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The governance of macro-regions in Europe

Governance Committee
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Summary

Macro-regional cooperation can bring many benefits to public authorities, improving public services and the quality of life of their citizens. For such cooperation to succeed, the aims must be realistic and carefully defined. The Congress is well-placed to support and accompany macro-regions, by stimulating greater cooperation in the framework of existing projects and tackling common obstacles, and proposes to include this activity in its cooperation with the intergovernmental sector.

¹ L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD: European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
NR: Members not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress
NPA: No political affiliation



The governance of macro-regions in Europe

RESOLUTION 349 (2012)²

1. A macro-region is a grouping of sub-national entities (local and regional authorities) – a territory covering a number of different countries or regions, which share one or more common features or challenges – which come together to co-operate on common issues.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has consistently sought to promote and develop transfrontier and inter-territorial co-operation of this nature, aware that the benefits for local and regional authorities, which are many, are all the more important in times of economic downturn. Mindful of the need to prioritise sectoral co-operation in areas where practical co-operation is easily identifiable, such as transport, environment management, health, waste disposal, public utilities or energy, the Congress also recognises the need to be practical, to have clear and realistic targets and to avoid over-ambitious programmes.

3. The entry into force of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (Madrid Convention, ETS No. 106) and of its Additional Protocol (ETS No. 159) and its Protocol No. 2 (ETS No. 169) was a milestone in developing such co-operation. Many macro-regions have now been established, some of them with the help of the Congress, and several more are in the planning.

4. The Congress has a role to support and accompany them, to debate the issues and analyse the problems with a view to identifying practical solutions. Existing co-operation projects need to be evaluated to avoid the recurrence of common errors. If the momentum is to be maintained, the entry into force of Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs) (CETS No. 206), which addresses many of the issues raised by the implementation of the Madrid Convention, should be a priority for the local and regional democracy agenda of the Council of Europe.

5. The Congress is convinced that it can and should increase its efforts in this respect, using its forum to bring potential collaborators together, working more with its partners such as the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the Committee of the Regions of the European Union (EU), as well as with specialised institutes and agencies, in the fields of training personnel, awareness raising and providing expertise.

6. The Congress therefore refers to:

a. the Madrid Convention and its protocols;

b. Recommendation Rec(2005)2 of the Committee of Ministers on good practices in and reducing obstacles to transfrontier and interterritorial co-operation between territorial communities or authorities;

c. the Chaves report, presented at the 17th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government in November 2011, promoting multilevel co-operation to overcome obstacles in matters of cross-border co-operation.

² Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 17 October 2012 and adopted by the Congress on 18 October 2012; 3rd sitting, rapporteur E. Mohr (Austria, L, EPP/CD).

7. The Congress calls on local and regional authorities in Council of Europe member States to:

- a.* make macro-regional co-operation a transversal issue wherever it can provide an added value;
- b.* encourage the inclusion of elected local and regional stakeholders and civil society in the development and management of any macro-regional project at the political level;
- c.* make goal-oriented projects close to the citizens a priority of macro-regional co-operation, in order to facilitate a life in Europe where borders are no barriers for life, work and travel.

8. It calls on national associations of local and regional authorities to:

- a.* lobby their governments, if they have not yet done so, to sign and ratify the Madrid Convention and its protocols;
- b.* encourage and support the formation and development of macro-regions around themes that are beneficial for democracy.

9. It resolves to:

- a.* keep inter-regional and transfrontier co-operation, including macro-regional, as priority activities and include them in its co-operation with the intergovernmental sector;
- b.* collect best practice with regard to macro-regional co-operation;
- c.* use its experience and know-how to support macro-regional groupings which are already operational through regular debates and seminars to enable exchange of experience and analysis of the challenges and obstacles that they encounter;
- d.* co-operate with its partners (AER, AEBR, CEMR and the EU Committee of the Regions) in seeking to overcome obstacles to macro-regional co-operation;
- e.* co-operate with specialised institutes and agencies in training personnel, awareness raising and providing expertise for new projects.

10. The Congress asks its Governance Committee to periodically review the progress of European inter-regional, transfrontier and macro-regional projects with a view to identifying strategies for achieving concrete and sustainable results.

The governance of macro-regions in Europe

RECOMMENDATION 331 (2012)³

1. A macro-region is a grouping of sub-national entities (local and regional authorities) – a territory covering a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges – which come together to co-operate on common issues. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe believes that such co-operation can provide added value in terms of social and territorial cohesion and democratic stability.

2. The potential benefits are many. Economies of scale make it easier for public authorities to carry out their tasks effectively, improve public services and thereby improve the quality of the lives of citizens. Macro-regions can raise the level of social and economic development, creating more opportunities for citizens in terms of employment and culture, improving creativity and productivity, as well as improving neighbourly relations and understanding between peoples. They can also be very useful in tackling common challenges, such as the protection of the environment.

3. Recognition of the benefits of regions co-operating together and the resulting removal of barriers has long been a core element of the European project. A key provision of both the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy is the right of territorial authorities to associate and to co-operate with other such authorities in other countries in matters within their competences and within the framework of the law.

4. The European Union (EU) is an increasingly important player in such co-operation. The progressive enlargement of the EU and the European Neighbourhood Policy have increased the number of Council of Europe member States which may benefit from EU structural funds, while at the same time highlighting the need to improve territorial cohesion between EU and non-EU member States within the wider European area.

5. Experience shows that many obstacles need to be overcome before the political intentions and commitment to improve macro-regional co-operation can be translated into concrete results. Projects need to be realistic in scope, result-oriented and practical, respecting the realities on the ground. By focusing on sector-specific co-operation, with moderate goals, co-operation can more easily proceed and avoid stalemates resulting from tensions between governments at national level.

6. Many obstacles to such co-operation are of a legal nature and stem from issues that are addressed in the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (Madrid Convention, ETS No. 106) and its Protocol No. 3 concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs) (CETS No. 206). The entry into force of this protocol in the near future should therefore be a priority for the local and regional democracy agenda of the Council of Europe.

7. The Congress therefore reaffirms the importance of the Madrid Convention and its protocols, and refers also to:

a. Article 10 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government on local authorities' right to associate;

³ Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 17 October 2012 and adopted by the Congress on 18 October 2012; 3rd sitting, rapporteur E. Mohr (Austria, L, EPP/CD).

b. the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy;

c. Recommendation Rec(2005)2 of the Committee of Ministers on good practices in and reducing obstacles to transfrontier and interterritorial co-operation between territorial communities or authorities.

8. The Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite those member States which have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Madrid Convention and its protocols and transpose them into their national legislation.

9. It also recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite member States to:

a. promote the conclusion of multilateral agreements and arrangements, as foreseen in Article 1 of the Madrid Convention, and provide financial instruments conducive to the setting up of macro-regional co-operation projects;

b. support the development of macro-regions as platforms facilitating inter-regional and transfrontier co-operation;

c. provide part-funding for macro-regional co-operation projects in order to stimulate these projects.

10. The Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to:

a. include, in its intergovernmental programme of activities, consideration of how obstacles to inter-regional, transfrontier and macro-regional co-operation can be overcome and how such co-operation can contribute to achieving its goal to promote democracy, with an emphasis on its local and regional aspects;

b. support exchanges between experts and exchange of advice among macro-regional representatives and experts, through seminars, co-ordination meetings and by establishing contact groups in order to learn from best practices, working in partnership to achieve greater impact and to use the existing resources of the Council of Europe more effectively.

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EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM⁴

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I. Defining macro-regional cooperation

1. Before mapping out the existing macro-regions, an attempt at defining macro-regional cooperation should be undertaken. In general, macro-regions can be understood as large European subspaces. However the term is also used at the global level by the European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Gulf States and occasionally within large states as in the case of the Russian economic macro-regions, or groupings of administrative regions, as in the case of Australia. Along these lines, the EU defines a macro-region as “an area covering a number of administrative regions but with sufficient issues in common to justify a single strategic approach”. However, a comprehensive definition of macro-regional cooperation will also have to encompass the following elements:

- Geographical consistency/belonging. The cooperation of administrations from several countries on different levels, often including the state level, which distinguishes them from cross-border cooperation which can also take place on a sub-national level only;
- Common issues and a common approach. Common characteristics which define it as a sub form of general transnational cooperation, a more neutral term also encompassing cooperation not based on common characteristics (e.g. a sea or a river) but only on common issues;
- Covering more than one policy.

2. Macroregions can also generate a new territorial dynamism by establishing a framework for cooperation on common issues, which are often related to the shared characteristics of the region.

⁴ Prepared with the contribution of Mrs Katrin Böttger, Deputy Director, Institut für Europäische Politik, Berlin, Germany. Adopted by the Governance Committee on 31 May 2012.

3. On the other hand, a definition of macro-regions cannot limit it in size, although the larger a macro-region is, the more important will be the need to focus on common characteristics and to cooperate only in a few policy areas, in order to avoid overstretching.

4. Not all cross-border forms of cooperation that fulfil the elements given above use the term macro-region in their name. For example, territories that the Council of Europe refers to as 'Euroregions' can, due to their size and complexity, be subsumed under the heading of macro-regions. The EU, on the other hand, refers to older cooperation of this kind as a 'Working Community' (e.g. Working Community of the Alps, Working Community of the Danube Regions, Alps-Adriatic Working Community, Working Community of the Pyrenees).

5. Transfrontier cooperation between local and regional authorities is an important part of the Council of Europe's (CoE) work to promote democratic stability and good neighbourliness between states and bodies. Macro-regions and macro-regional cooperation are characterised by their diversity and structural complexity. However, it is also true that sometimes this type of cooperation is politically contested. What makes it worthwhile nonetheless is that it provides the administration and, most importantly, the citizens with an added value in truly cross-border issues. They can also function as laboratories for territorial development and cohesion for all Council of Europe member states.

6. The Congress encourages the creation of macroregions as an important part of its work to enhance democratic stability and social and territorial cohesion. The EU is also one of its most active financial supporters through its structural and regional funds.

II. Stock-taking: existing macro-regions

a. Council of Europe Euroregions

7. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (hereafter "the Congress") has dealt intensively with questions related to the development and integration of half-closed sea areas such as the Adriatic and the Black Sea, by founding the Adriatic Euroregion and the Black Sea Euroregion.

i. Adriatic Euroregion

8. The decision to set up an Adriatic Euroregion, which is both a macro-region and a sea basin, was taken by representatives of international organisations, state, regional and local authorities at an international conference held on 9 November 2004 in Termoli (Italy). Representatives underlined the relevance of the resources of the area covering the Adriatic coast and the Ionic Sea, and declared that cooperation in this area could lead to integrating and enlarging the EU in Southeast Europe. The Adriatic Euroregion was then officially founded in Pula, Croatia in 2006. It now encompasses 26 local and regional administrations from Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and Greece on the one hand, and national governments and European institutions on the other hand. It brings together different political and economic areas that can work together closely (despite some regional distances) due to the initiative and support of the Congress. Its geographic dimension makes it an important factor for European integration. Its goals are the protection of marine resources, intercultural dialogue and the protection of migrants. In order to achieve its goals, the Adriatic Euroregion has formed six commissions for:

- tourism and culture;
- fisheries;
- transport and infrastructure;
- environment;
- economic affairs;
- welfare.

9. So far, the Adriatic Euroregion has concluded one project funded by the EU called 'Adri.Eur.O.P.', which offered operational support to the political process for the establishment of the Adriatic Euroregion.

ii. Black Sea Euroregion

10. The Black Sea Euroregion (BSER), of which the Congress is an honorary member, is based on the following legal instruments: The Final Declaration of the Conference on “Inter-regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area” held in Constanta (Romania) on 30 March 2006, Recommendation 199 (2006) of the Congress on “Inter-regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Basin”, adopted on 1 June 2006, the Final Declaration of the Conference on “A Black Sea Euroregion” held in Samsun (Turkey) on 3 November 2006, the Final Declaration of the Conference on “Inter-regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Basin”, held in Odessa (Ukraine) on 25 and 26 June 2007 and the Final Declaration of the Conference on “Launch of the Black Sea Euroregion” held in Varna (Bulgaria) on 26 September 2008, where it was founded with regard to the Madrid Convention and the European Union Regulation 1082/2006 of 5 July 2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

11. The BSER is a forum for cooperation among local and regional authorities of the Black Sea area and includes 14 local authorities from five countries (Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, and Romania), interested in opening the Black Sea region for inter-regional cooperation in order to maintain “stability, security and prosperity in the Black Sea area countries”. It is intended, in the future, to include additional members from Albania, Azerbaijan, Greece, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

12. The goals of the BSER are to develop cooperation among its members, to represent and support their common interests and to cooperate with the existing Black Sea international organisations in order to establish relations between inhabitants in cross-border initiatives, to protect common interests and define a common development strategy, to disseminate information on experiences and know-how to all members, elaborate and implement joint programmes and development strategies, develop social and economic activities while protecting the environment and considering the need to improve territorial cohesion among members, identify needs for intervention with joint projects and funding sources, and to support public/private partnership initiatives and the civil society.

13. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU means that an EU external border runs through this region as it does through the Adriatic Euroregion, offering new obstacles but also new opportunities for cooperation, for example through funding by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI).

14. When looking at the BSER-website, it appears, however, that cooperation has faltered; the site has not been updated with the required General Assembly decisions since 2009.

b. EU Macro-regions

15. The two most prominent macro-regions under EU-initiative (Baltic Sea, Danube) were formed around common characteristics and already existing cooperation which needed a more coherent approach.

i. EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

16. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was established in 2009 in order to coordinate action by its members (Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) to promote a more balanced development of the region. They have identified six common challenges:

- Maritime (shortcomings in safety and security);
- Environmental (sea pollution, dwindling fish stocks, risk of oil spills, climate change);
- Economic (uneven development, due partly to a failure to exploit the opportunities offered by access to the EU single market and a lack of enterprise culture);
- Energy (insufficient energy transmission and supply networks, which are not adequately connected);
- Transport (gaps in transport connections);
- Safety and security.

17. The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region wants to make this part of Europe more:
- environmentally sustainable (by for example reducing pollution in the sea);
 - prosperous (by promoting SME innovation);
 - accessible and attractive (through better transport links);
 - safe and secure (by improving accident response).
18. The most recent progress report by the EU Commission recommends:
- the setting of precise quantitative and qualitative targets to monitor the strategy;
 - that the strategy's orientation be enhanced and made more concrete in regard to its main aims;
 - a greater effort to align the Structural Funds and other sources of financing to the strategy's objectives.
19. The report also states that the strategy's "set-up is still vulnerable to organisational changes, or changes in political priorities". It recommends maintaining political momentum on the strategy, which "should be included on the agenda of relevant Councils of Ministers on a periodic basis, and be a natural focal point for European and national parliamentary debates."

ii. EU Strategy for the Danube Region

20. Concerning the Danube, coordination already existed in previous forms of cooperation, such as the Working Community of the Danube Regions or the Danube Cooperation Process, before the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) was started in 2011. Its aim is to improve cooperation in the Danube Basin. From the source to the water mouth, i.e. from the Black Forest to the Black Sea, it encompasses 14 countries, of which eight are EU member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Romania). The other six are either (potential) candidate countries (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia) or cooperate with the EU in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (Republic of Moldova and Ukraine). In some parts, the Danube forms the border between cooperating countries, while in other parts it flows within countries and passes capitals such as Vienna and Budapest. The macro-region aims at re-setting the framework for the innumerable forms of cooperation already in existence under the European Territorial Cooperation objective.

21. It aims at improving the quality of the Danube's waters, setting up sustainable energy supply cooperation between cities and regions which were at the outset the main driving forces for the Danube strategy, and local and regional support to the economy to establish direct contacts between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

22. Priority areas of cooperation are quite numerous which could make it difficult for the actors to focus on the most pressing needs. However, coordinating countries have been assigned to each of these priority areas – indicating a pragmatic division of competences which could allow progress in cooperation despite a wide variety of priorities, namely to:

- improve mobility and intermodality;
- encourage more sustainable energy;
- promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts;
- restore and maintain the quality of waters;
- manage environmental risks;
- preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils;
- develop the knowledge society (research, education and ICT);
- support the competitiveness of enterprises;
- invest in people and skills;
- step up institutional capacity and cooperation;
- work together to tackle security and organised crime.

c. Macro-regions in the planning

24. It can be expected that the near future will see the establishment of several more macro- or sea-basin regions, since the third protocol of the Madrid Convention allows for Euroregional Cooperation Groupings and as the EU-Commission proposes that "transnational cooperation can also support the

development and implementation of macro-regional strategies and sea-basin programs (including the ones established on the external borders of the EU).”

25. Examples of these are the Adriatic Ionian Macro-region, the Alpine Macro-region, the Atlantic Arc Macro-region, the North Sea Strategy, the Adriatic Strategy and the Mediterranean Sea Macro-region, many of which have started out as top-down (initiated by governments) instead of bottom-up (initiated by civil society or local and regional representatives on a needs basis) initiatives.

i. Adriatic Ionian Macro-region

26. The common Declaration for the creation of the Adriatic Ionian Macro-region was signed in the city of Ancona on 5 May 2010. It will gather together the eight countries bordering the Adriatic and the Ionian seas, three EU member states – Italy, Slovenia and Greece – and five countries that are preparing to join the EU – Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania. A new political declaration has resulted from the 2011 meeting of the Ionian Adriatic Initiative, held in Brussels on 23 May 2011, in which ministers from the eight countries asked for “formal acknowledgement of the strategy at the highest level” and confirmed their willingness to work with the EU Commission on this.

27. Its aim is to connect two shores which were separated during the Cold War period and can once again become a shared space for growth and development and no longer a border as they were from WWII to the fall of the Berlin Wall. In addition, it is seen to be part of the larger Mediterranean strategy. Although the specific projects that the macro-region will focus on are yet to be identified, it is planned for the region to be officially inaugurated in 2014, when Italy will have the rotating presidency of the European Union.

ii. Alpine Macro-region

28. The promoters of an Alpine Macro-region understand it as encouraging territorial cooperation and better policy coordination in line with multilevel governance principles. The strategy should favour a closer dialogue between local and regional authorities, better governance and coordination between the Alpine Convention and the "Alpine Space" Program, between Alpine networks and transnational cooperation projects, between Euroregions and Working Communities. They understand the Alps as a crossroads for European economic and cultural influences. Members of an Alpine Macro-region would be the South Tyrol (Italy), Franche-Comté (France), Lombardia (Italy), Trentino (Italy), Tyrol (Austria) and Western Slovenia (Slovenia). In addition, in September 2011, the “Arge Alp” (Working Group of Alpine Countries) advocated a resolution calling for a macro-region for the Alps. It stressed the fact that the macro-region as a functional space would not have any fixed borders and would need to “take account of relations and interactions with the metropolitan areas that surround it”. A working group of the Alpine Convention is planning to submit initial proposals in Autumn 2012, for what an Alpine macro-region might be and how such a joint venture might work in the Alpine states. It will aim at giving the Alpine Convention a new impetus. Participants of the “Arge Alp” Working Group criticised the fact that Brussels still does not have an Alpine policy and is procrastinating about ratifying all the protocols of the Alpine Convention. They voiced the hope that a macro-region for the Alps would force the EU to address the region's particularities.

iii. Atlantic Arc Macro-region/ EU Strategy for the Atlantic (EUSA)

29. An Atlantic Arc Macro-region was advocated by the Spanish presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2010, a suggestion picked up by the Atlantic Arc Commission. The Atlantic Arc Commission of the Council of Peripheral Maritime Regions is a network, set up in 1989, that currently brings together 27 regions located along the EU's Atlantic coast.

30. The Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities (CAAC) identifies the Atlantic Arc as being in a peripheral situation within an enlarged Europe, which must be countered through the application of the concept of territorial cohesion whilst developing accessibility and inter-communication, enhancing its role as a maritime gateway in a globalised world. The Conference considers that the importance of the debate on macro-regions should not be minimised or isolated from a maritime strategy, which should represent a step towards a more ambitious project for the whole Atlantic Arc. It also underlines the fact that the countries of the Atlantic Arc (especially Spain, Portugal and Ireland) have felt the effects of the current recession to a great degree, their local authorities facing a reduced capacity for reaction.

31. The CAAC states that, through the benchmarking of good local practices, the projects that integrate a macro-regional strategy can advance from a state of “study and analysis” to one of “implementation of initiatives”. However, macro-regions must not be confined to the efficient use of resources. They must base their legitimacy on consensus, a long-term approach, the definition of specific projects and cooperative work based on the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. by selecting priorities through dialogue and active queries. Therefore, the CAAC’s proposal for an Atlantic Arc Strategy is a multi-level governance model based on the potential of this area, so as to allow the transition towards a green economy, whilst relying on Atlantic assets.

32. The indicative timetable includes an invitation from the EU Commission to Atlantic member state governments (France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom) to identify a suite of strategic and large-scale co-funded flagship projects by April 2012. Such projects must provide added value in terms of job creation, economic development and stewardship of shared ocean resources.

iv. North Sea Strategy

33. In June 2009, the North Sea Commission (NSC) decided to prepare a Strategy for the North Sea Area. In September 2009, a steering group was established consisting of representatives from the NSC, the Committee of the Regions (Intergroup for North Sea/English Channel), the North Sea Regional Advisory Council and the Interreg North Sea Programme. The consultation process started with a Stakeholder Conference in Newcastle in March 2010.

34. The Intergroup for North Sea/English Channel noted that the North Sea-Channel area comprises the marine area of the North Sea and the passages to the Baltic Sea (Skagerrak and Kattegat), to the Atlantic (English Channel) and to the Norwegian Sea, as well as the coastal regions that surround it, to the extent that they are directly or indirectly connected with the sea, influence it or are influenced by it.

35. Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom and their local and regional authorities as well as Norway and Iceland are politically linked with the North Sea-Channel Macro-region.

36. The NSC strategy for the North Sea Region (NSR) aims at providing a potential pilot for a kind of macro-regional strategy that differs from the EU strategies for the Baltic and Danube. It is supposed to focus on issue areas where public sector intervention and collaborative action at the macro-regional scale would add value.

37. The strategy focuses on those areas of market failure where public sector intervention at the macro-regional scale would bring about accelerated advancement and improvement which otherwise would not be possible or would happen at a significantly slower pace, for example in the creation of a North Sea Energy Grid. An action plan should include actions/projects which demonstrate direct and visible benefits for the people in the region, or have an impact on the macro-region (or a significant part of it).

38. The shared priorities for action in the North Sea Channel lie predominantly in the areas of marine policy, environment, energy, transport, science and industry and the impact of these on social cohesion.

39. The themes identified for the North Sea Strategy are:

- managing maritime space;
- increasing accessibility and attractiveness;
- tackling climate change;
- promoting innovation and excellence;
- sustaining liveable communities.

v. Mediterranean Sea Macro-region

40. Concerning a possible Mediterranean Sea Macro-region, so far only some sub-macro-regions exist or have reached planning status (Adriatic Euroregion, Adriatic/Ionian Macro-region). Additional sub-macro-regions present a possible future development. Alternatively, a macro-regional strategy could be incorporated into the existing Union for the Mediterranean. An advantage would be that a

common secretariat already exists. In light of the recent events in the southern Mediterranean (“Arab Spring”) and in Syria and with the on-going conflict between Israel and Palestine, the political climate is currently not advantageous for such a project. A feasible approach could instead be for some Mediterranean countries to join forces for flagship initiatives that could in the medium to long-term lead to the setting up of a macro-region. The Euro-Mediterranean Assembly of Local and Regional Authorities (ARLEM) should be considered as an actor here. Due to the size of a possible Mediterranean Macro-region, actors would need to be especially sensitive to common characteristics in order to avoid overstretching.

41. Possible priorities mentioned by the Intermediterranean Commission advocating a Mediterranean Macro-region are:

- sustainability, environment and climate change;
- accessibility, transport and energy;
- innovation, research and competitiveness;
- employment and education;
- security and immigration;
- tourism and culture.

42. It is common to all newly envisaged macro-regions that they aim at strengthening an already existing form of cooperation rather than forming a new one. The challenge that they face is to identify the added-value of transforming their existing forms of cooperation into a structure that is formally identified as a macro-region. This appears to still be an on-going process for most of them.

III. Goals of macro-regional cooperation

43. In general, macro-regional cooperation is most useful and effective as an initial, early stage cooperation of regions within a heterogeneous group of countries. It would appear to be less useful for countries that are already deeply integrated, such as those in the EU. Therefore, its initial goals are relatively “soft”, without sharply defined *a priori* success criteria, namely to improve knowledge of each other leading to tolerance and eventually mutual understanding in order to create trust and ultimately continuous good neighbourly relations.

44. From an organisational perspective, a macro-region should be able to bring together, in a hub-and-spoke manner (similar to major airports feeding smaller ones), smaller forms of coherent bilateral and regional cooperation within the macro-region, and facilitate networking among these kinds of cooperation without inhibiting them from developing their own goals and projects. In addition, it should include a wide array of actors besides administration – for example civil society – but also business.

45. Ultimately, cooperation within a macro-region can make administration more effective, efficient and useful by avoiding duplication of institutions and instruments (for example leading to a common flood warning system).

IV. Elements that are prerequisites for success

46. An important prerequisite for successful cooperation within a macro-region is balanced size: if it is too small, it does not have enough presence and coverage; if it is too large, there is an increased danger of heterogeneity. One example with the potential for too much heterogeneity is the Danube Strategy, as it includes countries that the river does not flow through or along its borders, like Slovenia. It is doubtful whether these more peripheral members will be interested in the core issues of a macro-region – in this case flood management and environmental water protection.

47. Furthermore, policies should come first and common structures should only be the second step of cooperation, as the result of an initial cooperation experience, in which case they can be geared more towards the needs of the individual macro-region. The structure thus created should be oriented to address the practical problems the macro-region has, such as dependency on a geographical situation (a macro-region has different needs along a river than around a sea) or whether it is sparsely or densely populated. In addition, a macro-region should not be or create an additional level of administration, but rather function as an interface to improve cooperation between already existing administrative units at the local, regional and national level in all regions and countries participating, and therefore be part of multilevel governance. Despite the larger size compared e.g. to cross-border-

regions, a bottom-up approach to identify useful projects is important as this allows for problem-oriented cooperation.

48. Depending on the political and administrative structure of the cooperating countries, different levels of administration will be responsible for any given issue (e.g. floods are a regional issue in Germany and Austria but a national issue in more centralised countries). It is therefore necessary to identify the appropriate level of administration before setting up working groups and bringing together the relevant actors. Here, a small but well-organised intercultural team can be useful.

49. While the concept of a macro-region includes long-term cooperation, it should also allow for functional cooperation among only a smaller number of partners actually affected by an issue (e.g. if one country has only a small sea coast, it will be affected by issues of pollution but not by issues of harbour management if it does not have a harbour on this coast, therefore it should not be included in the cooperation on harbour management). This functional and project-based cooperation should last only as long as it needs to to achieve a specific goal and should not continue long-term or indefinitely. Rather, new goals and related forms of cooperation as stepping stones for increased integration within the macro-region should be developed frequently, for example approximately every five to ten years depending on the changing circumstances.

50. On the other hand, a macro-region needs an integrated approach and should not exclusively cover too narrow issues such as, for example, only the ecology of the Baltic sea (HELCOM), excluding naval issues, or only Danube shipping, excluding environmental issues.

V. Added value of macro-regional cooperation

51. The most important added value of macro-regional cooperation lies in the fact that it can pool resources on a larger geographic scale and enhance spatial integration that might have been patchy so far, for example by building bridges across rivers, setting up boat connections among countries bordering a common sea, making use of airports irrespective of country borders by offering commuter service to reach them etc. In addition, macro-regional cooperation can be useful to:

- allow for European diversity and cohesion at the same time;
- deal with inequalities and socio-economic heterogeneity in a macro-region;
- thematically focus on territorial cooperation;
- make multi-level and multi-layer governance possible;
- further differentiate multilevel governance with an additional level of interaction;
- integrate more deeply regardless of highly formalised structures.

VI. Typical topics to be dealt with within a macro-region

52. One of the greatest dangers for macro-regional cooperation is the risk of following too many goals at once. Instead it should only tackle issues that have a clear and visible cross-border relevance across a relatively large region, by addressing joint challenges as a common denominator, for example flood prevention, pollution of air or the water of a common sea, lake or river, natural catastrophes, e.g. flooding or fires or man-made catastrophes (spillages/leakages of chemicals or oil).

VII. Potential sources for conflict in cooperation

53. In order for macro-regional cooperation to be successful, it is pivotal that potential sources for conflict among the partners and among different stakeholders are not ignored but approached by first identifying them and, secondly, by starting a process which allows all parties to agree on a common solution in order to be able to continue pursuing the macro-regional strategy.

54. An important issue to deal with is the question of subsidiarity – i.e. which is the optimal level of administration with the necessary expert knowledge to deal with a given topic. This question is strongly related to the question of how macro-regional cooperation can achieve the highest possible added value and have access to high-level expertise.

55. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that regional goals can be conflicting. On the one hand, environmental protection is promoted; on the other, increased water traffic is a goal declared by the same strategy, as in the case of the Strategy for the Danube Region. However, increased water traffic would only be possible by broadening and deepening the river, which in turn would negatively

affect protection zones such as the “*Nationalpark Donauauen*” in Austria. Here, it would be useful to bring all actors to the table in order to formulate a common goal based on a compromise, instead of trying to pursue both goals relentlessly and achieving no progress for either issue.

56. Excluding political conflicts from cooperation enables increased interaction but also carries the risk for them to resurface at a later point in time. Cases of conflict in the Danube cooperation are the dispute between Hungary and Slovakia on the Danube power plant Gabčíkovo, in which both sides violated international law according to the International Court in The Hague, or the plans of Ukraine to dig out the northern arm of the river which would lead to a rerouting of water from Romanian territory. For a potential Mediterranean Sea Macro-region, it would also be necessary to circumvent “high politics” tensions by starting small-scale cooperation on a local or regional level.

57. The fact that some macro-regions are formed after cooperation in this region or around this topic (Baltic Sea, Danube) has already existed for several years can also inhibit further cooperation by creating “institutional tension”.

58. Macro-regional cooperation should not create new divisions and tensions by including some actors and excluding others (also geographically speaking). There is always the danger that other neighbouring countries, which are not part of the initiative, will feel left behind. It is no suitable solution however to try and include all of these in a given project as they will have less in common with the core group and, in turn, have new neighbours that also feel left out. Instead, in order for a macro-region not to create new borders, a flexible goal-oriented approach to include other actors, both from other fields and other cities or regions, should be adopted.

59. Other potential sources for stalemate or conflict are a lack of coordination with possibly one dominant actor accumulating too much responsibility and leaving questions on who has the power, be it legal, financial, communicative, bottom-up or top-down, unresolved or vague.

VIII. Instruments used and their advantages/disadvantages

60. In general, macro-regional cooperation is either based on classical intergovernmental cooperation or a regional one. Often, cooperation is limited to the executive branch of a government and a democratic deficit can be observed as parliaments are excluded from the decision making on the intergovernmental level.

61. At the European level, macro-regions should be able to have access to the same legal instruments that cross-border cooperation does, as outlined in the Madrid as well as in the third additional protocol on Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (Utrecht 2009) that has not yet entered into force.

62. Despite the difficulties it faces, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) could also be used to strengthen integration within a macro-region in order to manage Structural Funds, carry out strategic cooperation and support the practical implementation of a cooperation project.

63. Financial support to macro-regions could come from the EU’s financial instruments, especially the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Instrument for Pre-accession (IPA) and most notably its Cross-border Component (CBC). However, since the main focus of a macro-region should be to coordinate (amongst already existing actors) institutions and projects aimed at the well-being of the citizens, it should not need large sums to sustain itself. The most important support could come from a small interregional team, which could be temporarily seconded from participating local and regional authorities and organisations in order to stay in close touch with the issues they represent.

IX. Conclusions

64. Macro-regions can benefit from similar added value as cross-border cooperation if they are organised in a goal-oriented, sector-specific way. The larger the region, the wider the range of goals – and the harder it is to make the cooperation useful beyond mere “branding”.

65. One advantage of macro-regions is that within the borders of the Council of Europe they can overcome the “inside-out” paradigm of the European Union. The Danube Strategy (not originally started by the Commission) is a case in point. It is not linked to other policies of the EU, such as

enlargement or the European Neighbourhood Policy and can rather be seen as a form of enhanced cooperation.

66. Another advantage of a macro-region is the fact that it can be depoliticised and initiate cooperation at a relatively low level with “soft” policy issues, in order to cooperate despite political tensions among partners. Here, it is especially useful to identify fields of cooperation where mutual added value is apparent.

67. To establish a macro-region, it is useful to include many actors, *inter alia*, NGOs and municipalities, but also heads of state and government, in order to get the project started. In some cases, it will be useful to refrain from establishing a set of new institutions, from giving the cooperation a high-level legal foundation and from demanding additional funding from scarce resources, and to concentrate instead on the goals and use the existing instruments.

68. A macro-region should find the right balance between a top-down and, the harder to achieve, bottom-up approach. Unlike cross-border cooperation, the added value might not always be as apparent for the citizens, who should nonetheless be informed and included in the decision-making procedures. Furthermore, a macro-region should allow for a variable geometry so that the degree of cooperation (of some or all partners) depends on the topic and the need for the individual partners to be included.

69. It can be advantageous to subsume already existing cooperation under the heading of a macro-region, which would provide greater visibility but would not necessarily mean that the macro-region would formulate and pursue goals of its own.

70. The structures or, if necessary, institutions formed for this purpose should be goal-oriented and not a goal in themselves. They can be helpful to make cooperation more continuous in politically less supportive times. All macro-regions should have a forum to defend the regions’ interests, which is not yet the case for the Baltic Sea strategy or the Danube strategy.