

# Civil Society involvement in Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies

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## Context

On many occasions, EU institutions and member states have affirmed that EU policies need to consider and reflect the values and concerns of citizens. The active participation of stakeholders is essential because good policymaking involves those affected by the decisions. This is relevant also for macro-regional and sea basin strategies. Civil society organisations have the interest and potential to contribute significantly to shaping and implementing EU Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies. So far, this contribution and involvement has not been systematic or harmonised between the different strategies. This workshop provided an opportunity for civil society representatives and strategy stakeholders to reflect on **good practices for civil society involvement** and put forward some recommendations for concrete actions to enhance participation in macro-regional and sea basin strategies.

## Speakers

Miklós Barábas, European House Budapest

Anders Bergström, Norden Association Sweden

Krisela Hackaj, Cooperation & Development Institute, Albania

Thomas Keuten, EUSALP Youth Council, Germany

Stefano Palmieri, European Economic and Social Committee

Moderator: Gaby Hagmüller, European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy

## Key take-aways

**Stefano Palmieri**, member of the European Economic and Social Committee, underlined that today we could see a rather weak involvement of citizens and civil society in the macro-regional strategies, including in the governing boards. He emphasised the need to apply the partnership principle to macro-regional strategies, in order to involve independent and representative civil society organisations and ensure a transparent process. This question was also reflected in the [Opinion on the Implementation of EU macro-regional strategies](#) adopted by the EESC on 14/06/2023.

**Krisela Hackaj**, Executive Director of the Cooperation and Development Institute in Albania, pointed out that macro-regional strategies were a good instrument for accession, as Member States and candidate countries were treated on equal footing. This is an important capacity

building opportunity for candidate countries, because through the Instrument for Pre-Accession, neither the partnership principle nor the territorial principle are mainstreamed. Krisela also called for multi-level governance partnership structures which are inclusive of civil society, in order to increase societal ownership of development processes in candidate countries and mitigate risks associated with highly centralised decision-making.

**Anders Bergström** spoke on behalf of Norden Association Sweden, a Swedish CSO, while at the same time being the Pillar Coordinator for Education of the Baltic Strategy. Anders emphasised that there was a growing demand for cooperation and a need for infrastructure that would enable collaboration, where civil society actors could join and take part in the development of solutions to the complex societal challenges. Projects would still be needed but the demand for strategic and long-term collaboration calls for more tailor-made funding mechanisms for macroregional strategies. Anders' advice for CSOs was to contact their thematic coordinator, be proactive, and get involved.

**Thomas Keuten**, German member of the Alpine Youth Council, mentioned the fact that macro-regional strategies represent more than 300 million citizens in Europe. It is thus a challenge to represent the different views especially of young people. He underlined that cooperation among stakeholders and coordinated actions of CSOs and youth is a process requiring time and building up networks. Notably young people need to be empowered to participate in this process and require resources and support to build up their capacities.

As co-host and initiator of the workshop **Miklós Barabás**, Director of European House Budapest summarised that involving people from the ground is essential for the success of macro-regional strategies, not only when it comes to implementation, also in the policy-making processes. As part of this development, he presented a new initiative to bring together CSOs from the four macro-regions in the form of a network.

Workshop participants welcomed the organisation of this workshop as part of the official programme and expressed their hope that similar discussions would be part of future events related to all macro-regional strategies.

Participants agreed that macro-regional strategies needed to be brought closer to ordinary citizens and avoid the use of jargon and abbreviations. Civil society organisations could play a role in this respect.

Participants further concluded that there was a general openness on the side of macro-regional strategies to involve civil society in their processes of policy-making and implementation. The question was rather how concretely this could be achieved and enhanced. Specific task forces could be created for each of the strategies to reflect on how to enhance civil society involvement. The recently created network, co-ordinated by European House Budapest, could also assist this process.