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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE GOVERNANCE OF MACRO-REGIONAL AND SEA BASIN STRATEGIES

INTRODUCTION

In May 2014, the European Commission published a report on the governance of Macro-Regional Strategies¹. This report follows on from a previous EC Communication on the added value of Macro-Regional Strategies² published in June 2013. Since 2009 and the launch of the first Macro-Regional Strategy for the Baltic, there has been growing interest in these strategies at European institutional level as well as among CPMR members.

In 2012, the CPMR set up a "Macro-Regions Task Force" to develop thoughts and exchanges of experience between Geographical Commissions on how Macro-Regions might function, how they could be developed on a European scale, and which practical tools could be used for them to be successful. Two technical papers were published in September 2012 and March 2013 to guide this internal reflection. In June 2013, a policy paper entitled "Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies: Preparing for the future of European integration"³ was adopted unanimously by the Political Bureau at its meeting in Malmö in Sweden. This note presented fifteen concrete proposals from the CPMR on four key subjects: defining perimeters, governance, instruments and budget. On this basis, the CPMR has established a close working relationship with the Commission as well as the European Parliament so as to provide contributions and reactions to their working documents.

Following the publication of the latest EC Communication on the Governance of Macro-regional Strategies in May 2014, we felt that it would be useful to take stock of the European Commission's progress on this subject which is of key interest to CPMR. Indeed, the CPMR is the only regional organisation to be based on a macro-regional model. Back in the 1980s, long before the concept emerged in Brussels, our organisation took little time in structuring itself into Geographical Commissions bringing together member Regions according to sea basins (Atlantic, North Sea, Baltic, Mediterranean, Balkans & Black Sea) in order to be as close as possible to the issues on the ground, while maintaining a real European added value.

The issue of governance is essential and is a core element in shaping macro-regional and sea basin entities. These new population catchment areas, which are at the same time multiregional, subnational and transnational, require a completely new decision-making model with the aim of improving the integration of funds, policies and citizens in these new European areas concerned by common challenges. For this reason, genuine multi-level governance is needed so that different decision-making levels may act together to develop these territories within an overarching and profoundly European approach.

The aim of this paper is to review the activities of the Task Force over the past two years, providing a comparative analysis of the CPMR's proposals and the European Commission's recommendations on the Governance of Macro-Regional Strategies.

¹ Communication of the European Commission COM (2014) 284 final
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/macro_region_strategy/pdf/gov_macro_strat_en.pdf

² Communication of the European Commission COM (2013) 468 final


³ Cf. Macro-Regions Task Force [Working Documents](#) on the CPMR website

I. Comparative table of CPMR proposals vs. European Commission recommendations


CPMR PROPOSAL ON GOVERNANCE (POLICY POSITION JUNE 2013)	EC COMMUNICATION (REPORT ON GOVERNANCE MAY 2014)	REMARKS
Role of the Regions		
<p>CPMR believes “it is vitally important that the Regions should be at the centre of the preparation process, and subsequently of the decision-making process and the implementation of these European strategies”</p> <p>The Regions must be at the heart of a renewed territorial pact combining a bottom up approach (proposals from the territories concerned) and top down approach (institutional framework from the European Commission in particular).</p>	<p>“To succeed, the macro-regional strategies need a better balance between the leadership provided by the countries and regions involved and the role of the Commission.” (p. 4)</p> <p>On several occasions, the EC mentions the fundamental role of “Member States”, “national contact points” and “experts responsible for thematic priorities”</p> <p>In its conclusions, the EC argues in favour of “political leadership and clearer responsibility (...)” (p.10)</p>	<p>For the CPMR, this approach does not give enough visibility to the Regional authorities, which are nevertheless the first to be concerned by Macro-Regional Strategies.</p> <p>The CPMR is concerned that the EC’s vision is too nationally biased and based on experts, when what we actually need is concrete ventures in the territories, and therefore the direct involvement of regional politicians.</p>
Role of Regional Organisations (eg. CPMR and its Geographical Commissions)		
<p>The CPMR asked the Commission to take into account the proposals of “umbrella organisations” such as the CPMR and its Geographical Commissions when preparing partnership agreements regarding Member States concerned by Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies.</p>	<p>On several occasions, the EC stresses the importance of regional organisations:</p> <p>“good use should be made of current regional organisations” (p3)</p> <p>“[Coordination] should include cooperation with existing regional organisations” (p6)</p> <p>Conclusions: “better use and complementing work of existing regional organisations” (p10)</p>	<p>The CPMR welcomes this very important point, i.e. the recognition of regional organisations such as CPMR and its Geographical Commissions which need to be fully involved in efforts to implement Macro-Regional Strategies on account of their transnational nature and the support they have from the regional elected body.</p>

Link between Macro-Regional Strategies and Sea Basin Strategies




<p>The CPMR has always maintained that Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies both comply with the same philosophy, follow the same goals and have the same possibilities to be adapted in EU policies so as to develop concrete actions and projects in the heart of the territories.</p>	<p>“Related initiatives – for example, sea-basin strategies under the Integrated Maritime Policy – can also benefit from the approaches outlined here.” (p.3)</p>	<p>For the first time, the Commission acknowledges that Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies work in very similar ways, and can therefore be dealt with jointly.</p>
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Coordination 

<p>CPMR stresses the need for coordination at European level by the European Commission in order to avoid “renationalising” Macro-Regional Strategies.</p>	<p>The EC wants “a better balance between the leadership provided by the countries and regions involved and the role of the Commission”(p.4)</p> <p>In conclusion, the EC proposes “the nomination of a special representative for a Strategy, approved by the countries concerned. S/he could be given the role of steering implementation, trouble shooting, and reporting back to the ministerial level” (p.10)</p>	<p>It is perhaps here that the EC is most ambiguous. It clearly establishes that priority is given to member states and national experts, while at the same time wishing to retain a role as guarantor of the European dimension.</p> <p>The possible appointment of a “special representative” for Strategies, looks interesting but lacks details about his or her actual tasks and nomination (by the Member States concerned?).</p>
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The European Commission’s Role in the Governance of Strategies 

<p>CPMR has called for the Commission to be able to intervene to varying degrees depending on the maturity of the Macro-Regional Strategies, arguing that the Commission should play a strong role at the launch stage, and subsequently provide support and coordination for initiatives. The CPMR position stresses that “to maintain consistency in European intervention, CPMR wants the European Commission to play a central role in coordinating the actions of the different stakeholders involved in the preparation and in the implementation of MRS and SBS.”</p>	<p>“The Commission should continue to offer strategic support. It will facilitate the evaluation of progress, identify shortcomings that need to be addressed at political level, as well suggest resolution of implementation stalemates.” (p.6)</p> <p>The Commission concludes on the need for “continued involvement by the Commission, in partnership with countries and regions, ensuring a coordinated approach at EU level” (p.9)</p>	<p>The Commission maintains its role in terms of providing strategic support and acting as a facilitator, guaranteeing the consistency of EU Strategies and Policies.</p> <p>This vision is consistent with the CPMR’s proposals.</p>
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Coherence between EU Sectoral Policies 		
<p>CPMR proposes setting up a “Macro-Regions Task Force” between the various Directorates General of the European Commission. This Task Force would aim to improve coordination between the different Directorates General so that the Action Plans of the different Strategies are reflected in the various funds and sectoral programmes managed directly by the EC.</p>	<p>“[The EC] should ensure coherence with EU policies and positions, especially the integration of the macroregional approach into EU policies” (p.6)</p> <p>In conclusion, the EC promotes “better focused use of existing funds and better coordination of sector-specific initiatives and programmes, through key implementers and the Commission, but also including involvement of the private sector and international financing institutions, where appropriate” (p. 10)</p>	<p>The Commission acknowledges that efforts should be made in this direction, but does not set out any concrete proposals for improving the coordination of EU sectoral policies and programmes.</p>
Synergies between Funds 		
<p>“CPMR supports the aim of improving synergies between EU policies by using existing funding and focusing it on the priorities defined in the Action Plans of these strategies.”</p>	<p>“However, important work still remains to better align funds with the goals of the Strategies.” (p.8)</p> <p>In its conclusions, the EC notes the need for “better focused use of existing funds and better coordination of sector-specific initiatives and programmes, through key implementers and the Commission (...)”(p. 10)</p>	<p>While the Commission shares the view that greater synergies are needed between funds, there are no concrete recommendations aimed at ensuring improvement in the short or medium term.</p> <p>CPMR believes the “Task Force” between the EC Directorates could be an effective way to integrate macro-regional priorities within EC sector-specific programmes.</p>
Capacity Building 		
<p>The CPMR expressed its concern at cuts affecting the “cooperation” budget, which suffered a 25% reduction during the Council's discussions on the Multiannual Financial Framework. Aside from this, the CPMR proposed that the Smart Specialisation Platform (created by DG Regio) might be used to establish synergies between investment priorities identified at the regional level and the action plans</p>	<p>In Part 3 of the document, the Commission recommends that participating countries should fully utilise the new potential of transnational cooperation programmes as well as the INTERACT programme (p.6).</p> <p>In its conclusions, the EC asks for “sustained support to key implementers, using especially the institutional and capacity-building support of</p>	<p>Transnational programmes are allocated the lowest budget from the cohesion policy funds earmarked for “cooperation”. Moreover, these programmes are not sufficient in themselves to finance proper ambitious flagship projects in macro-regional areas. It is the synergies between the programmes led by different levels of governance that will help to channel investments into the heart of these population catchment areas. The CPMR feels that</p>

of Macro-Regional or Sea Basin Strategies.	newly-aligned transnational programmes 2014-2020" (p.10)	this proposal is not enough to effectively support the implementation of Macro-Regional Strategies. Adequate funding is needed in order to meet the goals of these strategies.
Clarifying and Facilitating Implementation		
CPMR asks the European Commission to draw up specific guidelines on how the Common Strategic Framework (CSF) funds can be used to implement projects in the framework of Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies.	The EC does not address this point in its Communication.	Now that the programming period 2014-2020 is already under way, it is necessary to have real support from the European Commission regarding the use of cohesion policy funds, as well as the new instruments available to improve the synergy and combination of funds (ITI, etc.), especially those subject to different management methods.

II. Conclusion and Next Steps

The European Commission's Communication on the Governance of Macro-Regional Strategies is an important step with regard to aiding decision-making and implementation for both macro-regional and sea basin strategies. The CPMR welcomes the fact that many of its proposals set out in the policy position of June 2013 have been included in this document, as is the case regarding the direct involvement of regional organisations, the role of the European Commission or the need to make the link between Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies. However, some points still need to be clarified and others are not even mentioned in this Communication. Since the Communication does not address the issue of how the strategies will actually be implemented, the CPMR is urging for clear guidelines focused on carrying out projects that will allow regional authorities to have concrete and direct involvement in these strategies.

The 1st January 2014 officially marked the beginning of the new 2014-2020 programming period. By the end of the year, all Regions and all territorial cooperation programmes (cross-border, transnational and interregional) will have a new Operational Programme based on the new regulations on European structural and investment funds⁴ ("ESI" funds). This context offers opportunities that need to be seized quickly.

In light of this, the CPMR, working closely with its Geographical Commissions and its "Macro-Regions" Task Force, intends to draw up a practical guide for Regions wishing to develop projects with a macro-regional dimension. The CPMR wants to ensure that these Strategies are not constraints for the actors involved, but rather that they provide real investment opportunities at the heart of European population catchment areas.

The CPMR will also maintain close relations with institutions and stakeholders concerned by the implementation of Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies. Firstly with the European Commission, in order to receive answers to our proposals that are not included in the Communication on Governance (especially regarding the allocation of part of the structural funds assistance for the launch phase of strategies, on the need for flexibility in the use of EU funds in a macro-regional context, and on stepping up pre-financing within the framework of macro-regional projects); and secondly with the new European Parliament, where we will continue campaigning for the development and financing of these strategies.

The CPMR's aim now is to take forward the debate and also and above all to facilitate the implementation of concrete actions and ventures in the territories of our Regions.

⁴ Cf. ESI Funds Regulations: http://ec.europa.eu/contracts_grants/funds_en.htm