



# Baltic Sea, Danube and Macro-Regional Strategies:

## A Model for Transnational Cooperation in the EU?

STEFANIE DÜHR

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BY STEFANIE DÜHR



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## Preface

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**W**ith the European Union's (EU) enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe and the resulting enriched diversity of the Union, the importance of territorial cohesion for the integration process is strengthened. This explains why "cohesion" became an objective in the Lisbon Treaty.

For many years now, Notre Europe has sought to study what links this issue to the social and economic development of the EU, notably through papers on rural and local development, but also on crossborder cooperation.

Here, Stefanie Dühr focuses on the most recent territorial-cohesion concept employed by European institutions: macro-regional strategies. The enthusiasm these strategies have recently drawn contrasts remarkably with the slow development of ideas at the European level.

In her study, the author invites us to better understand the intricacies of this new form of territorial cooperation. By analysing in detail two already existing macro-regional strategies – i.e. the Baltic Sea Region Strategy and the Strategy for the Danube Region – the author questions how they operate and whether they bring

any added value. To conclude, Dühr explores how the concept might affect EU policies, and particularly regional development policy.

As the negotiations on the future cohesion policy and on the budget are about to commence, and as the Europe 2020 Strategy is implemented, via this study, Stefanie Dühr provides the current cohesion debate with detailed and well-documented thoughts. By underlining the complexity of such governance questions and by examining the ramifications tied to the various geopolitical interests vested in the two macro-regional strategies, Dühr helps us understand the importance of not drawing conclusions too quickly: although macro-regional strategies are pregnant with potential, this does not mean they are destined to be a model for all territories.

Marjorie Jouen, Adviser of Notre Europe



## Table of Contents



|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <b>Summary</b>  | <b>P. 1</b>  |
| <b>Introduction: macro-regional strategies in the EU</b>  | <b>P. 3</b>  |
| <b>I - EU-strategies for macro-regions: the context and definitions</b>                           | <b>P. 5</b>  |
| 1.1. EU macro-regional strategies: the background   | P. 6         |
| 1.2. EU macro-regional strategies: state of affairs and the policy debate                         | P. 9         |
| <b>II - Transnational cooperation in Europe: ‘sub-regionalism’ and the ‘INTERREG’ initiative</b>  | <b>P. 15</b> |
| 2.1. Sub-regional groupings in Europe   | P. 16        |
| 2.2. Transnational territorial cooperation through INTERREG and the transnational spatial visions | P. 18        |
| <b>III -The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region</b>   | <b>P. 25</b> |
| <b>IV - The potentials and challenges of macro-regional strategies in Europe: a discussion</b>    | <b>P. 37</b> |
| 4.1. Functional geographies versus political realities  | P. 38        |
| 4.2. Priorities for cooperation   | P. 40        |
| 4.3. Complex governance arrangements  | P. 42        |
| 4.4. Transformative potential   | P. 43        |
| <b>Concluding reflections: European macro-regions as a model for EU territorial governance?</b>   | <b>P. 47</b> |
| <b>Bibliography</b>   | <b>P. 49</b> |



## Summary

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In the context of European integration, transnational cooperation has emerged to address the ‘in-between issues’ that neither national and regional perspectives (traditionally focused on issues within the boundaries of national territories) nor EU-wide perspectives (since the late 1980s focused strongly on European integration as a whole) gave sufficient attention to. This paper reviews experiences with EU macro-regional strategies for the Baltic Sea Region (2009) and the Danube Region (2010) to date, and discusses differences to existing forms of transnational cooperation. It is argued that the strengths of the EU macro-regional strategies are the high-level of political commitment and the wide involvement of EU and national institutions in their development and implementation. Complex governance arrangements, however, present considerable challenges, as does the limited involvement of sub-national and non-EU actors. The macro-regional strategies for the Baltic Sea Region and Danube Region would benefit from further prioritisation of the proposed joint actions in order to clarify the added-value of macro-regional working. The next steps will be crucial for determining their value as an instrument of EU territorial governance and to ensure their durability through long-term political commitment, in particular their eligibility in the future programming period of the cohesion policy.



## Introduction: macro-regional strategies in the EU

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The macro-regional level is currently given considerable attention in the policy debates of the European Union (EU). Macro-regional strategies have been prepared for the Baltic Sea Region (CEC 2009, 2010a, b) and the Danube Region (CEC 2010c, d), and several others are under discussion. These strategies are promoted as models to achieve territorial cohesion, the integration of sector policies and the coordination of actors at different levels of governance. Moreover, they should allow making better use of existing resources to achieve common objectives. Yet, given what has been termed a “macro-regional fever” that has taken hold of Europe’ (CPMR 2010a: 1), the added-value of macro-regional strategies vis-à-vis existing transnational cooperation initiatives, their potential to achieve territorial cohesion, as well as possible tensions in the approach as it is being pursued at the moment deserve closer inspection.

After all, transnational cooperation is not a new phenomenon in Europe. There are numerous examples of long-standing cooperation of clusters of nation-states in Europe, such as the Visegrad Group<sup>1</sup> or the Baltic Sea States<sup>2</sup>. The EU institu-

1. The Visegrad Group was established in 1991. Its members are Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

2. The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) was established in 1992 by Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland,

tions have been promoting the value of cooperation across national administrative boundaries in border regions for many years, and EU funding is available since 1997 (following the mid-term review of the 1994-1999 programmes) to support cooperation in large contiguous transnational areas. The EU macro-regional strategies, thus, need to be considered in the context of existing cooperation initiatives by the nation-states as well as an existing EU framework of political, financial and legal support which has for years provided opportunities for territorial cooperation for a wide range of actors at regional and local levels.

In this paper, the approach to macro-regional strategies in the EU is critically discussed. The paper is structured as follows. In the next section, the context of EU macro-regional strategies is explained, followed by a discussion of earlier initiatives on transnational cooperation in Europe. The process of preparation, the content and governance arrangements of the macro-regional strategies for the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region are described subsequently, followed by a discussion of the potential of the concept as well as its inherent tensions. The paper concludes with a critical discussion of the possible future role of macro-regions in the EU governance and policy framework.

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Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden and the European Commission.

## I. EU Strategies for macro-regions: the context and definitions

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EU macro-regional strategies are currently being explored in the policy framework of the enlarged EU of 27 member states as a new mode of territorial governance. The objective of ‘territorial cohesion’ has with the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 become one of the EU’s central objectives, next to economic and social cohesion (CEC 2008). Within the framework being established by the *Europe 2020* strategy (CEC 2010e), there is interest in the territorial dimension of EU Cohesion Policy and other EU policies, in the performance and effectiveness of such policies, and the efficiency of governance structures and implementation arrangements. The transnational dimension, or ‘macro regions’, is given considerable attention in this discussion, also in relation to the future EU Cohesion Policy post-2013 as discussed in the EU’s *Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion* (CEC 2010f). The debate on EU strategies for macro-regions should be understood in relation to these shifts in the EU policy framework.

## 1.1. EU macro-regional strategies: the background

The foundation for the EU macro-regional strategies that have been prepared over the past years can be found in a discussion paper presented by Pawel Samecki, then EU Commissioner of Regional Policy, in September 2009. It does not provide an explicit definition of what a macro-region is, nor of a macro-regional strategy. Rather, the paper states that ‘there is no standard definition for macro-region. (...) The definition applied here (...) will be “an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges”. This carries no implication of scale: however, in an EU context a macro-region will involve several regions in several countries but the number of member states should be significantly fewer than in the Union as a whole’ (Samecki 2009a: para 2.1).

This definition has both a territorial and a functional dimension. From a territorial perspective, it implies that a number of nation-states and regions are involved, thus requiring cooperation across national borders. Littoral countries of the Baltic Sea are eight EU member states (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and Russia. The Danube Region covers eight EU countries (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania) and six non-EU countries (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Ukraine and Moldova). DG Regio’s definition moreover implies that the extension of a macro-region does not have to be identical with administrative boundaries of nation-states but can cover just parts of those. The functional dimension of the concept suggests that in the first instance the macro-region concept is based on large natural or landscape systems, such as the ecosystems of the Baltic Sea and the Danube river and on the interlinkages between territories resulting from this shared ecosystem and other economic and social connections. DG Regio has emphasized that it considers the boundaries of the macro-regions as being flexible and subject to the issue addressed. Thus, while the reach of the natural ecosystems of the Baltic Sea and the Danube are the primary consideration, they are not the only criterion to determine the ‘geographical reach’ of macro-regional strategies.<sup>3</sup> Different actions may require different geogra-

3. And indeed, as Schymik (2011) has argued, the delineation of the areas for the Baltic Sea Region and Danube region strategies are not completely identical with the catchment areas of these ecosystems.



phies, requiring a flexible approach to addressing them. Therefore, only a multi-functional approach, that is, a combination of different topics, makes according to DG Regio a European region a macro-region for which it is useful to develop an integrated strategy.

A macro-regional strategy has been defined by DG Regio as ‘an integrated framework’ (Samecki 2009a: para 2.1). This integrated framework, it is argued in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, will allow ‘the European Union and member states to identify needs and match them to the available resources through coordination of appropriate policies, thus enabling the Baltic Sea Region to enjoy a sustainable environment and optimal economic and social development’ (CEC 2010a: 2). This formulation places the spotlight on the key ingredients of the EU macro-regional approach: the key actors (primarily the EU and its member states, as EU decisions don’t cover other countries), the identification of needs to achieve joint objectives and address shared concerns (agenda-setting and prioritisation, based on measurable needs as well as political preferences), and the role of the strategy as a framework for coordinating policies and resources.

The emphasis has been from the beginning that there should be no new funds, no new legislation, and no new institutions (the ‘three No’s’) for EU macro-regional strategies. Rather the European Commission has emphasised that the value of macro-regional strategies would be ‘to achieve better governance on large territories confronted with similar problems. Moreover, by resolving issues in a relatively small group of countries and regions the way may be cleared for better cohesion at the level of the Union’ (Samecki 2009a: para 2.2). The expectation is that the added-value of macro-regional strategies lies in the coordination of actions across policy areas, which should lead to more effective outcomes and ensure a more efficient use of resources than individual initiatives.

The preparation of the Baltic Sea Region Strategy and the role of different actors in the process have been described in considerable detail elsewhere (see for example Dubois et al. 2009; Schymik and Krumrey 2009; Stocchiero 2010a, b; Bengtsson 2009). In brief, the European Parliament published a report in late 2006 calling for a strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. In December 2007, the European Council invited the Commission to present a European Union strategy for the

Baltic Sea region by June 2009. This strategy was meant to address the increasingly visible degradation of the Baltic Sea itself but also the disparate development paths of the countries in the region and the potential benefits of more and better co-ordination. The European Council set three parameters for the Commission in its development of the strategy. It should be without prejudice to the Integrated Maritime Policy endorsed in the same Council Conclusions, it should *inter alia* help to address the urgent environmental challenges related to the Baltic Sea, and the Northern Dimension framework should provide the basis for the external aspects of co-operation in the region (CEC 2009). The European Commission has emphasised from the beginning that the objectives of a macro-regional strategy cannot be dictated from above, but that they need to be developed in response to the concerns of the regions involved, because the implementation of the strategy relies on the commitment of actors in the region. In order to achieve wide support and identify the priorities for cooperation, wide consultation processes were undertaken on the two EU macro-regional strategies that have been adopted to date.

DG Regio's Discussion Paper distinguishes two types of macro-regional strategies. The first type has very specific opportunities or problems that cannot be satisfactorily addressed by regions or countries acting alone, such as in the case of environmental challenges. In the second type there may be no obvious primary issue that would require a macro-regional strategy, but a group of regions may nonetheless consider the preparation of a joint, integrated strategy as beneficial. The Discussion Paper clearly states that at least in the short term the European Commission is interested only in the first type of macro-regional strategy (Samecki 2009a), as it is here where the added-value of rescaling policy responses to the transnational level should be most obvious.

This distinction mirrors an ongoing discussion in many of the EU funding programmes for transnational cooperation ('INTERREG') about the definition of 'transnationality' and the issues and projects that warrant European funding. Drawing on the principle of subsidiarity, which means that competences should only be ceded to higher jurisdictions when there is demonstrable need or benefit to be gained, two types of issues have commonly been distinguished in most programme areas. Thus, a 'transnational issue' has effects across national and regional borders that cannot be addressed adequately at the local, regional or national level alone and

need cooperation across administrative borders for effective responses. In comparison, a ‘common issue’ is experienced in different places in the transnational region (such as demographic change). It could be suitably addressed within nation-states, but transnational cooperation might bring more innovative and effective solutions by combining experiences from different places (Dühr and Nadin 2007). Yet, the value of coordinated transnational responses is undoubtedly greatest for real transnational issues that benefit most from a ‘rescaling’ to the most appropriate level to escape the limitations of administrative and nation-state boundaries and address large scale issues more effectively and efficiently (see Brenner 2004; Keating 2008).

## **1.2. EU macro-regional strategies: state of affairs and the policy debate**

The first EU macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) (CEC 2009) was published in 2009 as a ‘test case’ for a new approach to policy coordination in the EU, which aims to set priorities for large European regions at EU level and define concrete actions for cross-border and transnational cooperation.

Since the adoption of the Baltic Sea Strategy, a macro-regional strategy for the Danube region was adopted in December 2010 (CEC 2010c, d). There has been a decision to develop an EU Strategy also for the North Sea English Channel (to be named ‘North Sea Region 2020’), which in comparison to the previous two does not include an explicit East-West dimension of EU and non-EU countries. The Committee of the Regions has expressed its support for the macro-regional approach by forming ‘Interregional groups’ for these three macro-regions.

Further strategies, such as for the Alps, are under discussion (CIPRA 2010), and in 2010 there have also been proposals for an Adriatic-Ionian macro-region by the governments of Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and Greece. If all these discussions on macro-regional strategies come to fruition, then a web of partly overlapping areas would result (see Figure 1). Of a somewhat different status are other territorial policies that also contribute to the debate on transnational cooperation, such as the existing EU policy frameworks

for the Black Sea (CEC 2007), the Northern Dimension<sup>4</sup> and for the Mediterranean<sup>5</sup>, and the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy<sup>6</sup>.

The enthusiasm for an approach that is widely regarded as experimental has prompted the European Commission and other actors to caution against unreflected copying of the approach and the mere bundling together of existing and planned projects. Rather, in recent statements DG Regio has emphasised that new initiatives should be explicitly supported by a clear and common strategy which has been developed 'bottom up' and comes in response to clearly identified shared challenges of the macro-region. The potential added-value of an EU macro-regional strategy to existing cooperation arrangements should be carefully considered. For the Alpine Region, for example, actors in the region have emphasised that a macro-regional strategy should only be developed if it helps to reinforce, rather than replaces, existing agreements and instruments (as for example the Alpine Convention, see CIPRA 2010).

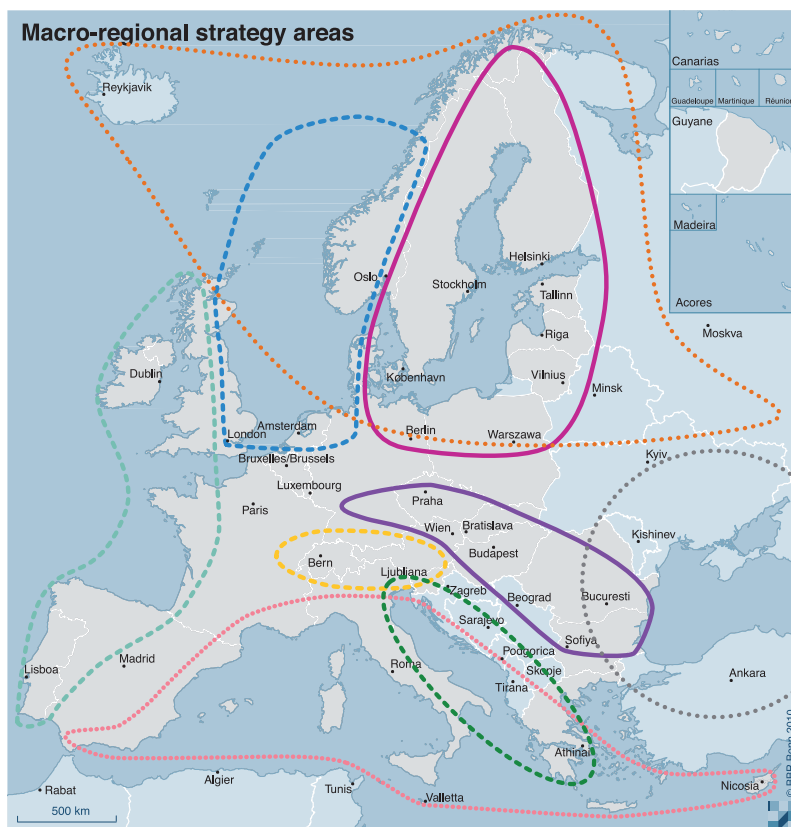
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4. [http://eeas.europa.eu/north\\_dim/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/north_dim/index_en.htm)

5. [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index_en.htm)

6. [http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/publications\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/publications_en.html)

FIGURE 1: MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGY AREAS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION



**Core areas of macroregional strategies of the European Union**

- |   |        |                                |        |
|---|--------|--------------------------------|--------|
| <b>Existing or adopted</b>                                      | —      | <b>Under discussion</b>        | --- -- |
| European Danube Strategy  | —      | European North Sea Strategy    | --- -- |
| EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region                           | —      | Atlantic Strategy              | --- -- |
| <b>Existing of different character</b>                          |        | Alpine Strategy                | --- -- |
| Mediterranean Strategy  | --- -- | Adriatic-Ionic Initiative      | --- -- |
| Black Sea Synergy   | --- -- |                                |        |
| Northern Dimension (EU, Norway, Iceland and Russian Federation) | --- -- | Regionen NUTS 2                | --- -- |
|   | --- -- | Geometrische Basis: GFK MACON  |        |
|   | --- -- | Quelle: Europäische Kommission |        |

SOURCE: BBSR RESEARCH NEWS 2/2010 AND UPDATES FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

([http://www.bbsr.bund.de/cln\\_016/nn\\_222942/sid\\_E9C9BA6FC5A05BEF2E330F0BC994994/BBSR/EN/Publications/ResearchNews/researchnews\\_\\_node.html?\\_\\_nnn=true](http://www.bbsr.bund.de/cln_016/nn_222942/sid_E9C9BA6FC5A05BEF2E330F0BC994994/BBSR/EN/Publications/ResearchNews/researchnews__node.html?__nnn=true))

What may explain the broad interest in the concept of EU macro-regional strategies are suggestions that the EU Baltic Sea Region Strategy may provide inspiration

for the territorial cooperation objective of the EU Cohesion Policy post-2013. In a discussion paper on the future of Cohesion Policy, former Commissioner Samecki for example noted that ‘many challenges cut across administrative boundaries calling for the need to find common solutions to shared problems. There is an increasing demand for shared implementation mechanisms in the framework of concrete cross border and network interconnection projects. In the context of the Single Market border regions still offer high unexploited potential. Exploiting this potential will require reinforcement in scale and a shift in the nature of territorial cooperation. The approach of functional macro-regions, like the example of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy and the Danube basin will be an avenue which deserves further examination’ (Samecki 2009b: 5). The European Parliament (EP 2010) has expressed support for the idea of an integrated approach for regional policy post-2013, including through strategies for macro-regions if first experiences prove useful, but has warned that such an approach should not lead to the renationalisation of cohesion policy. The Commission’s *Fifth Report on economic, social and territorial cohesion* (CEC 2010f: xxviii) has argued that the objective of territorial cohesion should be addressed in the new programmes post-2013, ‘with particular emphasis on the role of cities, functional geographies, areas facing specific geographical or demographic problems and macro-regional strategies’.

Such comments by EU institutions have prompted questions on the role of macro-regional strategies in relation to existing transnational cooperation funding programmes (shown in Figure 2). The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) for example argued that ‘macro-regional strategies could be reasonable in suitable areas and in single cases, but the whole European territory should not be covered with macro-regional strategies. Otherwise the European Commission has to explain thoroughly the differences between macro-regional strategies and INTERREG B programmes’ (AEBR 2011: 7). Also some member states expressed their reservations about the macro-regional approach until its benefits were proven. The UK Government’s response to the Fifth Cohesion Report for example states that ‘macro-regional strategies will not be appropriate for all regions and the EU should not create artificial regions that do not share common features and challenges. It is crucial that they do not become an extra bureaucratic layer that does not deliver a real added value. For many regions, territorial co-operation programmes will remain the best mechanism for co-operative working’ (United

Kingdom Government 2011). The German Government argued that ‘the aim should be to use the existing funding more effectively and in a more co-ordinated way. The structural funds can make an important contribution towards the success of macro-regional strategies; however, the regional development strategies must continue to play the main role in determining the use of the structural funds and the selection of the projects. Bureaucratic requirements to “label” projects or to produce reports should be avoided’ (German Federal Government, February 2011). The decision on whether or not macro-regions will receive their own funding, while subject to much speculation (see Pop 2009, 2010) is not expected before June 2011 (CEC 2010g). Meanwhile, the attention given to the first EU strategies focuses on trying to determine the nature and value of such macro-regional policies and how they can be most effectively organized and financed (cf. CEC 2010h; EP 2010).





## II. Transnational cooperation in Europe: 'sub-regionalism' and the 'INTERREG' initiative

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Cooperation between contiguous clusters of European countries, referred to as 'sub-regionalism' (Cotter 2009; Dangerfield 2009, 2010), is long-standing in many parts of Europe, with the new macro-regional strategies drawing on experiences of existing transnational institutions in the Baltic Sea Region and in Central Europe<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, given frequent references to the expected contribution of European transnational territorial cooperation programmes to the new macro-regional strategies, the 'INTERREG' initiative will also be discussed in this section. In doing so, the most important differences between these existing approaches to transnational cooperation and the new EU macro-regional strategies can be identified.

7. The Central European Initiative (CEI) arose in 1992 from the earlier 'Initiative of Four Integration Group' (established 1989 by Austria, Hungary, Italy and Yugoslavia). The CEI has today 18 members: Albania, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

Transnational bodies in the region specifically concerned with the Danube are the International Convention for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR; created in 1998; current Contracting Parties Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia, Ukraine and the European Union) and the Danube Commission (established 1948, with current members Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Moldova, Russian Federation, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Croatia).

## 2.1. Sub-regional groupings in Europe

The tradition of subregional cooperation in Europe predates the EU with the establishment of the Benelux Economic Union (1944) and the Nordic Council (1952).<sup>8</sup> Today there exist numerous cooperation arrangements of varying stages of formalisation in Europe that have been set up by the cooperating countries without direct involvement of supranational institutions such as the EU. There has been a wave of newly emerging sub-regional groupings in the early and mid-1990s, primarily ‘in the geopolitical space bordering and beyond the now enlarged EU and NATO: Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Mediterranean and the former Soviet Union’ (Cottey 2009: 3). Over the past years most of these groups have become established bodies ‘with a diplomatic and institutional momentum of their own reflected in regular meetings of their member states at various levels and ongoing programmes and activities’ (*ibid.*).

The sub-regional groups that were established in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s mostly sought to respond to the various post-Cold War challenges facing governments, such as the need to implement economic and political reforms. The main drivers for sub-regional cooperation in Southern Europe were, according to Cottey (2009), related to trends in North Africa and the Middle East, such as illegal immigration, environmental degradation and economic underdevelopment. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, established by the EU institutions in 1995 and re-launched in 2008 as the Union for the Mediterranean, was set up to bring together the EU member states and their neighbours on the southern shore of the Mediterranean to address such concerns. A second phase of post-Cold War European sub-regionalism in the late 1990s and early 2000s came in response to the eastward enlargements of the EU and NATO and sought to reduce the impact of the new ‘dividing lines’ between members and non-member countries (Cottey 2009). In the same period, marked by the end of the Yugoslav wars, sub-regional cooperation in the Balkans on common political, economic and social challenges in the reconstruction and transition period began.

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8. The members of the Benelux Economic Union are Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg. The Nordic Council has 87 elected members from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden as well as from three autonomous territories (the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland).

For these sub-regional groups that were established in the 1990s and early 2000s, Cottey (2009; see also Dangerfield 2009, 2010) has identified four main rationales or roles:

1. a bridging role (essentially a political role, with sub-regional groups seeking to overcome historical divisions and/or mitigating the emergence of new divisions);
2. as a means of helping states to integrate into the EU and NATO (be it through the functioning of the sub-regional group as a lobbying platform or for members to share experiences about the accession processes);
3. as a means of addressing functional and specific transnational problems and policy challenges (such as environmental problems) whereby the joint responses are meant to both help addressing challenges that are cross-border in nature as well as allowing the exchange of experiences on similar problems that are faced by the regions; and
4. as facilitators of internal (political, economic and military) reforms in the post-communist states (by acting as frameworks for policy transfer, with sub-regional meetings and exchanges providing the context for transfer of ideas and by acting as frameworks for the provision of financial and technical assistance).

By the late 2000s, the various sub-regional institutions created in the 1990s have, as Cottey (2009: 7) argues, become 'established features of the European diplomatic landscape, albeit not particularly prominent ones'. Regular meetings occur between actors from different levels and including governments and public actors, non-state actors (businesses and civil society organisations) and international administrative and policy-making/implementation structures which were established in many of these sub-regional groups. Cottey (2009: 7) comments that 'from one perspective, this can be viewed as the consolidation of the sub-regional cooperation which emerged in the 1990s. A more critical assessment, however, might be that once institutions have been established, they have a tendency to perpetuate themselves, continuing along pre-set institutional paths, with those actors involved developing a self-interest in maintaining the institutions and their activities'. In any case, the effects of such cooperation are difficult to assess, but they have arguably 'contributed to the development of habits of cooperation, a sense of common identity and interests amongst their members

and, albeit in limited forms, policy coordination and common policies' (Cottey 2009: 12). At present, sub-regional groups are mostly dependent on the financial support of their member states and international organisations such as the EU and the World Bank. Increasing the role and impact of European sub-regional groups, Cottey (2009) argues, would require allocating independent financial resources to fund programmes, policies and activities.

## **2.2. Transnational territorial cooperation through INTERREG and the transnational spatial visions**

While sub-regionalism denotes cooperation between nation-states, there are also numerous long-standing examples of cross-border and transnational cooperation between regional and local authorities. Especially in the densely populated areas of Western Europe several early examples of transboundary cooperation can be found, which were set up in response to urgent urban, economic and spatial development issues. The first 'Euregio' in the Dutch-German border region of Gronau and Enschede was for example founded in 1958. However, the funding provided for cross-border cooperation since 1990 and for transnational cooperation since 1997 through the EU 'INTERREG' initiative has been crucial for widening involvement of actors across Europe in transboundary cooperation programmes and projects. INTERREG programmes are co-financed through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), allowing actors from the identified cross-border or transnational areas to bid for EU funding to support cooperative action.

Besides providing financial support for a wide range of public, private and non-governmental actors to cooperate across national borders, the launch of the INTERREG initiative on cross-border cooperation in 1990 marked an important step towards multi-level governance in the EU (Dühr et al. 2010). This is because INTERREG funding did not have to be awarded to nation-states, but could be allocated to existing cross-border institutions such as 'Euroregions'. According to Brenner (2004: 288), this approach to engaging regions and municipalities and existing cross-border structures in EU regional policy allowed municipalities and regions 'to establish transnational lobbying platforms without directly involving their respective national governments. Concomitantly, the European Commission

attempts to capitalize upon such networks in order to influence local development outcomes without the direct mediation of national state institutions.’

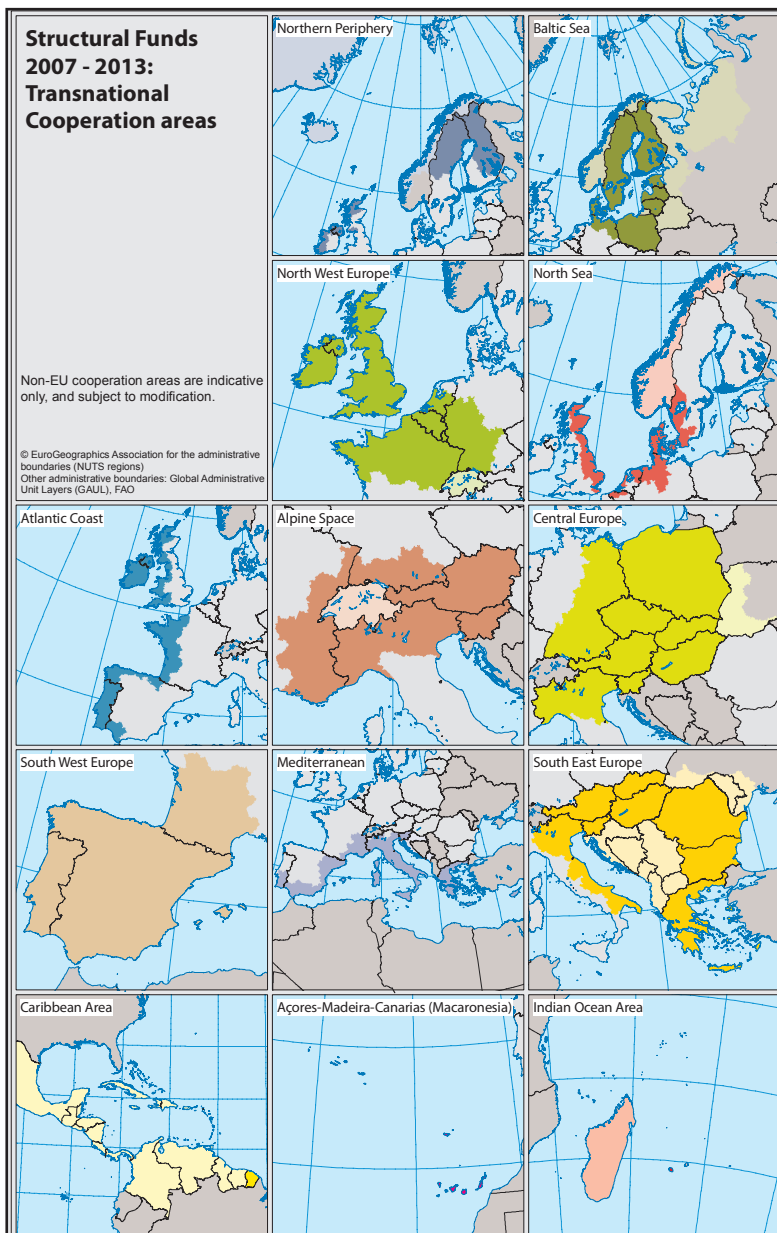
While EU-funding for cross-border cooperation focuses since 1990 on reducing the effects of national borders in pursuit of the objectives of the Single Market, the idea of building EU policy interventions around the needs of large-scale transnational regions was introduced with two European Commission studies: *Europe 2000* (CEC 1991) and *Europe 2000+* (CEC 1994). With this approach to identify functional regions the European Commission sought to encourage ‘new ways of thinking about spatial prospects which are not limited by national boundaries’ (CEC 1994: 169). The *Europe 2000* studies provided inspiration for the setting up of the Community Initiative INTERREG IIC in 1997, which henceforth complemented the existing INTERREG initiative on cross-border cooperation by introducing EU funding for transnational cooperation across large contiguous areas. INTERREG IIC was created as an instrument to support the application of the ‘European Spatial Development Perspective’ (ESDP) (CSD 1999). The *ESDP* is commonly seen as the first spatial development framework by and for the then 15 EU member states. The transnational cooperation areas for INTERREG IIC were identified on the basis of existing cooperation structures (as in the case of the Baltic Sea Region) as well as studies by the European Commission that identified a number of transnational regions with shared spatial development concerns, such as the Atlantic Area, or the Central and Capitals Region of North-west Europe. The coherence of some of these transnational regions was debatable from the beginning, and they have over time been expanded following political lobbying or altered in response to administrative considerations. Such changes to the cooperation areas have arguably led to a considerable ‘blurring of the initial intentions for cooperation [as] they are too large to suggest specific transnational issues’ (Dühr and Nadin 2007: 379). In the current EU Cohesion Policy period 2007-13, INTERREG has become one of three main funding objectives, with ‘territorial cooperation’ complementing the objectives for ‘convergence’ and for ‘regional competitiveness and employment’. The *ESDP* has been replaced as the guiding reference framework for transnational cooperation with funding priorities derived from the EU’s ‘Growth and Jobs’ agenda (CEC 2005). This places emphasis on supporting actions in relation to innovation, economic competitiveness and sustainable development, but does not specifically promote an integrated or territorial perspective as the *ESDP* did. In

the period 2007-13, transnational territorial cooperation is supported within 13 large programme areas (see Figure 2).

There are considerable differences between these transnational cooperation areas and the definitions of ‘transnationality’ that they apply. This has resulted in a wide variety of projects that make it difficult to assess the effects of EU-funded cooperation comprehensively. Arguably many of these projects focussed on cooperation on issues of common concern, rather than issues of transnational relevance. While INTERREG cooperation so far may thus not have contributed to a rescaling of planning and public policy perspectives to the transnational level (Dühr and Nadin 2007), it has been argued that it has succeeded in engaging local and regional authorities in fields previously reserved for central state actors. Moreover, INTERREG funding has been found to encourage the creation of new regional identities, institutions and governance systems; it provided incentives to tackle issues that are given low priority in domestic contexts (i.e. that EU-funded transnational cooperation has an important political and symbolic added value); it mobilized financial resources (as matching funding from public or private sources is required for EU-funded territorial cooperation projects); and provides a platform for bringing together different types of organisation which do not regularly work together (see Barca 2009; Dühr et al. 2010; Panteia et al. 2010).

Harvesting the results of INTERREG cooperation more effectively has been hampered by limited political commitment to fully exploit the programmes and results of cooperation projects within national and regional contexts. Moreover, broad programme objectives have left room for the pursuit of vested interests, often resulting in projects of arguably limited relevance for the transnational region as a whole (Barca 2009; Dühr and Nadin 2007). EU Cohesion Policy reform for the 2007-13 programming period may have created additional obstacles for effective transnational cooperation by aligning the funding priorities with the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas, ‘thus removing any possibility of an approach tailored to the specific characteristics of each area’ (CPMR 2010b).

**FIGURE 2: THE INTERREG IVB COOPERATION AREAS (2007–13)**



**SOURCE: © EUROGRAPHICS ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES (NUTS REGIONS).**

**OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES: GLOBAL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT LAYERS (GAUL), FAO.**

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Available online at [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/graph/cartes\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/graph/cartes_en.htm) (accessed 31 July 2009).

In trying to assess the outcomes of EU-funded transnational cooperation, it should not be overlooked that territorial cooperation is complex: projects are 'characterised by interdisciplinarity, multiple languages, cultural diversity and the challenge of communicating across sectoral boundaries' (Barca 2009: 98). Cooperation structures need time to evolve and mature, and trust between cooperating partners needs to develop before harder choices can be made which would also allow the sharing of financial gains and losses. Political agendas and the mindsets of senior officials play an important role for more intensive cooperation, but they are slow to change. A clear definition of the agenda for cooperation, and a discussion about the issues that should be tackled at the transnational scale is crucial. However, this has proven complex in the context of INTERREG programmes, where regulatory and administrative issues of managing Structural Funds are often given most attention.

In an attempt to identify the transnational agenda for cooperation, the Community Initiative INTERREG IIC (1997-1999) and its successor INTERREG IIIB (2000-2006) explicitly encouraged the development of 'transnational spatial visions' as an instrument to coordinate the numerous and often divergent interests, and to reach agreement at a scale where many uncertainties about complex spatial processes and future developments exist. The transnational visions were also expected to guide the development and selection of transnational INTERREG projects in these areas (see Dühr et al. 2010). The 'model' for transnational spatial visions prepared in the context of the transnational INTERREG initiative is commonly acknowledged to be the 'Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010' (VASAB2010 1994) document. It was prepared by the ministries for spatial planning and development of countries around the Baltic Sea Region even before the INTERREG IIC initiative was launched. The VASAB vision sought to address shared concerns over environmental pollution of the shallow sea and to consider policy responses to the shared issues of a largely peripheral region of Europe after the fall of the 'Iron Curtain'. An action programme, entitled 'From vision to action' (VASAB2010 1996) proposed measures for the application of the spatial vision. In 1997, INTERREG funding supported the process of updating of the VASAB 2010 strategy (VASAB2010+2001). The 'VASAB Long-term perspective for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region' (VASAB LTP 2009) was recently adopted to provide strategic direction until 2030.



There are four other examples of transnational spatial visions that were prepared in the context of INTERREG IIC and IIIB cooperation and that sought to draw together the broad principles of the ESDP with the planning activities of different national and regional governments and many hundreds of cooperation projects funded by the INTERREG programme. These are: the visions for the CADSES area (BBR 2000a)<sup>9</sup>, North-West Europe (NWMA Spatial Vision Group), North Sea Region (Vision Working Group 2000) and the Atlantic Area (CPMR 2005). Prepared by groups of mostly spatial planners from the participating countries, the outcomes have been criticised for not engaging sufficiently with a wider public and private audience (Stumm and Robert 2006). Overall, the influence of these spatial visions on the selection of INTERREG projects was arguably limited, as was their effect on national and regional planning policy and practice. Their main value may thus have been in helping to intensify cooperation between the national and regional actors involved in the development of the transnational INTERREG spatial visions. The visions have arguably stimulated a discussion on the agenda for issues that benefit from transnational cooperation and the value of a coordination framework for sector policies and actions (Dühr et al. 2010; Stumm and Robert 2006). With the policy shift since the 2000s towards the Lisbon-Gothenburg agenda, in the current EU Cohesion Policy period (2007-13), there has been little attention to the potential role of transnational spatial visions in providing a strategic framework for cooperation. However, there is a growing recognition that EU sector policies and action across administrative borders need to be better coordinated that explains the recent interest in developing integrated strategies for macro-regions.

9. In the INTERREG IIC and IIIB funding periods, CADSES denoted the 'Central European, Adriatic, Danubian, South-Eastern European Space' transnational cooperation area. In the funding period 2007-2013, the CADSES transnational cooperation area was divided into two separate programme areas: the Central Europe Programme (CENTRAL) and the South East European Space (SEES) (see Figure 2). They both partly overlap the area covered by the Danube macro-regional strategy.



### III. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

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**E**U macro-regional strategies have so far been adopted for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) (2009) and the Danube Region (EUSDR) (2010). In line with the European Commission's proposals, no extra EU funding has been made available, and in both regions there were existing cooperation structures on which the strategy and its implementation can build. First experiences from the implementation of the Baltic Sea Region Strategy are now available, and the discussion in this section will therefore focus mainly on this macro-region, although references to the Danube Region Strategy are made in case of significant differences between the two initiatives.

Since the 1990s, the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea have been cooperating at the transnational level. Besides the political forum of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), there are other well-established forums of cooperation that have considerable influence on policy- and decision-making, such as HELCOM<sup>10</sup> in the field of environmental policy and VASAB<sup>11</sup> for transnational spatial planning. The

10. The Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) is an intergovernmental organization (Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden) working to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea.

11. VASAB – Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea – is an intergovernmental network of 11 countries of the Baltic Sea Region promoting cooperation on spatial planning and development in the Baltic Sea Region.

fact that transnational cooperation is well established and institutionalised is particularly remarkable because the region was divided for forty years during the cold war, which resulted in considerable differences in political and economic systems.

Given such comparatively well-established arrangements for transnational cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, the question arises why the EU institutions should become directly involved in action that covers only parts of the EU territory. The main argument for EU involvement in this region derives from the recognition that intergovernmental cooperation faces limitations in trying to coordinate sector policies across different levels of government and across national borders. After all, as Kröger (2006) has argued, policy-makers and stakeholders are faced with competing interests when involved in European co-operation, including uncertainty over outcomes, diverging interests and political conflict, which may simply override their cooperation objectives, valuable as they may be considered on their own. It is hoped that by involving the EU institutions, this dilemma can be resolved and macro-regional cooperation be pursued with more stability.

Given the ambitions of the macro-regional approach to improve coordination of policies and actions geographically (across national borders), horizontally (across sector policies) and vertically (across different levels of governance), considerable emphasis has been placed on ensuring the wide-ranging support of actors from across the region and at EU level. Describing the process of preparing the EU Baltic Sea Region Strategy, Joenniemi (2009) has emphasised the unprecedented approach of DG Regio (as the actor charged with the preparation of the strategy) coordinating the input of 20 other Directorate-Generals of the European Commission in the drafting of the strategy. A series of consultation events with EU member states, regional and local authorities and stakeholders (inter-governmental and non-governmental bodies, experts and representatives from the private sector) in the Baltic Sea Region and an online consultation of the public were organised. These consultations resulted in the identification of four pillars of the Strategy that aim to make the BSR more:

1. Environmentally sustainable (e.g. by reducing pollution in the sea);
2. Prosperous (e.g. by promoting innovation in small and medium enterprises);
3. Accessible and attractive (e.g. by implementing better transport links);

#### 4. Safe and secure (e.g. by improving accident response).

The European Commission has emphasized that this structure is ‘only for ease of analysis. In fact, every pillar relates to a wide range of policies and will have impacts on the other pillars: they are interlinked and interdependent’ (CEC 2010a: 3). In addition to the four thematic pillars, the strategy also contains horizontal actions intended to support territorial cohesion (see Box 1).

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is accompanied by a ‘rolling’ Action Plan (intended to allow for adjustments over time, see CEC 2010a, b) of 15 priority areas (see Table 1 for an overview of the content of the Action Plan for Baltic Sea Region Strategy, and Table 2 for the structure of the Danube Region Action Plan with its 4 pillars and 11 priorities). The priority areas are implemented through actions, some of which are strategic for the Baltic Sea Region (i.e. ‘transnational issues’ in the definition discussed above) and others are cooperative, meaning they are based on the benefits in improving cooperation on issues where member states and stakeholders are ready to do so (i.e. ‘common issues’) (CEC 2010a, b). The Action Plan further lists examples of flagship projects, meaning projects with high significance for the Baltic Sea Region (see Table 3 for examples). For each of these, a responsible lead partner as well as a deadline for implementation should be identified (although there are several projects where these have not yet been determined, see CEC 2010b). Some flagship projects are labelled ‘fast track’, denoting the expectation ‘that they can be launched and implemented relatively rapidly’ (CEC 2010a: 4). The projects should be financed from available EU funding programmes in the regions and other sources, as summarised in Table 4.

**Box 1: HORIZONTAL ACTIONS IN THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION**

- Align available funding and policies to the priorities and actions of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (Deadline for progress review 12/2010).
- Cooperate on the transposition of EU Directives so that national implementing rules do not create unnecessary barriers. All such co-ordination would be completely voluntary and would remain entirely within the EU legislation.
- Develop integrated maritime governance structures in the Baltic Sea region (Deadline for progress review 12/2010).
- Become a pilot project in implementing the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and take early actions to restore the Baltic Sea (Deadline for progress review 12/2010).
- Encourage the use of Maritime Spatial Planning in all member states around the Baltic Sea and develop a common approach for cross-border cooperation (Deadline for progress review: to be confirmed).
- Develop and complete Land-based Spatial Planning, with the VASAB Long Term Perspective for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region<sup>12</sup> to be taken into account by other priority coordinators with regard to spatial objectives, conditions and impacts of their actions (Deadline for progress review: to be confirmed).
- Strengthening multi-level governance, place-based spatial planning and sustainable development (Deadline for progress review: to be confirmed).
- Transform successful pilot and demonstration projects into full-scale actions (Deadline for progress review: to be determined).
- Use research as a base for policy decisions through common research programs in the Baltic Sea Region (Deadline: to be determined).
- Ensure fast broadband connection for rural areas using local solutions to include the rural communities in the communication networks (Deadline: to be determined).
- Define and implement the Baltic Sea basin component of the European Marine Observation Data Network (EMODNET) and improve socio-economic data (Deadline: to be determined).
- Build a regional identity at the level of the wider region based on a common vision (Lead: BaltMet; Deadline: to be determined).
- Support for sustainable development of the fisheries areas under the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) operational programmes and the Community FAR-NET network (Lead: each member state network for fisheries areas, in cooperation with the Community FAR-NET network; Deadline for progress review: to be determined).

12. Adopted by the Ministers responsible for spatial, planning and development of Baltic Sea Region countries in October 2009 in Vilnius

**SOURCE: CEC 2010b.**

**TABLE 1: PILLARS AND PRIORITY AREAS OF THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION**

| PILLAR/PRIORITY AREA   | COORDINATING COUNTRY/-IES  | NUMBER OF ACTIONS | NUMBER OF PROJECTS |
|--|--|-------------------|--------------------|
| <b>PILLAR I: TO MAKE THE BALTIC SEA AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE PLACE</b>  |  |                   |                    |
| 1. TO REDUCE NUTRIENT INPUTS TO THE SEA TO ACCEPTABLE LEVELS   | POLAND/FINLAND   | 6                 | 5                  |
| 2. TO PRESERVE NATURAL ZONES AND BIODIVERSITY, INCLUDING FISHERIES   | GERMANY  | 2                 | 3                  |
| 3. TO REDUCE THE USE AND IMPACT OF HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES  | SWEDEN   | 4                 | 8                  |
| 4. TO BECOME A MODEL REGION FOR CLEAN SHIPPING   | DENMARK  | 1                 | 6                  |
| 5. TO MITIGATE AND ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE   | DENMARK  | 3                 | 3                  |
| <b>PILLAR II: TO MAKE THE BALTIC SEA REGION A PROSPEROUS PLACE</b>   |  |                   |                    |
| 6. TO REMOVE HINDRANCES TO THE INTERNAL MARKET IN THE BALTIC SEA   | ESTONIA  | 6                 | 7                  |
| 7. TO EXPLOIT THE FULL POTENTIAL OF THE REGION IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION  | SWEDEN/POLAND  | 2                 | 5                  |
| 8. IMPLEMENTING THE SMALL BUSINESS ACT: TO PROMOTE ENTREPRENEURSHIP, STRENGTHEN SMEs AND INCREASE THE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN RESOURCES | DENMARK/GERMANY  | 8                 | 8                  |
| 9. TO REINFORCE SUSTAINABILITY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES  | FINLAND; LITHUANIA FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT; SWEDEN FOR FISHERIES   | 7                 | 10                 |
| <b>PILLAR III: TO MAKE THE BALTIC SEA REGION AND ACCESSIBLE AND ATTRACTIVE PLACE</b>   |  |                   |                    |
| 10. TO IMPROVE THE ACCESS TO, AND EFFICIENCY AND SECURITY OF, THE ENERGY MARKETS   | LATVIA/DENMARK   | 3                 | 4                  |
| 11. TO IMPROVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL TRANSPORT LINKS   | LITHUANIA/SWEDEN   | 5                 | 5                  |
| 12. TO MAINTAIN AND REINFORCE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE BALTIC SEA REGION IN PARTICULAR THROUGH EDUCATION, TOURISM AND HEALTH              | TOURISM: GERMANY (MECKLENBURG-VORPOMMERN)<br>HEALTH: NORTHERN DIMENSION PARTNERSHIP ON PUBLIC HEALTH<br>EDUCATION: GERMANY | 8                 | 13                 |
| <b>PILLAR IV: TO MAKE THE BALTIC SEA REGION A SAFE AND SECURE PLACE</b>  |  |                   |                    |
| 13. TO BECOME A LEADING REGION IN MARITIME SAFETY AND SECURITY   | FINLAND/DENMARK  | 4                 | 7                  |
| 14. TO REINFORCE MARITIME ACCIDENT RESPONSE CAPACITY PROTECTION FROM MAJOR EMERGENCIES   | DENMARK  | 2                 | 3                  |
| 15. TO DECREASE THE VOLUME OF, AND HARM DONE BY, CROSS BORDER CRIME  | FINLAND/LITHUANIA  | 1                 | 5                  |
| <b>HORIZONTAL ACTIONS</b>  | <b>EUROPEAN COMMISSION</b>   | <b>13</b>         |                    |

SOURCE: CEC 2010b.

**TABLE 2: PILLARS AND PRIORITY AREAS OF THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE REGION**

| PILLAR/PRIORITY AREA   | COORDINATING COUNTRY/-IES  | NUMBER OF ACTIONS | NUMBER OF PROJECTS |
|--|--|-------------------|--------------------|
| <b>PILLAR A: CONNECTING THE DANUBE REGION</b>  |  |                   |                    |
| 1. TO IMPROVE MOBILITY AND MULTIMODALITY   | INLAND WATERWAYS<br>TRANSPORT:<br>AUSTRIA, ROMANIA                           | 10                | 9                  |
|  | RAIL, ROAD AND AIR<br>TRANSPORT: SLOVENIA,<br>SERBIA, (INTEREST:<br>UKRAINE) | 7                 | 6                  |
| 2. TO ENCOURAGE MORE SUSTAINABLE ENERGY  | HUNGARY, CZECH<br>REPUBLIC   | 17                | 10                 |
| 3. TO PROMOTE CULTURE AND TOURISM, PEOPLE TO PEOPLE CONTACTS                                 | BULGARIA, ROMANIA  | 14                | 20                 |
| <b>PILLAR B: PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE DANUBE REGION</b>                             |  |                   |                    |
| 4. TO RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF WATERS   | HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA  | 14                | 7                  |
| 5. TO MANAGE ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS   | HUNGARY, ROMANIA   | 8                 | 11                 |
| 6. TO PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY, LANDSCAPES AND THE QUALITY OF AIR AND SOILS                     | GERMANY (BAVARIA),<br>CROATIA  | 16                | 13                 |
| <b>PILLAR C: BUILDING PROSPERITY IN THE DANUBE REGION</b>                                    |  |                   |                    |
| 7. TO DEVELOP THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY THROUGH RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES | SLOVAKIA, SERBIA   | 8                 | 12                 |
| 8. TO SUPPORT THE COMPETITIVENESS OF ENTERPRISES, INCLUDING CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT              | GERMANY (BADEN-<br>WÜRTTEMBERG),<br>CROATIA                                  | 7                 | 10                 |
| 9. TO INVEST IN PEOPLE AND SKILLS  | AUSTRIA, MOLDOVA   | 8                 | 7                  |
| <b>PILLAR D: STRENGTHENING THE DANUBE REGION</b>   |  |                   |                    |
| 10. TO STEP UP INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND COOPERATION  | AUSTRIA (VIENNA),<br>SLOVENIA  | 9                 | 8                  |
| 11. TO WORK TOGETHER TO PROMOTE SECURITY AND TACKLE ORGANISED AND SERIOUS CRIME              | GERMANY, BULGARIA  | 11                | 10                 |

**SOURCE: CEC 2010d, CEC 2011.**



**TABLE 3: EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS AND PROJECTS FOR SELECTED PRIORITIES FOR ACTION IN THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION**

| <b>Pillar I: To make the Baltic Sea and environmentally sustainable place</b>       |  |   | <b>FLAGSHIP PROJECTS</b>  |
|---|--|---|---|
| <b>PRIORITY AREA</b>  | <b>ACTIONS (STRATEGIC)</b>   | <b>ACTIONS (COOPERATIVE)</b>  |   |
| 1. To reduce nutrient inputs to the sea to acceptable levels                        | Implement actions to reduce nutrients (Key Directives, HELCOM action plan)<br>Promote measures and practices which reduce nutrient losses from farming and address eutrophication (EU Nitrates and Water Framework Directives, CAP cross-compliance requirement)<br>Full implementation of the Water Framework Directive to maximize the environmental benefits for the Baltic Sea | Establish and restore more wetlands to recycle nutrients and mitigate floods<br>Set up the <b>BONUS 185</b> scheme (Joint Baltic Sea Research and Development Programme)<br>Facilitate cross-sectoral policy-oriented dialogue on integration of agricultural, environmental and rural development issues | <p>1.1 TIME/TABLE FOR PHASING-OUT OF PHOSPHATES IN DETERGENTS (LEAD: SWEDEN, DEADLINE 12/2012) <b>FAST TRACK</b></p> <p>1.2 WASTE WATER TREATMENT PLANTS AROUND THE BALTIC SEA (BUILDING / UPGRADING) (LEAD: SWEDEN, DEADLINE FOR PROGRESS REVIEW TBD)</p> <p>1.3 ANALYSE RESULTS OF PILOT ACTIONS FUNDED THROUGH ERDF, LIFE AND BALTIC 21 ON PREVENTION OF EUTROPHICATION (LEAD: TBC, DG REGIO TO FOLLOW UP, DEADLINE FOR PROGRESS REVIEW 06/2010) <b>FAST TRACK</b></p> <p>1.4 PUTTING BEST AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES INTO WORK ('BALTIC DEAL') (FUNDED BY INTERREG IVB BSR PROGRAMME AND NEFCO/NIB BSAP TRUST FUND) (LEAD: FEDERATION OF SWEDISH FARMERS AND LATVIAN RURAL ADVISORY AND TRAINING CENTRE; DEADLINE: 12/2013)</p> <p>1.5 ASSESSMENT OF REGIONAL NUTRIENT POLLUTION LOAD AND IDENTIFICATION OF PRIORITY PROJECTS TO REDUCE NUTRIENT INPUTS FROM BELARUS TO THE BALTIC SEA (LEAD: FINLAND, DEADLINE: 12/2011)</p> |
| <b>Pillar III: To make the Baltic Sea region an accessible and attractive place</b> |  |   | <b>FLAGSHIP PROJECTS</b>  |
| <b>PRIORITY AREA</b>  | <b>ACTIONS (STRATEGIC)</b>   | <b>ACTIONS (COOPERATIVE)</b>  |   |
| 10. To improve the access to, and the efficiency and security of the energy markets | Establish an integrated and well functioning market for energy (Implementation of Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan BEMIP)   | Increase use of renewable energies<br>Ensure more cross-border cooperation  | <p>10.1 MONITOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BALTIC ENERGY MARKET INTERCONNECTION PLAN (BEMIP) (LEAD: LITHUANIA; DEADLINE TBD) <b>FAST TRACK</b></p> <p>10.2 DEMONSTRATION OF COORDINATED OFFSHORE WIND FARM CONNECTION SOLUTIONS (LEAD: DENMARK; DEADLINE FOR PROGRESS REVIEW TBO) <b>FAST TRACK</b></p> <p>10.3 IMPLEMENT THE BALTIC SEA REGION BIOENERGY PROMOTION PROJECT (LEAD: SWEDEN; DEADLINE FOR PROGRESS REVIEW TBD)</p> <p>10.4 EXTEND THE NORDIC ELECTRICITY MARKET MODEL (NORDEL<sup>13</sup>) TO THE THREE BALTIC STATES (LEAD: LATVIA; DEADLINE FOR PROGRESS REVIEW TBD)</p>  |

NOTES: TBD = TO BE DETERMINED; TBC = TO BE CONFIRMED.

SOURCE: CEC 2010b.

13. NORDEL is the collaboration organisation of the Transmission System Operators (TSOs) of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

**TABLE 4:**  
**EXAMPLES OF FINANCING OF THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION AS IDENTIFIED IN THE ACTION PLAN**

| PILLAR  | EXAMPLES OF FINANCING  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>PILLAR I:</b><br/> <b>TO MAKE THE BALTIC SEA AN ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE PLACE</b></p> | <p>CONVERGENCE AND COMPETITIVENESS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES (2007-13, ERDF AND COHESION FUND) IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION IN THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENT:<br/>           WASTE WATER TREATMENT: € 3.1 BILLION<br/>           CLEAN URBAN TRANSPORT: € 2.3 BILLION<br/>           HOUSEHOLD AND INDUSTRIAL WASTE: € 1.6 BILLION<br/>           WATER DISTRIBUTION: € 1.2 BILLION<br/>           OTHER<sup>14</sup>: € 1.6 BILLION<br/>           TOTAL: € 9.8 BILLION</p> <p>PLUS OTHER EU COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES (7<sup>TH</sup> RESEARCH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME, LIFE PROGRAMME, EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION PROGRAMMES (ERDF), ENPI CBC, EAFRD, EFF AND THE COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME) AND NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL POLICIES.</p> <p>PLUS LOANS AND CO-FINANCING BY THE EIB.</p> |
| <p><b>PILLAR II:</b><br/> <b>TO MAKE THE BALTIC SEA REGION A PROSPEROUS PLACE</b></p>           | <p>CONVERGENCE AND COMPETITIVENESS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES (2007-13, ERDF AND COHESION FUND) IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION IN THE FIELD OF PROSPERITY:<br/>           INNOVATION IN SMEs AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: € 2.4 BILLION<br/>           INVESTMENTS IN FIRMS: € 2.0 BILLION<br/>           RTD ACTIVITIES: € 1.2 BILLION<br/>           RTD INFRASTRUCTURES: € 1.1 BILLION<br/>           TOTAL: € 6.7 BILLION</p> <p>PLUS OTHER COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES (7<sup>TH</sup> RESEARCH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME, LIFE PROGRAMME, ESF, THE EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION PROGRAMMES, ENPI CBC, EAFRD, EFF<sup>15</sup> AND THE COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME)</p> <p>PLUS NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL POLICIES.</p> <p>PLUS LOANS AND CO-FINANCING FROM THE EIB.</p>                           |

14. Including air quality, promotion of biodiversity and risk prevention.

15. Programmed Community expenditures 2007-2013 under the EFF in the field of prosperity: Sustainable development of fisheries areas € 316 million; Investments in fisheries processing, marketing and aquaculture € 500 million; Total: € 816 million.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>PILLAR III:</b><br/><b>TO MAKE THE BALTIC SEA REGION AN ACCESSIBLE AND ATTRACTIVE PLACE</b></p> | <p>CONVERGENCE AND COMPETITIVENESS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES (2007-13, ERDF AND COHESION FUND) IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION IN FIELDS LINKED TO ACCESSIBILITY AND ATTRACTIVENESS:<br/>INFORMATION SOCIETY: € 1.4 BILLION<br/>TRANSPORT: € 23.1 BILLION<br/>ENERGY: € 2.6 BILLION<br/>TOTAL: € 27.1 BILLION</p> <p>PLUS TEN-T PROGRAMME AND OTHER COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES (I.E. THE 7<sup>TH</sup> RESEARCH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME, THE LIFE PROGRAMME, THE EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION PROGRAMMES, THE (ENPI CBC, THE EAFRD, THE EFF; AND THE COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME.</p> <p>PLUS NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL POLICIES.</p> <p>PLUS LOANS / CO-FINANCING FROM EIB</p> |
| <p><b>PILLAR IV:</b><br/><b>TO MAKE THE BALTIC SEA REGION A SAFE AND SECURE PLACE</b></p>             | <p>CONVERGENCE AND COMPETITIVENESS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES (2007-13, ERDF AND COHESION FUND) IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION IN THE FIELD OF RISK PREVENTION:<br/>TOTAL: € 697 MILLION</p> <p>PLUS OTHER COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES (THE THREE FRAMEWORK PROGRAMMES PROVIDING SUPPORT TO AN AREA OF FREEDOM, SECURITY AND JUSTICE, THE 7<sup>TH</sup> RESEARCH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME, AND THE CIVIL PROTECTION FINANCIAL INSTRUMENT)</p> <p>PLUS NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL POLICIES.</p> <p>PLUS LOANS AND CO-FINANCING FROM THE EIB.</p>   |

NOTES:

SOURCE: CEC 2010b.

ERDF = European Regional Development Fund

ESF = European Social Fund

EAFRD = European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development

EFF = European Fisheries Fund

ENPI-CBC = European Neighbourhood and Partnership

Instrument Cross-border Cooperation programmes

EIB = European Investment Bank

INTERREG IVB = European Territorial Cooperation Programme (2007-13)

TEN-T = Trans-European Transport Network Programme

TEN-E = Trans-European Energy Network Programme

Although macro-regions should not lead to new institutions, they still require governance structures for their implementation. Given the large number of actors involved at different levels this has led to rather complex governance arrangements. Thus, for the Baltic Sea Region the governance model pursued foresees a role for the European Commission (coordinated by DG Regional Policy) for coordination, monitoring, reporting to the Council and supporting the implementation of the strategy. Moreover, the European Commission organises an Annual Forum on the Strategy and is even a direct participant in the implementation by taking a lead on horizontal actions and individual projects. Schymik (2011) comments

that although the European Commission initially was merely meant to be a facilitator of the process, it now seems to be an engine for the implementation and further development of the Strategy. The EU member states through the Council of the EU are in charge of broader policy development and have a coordinative role in several respects: through the priority areas of the action plan (usually coordinated by the relevant sector ministries of the involved countries), through the monitoring of the implementation of the action plan by the Council, and lastly through the decisions on the further development of the strategy. A High-Level Group of officials from the EU27 member states and a representative from the Committee of the Regions has been set up, which consults the Commission on all major developments. The European Investment Bank (EIB) is also invited to participate in meetings. National Contact Points were identified for each of the eight EU member states concerned to assist the implementation of the Strategy at national level. Coordinators for Priority Areas have been assigned, responsible for coordinating the implementation through the flagship projects (see Table 1). The implementation of the Strategy through actions and projects is predominantly the task of national ministries, national public agencies or transnational bodies. Russia, as the only non-EU member around the Baltic Sea, is involved in the implementation of the Strategy only through specific projects and via existing regional frameworks such as the Northern Dimension. This limited involvement of Russia in the development and implementation of the Baltic Sea Region Strategy is at odds with existing intergovernmental cooperation in the region which is characterised by a balanced involvement of EU member states and other countries. There is a notable difference to the approach taken with the Action Plan for the Danube Region Strategy with respect to the 'external dimension', however, as non-EU countries are listed as co-coordinators for several of the priorities (see Table 2).

The Baltic Sea Strategy is under review under Polish EU Presidency from July 2011, when countries and regional organisations responsible for specific projects will report on their results and achievements. First reactions have indicated that, perhaps unsurprisingly, a reliance on projects to achieve the strategy's objectives and to achieve more policy coherence implies certain challenges. Setting up complex governance structures and arranging the tasks has taken time, prompting the European Parliament to note that implementation of the Baltic Sea Strategy has in the beginning 'been very slow' (EP 2010: point 20).

However, the European Commission in the first annual review of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy concluded that experiences have overall been positive and that the adoption and early implementation of the Baltic Sea Region Strategy has received ‘considerable high-level political interest’ (CEC 2010h: 5). The Report identifies first results as being evident in the creation and financing of new projects in response to the needs identified in the Action Plan; the gaining of new momentum to existing projects across the four pillars; the creation of new macro-regional networks in areas previously dominated by national approaches (as in Priority Area 13 on Sea Surveillance); and the extension of networks in otherwise established areas (CEC 2010h).

Yet the report also identified a number of challenges that need further attention. First, it notes that the level of ambition across national actors, both political and administrative, has been uneven. There are also considerable differences in the working arrangements for the 15 priority areas, depending on existing networks and the maturity of cooperation arrangements on which the implementation could draw (CEC 2010h). The limited role of sub-national governments and of the private sector and civil society in the implementation of the Action Plan, as well as the limited involvement of Russia in the Strategy preparation and implementation, have been raised as important issues to be redressed (CPMR 2010a; Schymik 2011; Görmar 2010). This has led to calls for a stronger involvement of regional and local actors (CoR 2009), local communities (EP 2010) and for establishing a ‘Baltic Sea Civil Society Forum’ (EESC 2009). Given the complexity of the task of coordinating actions and projects, a need for technical assistance funding to cover running costs has been identified as an important issue by some Priority Area Coordinators and Flagship Project Leaders. It has been pointed out that ‘absence of a centralised financing opportunity may limit the level of ambition of some areas and projects. It also makes the implementation of the Strategy more vulnerable to administrative savings and changes in political priorities, which reduce the human and financial resources allocated to the Strategy in various public administrations’ (CEC 2010h: 4).

Importantly, aligning the implementation of the Strategy with existing funding of Cohesion policy programmes and other EU, national and regional funding sources appeared to present considerable challenges (CEC 2010h, see also CPMR 2010b).

The Annual Report on the EUSBSR notes that ‘the readiness to engage in dialogue on how to focus future funding in line with the Strategy’s objectives varies, and there is insufficient discussion among the different programme authorities on finding complementarities with respect to their funding decisions’ (CEC 2010h: 4). Some exceptions are identified, such as the South and Central Baltic programmes, the Baltic Sea Region Programme and the Swedish competitiveness programmes, with the latter two having ‘adopted a new selection criterion to give extra priority to projects that are or can be included in the Strategy, [while] other programmes have made an inventory of their existing projects to establish how many of them indirectly support the Strategy’ (CEC 2010h: 4). The transnational Baltic Sea Region Programme has even published a brochure setting out how the projects funded to date respond to the priorities of the macro-regional strategy. Of the 46 projects listed, 15 are Flagship projects of the Strategy (JTS BSR 2010). In order to ensure that other EU funding is better aligned, the Annual Report identifies ‘a need to secure stronger programme involvement in the implementation process in order to ensure that the best possible financial solutions are found for the priorities of the Strategy’ (CEC 2010h: 4). In response to the identified shortcomings, the Action Plan further suggests that platforms for the region’s leaders should be established to engage in constructive dialogue on the implementation and future of the Strategy. The Annual Report proposes a systematic monitoring and evaluation, possibly by independent consultants, to inform the ongoing debate.

## IV. The potentials and challenges of macro-regional strategies in Europe: a discussion

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The previous sections have shown that macro-regional cooperation in Europe is not a new phenomenon. Neither is the preparation of strategies and frameworks for action for transnational regions. There are numerous examples of transnational strategies in the Baltic Sea Region alone, prepared by HELCOM and other intergovernmental bodies, although many of these are of sectoral nature. There are also examples of joint strategies for transnational territories that seek to coordinate sector policies across different levels of government, such as the VASAB perspective and INTERREG transnational spatial visions. However, the strength of such initiatives has arguably also been their main limitation, namely the intergovernmental nature of cooperation, as it is invariably influenced by changes in political priorities of successive governments. The EU macro-regional approach has lifted transnational cooperation out of the domain of intergovernmental cooperation and into the sphere of EU multi-level governance with a stronger role for supranational institutions. The European Commission in particular, as facilitator and coordinator of the macro-regional strategies, may be able to provide some stability that intergovernmental cooperation often misses.

The EU macro-regional approach has undoubtedly helped to revitalise the process of transnational cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. It has provided a platform for EU and national actors to discuss those actions that groups of countries around the Baltic Sea Region need to undertake for the benefit of the macro-region as a whole and that seek to integrate the various impacts of EU sector policies. Any debate on which issues need to be ‘scaled up’ to the macro-region should be welcomed, as it is widely recognized that governance and public policy-making and implementation within administrative borders has considerable shortcomings where functional relationships between territories are to be addressed. As Allmendinger and Haughton (2009) have pointed out, ‘soft spaces’ with ‘fuzzy boundaries’ require actors to acknowledge that they must work within multiple spaces, and increasingly in a flexible and task-specific manner. While theoretically this holds great promise, there are numerous practical challenges and inherent tensions that come with such a flexible macro-regional strategy approach. Four such challenges will be discussed in turn. They relate to the tension between the ambitions of the strategy to address functional relations and the political commitment of actors that is focused on their administrative territories. Prioritisation is another key challenge for consensus-led processes. Complex governance arrangements and the need to ensure long-term political commitment present further challenges for EU macro-regional strategies.

#### **4.1. Functional geographies versus political realities**

The argument for territorial and functional interrelations is at the heart of the EU macro-regional strategies for the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region. This implies that the geographies change depending on the question being addressed. Environmental issues, for example, will have a different geographical reach than the economic geography or the transport geography. While this is theoretically convincing, the proposal for policy responses and actions to be decided on the basis of a ‘flexible geography approach’ still requires attention to the political dimension of policy-making. Because as Stocchiero (2010b: 11) reminds us, while ‘natural macro-regions have no internal and external administrative and political dimensions’, this ‘is not the case with the EU strategy for the macro-regions: even if it is elaborated on functionalities, political conditions continue to be relevant and particularly in the internal and external relationship dynamics’.



Defining a macro-region and the geographical reach of 'macro-regional issues' requires multidimensional analyses of many types of spatial data, as economic, transport, environmental and social issues are to be considered. Yet, data on functional relationships and flows is usually not readily available, and gaps in data availability stand in the way of undertaking comprehensive analyses of all functional relations between territories. Also, there are generally more and better data available for some sectors and flows, as for commuter relations, than for others. For example, there is usually little information available on links between universities and businesses in terms of knowledge flows and suchlike. Moreover, functional links between territories and thus the issues that may benefit from a macro-regional response are not static, but change over time in response to economic, societal and environmental trends, but assessing such future developments is complex, and especially so for macro-regions.

However, while understanding the functional relationships between territories is undoubtedly important to inform the rationale and agenda for cooperation at macro-regional level, what may be as much, if not more, important is the political commitment to work together at this level of scale. After all, as Perkmann (2003: 157) in his analysis of cross-border regions (CBR) in Europe concluded, 'it does not matter whether a CBR is built upon cultural or ethnic commonalities, a common historical background, existing functional interdependencies or a mere community of interests, as it is precisely the process of construction that matters'.

In the case of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the challenge in the process of construction and ensuring political commitment lies in particular in relation to the involvement of Russia. Russia is clearly a key actor from a functional and territorial perspective in the Baltic Sea Region, but it has reportedly not played a central role in the development of the Strategy and is only marginally involved in the implementation. The focus in developing the Strategy has arguably been mostly on the internal dynamics of EU integration, in relation to cooperation between the EU institutions and the EU member states, with insufficient attention given to the external dimension. There have been concerns that the EU Strategy might therefore come in the way of established forms of intergovernmental cooperation around the Baltic Sea as it shows a 'lack of a perspective on how to work with Russia in the years to come' (Bengtsson 2009: 8). There are only few

references to the Northern Dimension policy (which is since 1999 jointly being pursued by the European Union, Norway, Iceland and the Russian Federation) in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Reconciling the functional region approach of macro-regional strategies with the political reality of the EU and its neighbours will thus be important to ensure lasting macro-regional cooperation in this area.

## **4.2. Priorities for cooperation**

The process of preparing a transnational strategy and identifying priorities for action implies a number of challenges, not merely because the analysis of functional interdependencies is hampered by insufficient data. Consensus-based policy-making is faced by considerable complexities of integrating the views of a large number of different actors. Healey (2007) has identified different phases in strategy formation processes in complex institutional settings, starting with the filtering of ideas and prioritising and the framing of the strategy. She argues that only if the strategy is sufficiently focused and convincing will it be able to generate ‘mobilising force’ that ensures the long-lasting support of actors. This would lead to the strategy having the potential for ‘transformative force’, which implies a rescaling of the perspectives of key stakeholders, a certain institutionalisation of approaches and of cooperation structures, and the establishment of new ‘communities of practice’ at macro-regional scale.

Identifying issues for cooperation inevitably involves struggles about the prioritising of interests, rights and claims for policy attention. Yet the filtering is a crucial process, because if strategies are to inspire and motivate a range of actors over a long period of time, they need to be more than merely an aggregation of issues and claims. Moreover, the experience with the transnational INTERREG programmes has shown that broad frameworks with largely generic funding priorities rarely result in projects of real significance for the macro-region (Panteia *et al.* 2010). It is therefore important that policy priorities and actions are specific to the macro-region, and not merely replicate EU policy objectives. Focusing only on such issues of truly transnational significance where there is real value in ‘upscaling’, rather than merely on exchange of experience or the joining political force, the following two types of transnational issues can be identified:

- Issues that are currently not dealt with appropriately within a country and by nation-states acting alone, and
- Issues that may in future not be dealt with satisfactorily by nation-states acting alone as a consequence of changing framework conditions (political, economic, environmental, social, or else).

There are likely considerably fewer issues that are usefully addressed at transnational level than the long lists of actions and projects in either the Baltic Sea or the Danube Region strategies, criticised as being ‘too broad, complex and not sufficiently focused’ (Schymik and Krumrey 2009: 3), would suggest. At present, both the action plans for the Baltic Sea Region and for the Danube Region list numerous issues that are of common concern, besides those that will clearly require transnational cooperation as individual countries alone will not be able to address the challenges successfully. In the list of projects in the Baltic Sea Region Strategy<sup>16</sup>, examples of such transnational issues are those related to shipping pollution in the Baltic Sea. In comparison, other flagship projects, such as those aiming to ‘create a network of sustainable cities and villages’ or on ‘Health: Alcohol and drug prevention among young people’, are not specific to the macro-region.

Narrowing the priorities to those of truly macro-regional significance is difficult in complex political processes, but it is crucial for the longer-term impact of the EU macro-regional strategies. There is a danger that ‘the Commission, while trying to do justice to as many interests and actors as possible, is possibly about to create just another label for an already established cooperation, thereby losing out of sight the original motive behind the Strategy, namely to revive the stagnating Baltic Sea cooperation by means of a clear, coordinated and action-oriented strategy’ (Schymik and Krumrey 2009: 3). Bengtsson (2009: 6) has called this the ‘efficiency challenge’ of the EU macro-regional strategies: while on the one hand the strategy should respond to the identified needs of all actors to ensure their commitment, on the other hand ‘there is an argument, from an efficiency point of view, to keep the scope of the strategy more narrow, and [to] focus available political energy on a set of specific tasks’ (*ibid.*).

16. For an overview of the BSR flagship projects see :  
[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperation/baltic/priority\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/priority_en.htm)

### 4.3. Complex governance arrangements

EU macro-regional strategies seek to achieve coordination across three dimensions: horizontally (across sector policies), vertically (across different levels of governance from EU to regional or local), and geographically (across administrative boundaries). This quest for coordination comes in response to the expectations that the objective of territorial cohesion implies, but it is not a new concern. Already the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (CSD 1999) and its successor, the *Territorial Agenda for the European Union* (EU Ministers 2007) promoted better policy coordination, but they have arguably been limited in their impact because of the intergovernmental nature of their preparation and application.

The ‘costs of non-coordination’ (Robert *et al.* 2001) of the spatial impacts of EU sector policies have been an important part in the discussion on a coordinated EU approach to spatial development or, as it is now referred to, territorial cohesion. Yet there are also costs of coordination given the complex governance arrangements to implement macro-regional strategies. These are expressed through the calls for a technical assistance budget to support the work on the EU macro-regional strategies, although the expectation is that the savings through better coordination will far exceed the coordination costs.

The two-tier construction of coordination (with the Commission seeking an overall responsibility, while different member states are responsible for the various priority areas and in response to the different ‘geographical reach’ of different issues) creates a complex web of institutional relations. It has been argued that making each member state responsible for one or more of the priority actions is ‘in theory [a] clever approach; in practice it may be very difficult to achieve’ (EESC 2009: para 3.9). This is because ‘each member state will be required to co-ordinate actions across the macro-region and across multiple Directorates General’ (*ibid.*). This is a considerable task that requires resources and staff with experience with EU politics and diplomacy, which not all countries may have in equal measure. Bengtsson (2009) has expressed concern that such complex governance arrangements could result in some countries in the region being more centrally involved in the strategy than others. Based on the list of coordinators for priority areas for the Baltic Sea and Danube Region strategies, some countries indeed seem to have

a more prominent role than others (see Tables 1 and 2). Such imbalance bears the risk of the agenda for macro-regional cooperation being carried by a small number of powerful actors, rather than being a collective effort on which the success of the macro-regional approach relies.

Policy- and decision-making in the EU's multi-level governance systems is a process that involves continuous negotiation among governments and other actors at several territorial tiers. So far, the focus for EU macro-regional strategies has been on the supra-national (EU) and national levels, but there have been calls that the regional and local levels, as well as non-governmental actors, need to become more strongly involved. This would result in even more complex governance arrangements, which could risk that implementation of the macro-regional strategies become bogged down in administrative considerations unless more effective coordination models can be found. Besides the tension between involving a wide range of actors while ensuring effective management, the complex governance arrangements of the macro-regional strategies also present a challenge for achieving visible results in a short period of time, which will be important to demonstrate their added-value and thus ensure ongoing political and Community support.

#### **4.4. Transformative potential**

The long-term relevance and success of a collaborative strategy is determined by what Healey (2007) has called its 'transformative force'. Eventually, a strategy should lead to institutional changes by generating new or by shaping existing practices through providing a different way of 'making sense'. They should prompt the setting up of new policy networks or lead to the adaptation of existing ones. Thus, even though the EU macro-regional strategies were set up with the intention of not creating new institutions, they may eventually prompt institutional changes that can better support their objectives and actions. Such institutional changes will likely also have implications on the question of instruments and resources for implementation.

In the Baltic Sea Region, traditionally characterised by a high density of transnational institutions, the development of the macro-regional strategy and the governance structures that have been emerging around its implementation and

further development have according to Schymik (2011) already led to discussions on the need to review some of the existing structures, such as the Council of the Baltic States (CBSS). In the Danube region, where there are fewer transnational structures, Schymik (2011) reports that in 2009, the 'Council of Danube Regions and Cities' was set up to strengthen inter-regional and inter-municipal cooperation in the region.

The decision to attach no additional funding to EU macro-regional strategies was undoubtedly crucial in ensuring wider Community support and to avoid 'conflict over distribution' (Stocchiero 2010a: 7). After all, as Bengtsson (2009: 7) has pointed out, 'the basic logic of the strategy is to single out a limited part of the EU and treat it in special ways against the background of acute needs for protection and development. Such an effort however requires the solidarity of all EU members, not only those that are littoral states of the Baltic Sea'. Ensuring continuing Community support will require macro-regional strategies to show that they can indeed deliver 'added value that corresponds to the rhetoric' (Bengtsson 2009: 6).

The need to show results of macro-regional cooperation fast has however been complicated by the need to coordinate different funding sources. There have been several calls to allocate additional resources to support the coordination of macro-regional action, and to better align existing EU funding programmes for the implementation of flagship projects. For example, the Economic and Social Committee argued that 'unless it is made possible to pledge appropriate funding resources to the Baltic Sea Region Strategy initiatives, there is a risk that the entire strategy will become incoherent, diffuse and that it will lose the commitment of stakeholders in member states. [...] The effective implementation of the Baltic Sea Strategy requires the establishment of its own separate budget, in order to avoid the risk that the strategy becomes merely a political statement with its aims unfulfilled' (EESC 2009: para 3.7). There have also been suggestions that the macro-regional approach should inform the reforms of EU sector policies. The European Parliament for example suggested that 'reforms to the CAP [Common Agricultural Policy] and the CFP [Common Fisheries Policy] must be made in such a way that they contribute to achieving the objective of an environmentally sustainable Baltic Sea area' (EP 2010: point 42).

In the discussion on aligning EU funds with macro-regional strategies, the transnational territorial cooperation programmes (INTERREG IVB) are given particular attention (see Dubois *et al.* 2009; Stocchiero 2010a; Görmar 2010). However, bringing INTERREG programmes in line with the EU macro-regional strategies would require considerable adaptations to their current organisation. While the INTERREG programme area in the Baltic Sea Region is largely identical with the macro-region, the Danube Region is covered by two transnational programmes. Moreover, the functional region approach of the macro-regional strategies is not easily reconciled with the area-sharp delineation of INTERREG programme areas, where borders of the cooperation are define eligibility for funding from the European Regional Development Fund.

Aligning EU policies and instruments to the needs of macro-regional strategies unquestionably implies numerous challenges, not least because of the complexity that is inherent to EU budgetary negotiations. However, if the integrated and coordinated approach of macro-regions were indeed to provide guidance for the reform of the EU's policy and budgetary framework, then their transformative power would be convincingly demonstrated.





## Concluding reflections: European macro-regions as a model for EU territorial governance?

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**E**U macro-regional strategies introduce a new layer of governance to the existing ‘many vehicles for multilateral cross-border cooperation already at work in the EU and broader European space’ (Dangerfield 2009: 3-4). In the context of European integration, transnational cooperation has emerged to address the ‘in-between issues’ that neither national and regional perspectives (traditionally focused on issues within the boundaries of national territories) nor EU-wide perspectives (since the late 1980s focused strongly on European integration as a whole) gave sufficient attention to. Although the INTERREG programmes were explicitly intended to support cooperation across national administrative boundaries, they have been frequently criticised for creating additional boundaries through the definition of the cooperation programme areas (as only actors within the programme areas are eligible for EU funding and will therefore cooperate with each other). The flexible and task-specific approach to addressing the functional interlinkages between territories that the EU macro-regional strategies promote should therefore be welcomed.

However, the challenge ahead now lies in the implementation of the EU macro-regional strategies and their performance over a longer period of time. The new instruments need to show their added-value by providing a strategic framework for

the actions of a diverse set of actors and coordinate policies and different funding sources across different levels of scale. This will be no mean feat, but to achieve this much will depend on how the key challenges facing the macro-regions will be addressed.

In any case, the current enthusiasm for EU macro-regional strategies does not necessarily mean that this is a suitable instrument for all parts of Europe. The rationale for transnational cooperation is crucial for the strategy-building process and to ensure long-lasting commitment of cooperating partners. After all, macro-regional cooperation is complex and time-consuming, as recent experiences show, and only where there is clear value in upscaling policy responses and action to the macro-regional level will it likely succeed. Yet even if the macro-regional approach as it is currently being implemented in the Baltic Sea and Danube regions is not suitable for all of Europe, there are likely useful lessons to be learned about the coordination of policies in the EU's system of multi-level governance that have a wider application.

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## Competition-Cooperation-Solidarity

### Baltic Sea, Danube and Macro-regional Strategies: A Model for Transnational Cooperation in the EU?

In the context of European integration, transnational cooperation has emerged to address the 'in-between issues' that neither national and regional perspectives (traditionally focused on issues within the boundaries of national territories) nor EU-wide perspectives (since the late 1980s focused strongly on European integration as a whole) gave sufficient attention to. This paper reviews experience with EU macro-regional strategies for the Baltic Sea Region (2009) and the Danube Region (2010) to date, and discusses differences to existing forms of transnational cooperation. It is argued that the strengths of the EU macro-regional strategies are the high-level of political commitment and the wide involvement of EU and national institutions in their development and implementation. Complex governance arrangements, however, present considerable challenges, as does the limited involvement of sub-national and non-EU actors. The macro-regional strategies for the Baltic Sea Region and Danube Region would benefit from further prioritisation of the proposed joint actions in order to clarify the added-value of macro-regional working. The next steps will be crucial for determining their value as an instrument of EU territorial governance and to ensure their durability through long-term political commitment, in particular their eligibility in the future programming period of the cohesion policy.

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