



Committee of the Regions

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**OWN-INITIATIVE OPINION
of the
Committee of the Regions**

**TERRITORIAL COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN
THROUGH THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN MACROREGION**

The Committee of the Regions

- stresses that the macroregional strategy cannot operate in all areas, but must focus on challenges and issues of this particular macroregion that the partners identify in a joint assessment; it notes that, being functional areas, macroregions have no predefined borders, but are very much shaped by the shared challenges chosen to be tackled;
- maintains that this approach can give substance to the territorial objective;
- stresses that an important added value of the AI macroregional strategy is to underline the EU's attention towards the Western Balkans, constituting a significant factor in reconciliation between territories and so contributing to their EU accession;
- notes that the area covered takes in three EU Member States (Italy, Greece and Slovenia), two candidate countries (Croatia and Montenegro) and three potential candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia); further notes that, alongside the maritime dimension, the macroregional approach will have to take into consideration every major issue facing the area (environmental protection and conservation, energy, climate change, research and innovation, etc.);
- recalls that the European Commission's "three no's" (no new regulation, no new institutions and no additional funding) should be matched by "three yeses": application and monitoring of existing rules in the macroregion, creation of a platform, network or EGTC and agreed use of existing Union funding.

Rapporteur

Mr Spacca (IT/ALDE), President of the Marche Region

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. welcomes the fact that since the European Council adopted the European strategy for the Baltic Sea macroregion in October 2009, a number of European regions have already recognised (or are recognising) macroregional strategies as a possible response to the challenge of achieving balanced and sustainable development;
2. recalls its role in developing EU macroregional strategies from the very outset since they promote the involvement of regional and local entities, provided they show an EU added-value;
3. is pleased that many of Europe's regions confirmed their interest in the idea at the forum entitled "Europe's Macro-regions: Integration through Territorial Cooperation", held by the Committee of the Regions on 13 April 2010. It is clear from the discussion at the event and the further exploration it provoked that macroregions have the makings of a new mode of territorial cooperation at the interregional and transnational level capable of i) bolstering the coherence and coordination of political action in various sectors, ii) making sound use of financial resources, and iii) boosting the role of regional and local authorities in line with the principles of multilevel governance, while at the same time ensuring substantial involvement of civil society organisations;
4. maintains that the nature and scope of the macroregional approach can tie in with other EU strategic policies, such as the Europe 2020 strategy, cohesion policy and the integrated maritime policy;
5. stresses that, by its very nature, the macroregional strategy cannot operate in all areas, but must focus on challenges and issues of this particular macroregion that the partners identify in a joint assessment, wedding principles of cooperation with the principle of subsidiarity;
6. notes that, being functional areas, macroregions have no predefined borders, but are very much shaped by the nature and number of shared challenges chosen to be tackled; therefore their setting should be based on concrete criteria (based on geographical interconnectedness) for cooperation on solvable issues. This should ensure better links with other areas such as central Europe, the Alps and the Danube area;
7. maintains that, seen in these terms, they can become a prime way of giving substance to the territorial objective so robustly espoused by the Treaty of Lisbon and bolster the EU accession process of candidate countries and potential candidate countries by drawing on the shared interests of regions in both "old" and "new" Member States and in third countries, as

the European Union's strategies for the Baltic Sea region and the Danube region are already demonstrating;

8. stresses that an important added value of the AI macroregional strategy is to underline the EU's attention towards the Western Balkans, as happened in the past with the integration of territories in eastern and central Europe;
9. points out that the AI macroregional strategy is a significant factor in reconciliation between territories to the east of the Adriatic and Ionian seas, while at the same time acknowledging and rediscovering the values that have for centuries united the two regions;
10. points out that a further value of the macroregional strategy is the opportunity to strengthen the regional cooperation in these territories – which are also part of the greater Mediterranean area – and to contribute to their progress towards EU accession;
11. stresses that macroregions are not an extra institutional tier within the European Union, but a network, a *modus operandi* or, rather, a form of joint action that involves various European, national, regional and local players, various policies and various funding programmes. Flexible and non-bureaucratic networking of all stakeholders, instruments and initiatives is therefore desirable;

A European Union strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian region: background

12. notes that the territories of the Adriatic and the Ionian seas form an international sea basin and an international region. Whether viewed historically, geographically, economically, environmentally or socially, the interactions between countries have always been one of its key features. The Adriatic and the Ionian seas are major maritime and marine (eco)regions in Europe, contiguous and flowing into the central Mediterranean Sea, which is a semi-enclosed sea with a low water renewal rate;
13. points out that the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion (AIMR) includes coastal EU Member States and candidate and potential candidate countries. It is a highly heterogeneous area in economic, environmental and cultural terms. Within the ongoing accession process of countries in the Western Balkans, the Adriatic and the Ionian seas will not just share a common heritage, but will be even more affected by the free movement of people, goods and services;
14. notes that the geographical area covered by the strategy takes in three EU Member States (Italy, in particular, with its regions bordering the Adriatic and Ionian seas; Greece and Slovenia), two candidate countries (Croatia and Montenegro) and three potential candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia). The area, excluding waters, extends to just under 450 000 km² and has a population of around sixty million. By its very nature, a region that extends beyond the sea basin and is a link between territories, a connecting hub

between people and institutions, is better equipped to work out a joint strategy capable of creating opportunities for sustainable development and to optimise the exchange of ideas, people, goods and services;

15. stresses that the Adriatic-Ionian basin is a "semi-closed sea" and is set to increasingly become a European Union "internal sea". It has something in common with the Baltic area, both being seas with similar difficulties and challenges. Both are "lynchpins" between Member States and third countries and, at the same time, the natural maritime outlet of the Danube area;
16. points out that all of Europe's areas are interconnected, so that linking the Baltic and Danube areas with the Adriatic and Ionian area would be desirable and constitute their natural extension, while strengthening European territorial cooperation policy;
17. notes that the Adriatic-Ionian region has been involved since the end of the 1970s in various organisations and initiatives, of which the more important are:
 - the Association Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns, where interest focuses on sharing a common administrative model in order to bring about a more balanced development of the (around fifty) administrative areas;
 - the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce (around thirty members), where socio-economic issues and the protection of resources take on particular importance;
 - the UniAdrion network of universities (around thirty-two members), where the ambition is to achieve a permanent link between universities and research centres of the Adriatic and Ionian seas to create joint multimedia products;
 - the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) (members: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Slovenia and Serbia), which was set up in Ancona in May 2000 following the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia with the specific goal of guaranteeing security and cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian seas;
 - the Adriatic Euroregion, which brings together institutions, usually at the immediate subnational level, on both sides of the Adriatic Sea to discuss and align their planning priorities.

To these can be added numerous networks for infrastructure (such as the North Adriatic Port Association – N.A.PA.), culture, education and training;

18. notes that the area also benefits from major European Union schemes funded from thematic programmes (transport, energy, environment, etc.), from national and regional programmes of European cohesion policy (objectives 1 and 2) and from European territorial cooperation programmes such as Adriatic IPA CBC programmes and the equivalent programmes for cross-border cooperation (e.g., Italy-Slovenia, Greece-Italy) and transnational cooperation (central Europe programme – CE; south-east Europe programme – SEE; Mediterranean programme – MED and Alpine Space), from ERDF funds and the Instrument for Pre-

Accession Assistance (IPA). The urgency and the added value of a European strategy for macroregions lies precisely in the benefits of close interlinkage between these programmes and those carried out at national, regional and local level, as well as the investment by the European Investment Bank, the local credit system and private stakeholders. It should be stressed here that a process of this kind must go beyond an intergovernmental approach and requires the immediate application of the political and institutional leverage and technical expertise of the EU institutions;

19. stresses that this vast network of affiliations is an important reference point and the necessary basis for fostering the European dimension of local and regional policies. Supporting cross-border, transnational and interregional partnership systems acquires strategic importance at territorial level and helps structure mechanisms of dialogue and collaboration between local and regional bodies and central administrations, in line with the Treaty of Lisbon;
20. argues that, because of the features that distinguish it, and especially because of the interest its member countries have in maritime waters and coastal issues, the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) is well equipped to operate in the Mediterranean dimension. At the same time, by virtue of its geographical location and the concerns intrinsic to this, it is destined to provide an added value to the stabilisation processes in the area and, more particularly, to the dynamics of integration in the European ambit, without duplicating the work of other institutions, which have different competences and scope;
21. notes that, meeting in Ancona on 5 May 2010, the Adriatic Ionian Council, made up of foreign ministers from the (AII) member countries, adopted a declaration endorsing the proposal for a macroregional strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian area and called on its member countries in the EU (Italy, Greece and Slovenia) to work for its adoption by the Community institutions;
22. stresses that the Adriatic Ionian Council adopted a further declaration, on 23 May this year in Brussels, in which it welcomed the decision of the European Council of 13 April (which called on the Member States to press ahead with work on macroregions) and reasserted its own commitment to supporting the macroregional strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian seas, to be implemented in cooperation with the European Commission and with the involvement of national, regional and local institutions;
23. notes that at their eighth and ninth conferences, held respectively in Bari (Italy) on 29 April 2010 and in Budva (Montenegro) on 11 April 2011, the speakers of national parliaments in the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) adopted specific final declarations by which the parliaments committed themselves to redoubling their efforts to contribute to the EU accession process for all AII members in the Western Balkans and called on the EU institutions to draw up for south-east Europe a macroregional strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian basin;

24. notes that the activities of the territories involved in the strategy naturally gravitate towards either the Adriatic Sea or the Ionian Sea, where the landscape and environmental differences between the two coasts and interiors of the Adriatic basin are important because of their geomorphologic characteristics, the high pressure of urban development and demographic differences. The area also shares strong connections and influences with parts of Austria and the central and eastern Mediterranean;
25. points out that some coastal areas are affected by a high level of urbanisation, with peaks around manufacturing areas as well as areas with a high rate of tourism. Excessive pressure of productive use, localised demand and the consequent transformations of coastal habitat have caused widespread congestion and a constant reduction of the natural environment. There are nonetheless excellent environmental sites and national and regional protected areas;
26. points out that some coastal areas present a continuity of landscape and an environmental heritage now increasingly threatened by development. Challenges evident in these areas include a lack of sewage and waste disposal systems, increasing urbanisation of the coast, continuing atmospheric emissions of pollutants from transport, industrial processes and energy production;
27. stresses that, on a broader scale, the European Union's Adriatic-Ionian macroregion strategy is intended to be a valuable asset not only for the areas concerned, but for the EU as a whole, since it is fully geared to pursuing the EU's strategic aims of smart, sustainable and inclusive development and, in particular, the EU 2020 strategy. A start on planning the AIS must be scheduled for 2012–2013, which will allow time for the alignment referred to above and assure maximum coherence with the priorities of the next multiannual financial framework, the related common strategic frameworks and the operational programmes;
28. maintains that, if a mission for the AI strategy was to be defined, it would be "connecting and protecting": connecting the territories of the macroregion to foster its sustainable development while protecting the fragile maritime, coastal and inland environment. The two EU macrostrategies for the Baltic Sea and the Danube, together with the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion and future EU strategies¹, are capable of creating those interconnections and synergies, including infrastructural ones, called for in point 18 of the conclusions of the General Affairs Council of 13 April 2011. These should create an ideal axis from the north to the south of Europe, the Adriatic-Ionian macroregion serving to improve and free up Europe's south-eastern gateway to the world and also bring in the area of the central and eastern Mediterranean through the extension of the Baltic-Adriatic corridor, as provided for by Commission Communication COM(2011) 500 of 29 June 2011 and its connection with the intermodal networks. Given the possibility of large territorial overlaps

¹ Strategies currently being drawn up include those for the North Sea-Channel area, the Alpine Space, the Atlantic Arc and the Black Sea.

between the AI strategy and the Danube strategy, the European Commission should provide for appropriate coordination mechanisms;

Sea, coast and interior: a macroregion to connect, protect and develop

29. maintains that a sea basin is by definition a common resource connecting the countries and regions bordering it, as well as a common asset for them to safeguard. Yet the sea also needs joint interventions in order to generate wealth and development. It is also a fragile system and this is particularly true of the Adriatic and the Ionian seas, which are sea basins with a low water renewal rate, connected to the Mediterranean, itself also a semi-enclosed sea. Marine strategies should be incorporated into the AIS to preserve the Adriatic and Ionian environment;
30. points out that, from this perspective, the AIMR can be seen as a maritime community. The strategy will therefore produce not only planning documents, but actions – concrete, visible actions to overcome the challenges facing the region. States, regions and the other stakeholders will take responsibility as lead partners for specific priority areas and flagship projects inspired by an integrated approach to maritime, transport and port policy in relation to the Pan-European Corridors;
31. notes that, alongside the maritime dimension, the macroregional approach will have to take into consideration every major issue facing the AIMR today, from environmental protection and conservation to energy, from climate change to research and innovation, from preservation of underwater areas to cultural resources, competitiveness and job creation, trade, logistics and the training of public sector managers in the Adriatic-Ionian area;
32. recalls the position of the European Commission stating that macroregional strategies should currently take into account the principle of "three no's" – no new regulation, no new institutions and no additional funding; thinks, however, that there should also be "three yeses": jointly agreed application and monitoring of existing rules in the macroregion; creation – for which EU bodies should be responsible – of a platform, network or territorial cluster of regional and local authorities and Member States which also brings in stakeholders; agreed use of existing Union funding for developing and implementing macroregional strategies;
33. insists that the European Council should task the European Commission with drawing up an AI macroregional strategy by 2012–2013 (by which time debate will have shown this to be a responsible decision on the part of the Community institutions), so that a consensus and a practical approach can be found regarding the three pillars of the macroregional strategy in the 2014–2020 programming period;
34. points out, on the matter of subsidiarity and proportionality: It is possible – for the Adriatic-Ionian area as for the Baltic Sea and the Danube – to hit upon a European strategy that i)

capitalises on the many cooperation networks already in existence and on the array of initiatives, programmes and projects already in train, ii) adapts and coordinates the instruments available to different players, and iii) contributes to consolidating the integration process, both between and within states, through greater involvement of civil society in the decision-making process and in the implementation of particular measures;

35. stresses that, if this is achieved, the macroregional strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian area will be seen as an excellent example of multilevel governance in practice, since it creates the context for qualifying and defining the cooperation and interaction of all the stakeholders grappling with the major challenges in this area;
36. points out that, at this stage, in which most of the measures rest on legal bases relating to EU and Member State spheres of competence, the Commission will initially have to restrict itself to supporting agreed initiatives. All levels of government involved will then cooperate to pursue these in line with their respective competences and responsibilities, after which the Commission will assume a role of coordinating, monitoring and facilitating the strategy's implementation and follow-up. To fulfil this task, it should as far as possible make use of suitable existing structures;

Conclusions

37. notes that, in the light of the declarations adopted by the Adriatic-Ionian Council (foreign ministers of the AII) and given the pressing problems and the current challenges, a start must be made immediately on drawing up a strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian area. It therefore asks the European Council to task the European Commission with drafting this strategy;
38. calls on the European Parliament, in the light of the declarations of the conference of the presidents of the national parliaments in the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) and given the strategic value for the completion of EU accession, to take a resolute political initiative to set in train a European Union strategy for an Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion;
39. calls on the European Parliament, which is currently drafting important documents on the implementation of the integrated maritime policy, on the management of territorial waters and on transport policy, to take on board the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion dimension;
40. emphasises that the AI macroregional strategy is perfectly compatible with the development of Euro-regions focusing on cooperation between border regions or the development of European structures in the context of cross-border, transnational and interregional projects assuming the legal form of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC);
41. recommends that the macroregional strategies be fully incorporated into the policies of the European Union and, in particular, the territorial cooperation dimensions of the post-2013 cohesion policy, especially where crossborder and transnational cooperation is concerned, so

that regional operational programmes in the next programming period (2014–2020) can be deployed to assist the macroregional strategies' effective implementation;

42. calls on the Commission, in line with point 21 of the conclusions of the General Affairs Council of 13 April 2011, in line with the conclusions of the European Council of 23-24 June 2011, and in view of the fact that national and local institutions have been at work for some time now on a draft macroregional strategy, to immediately conduct detailed monitoring of strategic projects being carried out, approved or in the process of approval in the Adriatic-Ionian area, and again urges the European Commission to adopt "three yeses" as referred to in point 32 above;
43. considers it necessary and urgent that the role and functioning of macroregions be further examined and defined in a green paper, as it has already requested in its resolution on the European Commission's legislative and work programme 2010;
44. stresses that the strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian area is based on the application of the subsidiarity principle. It will address a range of issues and problems that cannot be solved at local, regional and national levels alone;
45. notes that the drafting of this strategy must be accompanied by a broad public consultation exercise. This must be conducted in the light of experience with the EU strategies for the Baltic Sea and Danube regions and in close collaboration with existing networks and organisations in the area, with the Committee of the Regions as the representative of local and regional authorities, and with other key partners;
46. points out that, in keeping with the recommendation of the General Affairs Council of 13 April 2011 on transparency, visibility and the exchange of good practices between macroregional strategies, the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion partnership conducted an analysis of macroregion issues at the 2011 Open Days. This looked especially at the proposal for a macroregional strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian area, with a debate between representatives from the thirteen regions and cities in the partnership and a workshop of public and private partnerships and the presentation of projects currently being implemented;

47. instructs its president to forward this own-initiative opinion to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the current Council presidency and its partners in the presidency trio.

Brussels, 11 October 2011

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Mercedes Bresso

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Territorial cooperation in the Mediterranean through the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion
Reference document	
Legal basis	Own-initiative opinion, Article 307(4)
Procedural basis	Own-initiative opinion (Article 42)
Date of Council referral/Date of Commission letter	
Date of Bureau decision	4 March 2011
Commission responsible	Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER)
Rapporteur	Gian Mario Spacca (IT/ALDE), President of the Marche Region
Analysis	29 March 2011
Discussed in commission	Discussion based on the working document: 19 May 2011
Date adopted by commission	4 July 2011
Result of the vote in commission	Majority
Date adopted in plenary	11 October 2011
Previous Committee opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Opinion on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, CdR 255/2009 fin²– Opinion on an EU strategy for the Danube Region, CdR 149/2009 fin– Own-initiative opinion on A Strategy for the North Sea-Channel Area, CdR 99/2010 fin³– Opinion on the Danube Region Strategy, CdR 86/2011 fin

² [OJ C 232, 27.8.2010, p. 23.](#)

³ [OJ C 15, 18.1.2011, p. 26.](#)