



European  
Commission



## WHAT IS AN EU MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGY?

A European Union (EU) macro-regional strategy is a policy framework which allows countries located in the same region to jointly tackle and find solutions to problems or to better use the potential they have in common (e.g. pollution, navigability, worldwide business competition, etc.). By doing so, they benefit from strengthened cooperation, with the aim of making their policies more efficient than if they had addressed the issues in isolation. An EU macro-regional strategy can be supported by EU funds, including the European Structural and Investment Funds.

To increase the chances of success for EU macro-regional strategies, the partners involved (Member States, regions, municipalities, NGOs, etc.) must base their actions on a few key principles: a relevant partnership and an adequate collaboration mechanism, good action coordination as regards relevant policies and their funding sources, and a high spirit of cooperation within and across countries and sectors in the macro-region.

### WHO INITIATES THE STRATEGY?

EU macro-regional strategies are initiated and requested by EU Member States concerned (and in some cases non-EU countries) located in the same geographical area via the European Council. Following the European Council request, the strategies are drafted and adopted by the European Commission.

Therefore, the strategies are purely intergovernmental initiatives and their implementation relies heavily on the commitment and goodwill of the participating countries. The process is as important as the result: it must be inclusive and bottom up to ensure ownership.

### WHAT ARE THE KEY FEATURES?

Strategies do not come with new EU funds, legislation or formal structures: they rely on coordination and synergy. This means optimal use of all existing financial sources (EU, national, regional, private, etc.), better implementation of existing legislation, and better use of existing institutions at all levels.

EU macro-regional strategies address challenges and opportunities specific to certain geographical areas which are too local to be of direct interest to the whole EU, but too broad to be dealt with efficiently at the national level. In other words, they act as a bridge between EU and local policymaking.

The objectives of the strategies are strategic, long-term and jointly agreed by the participating countries. They vary according to the needs of the macro-region concerned, and prominence has to be given to strategic issues which bring added value to horizontal EU policies.

Each strategy involves a broad range of actors at various levels (international, national, regional, local), sectors (public, private, civil society) and fields of expertise, thereby providing a platform for consistent multi-country, multi-sectorial and multi-level governance.

**To date, four EU macro-regional strategies have been adopted; each is accompanied by a rolling action plan to be updated regularly in light of new, emerging needs and changing context:**

- the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (2009);
- the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (2010);
- the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (2014); and
- the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (2015).

**They concern 19 EU Member States and 8 non-EU countries, representing over 340 million people<sup>1</sup>:**

**19 EU MEMBER STATES:** Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Sweden;

**8 NON-EU COUNTRIES:** Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Switzerland and Ukraine.

Some EU countries such as Germany and Slovenia are involved in three strategies, while Croatia, Italy and Austria are concerned with two. Three non-EU countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia – are part of two EU macro-regional strategies.

## KEY ACTORS IN THE STRATEGY

Each macro-regional strategy, involving a broad range of various actors, has slightly different governance arrangements, as regional specifics are taken into account. Nevertheless, common key implementers can be defined.

### EU level

The European Commission plays a leading role in the strategic coordination of the strategy's key delivery stages. In addition, a high-level group of EU macro-regional strategies with representatives from all 28 EU Member States and non-EU countries involved in the strategies, meets to consider the overall approach for all EU macro-regional strategies.

### National/regional level

In each participating country, national coordinators are responsible for the overall coordination of and support for the strategy's implementation in the home country.

### Thematic area level

The thematic fields are led by thematic area coordinators (coordinators of policy/priority areas, horizontal actions, pillars or actions) who represent the macro-regional interest. They are supported by counterparts from the respective region and are organised into steering groups. Their main role is to promote the creation of joint projects that will contribute to reaching the strategy's objectives. In addition, based on the results and success of such projects, their role is to influence the content and implementation of the policies in the countries and regions concerned, in order to improve the macro-region's global positioning in the long run.

## CROSS-STRATEGY COOPERATION

Cooperation and coordination between different macro-regional strategies is of key importance with a view to maximising mutual co-benefits and impact. This is even more important where there is a geographical overlap between the strategies. Cross-strategy cooperation can take different forms (e.g. implementation of joint projects, sharing of best practices and experience, etc.).

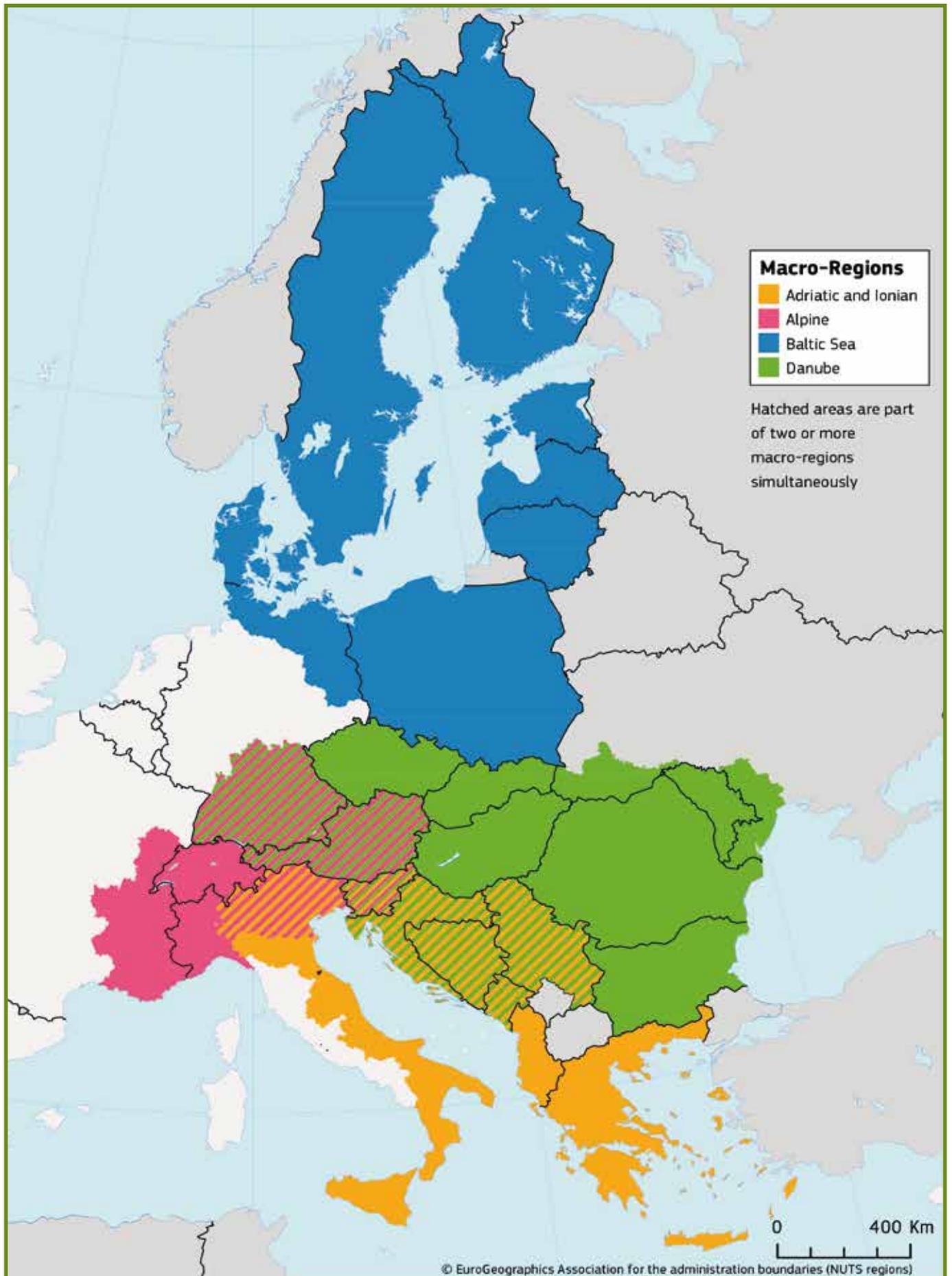
### Examples include:

- Organisation of the EU macro-regional strategies week in Slovenia (Portorož) in September 2017, to exchange and improve communication actions;
- The DanuBalt project, which aims to tackle the health innovation and research divide in the Danube and Baltic Sea regions, is being implemented by stakeholders from two macro-regions;
- A seminar, co-hosted by the Regional Cooperation Council and the United Nations Environment Programme in Sarajevo in April 2016, enabled key officials from the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) to compare priorities regarding environmental challenges in the Western Balkans;
- Due to significant geographical overlap between EUSDR and EUSAIR (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina), joint meetings have been held for thematic fields of common interest, such as transport, energy and the environment. Similar meetings have been held between EUSDR and EUSALP key actors, for example, in the field of energy.

In conclusion, the added value of macro-regional strategies is characterised by its cross-sectoral approach, its trans-national dimension (including the participation of non-EU countries) and its contribution to better multi-level governance. But this is an ambitious concept that needs time to be consolidated and to bear fruit.

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<sup>1</sup>) Source: Eurostat, World Bank, NSI Ukraine



## FURTHER INFORMATION:

### EU macro-regional strategies

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/)



**EU Strategy  
for the Baltic  
Sea Region:**  
[www.balticsea-region.eu/](http://www.balticsea-region.eu/)



**EU Strategy for  
the Adriatic and  
Ionian Region:**  
[www.adriatic-ionian.eu/](http://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/)



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[www.danube-region.eu/](http://www.danube-region.eu/)



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