Pillar 1 / Blue Growth

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# Blue Growth – The Pillar’s challenge

The Adriatic-Ionic Region is primarily defined by the Adriatic and Ionian Seas basin, suggesting a focus on maritime issues. Marine and coastal areas are considered in an interconnected system also including terrestrial areas beyond the coastal areas. With intensified movements of goods, services and peoples owing to Croatia’s accession to the EU and with the prospect of EU accession for other countries in the Region these links become more prominent. They do not only matter for environmental quality (Pillar 3) or connections in the Region (Pillar 2) but for Blue Growth issues, too.

Blue growth, at first glance maybe focusing on maritime and coastal issues only, excluding potential interest and involvement of the land-locked countries that are part of the EUSAIR Strategy. With the inclusion of North Macedonia and San Marino, two more land-locked countries joined the Strategy. Currently, Pillar 1 focuses on three topics, namely:

* Blue technologies
* Fisheries and aquaculture
* Maritime and marine governance and services

This paper reflects on the focus of the three topics to better involve the land-locked countries in Pillar 1 and the alternatives that could be thought of to enhance overall ownership of Pillar 1 actions. In addition, some concerns on the TSG of Pillar 1 exist regarding the current TSG members’ limited ability to cover blue technologies actions, since they represent mainly the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

The following gives food for thought for the TSG meeting discussion on 09 May 2023 in Athens.

# Three alternatives

The following shortly outlines three alternatives for discussion including the pros and cons for the TSG and some general strategic reflections. The chapter ends with some tentative conclusions. All TSG members are invited to reflect on the alternatives in preparation of the TSG meeting and possible other arguments supporting the development of a joint TSG opinion to be suggested to the EUSAIR Governing Board.

In each section the table provides a tentative overview of arguments for and against the particular alternative from the perspective of the Pillar 1 TSG. This is complemented with a few strategic considerations that may be considered for the joint position proposal to the EUSAIR Governing Board.

## New Green Growth Pillar

One option is to set-up a new pillar on green growth. Green growth is on “fostering economic growth and development, while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our well-being relies”[[1]](#footnote-2). It matters for both, terrestrial and coastal areas, whether located inland or along the sea basins. Thus, it is a pillar that is supportive to balancing involvement and ownership across EUSAIR countries.

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| **To consider for Pillar 1 TSG …**  | **PRO** | **CON** |
| Objectives & actions | No immediate implications for Pillar 1 |  |
| Complexity  | A separate pillar does not add complexity for Pillar 1 |  |
| Coordination across pillars |  | Potentially many overlaps with Pillar 1 increasing the need for coordination |
| Governance  | No immediate effect on Pillar 1 TSG members | Countries need additional continuous TSG capacity that could negatively affect Pillar 1 capacities |
| Balanced involvement |  | No improvement regarding the involvement of land-locked countries in Pillar 1 |
| **From a strategic perspective this alternative also means:**⇨ A clear commitment to green growth is strengthened in the EUSAIR Strategy (in line with EU policy objectives).⇨ Setting up a new TSG now is very late in the process for the Action plan update.⇨ There is a risk to overload the EUSAIR with too many objectives. |

If this alternative was preferred by Pillar 1 TSG members, this would not affect the work of Pillar 1 or the update of the Action Plan for this pillar. Achieving a more balanced engagement would be ‘out-sourced’ to the strategic EUSAIR level and the status-quo within Pillar 1 remained unchanged. The feeling of being excluded would not be solved at the level of the Pillar but across Pillars, with the risk that for Pillar 1 the issue may reoccur after a while.

Some additional thoughts would have to be spent nevertheless on how to overcome the lack of ‘blue technology’ capacity in Pillar 1.

## Extending Pillar 1: Blue & Green Growth

Taking into account green growth objectives to better include land-locked countries’ perspectives could also be done via an extension of the blue growth pillar. This way green growth objectives would be explicitly added and connected to blue growth objectives. Such an approach overcomes territorial divisions (terrestrial – coastal – maritime), creates the link between and values environmentally sustainable economic development in view of the whole Region: The common concern of blue and green growth is “how to sustainably manage the planet’s resources in light of global warming, resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem collapse”[[2]](#footnote-3).

In this case topic 1 of the pillar could be extended to ‘blue and green growth’ and topic 3 could be extended to ‘maritime, marine and terrestrial governance and services’ (maritime and terrestrial spatial planning). Topic 2 would remain untouched ‘fisheries and aquaculture’.

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| **To consider for Pillar 1 TSG …**  | **PRO** | **CON** |
| Objectives & actions | Support to the natural relation between blue and green growth by amending some Pillar 1 topics | Less focused pillar with a risk to lose clear objectives |
| Complexity within Pillar 1 |  | Increasing complexity of objectives, actions and involved team may increase Pillar 1 coordination and may hamper clarity of responsibilities, tasks etc. |
| Coordination across pillars | With a clear division of objectives, no overlaps between Pillars 1 and 3 |  |
| Governance  | Additional representatives in the TSG could help overcome the lack of ‘blue technology’ competence | Necessary to add people to Pillar 1 to cover the additional themes |
| Balanced involvement | More balanced consideration of all countries’ interests / perspectives |  |
| **From a strategic perspective this alternative also means:**⇨ A clear commitment to green growth is strengthened in the EUSAIR Strategy (in line with EU policy objectives).⇨ Changes could be more easily facilitated at strategic level than setting-up a new Pillar.⇨ Overall, still more capacities and resources may be needed. |

If this alternative was preferred by Pillar 1 TSG members, some follow-up questions and tasks arise, which had to be solved in a relatively short time to ensure the timely update of the Pillar 1 action plan:

* Formulate green growth objectives, a clear Pillar 1 strategy (red tape to manage the increased complexity) and develop corresponding actions.
* Streamline blue and green growth objectives and actions in view of the countries’ needs to achieve a coherent approach. This should be done jointly by (future) TSG members to create ownership for the then extended Pillar 1.
* Ensure a clear differentiation from Pillar 3.
* What other representatives will have to be added to Pillar 1 to ensure adequate coverage of all topics beyond fisheries and aquaculture?
* What is the best governance structure within Pillar 1 to accommodate additional people? Increasing the TSG size or setting-up separate TSGs within the pillar? In case of the second option, how to coordinate the two TSGs and how should they be differentiated, e.g. blue vs. green or by topics?

## Keep status quo

The third principal alternative is to leave pillars unchanged, both the number of pillars and the structure of Pillar 1. In this case, the blue growth objective remains at the core of EUSAIR ‘sustainable economic development’ actions and ‘green’ objectives are tackled exclusively in the area of environmental protection.

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| **To consider for Pillar 1 TSG …**  | **PRO** | **CON** |
| Objectives & actions | No immediate implications for a general revision of Pillar 1 | Possibly still the need to twist ‘blue growth’ to enhance interests of land-locked countries |
| Complexity within Pillar 1 | No additional complexity with continued current structure |  |
| Coordination across pillars | No changes necessary |  |
| Governance  |  | The current lack of ‘blue technology’ representatives cannot be tackled in the context of a wider revision of Pillar 1 |
| Balanced involvement |  | Land-locked countries feel continuously excluded from some Pillar 1 activities |
| **From a strategic perspective this alternative also means:**⇨ Green growth issues not addressed in EUSAIR (albeit its prominent role for EU policy objectives).⇨ The thematic focus of EUSAIR is not blurred, which avoids being over-ambitious.⇨ Across pillars, this alternative has the least implications. |

If this alternative was preferred by Pillar 1 TSG members, still some follow-up questions and tasks arise, to overcome current challenges. This may be less time-consuming than for the previous alternative but could still be challenging for the timely update of the Pillar 1 action plan:

* What could be done to better facilitate the interests and needs of the land-locked countries? What are these countries needs that have a twist to ‘blue growth’?
* How could actions more explicitly consider ‘blue growth’ in freshwater areas or in case of ‘blue technology’ actions go even beyond the currently perceived territorial border between terrestrial, coastal and maritime areas?
* What other stakeholders / representatives are needed in Pillar 1, not least to better cover ‘blue technology’ actions?

## Tentative conclusions

These outlines illustrate clearly that no alternative is superior to all others. Instead, to overcome the currently perceived imbalance in Pillar 1, an open and honest reflection is necessary to (i) enhance each other’s understanding, (iii) develop a joint position towards the EUSAIR Governing Board and through this (ii) increase the ownership for joint actions in Pillar 1.

The TSG meeting shall facilitate the discussion towards such a joint position or at least help developing joint preferences towards one or another alternative that offers a feasible solution to each and every country involved in Pillar 1 of the EUSAIR.

1. <https://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/explaining-green-blue-growth> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)