

The European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region

On 14 December 2012, the Heads of State or Government of the EU called on the European Commission to bring forward an EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region before the end of 2014. The proposed Strategy will build on the experience gained in the existing ones for the Baltic Sea macro-region and the macro-region along the Danube River. It will also incorporate the Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, which was adopted by the European Commission on 30 November 2012.

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region aims to consolidate the already extensive cooperation among the 8 countries of the region, thanks to existing European cooperation programmes and other regional schemes, such as the Adriatic Ionian Initiative.

A macro-regional strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region aims to give a new impetus to that cooperation, and to find joint solutions to common challenges. The 8 countries of the Region are not only diverse in terms of socio-economic development and geographic size, but also only 4 of the partner countries are EU members.

The biggest issues which need to be tackled in cooperation are related to environment, transport and energy. The main opportunities for development are linked to maritime and marine innovation, blue growth and tourism. The main objective of the proposed Strategy is to promote sustainable economic and social prosperity in the Region, by improving its attractiveness,



competitiveness and connectivity, while at the same time preserving the environment and ensuring healthy, balanced marine and coastal ecosystems. The Strategy is also expected to contribute to the EU integration of the candidate and potential candidate countries in the region.

The issues

In line with the recommendations of the European Commission Evaluation of the macro regional approach (adopted in June 2013), the new Strategy will focus on a limited number of areas of mutual interest, with high relevance for the Adriatic and Ionian countries.

In its initial phase, it is envisaged that the Strategy will be concentrated on the following four pillars:

1. Marine and Maritime Growth/Blue Growth ;
2. Connecting the Region;
3. Environmental quality; and
4. Sustainable Tourism

Moreover, there will be two cross-cutting issues:

- Capacity building, including communication;
- Research, innovation and SMEs

The Countries

Eight countries in the Adriatic and Ionian Region are covered by the Strategy. Four EU Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia) and four non-EU countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia).

The preparations

From September to December 2013, a stakeholders' consultation was held across the Region on the content of the future Action Plan of the Strategy. This had the aim of tapping into the ideas of the relevant stakeholders, to ensure a realistic starting point for the Strategy with appropriate objectives and responses to the real needs of the inhabitants of the area.

The contributions gathered will be further discussed at a Stakeholder Conference of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, co-organised in Athens on 6-7 February 2014 by the Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. All this work will contribute to the preparation of the Strategy.

The next steps

Following the results of the extensive consultations, the Strategy will be adopted in the form of a draft Communication accompanied by an Action Plan, with a view to adoption by the European Commission during the first semester of 2014. The Communication and the Action Plan will be submitted to the Council of the European Union for endorsement in the second half of the year. Once adopted, the implementation of the Strategy can start.

Background: The macro-regional approach

Since 2009 the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy has been engaged in a new approach to tackle problems of a cross-regional nature. The EU's Baltic and Danube macro-regional strategies, involving over 20 EU and non-EU countries, have pioneered a unique kind of cooperation. This is based on the idea that common challenges facing specific regions – whether environmental, economic, territorial or security-related, are best tackled collectively. Furthermore, it makes sense to plan together for the most effective deployment of the resources available.

The approach provides an integrated framework bringing together Member States and non-EU countries in the same geographical area to address common challenges. The overriding aim of a macro-regional strategy is to mobilise new projects and initiatives. The approach offers many potential benefits in terms of strengthened cooperation for economic, social and territorial cohesion.

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EU Macro-Regional Strategies

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/macro_region_strategy/index_en.cfm

EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/adriat_ionian/index_en.cfm

EU Strategy for the Danube Region:

<http://www.danube-region.eu>

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region:

<http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu>