**Introduction**

Following its first two meetings, in June and July 2009, the CPMR’s “Territorial Cooperation” working group issued a first paper describing the state of play of the current territorial cooperation instrument and proposing some thoughts on the future of this instrument after 2013. These will be fine-tuned over the coming months. The group’s work will provide an input to the seminar on “territorial cooperation and the neighbourhood instrument” to be organised in the spring of 2010 under the Spanish EU Presidency.

The aim of this paper is to prepare the discussions of the working group’s third meeting, which will take place on 20 November in Brussels. It proposes some initial elements of analysis on the macro-regional strategies currently being prepared by the European Commission and their links with territorial cooperation and with the integrated maritime policy, and raises a number of questions for debate by the group.

This paper is also intended for use by the Geographical Commissions (especially the Atlantic Arc and the North Sea Commissions) in their discussions on their own strategies.

1. **Origin, concept and operation of the macro-regional strategies being designed and implemented**

It is not easy, at this stage, to define what is covered by the term “macro-region”. The concept was first used to describe international organisations based on large geographical areas, such as ASEAN or the European Union. Today, the European Commission sees the macro-region as “an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges”. In relation to these areas, a macro-regional strategy refers to “an integrated framework that allows the European Union and Member States to identify needs and allocate resources” with a view to protecting the environment and enabling sustainable economic and social development.

Two macro-regional strategies have so far been developed or are in the process of being developed:

- the European Union’s Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, adopted by the October 2009 European Council;
- a Strategy for the Danube Region, being drawn up by DG REGIO in response to a request from the June 2009 European Council.

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2. Ibid.
1.1. Member States and the Commission are at the origin of the Baltic Sea and Danube Strategies

Numerous partners have contributed to the emergence of the Strategies for the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region. This is particularly true for the Baltic Sea Strategy, which has been encouraged by the European Parliament, amongst other actors, through an Intergroup. More generally, supra-national organisations (inter-governmental or non-governmental organisations) in these two regions have strongly supported the development of so-called integrated strategies.

In both cases, however, it is the link between the European Council and the European Commission that has really triggered the preparation of the Strategies. The Member States/Commission “couple” would therefore appear to be decisive in progressing from thinking about a macro-regional strategy to actually creating one.

The example of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

- 14 December 2007: under the decisive influence of Sweden, the European Council, in its Conclusions, invites the Commission to present a Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.
- 30 October 2009: under the Swedish EU Presidency, the European Council adopts the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The example of the Strategy for the Danube Region


The Member States play the dominant role in this “couple”. Not only are they the decision-makers in the Council, but they can also – through regional inter-governmental organisations – actively lobby in favour of a Strategy in the pre-decision-making phase. The example of Sweden is particularly revealing, since it acted first of all in its capacity as a member of various transnational organisations (Council of Baltic Sea States, Baltic 21, HELCOM, etc.), then as a member of the Council when in 2007 it encouraged the call for a Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, and finally in 2009 as President of the same Council which conclusively adopted the Strategy proposed by the European Commission.

1.2. Should the strategies aim to take a holistic approach?

The example of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

The Action Plan of the European Union’s Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region details 76 actions organised in four thematic “pillars” (plus ten horizontal actions) intended to make the Baltic Sea Region:
- an environmentally sustainable place;
- a prosperous place;
- an accessible and attractive place;
- a safe and secure place.

The Strategy is therefore designed to go beyond the maritime dimension and adopt a holistic approach. This has been backed up in speeches made by a variety of partners. Joe Borg himself evokes the integrated approach of the Baltic Sea Strategy as an opportunity to consider the maritime economy sector as an important lever for development. Pawel Samecki speaks of an all-encompassing approach to macro-regional

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3 Council of the European Union, Presidency Conclusions, 14/12/2007, 16616/1/07
5 Council of the European Union, Presidency Conclusions, 29-30/10/2009, 15265/09
6 Danuta Hübner, SPEECH/08/501, 06/10/2008
7 Council of the European Union, Presidency Conclusions, 18-19/06/2009, 11225/2/09
strategies as being the key to their success because it is the only approach that will draw in all actors in a particular macro-region.\(^8\)

A holistic approach therefore implies the integration of the different thematic priorities. As far as the territory is concerned, the approach is different: the territorial limits of the macro-region are intended to be flexible depending on the policies conducted. The European Commission indicates simply that “following the principles of functional regions, the physical boundaries may vary according to the policy area in question”\(^9\). In other words, integration is thematic but not territorial.

**Integrated maritime policy and macro-regional strategy**

The macro-regional strategies seem to aim at a holistic thematic approach. However, a certain confusion exists between macro-regional strategy on the one hand and integrated maritime policy (IMP) on the other. The fact that the European Council adopted the integrated maritime policy on the same day as it asked the Commission to present a strategy for the Baltic Sea Region no doubt contributes to this confusion, especially as the Council underlined in its Conclusions that the Baltic Sea Strategy should take the IMP into account.

The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region has therefore been designed against this backdrop of conceptual confusion. Although the initiative has been led by DG REGIO, DG MARE has been very closely involved in the process, since it considered that the challenges to be addressed by the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region – environmental protection, energy, climate change, research and innovation, competitiveness, job creation, trade, and transport – included a maritime dimension.

At a stakeholder conference during the consultation process of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Joe Borg described the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region as the meeting-point of the maritime and the terrestrial aspects of the territory, of the IMP and territorial cohesion policy. He concluded by saying that the Baltic Sea Strategy was a model the other maritime regions could follow, since, in his view, the actions of the IMP could only truly become tangible if this policy was brought to a regional level.

The launch of a macro-regional strategy for the Danube region has however permitted a clarification of DG REGIO’s position, namely that the strategies being developed do not necessarily have to be based on a sea basin. There is a clear intention to mark a split between macro-regional strategies and integrated maritime policy.

The announcement by DG MARE\(^{10}\) in September that it was launching a Strategy for improved governance of maritime affairs in the Mediterranean is also a means by which DG MARE can reassert its role. DG MARE is in this way indicating to those who might have thought that IMP was just one aspect of the macro-regional strategies that in fact IMP is a policy in its own right.

The successive announcement of these different regional strategies therefore results from a complex interplay between DG MARE and DG REGIO.

**1.3. Macro-regional strategies after the Baltic and the Danube**

The future of macro-regional strategies remains uncertain. It certainly does not appear that the European Commission wishes to use these strategies as a model to be reproduced across the European territory, since it makes a distinction between:

- macro-regional areas, in which the specific challenges can only be addressed by national and regional authorities and in which the added value of Community intervention is high;
- groups of regions that wish to cooperate on a common integrated strategy, which – although the existence of any specific challenge is less evident – may enable the area to enhance its global competitiveness.

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\(^8\) Pawel Samecki, SPEECH, 29/06/09, *Commission Expectations from the Danube Strategy*
\(^9\) *Macro-regional strategies in the EU*, op. cit.
\(^{10}\) European Commission, COM(2009)466 – Towards an Integrated Maritime Policy for better governance in the Mediterranean
Given this distinction, the European Commission then states that “Given limited resources, it is essential that macro-regional strategies are prepared only where the impact, in the form of clear, concrete actions, is high and visible.”\(^{11}\)

It is therefore possible that, although the Commission appears to be taking an interest in regions in the Alps, the Adriatic Sea, and the Mediterranean, the Strategies for the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube will be the only macro-regional strategies. However, there is nothing to prevent “areas” that wish to develop their own strategy doing so, even if the initiative is not led by the European Commission.

2. Governance of the macro-regional Strategies: what role for the Regions?

We have already highlighted the fundamental role played by national governments and inter-governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea Region in the request from the Council to the Commission to present a macro-regional Strategy. The question is, what part have sub-national authorities played in the preparation of these Strategies and what will their role be in the implementation of these Strategies?

Preparation: participation in the ex ante consultations

In order to prepare the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the Commission launched a wide-ranging ex ante consultation process, organising:
- 2 stakeholder conferences, held in September 2008 in Stockholm and in February 2009 in Rostock;
- 4 roundtables, held in September 2008 in Kaunas, November 2008 in Gdansk, December 2008 in Copenhagen and December 2008 in Helsinki;
- 1 youth conference, held in February 2009 in Hamburg;
- an Internet consultation.

An analysis of this process reveals that the majority of those who took part in the various events were either representatives of the European Commission or representatives of the different national institutions or governments. Representatives of regions, regional networks (CPMR being the only regional network to have taken part in the processes) or the Committee of the Regions only represent 12.5% of speakers, as far as we have been able to identify, compared with the Commission (approx. 25% of speakers) and national bodies (30%).

So even at the consultation phase, the Member States/Commission “couple” controlled the definition of the challenges of the future Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

Implementation and decision-making process

Looking at how the Strategy will be implemented, here again the role of sub-regional authorities is a secondary one. Each of the Strategy’s actions is led by an identified actor. In the majority of cases, this is a Member State, a group of Member States, or a competent national organisation. The Land of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern does however lead an action on tourism; and for certain actions reference is made to the necessary participation of sub-national authorities alongside other actors and within the limits of their field of competence\(^{12}\).

A “High level working group”, made up of representatives from the Foreign Ministries or Prime Ministers’ offices of the 27 Member States, will be the driving force of all the macro-regional strategies. Together with the European Commission, the HLWG will be responsible for the coordination and day-to-day monitoring of the strategies. The “important” decisions will be taken by the relevant Council and if necessary endorsed by the European Council. This decision-making process is also valid for reviews of the Strategy, which could be proposed for example on the occasion of an annual stakeholder forum.

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\(^{11}\) Macro-regional strategies in the EU, op. cit.

\(^{12}\) Example of a cooperation action: encourage ports, local and regional authorities and maritime transport companies to adopt non-binding measures to reduce the discharge of waste water from maritime transport and leisure sailing, and to make facilities available in ports so as to avoid or limit the emission of greenhouse gases by vessels.

On several occasions, voices have been raised asking what link exists between the macro-regional Strategies and territorial cooperation, in particular transnational cooperation. At the joint session of the Committee of the Regions COTER Commission and the European Parliament’s REGI Committee held during the Open Days, Danuta Hübner referred to the macro-regional Strategies as being the future of territorial cooperation.

At the present time, the “Baltic Sea Region” transnational cooperation programme is one element, notably a financial one, in the Baltic Sea Strategy. This idea is reinforced in the published document listing the contribution of 24 transnational cooperation projects already selected by the Baltic Sea Region Programme. We will now compare the objectives, operating mechanisms, and funding of the two tools, in order to guide a discussion on this subject.

Objectives

An analysis of the objectives pursued respectively by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the Baltic Sea Region INTERREG IVB programme reveals a clash between two different kinds of strategic argumentation:

- The Baltic Sea Region programme is based on and develops the major European Union policies: priority 1 is the regional translation of the Lisbon Strategy; priority 2 reflects the Gothenburg Strategy; priority 4 takes up the key points of the Territorial Agenda.
- The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region adopts a more inductive approach, basing its priorities on concrete projects already planned or considered as necessary by the national governments of the macro-region.

So on one side we have the territorial application of the EU’s major strategies, and on the other side the definition of a strategy on the basis of the situation “on the ground” in the territories.

In addition, a simple analysis of the objectives of the two documents highlights the low level of consideration given to the sub-regional territories as mere project implementation areas. For example, whereas the transnational cooperation programme devotes an entire project to the attractiveness of cities and regions, the Baltic Strategy reasons on an exclusively national basis.

Governance

Distinguishing between a “top-down” Baltic Strategy on the one hand and a “bottom-up” territorial cooperation programme on the other hand, does not however fully reflect the reality of these two approaches.

The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is in fact quite “bottom-up” in its approach, in that its priorities are dependent on the challenges identified as fundamental on the ground, not conversely. The governance of the Strategy is however clearly “top-down” in that the sub-national territories are excluded from its governance or have no decision-making power.

Conversely, while the specific challenges of the territories are not to be found among the priorities of the INTERREG IVB programme, the governance of this programme shows much greater consideration of regional and local authorities. One-third of the seats on the Baltic Sea Region INTERREG IVB programme Monitoring Committee are held by representatives of cities, regions, or networks of sub-national authorities.

Funding and nature of the projects

14 Priority 3 deals with maritime challenges, and therefore stems directly from the EU’s maritime policy (and in particular the IMP) however this policy is not so symbolic as the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies or the Territorial Agenda.
Whereas the earmarking of existing appropriations from a variety of EU policies should raise EUR 45.97 billion for the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the transnational cooperation programme only has funding of EUR 236.6 million (almost 200 times less), which says it all as far as the nature of the projects planned or implemented by the two different systems is concerned.

The macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is often presented as being a response to the lack of a strategic dimension in the transnational cooperation programme. However, if we take a look at the projects funded by the Baltic Sea Region INTERREG IVB programme, we can see that they respond to the programme’s objectives, which are strategic. But the strategic nature of the projects is directly related to what is possible in terms of their budget, and this is obviously limited. The “concrete” actions of the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region are not noticeable for their strategic scope, since:

- the so-called strategic actions often merely involve the implementation of existing legislation;
- many of the so-called cooperative actions resemble transnational cooperation projects;
- the flagship actions, presented as being the most concrete, are not all fully defined.

In other words, the Strategy provides guidelines about what should be done in the macro-region in the years ahead, but has no binding value. It does however have the merit of earmarking European funds for challenges where transnational cooperation is necessary.

4. Questions

The following questions are intended as a guide for the discussions of the “Territorial cooperation” working group. This is obviously not a comprehensive list.

- Do the macro-regional strategies, as they exist today, respond to the shortcomings in the territorial cooperation programmes identified in the working group’s first meetings (objectives, governance, funding, etc.)? Why?

- What added value do the macro-regional strategies contribute to the territorial cooperation tool, in particular with regard to transnational cooperation? What are the first lessons that can be learned for the future?

- What added value do the macro-regional strategies have for the integrated maritime policy?

- What is the future for macro-regional strategies that do not benefit from being steered by or supported by the European Commission?