

Minutes of the High Level Group meeting on macro-regional strategies Brussels, 30 January 2013

Overall introduction and welcome

Mr Palma Andrés opened the meeting and gave the floor to **Mr Johannes Jung**, Director of the Representation of Baden-Württemberg to the EU, who welcomed the participants, and noted how the macro regional strategy for the Danube region is a high priority for the State of Baden Wurttemberg and the commitment to the continued progress of the co-operation.

Mr Palma thanked the Representation to Baden-Württemberg for hosting the meeting in their premises.

He mentioned the upcoming strategy for the Adriatic Ionian region, following the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region Strategies, as an indication of the seen need to coordinate policies in order to achieve common objectives.

Mr Palma placed the macro regional strategies in the overall policy framework, described as a hierarchy in which the Europe 2020 strategy informs the whole process, whereas the European Semester structures action towards achieving the objectives. The common strategic framework for cohesion policy is cohesion policy's way of embedding Europe 2020. The macro regional strategies are placed between the common strategic framework and national and regional priorities.

In this light, Mr Palma stressed that the first real test for the macro regional strategies will be evaluated by the extent to which they are embedded in the involved member states' and regions' own policy instruments and policies in the upcoming programming period.

Then he gave the floor to **Emma Udwin**, Member of the Cabinet of the Commissioner for Regional Policy, who presented Commissioner Hahn's perspective on the macro regional strategies – strategies are about results and should ideally become self-sustaining. The key element is that they need to deliver, we need to demonstrate the added value. This also applies to future strategies.

In addition, she recalled that the present situation is a good chance to embed strategies into policies, and that it is crucial not to lose momentum. ETC-programmes are not enough to reach the targets and objectives of the strategies. Embedding the strategies into mainstream policies presents a great challenge that requires a very horizontal way of working.

Part I: Towards the new programming period and new geographies

a. Next programming period 2014-2020 and new geographies

The **Commission** (C. Wolfe) presented the state of play regarding the macro regional strategies, the next programming period and new geographies. He emphasised the efforts made to ensure that partnership agreements and country specific programmes make macro regional strategies embedded in programme strategies. On the proposed new programme geographies, one of the major changes is the establishment of a transnational programme for the Danube region.

Cyprus/Italy (E. Kanelli, R. Rusca) mentioned the importance that cooperation programmes and macro regions facilitate contacts and do not create blocks between strategies and programmes.

Germany (Peter Schoof) expressed the commitment of the country to the two existing strategies, which have triggered positive momentum. On possible further strategies, the German position is that these should be based on careful assessment of added value.

Hungary (Balázs Medgyesy) mentioned that it is crucial to link programmes with strategies. The success of macro regional strategies is partly dependent on correct geographies (macro regions as natural functional regions).

The **Commission** (J. Palma Andrés) concluded by acknowledging the importance of existing networks, and mentioned interregional cooperation as one way of maintaining these. He also mentioned the upcoming kick-off events for the new programming period as opportunities to voice concerns.

b. Forthcoming evaluation in June 2013 on macroregional strategies concept and added value

The **Commission** (J-M Venineaux) informed about the on-going evaluation of the added value of macro regional strategies. Mr Venineaux reminded the participants of the questionnaire that had been sent out to stakeholders in December and described the methodology and timeline of the exercise.

Austria (R. Arbter) mentioned the importance of having a consistent impact model to be evaluated. It is important to consider the institutional context and not only focus on hard facts, but take into account also soft objectives.

Finland (J. Yli-Lahti) asked about the involvement of priority area coordinators and horizontal action leaders

France (E.Allioux) mentioned the value of the evaluation to future work, and also emphasised the need to take into account socio-cultural aspects such as the impact on neighbours.

UK (L. Moore) mentioned that a discussion on initial findings could be interesting.

Lithuania (A. Radikaitė) mentioned that macro-regional strategies will be given high attention during the Lithuanian presidency and that it is expected that the 'Friends of the Presidency' group will draft conclusions based on the evaluation of the macro-regional strategies.

The **Commission** (J. Palma Andrés) acknowledged the comments received and took note of the Lithuanian plans for the upcoming presidency.

Part II: EU Strategy for the Danube Region

a. Annual Forum in Regensburg: feedback and follow-up

The **Commission** (A. Repullo) gave a brief summary on the First Annual Forum of EUSDR that was held on 27-28 November 2012 in Regensburg (Bavaria, Germany). The presence of Commissioner Hahn and Chancellor Merkel, as well as many other high level representatives, sent an important message of commitment towards the Strategy. For the future, the Forum should be streamlined as the main event of the year.

Hungary (Balazs Medgyesy) expressed sincere congratulations on the organisation and success of the First Annual Forum.

Within the frame of this session, **Romania** announced its offer to host the next Annual Forum in 2013.

b. Progress to date and next steps. First report on the implementation of the Strategy

The **Commission** (E. Nussmueller) presented the state of play of the first EUSDR implementation report. She informed the participants that the report is now being consulted within the Commission services and will be finalised in March. She emphasised the main achievements of the Strategy, the lessons learned and indicated the Report's recommendations for the future. Please find her presentation in Annex.

Part III: EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

a. State of play

The **Commission** (C. Wolfe) opened by an account of the state of play for the revised Action Plan, and recalled the objective of the revision in terms of:

- emphasising Europe 2020 Strategy;
- the need to align funding sources with the EUSBSR;
- the need to clarify roles and responsibilities;
- the need to strengthen communication efforts;
- the need to strengthen the aspect of gender equality and getting all good forces aboard;
- the introduction of systematic frame for targets and indicators.

M Wolfe mentioned the fact that we are on overtime, given that the request from the Council was to have the Action Plan revised by the end of 2012, and that in December 2012 the Council stressed the need to implement the revised EUSBSR. In this light, Mr Wolfe recalled that almost all of the text is agreed between the stakeholders and that only one area (Horizontal Action 'Sustainable Development') is still under discussion. Mr Wolfe asked the High Level Group to take note of this and to agree on a short time for the final part to be agreed.

Germany (P. Schoof) commented on the point of disagreement regarding the Horizontal Action 'Sustainable Development' and stated that the issue was mainly terminological. Germany could agree to the proposal, but the deadline for an agreement would have to be very short.

Lithuania (A. Radikaitė) followed up by commenting on the governance of the Strategy and the need for Member States to be central in its implementation. Normally Priority Areas and Horizontal Actions are coordinated by Member States and in exceptional cases by regional organisations. In these exceptional cases the Steering groups are important to maintain the Member States responsibilities. Lithuania would like to reduce the number of exceptional cases. In this light, Lithuania volunteered to coordinate the Horizontal Action 'Neighbours' (jointly with city of Turku and CBSS).

Italy (R. Rusca) mentioned that the approach and the efforts to the revision of the Action Plan are appreciated. The chapter on governance could possibly be used also as a general guidance for all countries. She stressed the importance of targets and indicators which show what the real contribution of the Strategy is. She prefers that the performance framework would be less ambitious, but more realistic. Strategy's relationship with national policies should be developed in the future.

Poland (K. Wojsznis) said that it is important to view the Action Plan as a rolling document which is updated when it is needed.

The **Commission** (C. Wolfe) concluded by saying that indeed the Action Plan is a rolling document open to new ideas. The comments from Italy were very useful and will be considered for the programming process.

The Commission is reluctant to open discussion in other areas than the Horizontal Action 'Sustainable Development', but is willing to listen to initiatives to strengthen the Member States presence in Horizontal Actions for example through well-functioning Steering groups.

As for the agreement on the text, the final deadline will be the week of February 22. If no agreement has been found by then, the Commission will take a decision, considering including a footnote/disclaimer that the Horizontal action 'Sustainable Development' will be further discussed.

ii. Seed money facility

The **Commission** (J-M Venineaux) presented the background (SWECO study 'Analysis of needs for financial instruments in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region') and rationale for the EUSBSR Seed money facility which is operational of early 2013. The EUSBSR Seed money facility covers roughly half of the technical assistance funding made available by the European Parliament. The EUSBSR Seed money facility will be managed by *Investitionsbank Schleswig-Holstein* and the support to projects will range from 30.000 to 50.000 euro. There will be a kick off meeting on seed money in Berlin on 21 February.

Lithuania (A. Radikaitė) requested who would be invited to the kick off meeting on seed money.

Slovenia (A. Jerina) recalled the fact that since the European Parliament technical assistance funding is temporary, we should have a more permanent perspective.

Austria (R. Arbter) recalled that there is a certain appreciation from Priority Area Coordinators to have a direct contact with the Commission through the technical assistance funding, and that is worth considering keeping this funding possibility in the Commission.

The **Commission** (C. Wolfe) answered that the invitation to the seed money kick off is open to all Priority Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action Leaders as well as people with project ideas. Furthermore, there is a hope that programmes in the upcoming programme period will incorporate the possibility to fund such activities.

b. Presentation of Flagship Project on Civil security

The **Council of Baltic Sea States** (CBSS) (N. Magnadóttir) presented how the priority area ‘Secure’ (previous priority area 14) works through a flagship project on maritime security. Positive experiences were presented of the flagship project being a boost for the area of civil protection though i.e. agenda raising.

c. Committee of the Regions report on the EUSBSR

The **CoR** (K. Hebda) presented the content and recommendations of an Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the revised EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (stressed the need to use the Northern Dimension in the context of closer cooperation between the EU and Russia in the region; to involve local and regional level in implementing the Strategy; the importance of multi-level governance, stronger political commitment; etc.) The Committee of the Regions will continue to monitor the implementation of the EUSBSR and also follow the debate on other macro-regional strategies.

c. A.O.B.

Poland (K. Wojsznis) raised the question whether the gender aspect could be strengthened in the revised Action Plan.

The **Commission** answered that this should be possible.

Brussels, 7 February 2013