

# How to communicate macro-regional strategies

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## Report

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### Background

The second meeting of managers responsible for communicating EU macro-regional strategies (MRS) was organized during the Mediterranean Coast and EU Macro-regional Strategies Week 2019. The meeting aimed to focus on peer-to-peer learning across MRS. It looked into questions like, e.g., how to focus and plan realistic communication; how to communicate MRS value added and to involve others, who are the target group for the MRS communication. The workshop build on the needs expressed during the first workshop.

### MRS and strategic communication

The meeting kicked off by underlining the strategic importance of MRS communication. Agnès Monfret, Head of Communication Unit of DG REGIO, European Commission, confirmed the unique position of MRS (Member States too small, Europe too big, MR just the right level to valorise macro-regional assets and address common challenges) and congratulated for the initiative taken years ago by Slovenia to lead the endeavours to better communicate MRS.

How do we fair as communicators on MRS? She recalled the 2017 EuroBarometer flash survey results on awareness (1 in 5 Europeans) and announced that huge efforts made since pay off (stay tuned for 7 October new EuroBarometer flash survey).

However, she also raised on number of questions, starting with “should we communicate on macro-regions? to whom? -decision makers?” - in which case how about increasing the visibility/readability, e.g. via a common portal; would a more consistent branding help? She went on stressing that communicating per (individual) macro -region resonating with local audiences and interacting with the latter (for better input, buy-in and ultimately impact) matters most and invited all those who communicate on MRS to **be much clearer** (even visual) on the narrative (purpose) of each macro-region; to **simplify, repeat** and

systematically **connect** all communication efforts to this simple repeated narrative – duly acknowledging EU identity, our flag.

Thinking about strategic communication, Andreja Jerina, National Coordinator of MRS in Slovenia (EUSDR, EUSAIR, EUSALP) stressed that MRS need to define common messages to be further communicated in particular territories in national languages. Moreover, speakers reminded of earlier proposal for a common MRS branding.

Communicators of the MRS were invited to **target** their communication on most relevant messages addressing specific target groups; to **simplify** it and not to hesitate to **repeat** it. Multi-level governance (MLG) principle makes MRS unique. Therefore, it is crucial to keep up the regular dialogue with most relevant MLG stakeholders' institutions ensuring top-down and bottom-up communication flows.

For efficient strategic communication, those responsible for MRS communication need to be equipped with the most relevant tools.

### **How to make MRS communication more efficient**

One of the questions addressed during the workshop was how to make communication more efficient within the resources allocated for the task. Appreciating Interreg communication achievements and supporting learning from Interreg experiences, Frank Schneider, Head of Communication and Public Policy, Interreg Central Europe was invited to share his expertise.

Three golden rules in communication were highlighted:

**#1: Communication should not be a goal in itself.**

**#2: Communication should be adapted to the audience.**

**#3: There is no 'one-size-fits-all-and-forever' content.**

Efficient communication should:

- aim to **change** an action;
- be **targeted** to a certain audience (creating 'personas');
- be **clear** for that target audience.

'The Golden Cycle' in communication was reminded. Why; how; and what questions should be asked when planning communication and while communicating.

Not only texts but also photos and videos are good communication tools that, if used wisely, could encourage action.

Communication have to build on what the audience knows. Understanding the audience helps to select the most appropriate channels and to pick up the most appealing message.

Participants discussed target groups for MRS communication. MRS communication is everyone's responsibility; therefore, creating a communication chain is crucial. Communication needs to be tackled on multiple levels of the MRS governance structure. In view of the limited resources (financial/staff) of the MRS communication projects and points, it was discussed that they should focus on internal audiences like PACs/NCs to begin with. It was agreed that they cannot communicate across the MRS about all themes, this would require much larger resources. Instead, they should aim to first build a stronger MRS community internally and increase the awareness of PACs/NCs on their key role as MRS communicators themselves (in view of their specific thematic audiences). They should also help to build the PACs/NCs capacity to better communicate.

Participants identified that their primarily external target groups would be national governments; the European Parliament and European Commission (these target groups all MRS share). External communication is suggested to be targeted using 'business-to-business' promotion but applying 'business-to-clients tactics. In terms of external communications, MRS projects and points should ensure that messages from the MRS (and its various, directly involved stakeholders) to European institutions are consistent. MLG stakeholders' representing organisations should not be forgotten in communicating MRS.

Despite very limited communication resources allocated to MRS communication, some overlaps of efforts are observed. Eloy Gómez Girón, Communication Officer from Interreg Danube Transnational Programme shared his observations on overlaps.

More importantly, it was suggested to differentiate MRS and Interreg communication in:

- used tools and channels;
- addressed target groups;
- in messages/focus of communication (approach);
- adding value and communicating Interreg capitalisation for MRS benefit.

It was underlined that MRS communication could benefit from capitalisation activities provided by Interreg. There is a need for further discussion on how to coordinate efforts between Interreg and MRS.

One of the needs for MRS communication was to train on how to create efficient communication. The meeting foresaw a short training session on pitching the story, delivered by John Holland, Clear Europe. It was stressed that to get attention there should be 'news'.

Good news are built on:

- few, clear and simple,
- strong and distinctive,
- credible and relevant
- consistent and repeated messages.

We can conclude that there is a need for continued efforts to improve internal and external MRS communication.

- MRS could consider defining common messages that could be communicated in the national language(s), thus strengthening communication at national and regional levels. As MRS address the same external target groups on the EU level, joint messaging towards these groups could be also further discussed.
- Communication needs to get more specific, focused and targeted, as well as constant.
- Communication should be everybody's responsibility, not only the responsibility of few people in MRS.
- Taking into account limited resources for MRS communication, communication should be clearer, more targeted and more action oriented. Complementarities of efforts should be exploited, at the same time avoiding overlapping efforts.
- Existing knowledge and experience can be used to improve MRS communication and challenge own perception.
- Discussion on MRS communication should be continued, especially addressing questions of joint branding elements and capitalisation.

MRS responsible for communication can consider using existing tools for communication, like [EuroAccess](#) - free online search tool to support the optimal use of existing funding opportunities to improve economic, social and territorial cohesion in the MRS.