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Subject: Implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies
- Council conclusions (25 April 2017)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the Implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies, adopted by the Council at its 3531st meeting held on 25 April 2017.

**Council conclusions on the implementation of
EU Macro-Regional Strategies**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- (1) RECALLS its conclusions setting up the four current macro-regional strategies of the Union, namely the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) of 2009, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) of 2011, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) of 2014 and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) of 2015¹, as well as its conclusions of 22 October 2013 on the added value of Macro-regional strategies² and of 21 October 2014 on the governance of macro-regional strategies³;
- (2) RECALLS its conclusions of 27 November 2015 on EUSALP, asking the European Commission to draft a report every two years, starting end 2016, on the implementation of EUSALP, and taking note of the Commission's intention to draft a single report every two years, starting end 2016, describing the progress made towards the implementation of all macro-regional strategies;
- (3) RECOGNISES the importance of the Union's macro-regional strategies as a unique integrated framework to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area covering Member States and third countries which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to the achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion;

¹ Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (doc. 13744/09), Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (doc. 8388/11 + ADD 1 REV 1), Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (doc. 13503/14) and Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (doc. 14613/15).

² Doc. 14926/13 + ADD 1.

³ Doc. 16207/14.

- (4) REAFFIRMS that macro-regional strategies, based on the principles of no new EU funds, no additional EU formal structures and no new EU legislation, are an instrument for optimal use of existing financial resources, better use of existing institutions and better implementation of existing legislation;
- (5) WELCOMES the submission by the Commission of a single report on the implementation of all four above-mentioned macro-regional strategies⁴;
- (6) WELCOMES the progress and first results of the strategies and their contribution to territorial cohesion, a more integrated implementation of the Union's sectoral policies, as well as closer relations with third countries, and REITERATES the need to cooperate closely with existing multilateral institutions and under existing agreements;
- (7) NOTES that all four strategies face common and individual challenges and can be further developed, notably regarding governance, result-orientation, purposeful funding, communication and-cooperation;
- (8) CONSIDERS that the governance of the strategies could be further strengthened to improve their effectiveness; in this context, INVITES the participating countries and their regions
 - a) to maintain a strong political commitment together with a high sense of ownership for the implementation of their macro-regional strategies;
 - b) to improve coordination and cooperation in view of further enhancing the commitment to the strategies and their effective implementation;
 - c) to build the necessary administrative capacity to ensure that political commitment translates into effective implementation;

⁴ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, doc. 15792/16 + ADD 1.

- d) to empower key implementers (such as national coordinators, priority area coordinators/action group leaders, members of steering and actions groups) and increase the ownership of the involved line ministries;
 - e) to mobilize regions, cities, agencies and institutions such as universities, private businesses and civil society, encouraging them to network, cooperate and participate in the implementation and development of macro-regional strategies;
- (9) STRESSES that a stronger result-orientation and a focus on relevant priorities is likely to increase the overall performance, as well as the visibility of the strategies;
- (10) CALLS on the participating countries and their regions, in view of obtaining strong, tangible results and facilitating informed political decision-making and, to set, where relevant, clear targets and develop, in cooperation with the Commission, adequate indicators, which allow for a better monitoring and reporting of the results;
- (11) CALLS on participating countries and their regions and the Commission to further integrate macro-regional strategies and EU sectorial policies; and develop synergies among them, thereby improving the implementation of sectorial policies in an integrated way across territories;
- (12) CONSIDERS that while a sustainable contribution of the macro-regional strategies to territorial cohesion relies on long-term strategic thinking, the strategies should remain open to address new common challenges;
- (13) NOTES that the Commission intends to submit to the Council, in the course of this year, reports on Border Obstacles and on activities under the Urban Agenda for the EU, and LOOKS FORWARD to examine these reports, also against the background that their findings might help to improve the implementation of macro-regional strategies;
- (14) WELCOMES the funding possibilities for the macro-regional strategies provided by the legal framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) 2014-2020;

- (15) RECALLS that a relevant European territorial cooperation programme can financially support a macro-regional strategy, if the programme covers all or a part of a strategy, and CONSIDERS that the links between relevant European territorial cooperation programmes and macro-regional strategies should be further strengthened to their mutual benefit;
- (16) RECALLS that all relevant EU and national funding sources should be mobilized by the participating countries and their regions to ensure that adequate funding is available to implement the strategies and achieve the expected results;
- (17) CALLS, in this context, on
- a) the participating countries and their regions to ensure a better alignment of the ESI Funds programmes, IPA and ENI funds and macro-regional strategies, and to make best use of all other available funding sources (national, regional, municipal, private etc.);
 - b) the Commission to ensure, where appropriate and in full respect of the objectives and integrity of the programmes, the participation of macro-regional strategies in other EU funding programmes directly managed by the Commission, by formulating-calls and actions in a way which allows for applications from macro-regional strategies;
 - c) the participating Member States and their regions and the Commission
 - i) to strengthen the links between the macro-regional strategies and EU funding sources, when designing, defining the objectives of and implementing the programmes;
 - ii) to reinforce accordingly the coherence between macro-regional objectives and priorities and those defined at national and regional level;
 - iii) to encourage an exchange between macro-regional coordinators and programmes operators in an appropriate multilevel governance system, using *inter alia* the capabilities of the INTERACT programme;

- (18) NOTES the need for more detailed, reliable and comparable data regarding the implementation of macro-regional strategies, and CALLS on the Commission to gather such data, taking into account the related administrative burden for stakeholders and making the best possible use of existing data sources and technical assistance means, and provide these data to the Council;
- (19) CONSIDERS that information on good practices which can be transferred from one strategy to another would facilitate the implementation, and CALLS on the Commission to support and organise the sharing and transfer of such practices *inter alia* in cooperation with the INTERACT programme;
- (20) CALLS on the Commission, participating countries and their regions to communicate the results achieved by the strategies as broadly as possible in order to increase the visibility of the strategies, in particular for the general public;
- (21) CONSIDERS that the Commission should continue to play a leading role in the strategic coordination of key delivery stages of the macro-regional strategies, in partnership with the Member States;
- (22) INVITES the Commission to continue supporting the implementation of macro-regional strategies where this brings added value, in particular in terms of strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation and communication, while AGREEING that monitoring and evaluation processes should involve all relevant stakeholders;
- (23) REMAINS open to examine any commonly agreed and mature initiative of Member States facing the same challenges in a defined geographic area aimed at setting up a new macro-regional strategy;
- (24) LOOKS FORWARD to the following single implementation report of the Commission by the end of 2018.