



## **CEI VISION AND ACTION PLAN ON MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES (MRS)**

*as of the proceedings of the Committee of the CEI National Coordinators*

*held in Vienna on 21 November 2014 and in Skopje on 3 February 2015*

1. **Three MRS have been finalized** (EUSBSR – Baltic Sea Region in 2009 // EUSDR - Danube Region in 2011 // EUSAIR – Adriatic Ionian Region in 2014). The fourth, the Council appointed the Commission to finalize by June 2015, is the EUSALP (Alpine Region).
2. In the view of the best management of the MRS **the European Commission** repeatedly confirmed its expectations on the collaboration with the existing regional international organizations (RIO): there is need to bring European policies near to citizens through the inclusion in the implementation of MRS of Local & Regional Authorities (LRA) and Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and the fact that this cannot be directly done by the Commission, thus calling for an active role of the CEI also.

The Commission “Report concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies” (COM 284 Final of May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014) assesses the conditions to deliver the MRS added value, that are i.a.:

- Sharing experience among MRS;
- Matching funds from different international & national sources, public & private;
- Involving civil society organizations and subsidiary institutional levels (i.e. LRA);
- Make the most of the role of existing regional international organizations / institutions.

In fact, the future of the MRS approach beyond 2020 relates to the possibility of assessing the effectiveness of the strategies in terms of internal coordination, of confirming the added value provided to the financial engineering of their major investments (agreed infrastructures and policies), of overcoming the risk of fragmentation between each other's by sharing experiences and methodologies on their best governance and management, also through operational links.

3. The **vision of the CEI Secretariat** is that all macro-regional strategies have a role to play for the benefit of the CEI Countries, those who are not EU Member States in particular, since to facilitate their closer experience of the European Union system is the CEI strategic goal. Therefore it is possible to innovate the guidelines of all CEI funding tools for better coordinate them, (by means of concerted, explicit and transparent terms of reference), with the priorities of the (macro-)regional strategies (EUSDR – EUSAIR - SEE 2020) involving the Candidate Countries.

A specific work-package has to be finalized for the CEI Member States participating to the Eastern Partnership, thus implementing the proviso of the CEI Plan of Action 2014 – 2016, tacking stock of the already existing initiatives and also including the exchange of knowledge on the MRS.

4. **The agreed specific objectives of the MRS are State level responsibilities** and need specific funding for implementation, starting from consistent appropriations of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and IPA2 funds 2014-2020, and from national budgets, combined with IFI loans and private investments on short term return (e.g. Juncker Plan allocations by MRS). To exploit the added values of the MRS, effective coordination is needed between “regional” and “national” programmes.

The subsidiary role of LRA, NGO and CSO in the implementation of the MRS, important as it has to be, shall not shadow the above mentioned rule. Nevertheless these stakeholders categories are expected to play a key role in the framework of the Programmes for the transnational cooperation (TNC) of the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) goal of the Cohesion Policy.

5. Since the TNC Programmes for the Baltic, the Danube and the Adriatic – Ionian regions were eventually photocopied to the MRS geographical scope, the **institutional capacity building of their MRS** resulted in a Priority Axis of these programmes.

Notwithstanding the fact that the TNC programmes are fundamental for the effective management of the MRS as for paving the way to their improved planning and designing of quality investments, they remain only instrumental for the achievement of the macro-regional strategic results. Therefore the Transnational Programmes of the ETC have not to be considered the only nor the main funding source for implementing the MRS!

6. Anyway it is worth to emphasize the coincidence of EUSDR / EUSAIR related TNC programmes covering the Western Balkans.

The EUSDR and EUSAIR “pillars” are mirrored and matched by the TNC programmes according with the mandate of the Common Provisions Regulation of the European Structural and Investment Funds (Art.9) to concentrate their priorities on no more as four Thematic Objectives (TO) as follows.

**The Priority Axes of the Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme are:**

1. Innovative and socially responsible Danube region (TO1);
2. Environment and Culture responsible Danube region (TO6);
3. Better connected Danube region (TO7);
4. Well governed Danube region (TO11).

**The Priority Axes of the ADRION Transnational Cooperation Programme are:**

1. Strengthening research, technological development & innovation (TO1);
2. Protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency (TO6);
3. Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures (TO7);
4. Enhancing institutional capacity & efficient public administration (TO11).

This evidence calls for tapping the potential **benefit for the accession countries** of the WB region by transforming the risks of overlapping into a fruitful synergy.

7. **The CEI is in a particular position for bridging the macro-regional strategies**, being the only institution connecting all the four MRS through the participation of its Member States to the same MRS as follows:

2 with EUSBSR (Baltic Sea)	(Poland, Belarus)
13 with EUSDR (Danube)	(Austria, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine)
7 with EUSAIR (Adriatic-Ionian)	(Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia).
3 with EUSALP (Alpine)	(Austria, Italy, Slovenia, by June 2015)

**The CEI could feed the MRS implementation** with its support both in the field of capacity building (e.g. through actions aiming to the stock-tacking of models of MRS management and of experiences in projects prioritization and fund-raising techniques) and in all the sector specific activities.

8. **The CEI Secretariat is envisaged to act at three possible levels of operation**, where the CEI ambition would be to provide added value for the implementation of the MRS policy:

- **Level 1 > Bridging Macro-regions:**

to establish a permanent dialogue between the various organizations active in the region between the Baltic, the Adriatic and the Black Sea, thus avoiding overlapping, promoting fruitful partnerships / positive synergies, matching funding objectives, by building a sort of a “clearing house” / “exchange” on MRS projects in this part of Europe and the whole CEI area;

- **Level 2 > Focus WB Enlargement:**

to agree on a “plan of action” for the support of the WB Candidate Countries on the path for accession by leveraging on the MRS (EUSDR and EUSAIR) and the related TNC programmes in a way consistent also with the mainstreams of the SEE 2020 Strategy and of its national implementation by Country;

- **Level 3 > MRS connected implementation:**

to contribute to the implementation of each MRS through the generation of projects aiming to the stock-taking of MRS crossing experiences and results by setting up sector relevant project partnerships in the frame of each TNC programme pertaining the scope of CEI membership.

Moreover the CEI could offer to the Commission the **establishment of a working group composed by MRS leading persons from the CEI MS** (specific features to be agreed at CNC level) as an interlocutor of the High Level Expert Group on MRS that is managed by DG REGIO, where the representatives of all 28 EU MS are rallying together.

9. **About Level 2** it has to be underscored how the geographical scope of two MRS includes candidate WBC.

The EU Strategy for Danube Region (EUSDR) and the EU Strategy for Adriatic – Ionian Region (EUSAIR) both comprises Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Albania, whereas Macedonia and Kosovo\* are out of any MRS.

It is but not to forget that Macedonia and Kosovo\* are part of the all inclusive approach of the SEE 2020 Strategy for Growth and Jobs promoted and monitored by the RCC, which also entails the specific dimension and commonalities of a sort of WB (Macro)Region.

\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Therefore, in order to optimally leverage on these strategies for the support of the enlargement process in the WB, the long lasting **relationship between CEI, AII and RCC** provides the basic opportunity for developing more substantial synergies among the three regional organizations, in view of sharing/disseminating reciprocal knowledge on the implementation of each strategy and of feeding the mainstreams of EUSDR – EUSAIR – SEE 2020 with the focused deployment of inputs supporting the enlargement process.

10. Therefore a **summary of CEI standpoints and initiatives** suitable to be pursued by the CEI Secretariat provides that:

- i. The CEI should envisage to act at **three possible levels**:
  1. Level 1 > Bridging Macro-regions
  2. Level 2 > Focus WB Enlargement
  3. Level 3 > MRS connected implementation
- ii. The CEI could establish a **working group** of MRS leading persons from CEI Member States, also as an interlocutor of the High Level Expert Group on MRS of the European Commission.
- iii. The **guidelines of all CEI funding tools** are going to be innovated for clearly matching the combined priorities of the macro-regional strategies and of the SEE 2020, in order to better support the enlargement process in the Western Balkans.
- iv. To implement the proviso of the CEI Plan of Action 2014 – 2016, a **specific Work-Package** will be designed for the benefit of the CEI Member States in the **EU Eastern Partnership**, tacking stock of the CEI recent and current actions and aiming to make the most of their new opportunities stemming from MRS and the exchange of knowledge thereof, also in collaboration with the CBSS.
- v. CEI could confer to the EUSAIR implementation in particular a valuable support through projects aiming to the **stock-tacking of models of other MRS management and of sector project results**, including fund-raising techniques, for all topics included in the Pillars of the Strategy.
- vi. To pursue the establishment of a common platform on the synergy of the (macro)-regional strategies for the benefit of the WB accession countries by strengthening the fair and operational cooperation among **CEI, AII and RCC** as the regionally relevant international organizations, to be supported by a substantial political push from their

coincident Member States and by the direct commitment and endorsement of their peer-to-peer partnership by the European Commission and the European Parliament.

- vii. It remains of utmost importance to bring on the spot of the **agenda of the MRS Fora 2015** the issue of the role of Regional International Organizations in the MRS implementation.
- viii. After the Prime Ministers endorsement of the role of the CEI in the framework of the MRS at the occasion of the CEI Vienna Summit 2014, the CEI NCs could promote **coordination with fellow NC** of the relevant regional strategies by Country, aiming to further fitting this issue at a meeting of CEI MFA Directors.
- ix. For the facilitation of the exchange of experiences and stock tacking of project results in the implementation of the MRS by the subsidiary stakeholders, **the design of a “CEI of the Regions” as a new dimension of the organization** to be established further, could be appointed by the CNC to the CEI Secretariat.

February 2015