

Joint meeting of Transport Coordinators of the EU macro-regional strategies

14-15 March 2017

Ljubljana, Slovenia

Report

Authors Baiba Liepa, Interact
Wiktor Szydarowski, freelance consultant

Introduction

EU macro-regional strategies are aiming at addressing challenges shared within a functional area. They also aim at better implementation of the EU policies and more coordination of existing institutions and financial resources. By addressing broad scope of priorities, macro-regional strategies are making an effort for cooperation and better coordination of resources and activities across the territory.

Currently there are four EU macro-regional strategies adopted and in different implementation stages. Acknowledging specifics of each of the Strategies and individual approaches established for their implementation, there are certain development processes they all experience.

Within the mandate given to Interact III Programme, the meeting was aiming at exchanging implementation know-how, practices and experiences in among the Coordinators within the transport theme, priority, action or pillar in each of four macro-regional strategies¹. The meeting provided an opportunity for an open and lively dialogue on the daily management and coordination governance questions.

Event content and main conclusions

The event was addressing successes, failures and lessons learned by the participants in the implementation of the transport area in the four macro-regional strategies. Individual presentations by the Coordinators, followed by reaction from the floor, brought up the following issues:

- **Setting up governance structures:**
 - a) an effort needs to be made to involve countries and institutions from the macro-region in the steering/coordination/action group of the priority. The Coordinators

¹ Further in the text referred as 'priority'

have been arranging meetings with national authorities, e.g. by visiting each authority of the macro-region and collecting national priorities for the international cooperation in transport. This helped identify issues of common interest for cooperation in transport among several countries of the macro-region (case of the EUSBSR).

- b) where strong political support is ensured to the Strategy, it contributes to setting up steering/coordination/action group, like in case of the EUSALP;
- c) commitment and exchange among steering/coordination/action group members need to be kept constantly; the Coordinators have been organising study visits, workshops, providing and exchanging information, etc.; an active technical secretariat with experience in project management is crucial to maintain the process.
- d) representation of countries in the steering/coordination/action groups differ; when appointing representatives to the groups it would be important to consider not only knowledge and experience of the member but also his/her decision-making capacity;
- e) changes of representatives in the steering/coordination/action groups asks for extra effort from the Coordinator to get the newcomers on track for the cooperation.

- **Involving relevant institutions and multi-level governance actors:**

- a) steering/coordination/action groups are composed of wide range of organisations acting as members, observers of the group; some steering/coordination/action group are open for participation also for the project leaders and potential applicants, NGOs, others; approaches varies from inclusive to exclusive, open to limited; Coordinator's main task here is to keep the group balanced and manageable, also in terms of the number of participants vis-à-vis their decision-making mandate;
- b) setting up stakeholder platforms to network and ensure pooling of knowledge (common platform of knowledge) through the appropriate mix of actors involved is seen valuable; such an approach also contributes to finding focus in the steering/coordination/action group work; this calls for involving stakeholders with genuine interest in cooperation.
- c) The composition of stakeholders needs also to ensure that the macro-regional strategies fosters not only the project development but also helps initiate joint processes/initiatives in the transport field; a labelling procedure is important in that respect, same as giving a recognisable name/title to the priority action (leaving out a 'technical' denomination by digits, e.g. 1a).

- **Defining focus of the transport priority and reaching common agreements across the countries involved:**

- a) identifying shared interest of the steering/coordination/action group members/participants is crucial. Coordinators have been using different methods to identify few but most interesting and important priorities for their work;
- b) networking nature and informal character of steering/coordination/action groups is seen positive and contributing to the work;
- c) due to limited resources of the Coordinators, focusing and setting up realistic targets are crucial. Coordinators were encouraged to look for 'low hanging fruits' to show the value added and achieve the complementarity of work to e.g. the EU Transport policy (as illustrated by the implementation of the TEN-T core network corridors) in a context of available resources.

- d) It is essential that the macro-regional strategies establish a close project-policy interconnection through, inter alia, providing evidence (technical inputs) for the policies (e.g. the EU transport policy) and helping merging the gap between the EU and non-EU countries in transport standard levels; this may be enabled e.g. through a corridor approach to set a common level of service.
- **Distinguishing work of the Strategy from the other European or intergovernmental policy instruments, e.g. TEN-T core network corridors:**
 - a) taking into account other existing networks addressing transport related topics, Coordinators need to find their niche in EU, macro-regional, national or regional context. It was highlighted that finding focus is important not only to avoid overlaps with other networks but even more to see complementarities. Coordinators agreed that their main task is to provide a platform for coordination of activities, projects and processes;
 - b) in the EUSAIR, the Facility Point is becoming a part of the Thematic Steering Group, it could be consider as a good practice to share knowledge and provide the support to the stakeholders most efficiently.
 - **Defining milestones to be achieved and monitoring of implementation:**
 - a) setting up work programme and milestones to achieve defined targets within a specific period (3 years) was identified as a good practice (experience in the EUSALP); it was followed by a (mobility) conference to improve the public acceptance for common policies and projects.

In addition to the points mentioned above, participants of the event had a shared view that **communication and visibility** are in a core for the success of the macro-regional strategies. Therefore an active involvement of macro-regional actors in communication is requested. Joint events for all four macro-regional strategies could be organised. Slovenia will be hosting first of this kind of event entitled 'EU macro-regional strategies conference on media and communication - Know thy neighbour'. More information will be provided. Defining a communication plan for the macro-regional strategy (like in case of the EUSBSR) and even small improvements, like in defining titles of the priorities or synchronising terminology used by different macro-regional strategies, could help in the communication. Communicating concrete achievements would contribute to visibility of macro-regional strategies for wider public and politicians.

Another issue for further discussion was highlighted work of the Coordinators with **macro-regional relevant projects**. Although approaches differ, all the Coordinators admit this work as important. Coordinators differently see their role and involvement in project development, labelling of macro-regional projects and coordination across projects, supporting and monitoring of project achievements. Agreement on the concept of macro-regional (flagship) project is important.

Coordinators are in a need for the support to access to **funding (alignment of funding)**. It combines a need of knowledge on various finding sources but even more openness of funding sources to the dialogue with Coordinators on the support macro-regional projects. There are several macro-regional projects that can be highlighted starting from the macro-

regional initiative and having clear added value, like [FAIRway](#) (EUSDR, Priority Area 1A 'Inland waterways'), [EfficientSea](#) and [EfficientSea 2.0](#) (EUSBSR, Policy Area 'Safe').

Project and policy interconnection in macro-regional strategies context are seen important. The project [FAIRway](#) (EUSDR, Priority Area 1A 'Inland waterways') is a good example of project to policy impact.

However, macro-regional strategies should only focus on supporting macro-regional **projects** but also **processes**. Thought the question of assessing impact of the macro-regional process is there.

The second day of the event was aiming to focus on the key priorities in Coordinators' work for the upcoming years. There are several priorities that shared across Coordinators of the macro-regional strategies, like:

- developing and improving labelling process; identifying and implementing macro-regional projects;
- improving communication and visibility; developing tools for communication;
- linking macro-regional projects and processes to policy impact and implementation; involvement and contribution to the policy discussion;
- cross-priorities/cross-policies coordination within the macro-regional strategy;
- further implementation of the activities as planned under the priorities;
- cooperation and involvement of key stakeholders to the Strategy implementation;
- establishing closer links to the funding programmes and instruments;
- continue exchanges across macro-regional strategies.

Additionally it was highlighted that **strengthening role of Coordinators** and **recognition of the function** would help in further work.

In reply to the above listed key issues, Interact can support Coordinators with the following activities:

a) Communication and visibility:

Interact gathers experience and knowledge that could contribute to the Coordinators work, as such could be mentioned: developing Communication strategies - [EUSBSR Communication Strategy](#), Interact Communication Strategy and [Communication Toolkit](#); on communication methods, like story telling; on the communication tools like websites and newsletters, [KEEP](#), etc. Additionally, Interact is running the network of Interreg Communication managers that could provide valuable experiences to the Coordinators work;

b) Labelling of macro-regional projects:

Based on the information and knowledge gathered, joint thematic event for the Coordinators could be organised by Interact in autumn 2017 (September or October 2017). The event would focus on different approaches and experiences in labelling of macro-regional projects (principles, criteria, methodology).

c) Capitalisation and clustering of macro-regional projects:

Experiences in capitalising on project achievements differ from the Strategy to the Strategy and from the priority to the priority, therefore Interact would propose to

address these experiences and find the way that would make capitalisation and clustering exercise most efficient. Earlier experience and approach of Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme was proposed at the event. The follow-up and lessons learned of that specific programme and other programmes could be valuable inputs to the discussion. Experiences from Interreg Capitalisation network on Sustainable Transport could be feeding into the discussion.

Post 2020 context could be considered. The activity could be organised as a part of above mentioned labelling event.

d) Dialogue with funding programmes and instruments:

The question of more efficient use of existing funds is relevant in the macro-regional context. There are different approaches and initiatives taken from the Coordinators side as well as from the funding instruments side. Good practices in supporting macro-regional projects by different funding programmes could be promoted. Exchange across funding programmes and instruments from different macro-regions could be inspirational. The discussion would contribute to post 2020 developments. Interact's currently ongoing work on [developing models for cooperation and coordination](#) across programmes could contribute to the discussion (see the Task Force description).

e) Allocation of resources to the Coordinator's function

Following up on the discussion, before the end of March 2017 Interact will set up a short questionnaire to collect data on resource availability per priority in each of four macro-regional strategies. Compiled results of the survey will be provided to the national coordinators groups in each of the Strategies.

Other relevant actors could be involved in delivery of the above mentioned activities.

The participants of the event raised questions that should be addressed at more general level:

- What is the added value of macro-regional cooperation?
- How can one measure the success of a macro-regional strategy, its impact?
- What activities, projects and processes would have not happen if there had been no macro-regional strategy?

Looking for some inspiration and replies, the recent study of Interact '[Added value of the macro-regional strategies for projects and programmes](#)' could be read.

All Coordinators valued possibility to exchange knowledge, practices and experiences as well as agreed on further need for such events.