



## Report on the meeting ESIF/IPA Programme Authorities and EUSAIR structures, 17 October 2019 in Portorož, Slovenia

During the 3rd EUSAIR Annual Forum the representatives of the ministers from all eight EUSAIR Countries called on the national and regional authorities responsible for the ESI and IPA funds in EUSAIR 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 Papers and in relevant programming documents. The ministers have urged the ESIF and IPA programme authorities and the EUSAIR key implementers to jointly work to identify at the earliest convenience pilot macro-regional actions and projects which require, for their implementation, a coordinated planning and programming of national/regional ESI and IPA funds across the Region.

During the Montenegrin presidency National Coordinators agreed on consolidated version of the so called Position Paper in which the steps on how to approach the process was defined. One of the most important steps was the definition of the so called Thematic Steering Group Priorities which were approved by consensus in all four Pillars and sent to the National Coordinators in April 2019. National consultations were taking place with different approach across the countries to ensure the involvement of the suggested priorities into the relevant document addressing post 2020. In parallel, a joint dialogue shall be continued and spread among the key programming and implementing bodies in the region. A complexity of the process demands a pragmatic step by step approach.

The Meeting of the ESIF/IPA Programme Authorities and EUSAIR structures on 17 October 2019 in Portorož, Slovenia aimed to answer concrete practical questions: Could constant dialogue in the Adriatic Ionian region bring the value added in order to efficiently address the common territorial challenge? What are the tools and mechanisms needed, what are the opportunities / threats? What concrete steps should be taken at earliest convenience and what are the responsibilities of the key bodies? How shall EUSAIR serve as a platform for a constant dialogue, not just for limited scope of actions, but in general when addressing the common (natural, societal and other) challenges region is facing and exploit opportunities?

### First steps toward joint cooperation initiatives

From identification of common priorities to embedding them into the partnership agreements – mission possible?

The Position Paper on Follow-up actions in response to the request from EUSAIR Ministers under Paragraph 6 of the Catania ministerial Declaration adopted in February 2019 recognises the role of National Coordinators as mediators between macro-regional and cohesion communities in their respective countries. According to the agreed position paper the aim is to set a forum in each

country where national and regional 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 support 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.

## But what is the next step? How to translate theory into practice?

### Experience of other macro-regions – from Flagships to Networks of Managing Authorities

Within the EU Baltic Sea strategy a pragmatic, challenge-driven actions *beyond projects* was introduced, so called Flagships, where **the envisaged impact** becomes their guiding vision. **Flagships – joint transnational development processes** are strategic actions born to respond to macro-regional challenges, for which they gather relevant stakeholders from all levels of society. **Flagships** become “the home” (**‘containers’**) for projects, chains of projects, processes, thematic groups and platforms – that together produce a much higher impact on the issue.

Working with Flagships instead of projects allows them to pursue policy work in three dimensions:

- Policy implementation: in areas where EU/region-wide policy frameworks and agreements exist and are to be implemented in the countries
- Policy alignment: in areas where the implementation of a thematic policy varies from country to country or and where it creates institutional and other types of hindrances, so cohesion of the implementation becomes a goal
- Policy making/co-creation: in areas where policies are incoherent between the governance levels, where policies are detached from realities on the ground or where policy is needed but non-existent

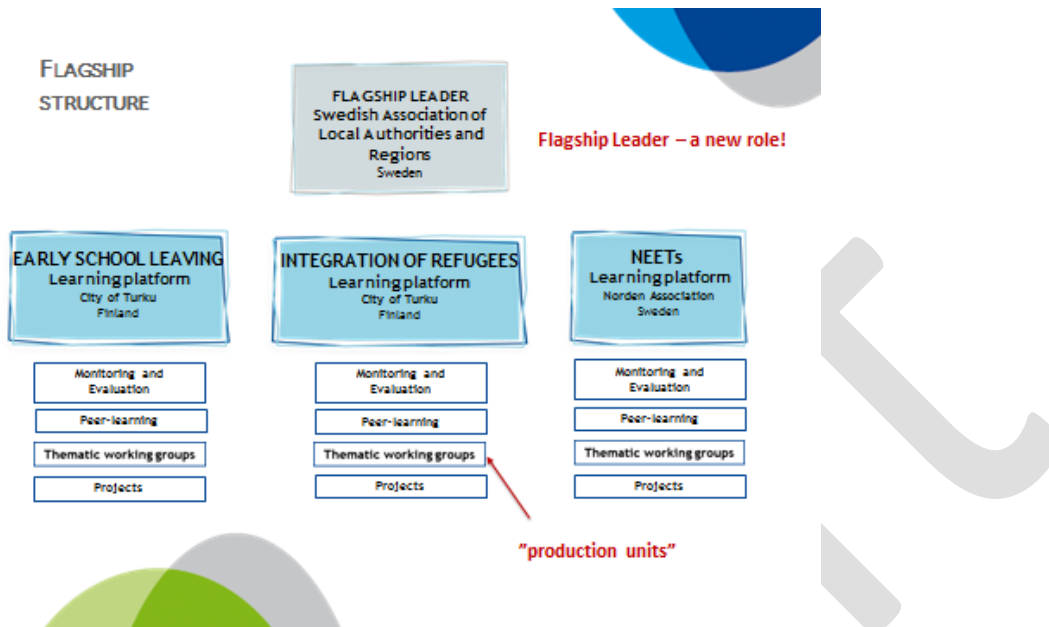
Depending on the state of play in a chosen area or with regards to a chosen macro-regional challenge, the designers should be able to assess the relevant policy field, see gaps, agree on the policy impact needed and lay out a course of action for a future ‘collaborative’. Essentially, the work should continue until the impact envisaged has manifested as reality.

Working in such multi-stakeholder flagships one need to ensure that the policy-level actors and the ground-level actors meet, discuss, learn from each other and together create multi-level solutions to the challenge they chose to collaborate around. **Benefits of ‘containers’ (vs ‘projects’) are**

- Involvement of all types of stakeholders (MLG + civil society)
- Incompatibilities between EU members and IPA countries that matter less
- Not limited in time
- Real alignment of funding

- Real alignment of policies
- Collaboration capacity of all involved grows through learning-in-action

Picture 1: Flagship structure in EUSBSR

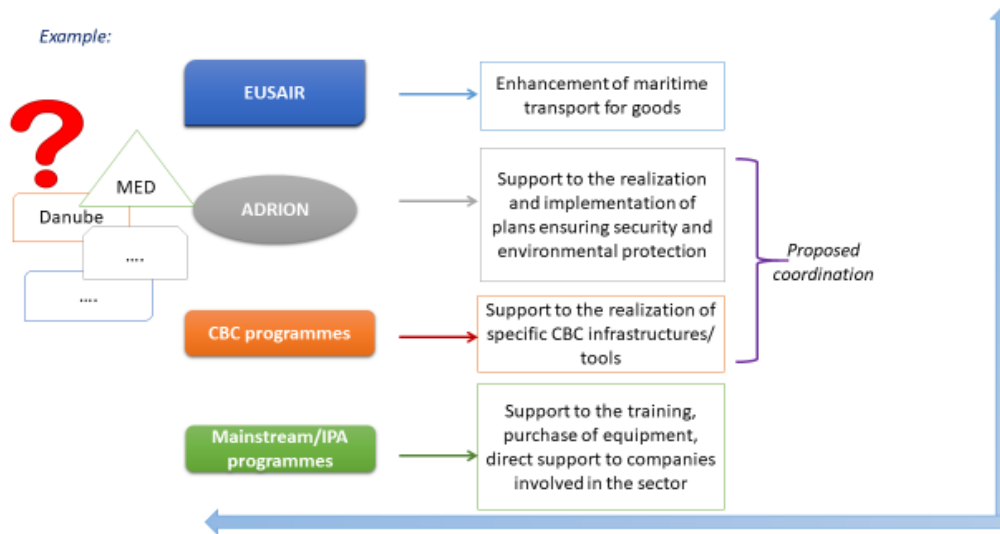


To facilitate the use of the Strategy as a strategic framework for ERDF and ESF so-called Managing Authority (MA) networks have been established to support the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The networks consist of representatives from the Managing Authorities in the eight Member States. They hold regular meetings and support the implementation with [agreement on thematic priorities and mandates defining “modus operandi”](#), with synchronized or coordinated calls, implying Article 70 is also possible. The MA-networks are established to facilitate and support cooperation between the Member States on the use of the EUSBSR as a strategic framework for the ESIF, but the experience show that more needs to be done in order to unlock the full potential of cooperation between Member States. An accessible way of aligning thematic objectives of the Strategy and the Programmes, is to synchronize and coordinate macro regional operations in mainstream programmes. A formalised mandate and/or guidance describing the functions for the MA networks’ operation is highly desirable.

### Transnational Cooperation programmes as supporter of common challenges

Already today transnational programmes are supporting strategy relevant thematic, however due to their size and mission, mainly soft measures can be supported. Interreg ADRION programme reflection into the future deriving from past experience show the potential for future investment within the mainstream programmes developed and tested in cooperation projects. There is a greater room for synergies as well. Picture shows the potential to boost synergies among transnational, CBC and mainstream programmes:

## LINKS WITH OTHER COHESION AND IPA PROGRAMMES – BOOSTING SYNERGIES



Source: ADRION

*Common capitalisation activities* among different types of programmes is a possible way to jointly build on potentials.

### Interact experience in the cooperation practice on macro-regional context

The overall agreement among the key EUSAIR implementers is that programmes and projects can make better use of macro-regional strategies – as a strategic framework – to increase the efficiency of investments and strengthen their policy relevance. In many regards, projects as well as programmes are too small to really ‘solve’ the development challenges they address alone (e.g., sustainable fisheries policy cannot be implemented without close cooperation with partner countries)

Macro-regional strategies as a coordination framework assure:

- Increased visibility, critical mass and credibility for both projects and programmes
- Capitalisation of results beyond project and programme lifetimes.
- Capitalisation on the ‘symbolic importance of the MRS using the possibility to position single programmes and projects in a wider context. Macro-regional strategies help to confirm the importance of actions, processes, projects and programmes that may individually be criticised for insufficient results, but that become more meaningful when considered in a wider context.

No way is the right and universal way, but there are different examples of cooperation practices among macro regional strategies used in the period 2014-2020.

MRS support approaches on operational level:

- *Specific selection criteria benefiting MRS relevance* (EUSAIR: 13 ESI Funds and 3 IPA-CBC programmes attributed extra-points to EUSAIR labelled projects.)

- *Targeted calls* (e.g., in Romania a specific programme designed to support twelve counties in the Danube river basin supporting measures such as energy efficiency, urban mobility and improved water quality).
- *Participation of key implementers in programme monitoring committees.*
- *Inclusion of transnational component* (e.g., in Sweden the Operational Programme offers already approved projects a possibility to apply for an additional cooperation package, a so-called Transnational Component. The Transnational Component is applied for in a separate application. The beneficiaries have had time and opportunity to develop the main project and to find partners in another Baltic Sea Region country working on the same topics and that will achieve a benefit by cooperating.).
- *Alignment of call timelines* (e.g. *European Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Fund Managing Authorities and national FLAG-networks in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR-EMFF network)* have a conceptual agreement to strive for more synchronised calls: *Launching calls for proposals for the same theme during the same time period*).
- *Pooling of resources* (rather on Pillar level, e.g., *river research and management activities are implemented in a coordinated manner by using various funding sources, such as, cross-border, transnational cooperation programme's as well as investments in Growth and Employment Austria 2014-2020 – Operational Programme funding*)
- *Coordinated parallel calls* (e.g., *InnovationExpress supporting cluster cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region and second call for cross-border multilateral scientific co-operation in the Danube Region. The focus is on a coordinated call requiring cooperation and joint work plan shared between partners. However, eligibility and implementation requirements are determined by national/regional OPs. To improve the use of such cooperation instrument, a stronger coordination of OPs would be advisable, as well as similar eligibility requirements needed. Coordinated parallel calls require coordination efforts (promotion and branding of the funding instrument, events like matchmaking, staff resources to coordinate the parallel calls and reply to potential partner questions ).*<sup>1</sup>

The Commission proposal for the regulative framework of the 2021-2027 programming period recognizes cooperation between regions and across the borders (to embed cooperation in mainstream) as a horizontal objective. As stressed by the representatives of DG Regio, during the implementation phase, programmes may develop and apply:

- *Specific project selection criteria* to facilitate or encourage cooperation projects by beneficiaries or projects supporting the priorities of a macro-regional or sea-basin strategy, functional area or network;
- *Programmes can earmark (allocate) a budget*, i.e. a certain percentage of their funds, for cooperation actions or projects that are considered to be of international importance or impact;
- *Funds can be allocated in a well-targeted manner* through specific calls for transnational, cross-border or macro-regional or sea-basin related projects;
- Projects can be defined ex-ante as being of macro-regional importance, based on the projects/actions prioritised or "labelled" by the actors of the macro-regional/sea-basin strategy.

<sup>1</sup> Last two examples have similar elements. Coordinated parallel calls include coordination of the timeline. However, the alignment of call timeline does not mean there is an element of cooperation as a pre-condition. Here, the MAs only agree to launch the calls close to each other to be able to draw the conclusions. But it is not required that the partners cooperate.

Coordinated calls not only have the same timeline, but they require a cooperation between involved partners, even if they apply individually. The aim is: cooperation, joint work.

The transnational component is a passive way of approaching cooperation. OP allows to integrate partners later, but it does not mean they will include and it takes time.

General calls may foresee – inter alia – the allocation of extra (bonus) points to cooperation projects or project contributing to the implementation of the macro-regional/ sea-basin targets and actions.

### Opportunities within the smart specialisation cooperation

EC, the Joint Research Centre -JRC for the S3 Platform, has recently launched S3 Framework for selected non EU countries in support to prepare smart specialisation strategies through the Horizon Europe 2020 programme. Some initiated or advanced S3 activities are ongoing in EUSAIR countries – Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and North Macedonia. Institutional capacity building will be followed by mapping of the stakeholders, entrepreneurial discovery and institutional capacity building for implementation of the S3. In this respect numerous S3 related activities are planned across the region: mutual trans-national learning activities, identification of common problematic areas across regions and development of thematic advice, match-making amongst regions with specific interests, organisation of discussions and exchanges and sharing of good practices. On a longer term the connecting different key actors and creating enabling environments for the development, commercialisation and exploitation of innovation, strong territorial innovation ecosystems are essential also for the valorisation of the Macro-regional innovation potential. Interregional cooperation based on Smart Specialisation has the potential to connect innovation ecosystems, complementary skills, infrastructure and markets. Nevertheless, the challenge is to promote investment synergies between the private and public sectors and to build competitive interregional value chains.

Grid 1: Some of the screened collaboration potentials on innovation (from the round table exercise)

<i>BLUE GROWTH</i>  <i>Digitalisation/open data, fisheries management, new technologies, scientists collaboration</i>	<i>CONNECTIVITY</i>  <i>Clean transport, renewable energy, energy efficiency, smart-grid, intermodal transport solutions, intelligent transport solutions</i>
<i>ENVIRONMENT</i>  <i>Clean technologies, risk prevention, risk response</i>	<i>TOURISM</i>  <i>Health tourism, branding, smart tourism solutions</i>

## MOVE FORWARD

### Collaboration potentials in addressing common territorial challenges and needs – roundtables

Embedding process remains difficult challenge within each EUSAIR participating country, but particularly because of the different funding mechanisms of EU member states and enlargement countries. Based on the perspective within the common challenge, different stakeholders need to be taken into the process, different funding sources could be addressed (soft measures can play a significant role also in the transport, energy or other sectors), but the biggest challenges remain:

- Definition of the key stakeholders to be involved in the embedding processes strongly rely on the perspective of the challenge/priority.
- The right mechanism to be used in the planning/implementation process, among others: exchange of good practices, developed networks of business and clusters, targeted calls, matchmaking, programming or sometimes managing authorities' networks. Those networks shall also influence the openness and flexibility of the further policy implementation instruments.
- Differences among full members of the EU with large scale of available sources at different levels and non-members of the EU with limited available sources, additional preconditions and strong horizontal role of DG Near. In this respect macro regional processes should serve also as common voice of the region towards the decision makers and positive EU incentive for delivering "basic" requirements and needed reforms.
- EUSAIR Facility Point can support the process in terms of offering the opportunity to network among the pre-defined key stakeholders in this respect (task forces?).

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## ANNEX 1: How to move on – key takeaways from the participants (feedback from the participants through the feedback form):

- Common initiative shall lead pragmatic approach in smaller, well defined groups for a focused financial dialogues according to the defined target groups - no unified way of macro regional collaboration – each stakeholder can plan an important part of the mosaic and all process shall be understood also in the context of learning among each other
- Voice from the country shall be represented in the voice among macro-region and vice versa – common priorities a good start
- need for focus on simplification of processes as the key approach (step by step)
- Stronger cooperation among EUSAIR / mainstream partners at national and EUSAIR level
- Networking among mainstream programming authorities once the priorities are agreed
- MRS challenges require to be addressed from various perspectives; for doing this sufficient time is needed
- There are options and experiences for better coordination of funds/among the programmes;
- Pillar coordinators should guide / be involved in the coordination work among the stakeholders.
- The roles within the EUSAIR structure should be clearer. Key implementers should agree on their tasks and responsibilities, Position paper is a good start.
- Funds have their own rules of eligibility, with differences between MS and non-MS, with effort and communication and EC support things can be done.
- At national level establishment of recognizable realistic strong priorities is needed.
- A task force at national level to be established to move things on.
- Discussion among mainstream and INTERREG programme authorities on macroregional operations to increase synergies and avoid negative overlapping including centrally managed EU funds)
- Stakeholders mapping, raising the awareness on the impact of the Strategy at a national level.
- A structure where the Managing Authorities (Member States) and corresponding IPA can coordinate the collaboration with the key implementing stakeholders of EUSAIR (Pillar Coordinators). Preferable to start with one MA/IPA-network for the ERDF questions/ corresponding IPA. This could for example be innovation, transport, tourism and environment.
- The MA/IPA-network need a mandate from the Ministries (Member States) and DG REGIO/NEAR (IPA) where it is regulated how they should coordinate/synchronize calls, how to regulate relations between the individual projects (Transnational Cooperation Agreement) and how they should audit these joint projects.
- A decision by Programming Authorities/Geographical Units (DG REGIO) + corresponding IPA on joint thematic priorities, for example innovation, transport, tourism and environment.
- Provisions in the Operational Programmes supporting this mandate on HOW to implement macro-regional projects and WHAT thematic priorities should be included as joint priorities to be financed in next programmes (ESIF/IPA).