the Executive Committee of the Skåne Region, Sweden, Chairman of the CoR Intergroup “Baltic Sea Regions”
The Danube is one of the European continent’s most important arteries, touching Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Croatia, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine. This makes the Danube area not only an important part of Europe economically and culturally, but also environmentally. It is the longest river in the European Union.

Since Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, the Danube has become an internal EU waterway. As one of the “Trans-European corridors” it represents a priority axis for inland waterway traffic across the Union. The “Rhine-Danube” corridor provides a direct link between the North Sea and the Black Sea. Improving navigability for cargo, in a more environmentally-friendly manner, is an important challenge.

The Danube Basin is also rich in biodiversity. Its wetlands host many breeds of wild birds and the islands provide rich habitats for many species. For instance, the Danube Delta is home to 70% of the world’s population of white pelicans. However, the waters of the Danube are no longer quite as blue as the waltz suggests and pollution is a real threat to this wildlife. Efforts to establish new water treatment plants, with the support of cohesion policy, will contribute to the improvement of water quality.

The potential for economic development in the area is strong since the river provides a variety of resources for business in the form of transport and logistics as well as for tourism and culture. Trips down the Danube are proving popular.

“With the start of the public consultation on the Danube area on 2 February 2010, the European Commission declared its wish to move “from words to action” on its way to a Danube strategy. In my opinion, this is a remarkable step for the whole region and at the same time an important challenge for all of us to build the strategy together and to strengthen its visibility at European level. Indeed, this work will mainly be done not by declarations, but by concrete projects and by exchange between people from different nations, regions and local authorities. Our objective must be to bring about a common awareness for this unique region that motivates people to engage actively in the Danube area.”

Peter Straub
President of the Baden-Württemberg State Assembly and Chairman of the CoR Intergroup “Danube”
with tourists and operators who are seeking to boost the region's profile. Tourist operators are considering developing a specific “Danube label”, which will increase the visibility and attractiveness of the region.

In June 2009, the European Council formally requested the European Commission to prepare an EU Strategy for the Danube Region by the end of 2010. The European Commission started a public consultation with relevant stakeholders, including regions, municipalities, international organisations, economic partners and civil society. Initially, the Commission envisaged three pillars for the strategy:

• to improve connectivity and communication systems (covering in particular transport, energy issues and the information society);
• to preserve the environment and to protect against natural risks;
• and to reinforce the potential for socio-economic development

In the past few years the CoR has repeatedly highlighted the particular importance of the Danube area in Europe and has called for the development of an EU Danube strategy. At the initiative of the president of the regional assembly of Baden- Württemberg and former CoR president Peter Straub, an interregional group on the Danube area was set up at the end of 2008. This group brings together regional and local representatives from regions along the Danube in Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as guest members from Croatia and Serbia. Its goal is to boost the visibility of the Danube area in Brussels and to represent the interests of the regions involved at European level.

In October 2009, the Committee of the Regions presented a report on an EU strategy for the Danube area, proposing concrete fields of action and underlining the central role of regions and cities in its planning and implementation. The report was prepared by Wolfgang Reinhart, European affairs minister of the State of Baden-Württemberg and adopted at the CoR plenary session in October 2009.

The blue band of the Danube has always connected people, cities and regions across borders. In addition, the Danube area brings together EU Member States, candidates for accession and neighbouring countries. Building on their practical experiences within the framework of existing cooperation and networks, the CoR is proposing concrete fields of action for the Danube strategy. The scope of the suggested measures ranges from the development of transport infrastructure and cross-border cooperation in flood protection to joint concepts for sustainable tourism and culture.

Seeing the Danube area as a single major unit is also a prerequisite for its sustainable economic development. The CoR has pointed out that in the current 2007-2013 structural funds programming period the Danube area is split into two overlapping development areas, and has therefore called on the EU institutions to treat it as one single unit in the next period.
Since its foundation in February 2009, the CoR-Intergroup “North Sea-English Channel” concentrated its work on strengthening the cooperation of the regions in the North Sea-Channel area. The North Sea-English Channel part of the conference, which was organised in close co-operation with the North Sea Commission (NSC) of the CPMR, will provide the opportunity to discuss the initiative with politicians from the regions, representatives from the European institutions and stakeholders. Moreover, the conference will allow the exchange of experience with the “advanced” strategies for the Baltic Sea and the Danube region.

“Since its foundation in February 2009, the CoR-Intergroup “North Sea-English Channel” concentrated its work on strengthening the co-operation of the regions in the North Sea-Channel area. Its main focus is the development of a “North Sea-Channel Strategy” which is embedded in the broader discussion of macro-regional concepts on EU-level and intends to create a new level of cooperation between the supranational Community, the Member States and the regions around the North Sea and the Channel.

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Hermann Kuhn
Member of the regional assembly of Bremen and Chairman of the CoR Intergroup “North Sea-English Channel”
Interest in increased cooperation at macro-regional level has been fuelled by the growing concern over these problems and a recognition of the need to come up with effective responses to these challenges. The North Sea states share a common interest and identical objectives with regard to the region’s socio-economic and ecological development. The prospect of closer cooperation on the control and conservation of fisheries, sustainable energy production, pollution reduction, coastal management and maritime research seems both necessary and beneficial for all the players involved. The CoR Intergroup on the North Sea–English Channel, as a first step in the push for an integrated EU strategy, has suggested the following key objectives for a regional strategy:

- Protection of the North Sea/Channel area as an ecological system;
- Adaptation to climate change;
- Use of the economic potentials of the area;
- Development of maritime resources, e.g. maritime research;
- Transport and energy interconnections.

For the states in the North Sea-English Channel area, the macro-regional approach is an opportunity to focus their common aims and interests, to coordinate them with their regional neighbours and to make the common concerns public at European level. According to the CoR Intergroup, the North Sea-Channel area still cannot rely on cooperation structures such as those that have grown up in the Baltic Sea Region over several decades. Neither the characteristic cooperation between the old and the new EU Member States nor the institutionalised cooperation with Russia can be transferred to the North Sea-Channel area. Compared to the Baltic Sea Region with Russia as its partner, cooperation with Norway is of importance to the North Sea-Channel area but natural circumstances, history as well as economic and social structures are different. Any North Sea-Channel Strategy will therefore clearly differ from the Baltic Sea Region Strategy by following its own priorities. Furthermore, it is necessary to examine whether the “macro-regional concept” is the right approach for the North Sea-Channel area or if other concepts or instruments should be preferred.
On 13 April 2010, the Committee of the Regions will welcome more than 300 regional representatives, experts and other stakeholders from existing and emerging ‘macro-regions’ to discuss issues related to strategy development and other themes of common interest. Organised in the context of the existing EU strategies for macro-regions and those under debate, the following questions will be addressed:

- What lessons can be drawn from existing and emerging macro-regional strategies?
- What is the role of local and regional authorities in the development and implementation of macro-regional strategies?
- To which extent can macro-regions be comprehensive in their approach, covering several policy areas?
- Should macro-regions become a means to deliver significant EU funding?
- What can macro-regions deliver in terms of economic and environmental benefits?

More information and the proceedings of the event can be found at: www.cor.europa.eu/macroregions