

Discussion Paper
***Follow-up actions in response to the request from EUSAIR Ministers under
Paragraph 6 of the Catania ministerial Declaration***

1. INTRODUCTION

The ministerial Declaration, adopted on the fringe of the 3rd EUSAIR Forum held in Catania on 24 May 2018 by the ministers - or their deputies - from the eight countries, paves the way for an effective and mutually beneficial relationship between the EUSAIR and ESIF and IPA programmes for the 2021-2027 programming period.

Paragraph 6 of the Declaration calls on the national and regional authorities responsible for the ESI and IPA funds in the eight participating countries to “closely coordinate among them across the Region, since the very early stages of 2021-2027 strategic planning, so as to jointly agree on the macro-regional priorities to be included in the ESIF Partnership Agreements and IPA Strategy Papers¹ and, subsequently, in the ensuing, relevant programming documents”. That same paragraph also urges “the ESIF and IPA programme authorities and EUSAIR key implementers² to jointly work to identify at the earliest convenience pilot macro-regional actions and projects which require, for their implementation, coordinated planning and programming of national/regional ESI and IPA funds across the Region”.

Such statement presents a great opportunity for the EUSAIR to make the breakthrough needed for delivering what is expected from it. It recognises the necessity to include macro-regional priorities - jointly agreed by the eight countries - in the ESIF and IPA 2021-2027 planning and programming documents from the very beginning, and to agree on a few pilot/emblematic projects with macro-regional relevance to be funded by future ESIF/IPA programmes. This requires upgrading the level of coordination among countries, notably among national/regional authorities responsible for ESIF and IPA planning and programming.

This process could gain further momentum thanks to the proposal for the 2021-2027 ESIF Regulations³ which allow mainstream national/regional programmes to support cooperation activities among countries and regions included e.g. in a macro-regional strategy. In their proposed (national/regional) programmes, EU member states are also requested to consider and describe, for each specific objective, the interregional and transnational actions envisaged with beneficiaries located in at least one other member state, as well as those contributing to relevant macro-regional or sea-basin strategies. The proposal for the 2021-2027 IPA III Regulation⁴, for its part, stipulates that IPA assistance should support countries’ efforts to advance macro-regional cooperation, including through implementation of EU macro-regional strategies.

The present discussion paper proposes to offer options for how best to translate Paragraph 6 of the ministerial Declaration into a concrete course of action.

¹ In the light of the proposal for the IPA III Regulation [COM(2018) 465 final of 14.6.2018], the reference to “Strategy Papers” should be understood as reference to “IPA programming framework” to be established by the Commission in partnership with the Enlargement countries.

² EUSAIR key implementers are National and Pillar Coordinators and TSG members.

³ COM(2018) 375 final (CPR Regulation) of 29.5.2018, notably Article 17; COM(2018) 372 final (ERDF+ CF Regulation), notably Article 2(3)

⁴ COM(2018) 465 final of 14.6.2018

2. PROPOSED COURSE OF ACTION

A first positive outcome of the actions undertaken in accordance to Paragraph 6 of the Catania Declaration would be an agreement between the national and regional authorities responsible for the ESI and IPA funds and EUSAIR key implementers on a set of macro-regional priorities (i.e. needs and key areas of cooperation) to be embedded in the relevant Partnership Agreements and in the IPA programming framework for the period 2021-2027. The NCs are unquestionably best placed for recognising such needs and cooperation areas just as those among them responsible for EU funds in each participating country are best placed to liaise with the ESIF/IPA programmes authorities⁵.

It is of paramount importance to ensure that the abovementioned set of macro-regional priorities is agreed from the very beginning of the 2021-2027 programming process. To this end, the authorities responsible for ESI and IPA funds in the eight EUSAIR countries should gather together as early as possible, so as to engage in parallel and coordinated planning and programming in cooperation with the EUSAIR key implementers.

A good example of joint planning and coordination is the pilot European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) managing authorities' network established in 2016 for the Baltic Sea Region. The aim is to find concrete ways to support the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) by ERDF funded country-specific programmes and to improve coordination for better use of available resources.

Following the example of the EUSBSR, similar networks could be set up in other macro-regions as a tool for coordinating themes for transnational cooperation under ERDF/IPA programmes of the programming period 2021-2027.

With these requirements in mind, the following steps are proposed:

- a) **Approval of the Discussion Paper by the GB (3-4 October 2018)**
- b) **TSGs to propose a set of macro-regional priorities to be included in the Partnership Agreements and the IPA programming framework.**

The GB of 3-4 October should give a mandate to TSGs to propose one or two macro-regional priority under the respective pillar, which should be included in the 2021-2027 Partnership Agreements of the four EU member states and in the IPA programming framework of the Enlargement countries.

In identifying these priorities, the TSGs should already have in mind the possible pilot/emblematic actions and projects under these priorities which would require, for their implementation, coordinated/synchronised financing from ESIF/IPA national/regional programmes. These actions and projects should meet the following criteria: (a) distinct, undisputed macro-regional relevance within the proposed priority; (b) consistency with priorities set at the national/regional level.

Timing: TSG shall agree on the proposed macro-regional priorities for their respective pillar in the round of TSG meetings to be held in November 2018. Pillar Coordinators shall communicate in writing the proposed priorities to National Coordinators by 30 November 2018.

- c) **NCs to agree on a shortlist of macro-regional priorities to be proposed for inclusion in the Partnership Agreements and the IPA programming framework**

⁵ For some countries, the two sets of actors may indeed be the very same officials.

NCs will assess the priorities proposed by the TSGs and agree, by consensus, on a shortlist to be submitted to ESIF/IPA national authorities for the inclusion in the Partnership Agreements and the IPA programming framework.

Timing: in the course of **December 2018** (by written procedure or, if needed, in an *ad hoc*-meeting). FP LP will assist NCs in this endeavour. Shortlist of agreed priorities to be finalised by **23 December 2018**.

d) NCs to call, as soon as possible, a meeting with the national authorities responsible of ESIF/IPA strategic planning and programming in the eight countries

Objectives of the meeting are:

- *To establish* a **coordination/cooperation network** among national authorities responsible for ESIF/IPA planning and programming, together with EUSAIR NCs.

The aim is to set a forum where national authorities responsible for ESI and IPA funds in the eight EUSAIR countries could, since the earliest stages, coordinate their 2021-2027 planning and programming exercise with a view to supporting the implementation of the Strategy through relevant national/regional programmes, in an organised/synchronised manner. Such network should then become a permanent tool for coordinating/overseeing the implementation of macro-regional actions and projects included in OPs and APs.

- As a first step, *to agree*, with those who are going to shape future Partnership Agreements (EU Member States) and IPA programming framework (Enlargement Countries), on a set of macro-regional priorities – proposed by the EUSAIR NCs - to be included in the 2021-2027 Partnership Agreements of the four EU member states and in the IPA programming framework;
- *To mandate* the EUSAIR Presidency to draft, in cooperation with DG REGIO and with the support of the Facility Point Lead Partner (FP LP), a Memorandum of Understanding governing the cooperation between national authorities responsible for ESIF/IPA strategic planning and programming and EUSAIR key implementers (i.e. governing the functioning of the coordination/cooperation network) .

Participants: national authorities responsible for ESIF/IPA strategic planning and programming (i.e. those responsible for preparing Partnership Agreements in EU member states and the IPA programming framework in the Enlargement countries); EUSAIR National Coordinators; European Commission (DG REGIO and DG NEAR); Facility Point Lead Partner (FP LP).

Timing/Practical aspects:

This first meeting should take place in **January 2019** under the aegis of the MNE EUSAIR Presidency. Invitation to the meeting should be sent by **end October 2018** (FP LP to prepare an invitation letter to ESIF and IPA national authorities, co-signed by all eight NCs). A concept paper should be drafted (DG REGIO and FP LP, in agreement with MNE Presidency and EUSAIR NCs.).

e) TSGs to propose pilot/emblematic actions and projects consistent with macro-regional priorities agreed at the meeting between NCs and ESIF/IPA authorities (January 2019)

According to the agreed macro-regional priorities to be included in the Partnership Agreements and the IPA programming framework (point d) above), the TSGs will

identify pilot/emblematic actions and projects which would require, for their implementation, coordinated/synchronised financing from ESIF/IPA national/regional programmes. These actions and projects should meet the following criteria: (a) distinct, undisputed macro-regional relevance within the proposed priority; (b) consistency with priorities set at the national/regional level. The actions and projects proposed, if selected, will be included in the relevant national/regional Operational Programmes and Action Plans.

The pilot/emblematic actions and projects proposed by the TSGs should be endorsed by NCs, who will then present them to the ESIF/IPA national authorities in the coordination/cooperation network.

Timing: round of TSG meetings in **March 2019**. NCs to endorse the list of proposed actions and projects by early **April 2019**.

f) Memorandum of Understanding – coordination/cooperation network

As for the mandate received at the meeting of January 2019 (step d) above), the EUSAIR Presidency, in cooperation with DG REGIO and with the support of the FP LP, will draft a MoU to be submitted to, and agreed with the ESIF/IPA national authorities.

The MoU should regulate the cooperation of ESIF/IPA national/regional authorities from the eight countries, among them and with the EUSAIR key implementers. In other words, the MoU should indicate the purpose of the ESIF/IPA – EUSAIR coordination/cooperation network and its functioning.

Through this MoU, ESIF/IPA authorities in each country should commit to include the agreed macro-regional priorities in their respective Partnership Agreements and the IPA programming framework and, consequently, to include pilot/emblematic actions and projects, implementing these priorities, in the relevant national/regional programming documents (OPs and APs).

The MoU should also specify practical mechanisms for coordinating the programming and implementation of the actions and projects in the OPs and APs.

In the absence of a ‘common pot’ shared by all, one option could be for the MoU to clarify how country-specific - and, in the case of Enlargement countries, also multi-country - funds will contribute (possibly on a pro-rata basis) to financing the jointly agreed pilot macro-regional actions and projects.

Ideally, in order to ensure smooth and well-orchestrated coordination of planning, programming and allocation of national/regional ESI and IPA funds, each country should take responsibility for its part of the overall macro-regional project(s). Agreement should be reached upfront on a common schedule for specific commonly agreed actions and investments, thereby ensuring that partial national actions contribute to joint pilot/emblematic macro-regional actions and projects.

Timing: conditional on the mandate to be received at the meeting of January 2019, the MNE Presidency, in cooperation with DG REGIO and with the support of the FP LP, will draft the MoU, to be ready in **February/March 2019**.

g) 2nd meeting of the ESIF/IPA – EUSAIR coordination/cooperation network

At the second meeting of the national authorities responsible for ESIF/IPA planning and programming, the EUSAIR NCs will present a shortlist of pilot/emblematic actions

and projects - consistent with the macro-regional priorities agreed at the first meeting (January 2019) - to be included in the relevant national/regional Operation Programmes and Action Plans.

At the meeting, the draft Memorandum of Understanding governing the functioning of the coordination/cooperation network (requested at the 1st meeting) should also be approved.

Timing: April 2019 or back-to back with the 4th EUSAIR Forum in May 2019

*European Commission
DG REGIO.D.1
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