



OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

Implementation of EU macro-regional strategies – 5th report

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the revised Action Plan of the EU Macro-Regional Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
(COM(2025) 191 final)

Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro regional strategies
(COM(2025) 196 final)

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.1 The EESC recognises the role played by macro-regional strategies (MRS) in generating multi-level synergies between policies, programmes and actors. They have supported the green and digital transitions, and developed significant resilience and solidarity during the pandemic and ongoing geopolitical crises.
- 1.2 Persisting regional gaps when it comes to administrative capacity and available resources make it necessary to strengthen vertical and horizontal multi-level governance by ensuring the involvement of local structures.
- 1.3 The EESC welcomes revision processes and calls for the social dimension, civic participation and interregional cooperation to be reinforced. The MRS must serve as laboratories for social inclusion and innovation, supporting green taxation and human capital, with a particular focus on youth participation and intergenerational dialogue.
- 1.4 The EESC notes the findings of the macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea region (EUSBSR), which has promoted sustainability and connections in the Baltic Sea. The 2021 revision through the Baltic Sea Strategy Point, strengthened cooperation and management. Despite relations with Russia and Belarus being suspended, the strategy remains valid.
- 1.5 The EESC highlights the progress of the macro-regional strategy for the Danube (EUSDR). The 2020 revision strengthened coherence with the EU's priorities and youth participation, despite there being inequalities and uneven political commitment. The presidencies have revived innovation and governance.
- 1.6 The EESC highlights the results of the macro-regional strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region (EUSAIR), which recently updated its action plan by introducing a fifth social pillar. The strategy integrates enlargement, circular economy and digitalisation, strengthening partnerships and resilience in an area affected by energy, climate and demographic crises.
- 1.7 The EESC welcomes the macro-regional strategy for the Alpine region (EUSALP) which consolidated cooperation and stable governance, by extending reach to non-EU countries. The revision integrates priorities concerning digitalisation, energy, water resources and circular economy.
- 1.8 The EESC notes that enlargement to the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova is a strategic priority and that the MRS have the potential to reinforce cooperation, institutional capacities and alignment with the *acquis communautaire*.
- 1.9 The EESC notes that Russia's military aggression against Ukraine has affirmed the role of MRS as instruments of solidarity and resilience. The EUSDR has supported inclusion, training and employment; the EUSBSR has launched humanitarian and environmental initiatives; EUSAIR has promoted the green agenda in the Balkans; and EUSALP has addressed the energy crisis and the reception of refugees.

- 1.10 The EESC considers the place-based approach adopted by the MRS essential, as it adapts European priorities to specific regional features and promotes cohesion through tools such as community-led local development and innovative initiatives such as the promotion of civic participation, youth employment, sustainable mobility and support for SMEs and universities.
- 1.11 The EESC calls for governance and funding to be strengthened, integrating MRS' priorities into the EU's main programmes. Local skills must be enhanced, partnerships consolidated and civil society and young people actively involved. This would make it possible to transform MRS into more inclusive, resilient instruments that have a structural impact on public policies.
- 1.12 In the EESC's view, the new multiannual financial framework (for the period 2028-2034) involves risks for the proper functioning of the MRS. It is therefore crucial that strategic actors ensure that priorities are included in the partnership plans, that they define clear and measurable objectives, encourage and monitor cross-border cooperation and avoid a merely formal involvement of regional and local stakeholders.
- 1.13 The EESC stresses the need for more transparent, responsible and corruption-free governance in the institutions involved in the MRS. Integrity, sound administration and the rule of law are essential for credibility, efficiency and mutual trust.
- 1.14 The EESC calls for the creation of a new macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean to address common challenges such as climate change, migration flows, the energy transition and blue sustainability. Such an initiative – integrated with the recent Pact for the Mediterranean¹ – would boost stability, cooperation and inclusion, enhancing connections between Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, and helping to consolidate the EU's strategic role in the Mediterranean area. The EESC also highlights the importance on advancing work on other macro-regional strategies, for example the Atlantic region and Carpathian strategies.

2. **General comments**

- 2.1 Since 2009, the European Union has been promoting macro-regional strategies (MRS) as innovative tools to address common challenges in geographically and operationally connected supranational regions. These strategies, the result of a joint effort by the States concerned and supported by the European Commission, involve both Member States and third countries in equal partnerships, providing a dynamic framework for addressing shared environmental, economic and social issues.
- 2.2 MRS are based on geographical criteria (river, sea or mountain basins) and on historical, cultural and economic ties. Each MRS is guided by a flexible action plan that can be adapted to geopolitical, climate and demographic changes.
- 2.3 The EESC highlights the fact that MRS have boosted multi-level synergies between policies and actors, becoming effective instruments for the twin green and digital transition, territorial

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[Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – The Pact for the Mediterranean. One Sea, One Pact, One Future \(JOIN/2025/26 final\).](#)

cohesion and resilience. During the pandemic and Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the strategies evolved from cooperation platforms into practical solidarity instruments.

- 2.4 In 2023-2024 the strategies began structural updating processes in response to complex challenges such as climate change, EU enlargement, the energy transition, population decline and migration pressures.
- 2.5 The EESC welcomes these revisions and encourages more ambitious integration of the social dimension, of civic participation and of interregional cooperation.

3. **General assessment of the implementation of the macro-regional strategies**

3.1 ***The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)***

3.1.1 The EUSBSR, launched in 2009, involves eight EU Member States and four neighbouring non-EU countries. The strategy has three key objectives – save the sea; connect the region; and increase prosperity – and is subdivided into 14 interconnected policy areas, including risks, the bioeconomy, health and education. For the period 2021-2027, the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme will have a budget of EUR 259 million.

3.1.2 In 2021, the EUSBSR action plan was revised, reducing the number of actions and introducing a system to facilitate closer cooperation between stakeholders (including economic and social partners) and a new tool – the Baltic Sea Strategy Point (BSP) – to provide administrative and technical support for managing, developing and communicating the strategy.

3.1.3 The EUSBSR has supported the regions involved in achieving the sustainable and smart growth targets set. Despite the fact that suspending cooperation with Russia and Belarus following Russia's unjustified and unprovoked military aggression against Ukraine has created an obstacle to solving the main problems in the region, the strategy nevertheless has significant potential to address emerging challenges.

3.2 ***The European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)***

3.2.1 The EUSDR, launched in December 2010 and updated in 2020, involves 14 countries (nine EU Member States and five non-EU countries) and is structured around four pillars: (1) connecting the region; (2) protecting the environment; (3) building prosperity; and (4) strengthening the region. These objectives are divided into 12 priority areas. For the period 2021-2027, the Interreg programme has a total budget of EUR 213.1 million.

3.2.2 The revision of the EUSDR action plan has improved alignment with EU priorities, including the Green Deal, and has boosted youth engagement and cooperation with European funds. However, although socio-economic inequalities, limited resources and uneven political commitment persist, the strategy has consolidated transnational cooperation and supported the EU pre-accession process.

3.2.3 Recent presidencies have redefined the EUSDR's priorities: Austria (2024) promoted innovation, competitiveness and cooperation with the European Commission, supporting the European prospects for candidate countries; Slovenia (2023) launched governance reforms and made 13 recommendations to boost stakeholder engagement. Initiatives such as the 2023 German resolution and inter-strategy coordination on mobility affirmed the strategy's resilience, backed by a solid governance system and the role of the Danube Strategy Point.

3.3 *The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)*

3.3.1 Launched in 2014, the EUSAIR strategy brings together 10 countries (four EU Member States and six non-EU countries) and is built on four main pillars: blue growth; connecting the region; environmental quality; and sustainable tourism. The EUSAIR Facility Point provides operational support for coordination and implementation. With regard to funding, for the period 2021-2027, EUR 136.7 million will be available under the Interreg Adriatic-Ionian programme.

3.3.2 The EESC observes that EUSAIR has strengthened partnerships and trust between stakeholders, contributing to EU enlargement. However, the region is facing post-pandemic crises, the effects of the war, inflation and the complex energy transition, exacerbated by dependence on fossil fuels. As a climate hotspot, it is exposed to extreme events, desertification and biodiversity loss, while significant population decline – up to 11% between 2012 and 2022 in some countries – weakens social cohesion and the availability of the labour force.

3.3.3 The new action plan introduced a fifth social pillar on youth, employment, gender equality and innovation. It reinforces commitments on digitalisation, climate neutrality and rural development and includes enlargement as a cross-cutting topic. Governance has been strengthened with three Interreg ADRION projects. The EESC welcomes EUSAIR's integrated multi-level approach for dealing with environmental, economic and demographic challenges.

3.4 *The EU strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)*

3.4.1 The EUSALP, launched in 2015, is the most recent strategy to be adopted by the EU. It involves seven countries – five EU Member States and two non-EU countries – and covers three subject areas: economic growth and innovation; mobility and connectivity; and environment and energy. For the period 2021-2027, an overall budget of EUR 107 million is available for the Interreg programme, focused on four priorities aimed at ensuring that the region is climate-resilient and able to achieve the green transition, with zero carbon emissions.

3.4.2 EUSALP has consolidated transnational cooperation in the Alpine region, providing shared solutions to common challenges. Switzerland's presidency (2023) and the current Austria-Liechtenstein co-presidency (2025) have helped extend reach to non-EU countries even more. Stable governance has ensured continuity and responsiveness, especially during crises.

3.4.3 Between 2022 and 2023, EUSALP set five thematic priorities and four cross-cutting priorities (digitalisation, energy, water resources, circular economy), initiating the revision of the action plan, to be completed in 2025. The Youth Council has become central to governance, strengthening generational inclusion. Through AlpGov2, the action groups have updated work

plans and strengthened inter-sectoral cooperation through greater involvement of SMEs, civil society and regions.

4. **The role and impact of the macro-regional strategies in the implementation of the green, digital and social transitions**

4.1 MRS are key tools for supporting the EU's environmental, digital and social transitions, as they mobilise regions and communities to boost competitiveness and sustainable development. In line with the Green Deal, they promote biodiversity, the circular economy, the efficient use of resources, decarbonisation and energy efficiency.

4.2 Digitalisation is increasingly important, with the MRS working to strengthen the infrastructure, skills and innovation in the public and private sectors. However, gaps related to the varying administrative and financial capacity of the regions remain. For this reason, the EESC highlights the urgent need to close these gaps and to strengthen multi-level governance.

4.3 Despite offering opportunities, the twin green and digital transition risks exacerbating socioeconomic inequalities. The EESC reiterates the need to integrate the social dimension into the MRS structurally by involving civil society, the social and economic partners and other local actors more actively in order to guarantee fairness and territorial cohesion.

4.4 In order to achieve more inclusive and resilient local economies, the strategies must promote smart specialisation, local clusters and social innovation, ensuring balanced access to economic and social opportunities. The EESC calls for MRS to be used as laboratories for testing redistributive instruments, green taxation and integrated cohesion policies.

4.5 Cooperation between strategies needs to be improved, especially in disadvantaged regions and in third countries. The EESC stresses the importance of investing in human capital – training, youth participation, intergenerational dialogue – to ensure fair and shared transitions.

4.6 With regard to specific MRS, we would point out the following:

- **EUSBSR**: vigorously promotes the green transition (CiNURGi, BALTIPLAST, EMPEREST) and the circular economy. Projects such as Real-Time Economy and DistanceLAB promote digitalisation, while RESIST and BSR Cultural Pearls reinforce social cohesion and civic participation.
- **EUSDR**: despite regional inequalities, contributes to environmental sustainability (DALIA, STOPFIRES, Danubepeaks) and to renewable energy (NRGCom). Plan-C and RIS4DANU develop digitalisation and circularity; on a social level, Fem2Forests and Back on Track promote inclusion and employability.
- **EUSAIR**: integrates sustainability into its pillars (PET HAB ECO, NAMIRS) and enhances the digital component with projects such as EUREKA and BLUEAIR. SI4CARE and TESI support social innovation and training. The new action plan focuses on cohesion and skills.
- **EUSALP**: invests in green (IMAGHyNE, MICROCLIM), digital (SmartCommUnity, CIRCULAR4.0) and social (soft skills, alpine mobility) projects, aiming for inclusive territorial growth.

5. **EU macro-regional strategies and enlargement**

- 5.1 The enlargement of the EU to the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova is a strategic priority. In this context, MRS play a key role in strengthening multi-level cooperation, institutional capacities and alignment with the *acquis*. The EESC stresses the importance of assessing their effectiveness in promoting social cohesion, territorial inclusion and sustainability.
- 5.2 The **EUSDR**, which involves five candidate countries, is a pillar for the enlargement process. The recent presidencies (Ukraine, Slovenia, Austria) have included the accession agenda into strategic activities. Projects such as NRGCom, GeoHeCo and DALIA promote the energy and environmental transition; Back on Track and Fem2Forests promote employment and inclusion. The strategy supports regulatory adaptation and strengthens the institutions.
- 5.3 **EUSAIR**, involving many candidate countries, has updated the action plan to support accession. It focuses on administrative capacity, innovation (BLUEAIR, EUREKA) and social cohesion (TESI, SI4CARE). As regards the environment, projects such as PET HAB ECO and NAMIRS boost biodiversity protection and risk management. The strategy contributes to the Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Balkans.
- 5.4 Despite not including any candidate countries, the **EUSBSR** has stepped up support for Ukraine since 2022, reinforcing resilience and cooperation. Inclusion in Interreg networks has enhanced regulatory convergence and training. Initiatives such as OpenRisk II and BALTIPLAST provide replicable models for sustainability and contribute to Ukraine's European path.

6. **The macro-regional landscape and Russia's unjustified and unprovoked military aggression against Ukraine**

- 6.1 Russia's military aggression against Ukraine has had a significant impact on the MRS, which have proven to be key instruments for promoting solidarity, resilience and cooperation. The EESC underlines the role of MRS in supporting the reconstruction and European integration of Ukraine and Moldova, highlighting the contribution of local communities and civil society.
- 6.2 The **EUSDR** has been the most involved strategy, since its members include Ukraine and Moldova. Ukraine's presidency in 2022, followed by Slovenia's, promoted priorities such as inclusion, training, mobility and employment. The EESC acknowledges the value of dialogue with Ukrainian and Moldovan civil society, which also emerged out of the 2023 Forum. Initiatives relating to people and skills and the use of the European Social Fund have provided practical responses to social and educational needs.
- 6.3 The **EUSBSR** has suspended relations with Russia and Belarus and has launched projects to help Ukraine, particularly in the humanitarian, environmental and training fields. The EESC appreciates the inclusion of Ukrainian actors in Interreg projects and their participation in European events, confirming the potential of MRS to promote European integration through territorial cooperation.

6.4 **EUSAIR** has expressed its solidarity by supporting a Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and strengthening cooperation on energy, mobility and socioeconomic resilience. The EESC encourages alignment of the MRS with pre-accession policies, including with a view to territorial cohesion.

6.5 **EUSALP** has addressed the indirect effects of the conflict such as the energy crisis and the reception of refugees. It has promoted energy autonomy, renewable sources and sustainable practices. The EESC points out that the MRS can strengthen the EU's internal cohesion in situations of instability, thanks to multi-level governance and local capacities.

7. **The territorial dimension of macro-regional strategies and support for cohesion processes**

7.1 MRS take an effective place-based approach to implement European policies that take into account the specific geographical, economic and cultural characteristics of the regions. Operating in functional areas such as river basins or mountain or coastal regions, these strategies facilitate cooperation between neighbouring regions and promote shared solutions to common challenges, strengthening integrated territorial development and interregional cohesion.

7.2 The EESC highlights the importance of integrating tools such as Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) into the MRS, in order to enhance the engagement of local communities in defining strategic priorities. The combination of multi-level governance and civic involvement fosters fairer and more effective environmental, digital and social transitions, reducing territorial inequalities.

7.3 MRS allow major European strategies to be adapted to local needs. Initiatives such as SMART ERA (to combat depopulation), BSR Cultural Pearls (cultural resilience) and ADRIONCYCLETOUR (sustainable mobility) demonstrate the potential of MRS to foster innovation, participation and sustainability. The EESC recognises the added value of these experiences, which help to make European cohesion more tangible and rooted in the regions.

7.4 MRS constitute a powerful tool for supporting European cohesion in a context that is marked by increasingly complex environmental, digital and social transitions. In fact, MRS make it possible to address supranational challenges with coordinated solutions, promoting environmental resilience and territorial sustainability.

7.5 Demographic challenges, such as depopulation and the ageing of the population, are some of the main threats to the EU's cohesion. MRS provide a framework for concrete action, promoting sustainable mobility, youth employment and the role of rural and mountain regions.

7.6 MRS foster social and economic cohesion by involving local authorities, civil societies, businesses and universities. The EESC calls for territorial inequalities to be reduced by strengthening participatory and territorial instruments for education, culture, training support to SMEs and innovation.

8. **The macro-regional partnership and the role of civil society**

- 8.1 The EESC considers the involvement of civil society, the social and economic partners and young people to be essential for reinforcing the efficiency, legitimacy and territorial impact of the MRS. These strategies bring Europe closer to its citizens by promoting inclusion and participation; however, communication on activities and results needs to be improved.
- 8.2 The oldest MRS, such as the **EUSBR** and the **EUSDR**, have already integrated civic actors into governance, including thematic coordinators and steering committee members. Initiatives such as the Danube Participation Days and DANUBE4all demonstrate effective application of the multi-level partnership principle, promoting social dialogue and community involvement.
- 8.3 Under **EUSAIR**, networks such as Chambers of Commerce or universities provide a solid infrastructure for territorial participation, including through instruments such as the forums known as Citizen Agoras.
- 8.4 **EUSALP** stands out for its good practices in involving civil society through its Action Group and Interreg projects. The EESC encourages the systematic extension of such models, acknowledging the crucial role of local communities in promoting sustainability, social cohesion and social innovation, particularly in marginal or cross-border regions.
- 8.5 The MRS also comprise a constructive dialogue with the economic world: SMEs, local businesses and social partners are actively involved in the projects. For example, in the sustainable energy sector under the EUSDR, they provide practical solutions for the green transition and the regions' recovery in terms of production.
- 8.6 The EESC acknowledges youth participation as a lever for inclusive and sustainable democracy, and supports the dissemination of macro-regional Youth Councils and the establishment of permanent networks, including digital networks, inspired by experiences such as Popri Youth and Baltic Sea Youth Camps. It also advocates for a cross-macro-regional civil society network, following on from the initiative launched in 2024 by the European House in Budapest.

9. **Governance, administrative capacity and access to funding**

- 9.1 The EESC considers that effective governance, strengthened administrative capacity and coordinated access to funding are key to the success of the MRS. These strategies must ensure multi-level cooperation, reinforcing territorial cohesion and defining clear priorities that are in line with the challenges and issues affecting the EU, according to criteria based on urgency, relevance and resource availability.
- 9.2 The EESC underlines the importance of actively involving regional and local authorities, something which still differs too much between the various strategies. **EUSALP** is a good example, with its strong regional participation, which could serve as a best practice. The subsidiarity principle needs to be strengthened by recognising the contribution of local actors in all strategies.

- 9.3 As they do not have their own budget, the MRS rely on EU, national, regional and private resources. The transnational Interreg programmes (Baltic, Danube, Adriatic-Ionian, Alpine) and Interreg NEXT for the neighbourhood constitute a key financial pillar. The EESC supports the integration of MRS priorities into operational programmes funded by the ERDF, ESF+, Horizon Europe, LIFE, Erasmus+ and other instruments.
- 9.4 Dialogue needs to be stepped-up between managing authorities and MRS coordinators, with stable financial platforms set up such as in the Alpine Space programme. The EESC calls for greater involvement of the social partners and of civil society, including in programming, in order to make the strategies more inclusive, participatory and operational.
- 9.5 The MRS make it possible to increase the resilience of production chains and support the integration of SMEs through cross-border projects in strategic sectors. The EESC recommends strengthening local administrative capacity through training, the exchange of good practices and the practical application of the partnership principle, involving civil society, institutions and economic actors.

10. **The way forward**

- 10.1 The future of MRS will be marked by growing challenges: climate change, the digital transition, energy security, demographic trends and geopolitical shifts. The EESC stresses the urgent need for coordinated, integrated territorial responses based on effective multi-level governance and structured civic participation.
- 10.2 The EESC highlights the strategic role of civil society organisations, the social partners and young people in connecting regions to European policies. Their active, structured participation in all phases of macro-regional strategies is key to fostering inclusion, active citizenship and a sense of belonging.
- 10.3 Governance needs to be strengthened, distinguishing between political and operational levels. The EESC calls for more active involvement of regions, local authorities and thematic stakeholders and for decision-making processes to be simplified, administrative capacities improved and the availability of adequate, accessible resources secured.
- 10.4 MRS need to evolve from ‘soft’ cooperation instruments into mechanisms that have a structural impact. The EESC recommends setting clear, measurable targets, implementing monitoring and follow-up systems and creating project chains that translate results into sustainable public policies.
- 10.5 The MRS must be integrated into the main EU funding instruments. The EESC supports systematically embedding the strategies into cohesion programmes, IPA funds, Interreg and directly managed programmes, and calls for stable cooperation with maritime strategies to enhance synergies.

10.6 The MRS must contribute more effectively to the green, digital and just transitions. The EESC calls for stronger measures for the energy transition, social inclusion and digitalisation accompanied by training and re-skilling programmes, especially for the most vulnerable.

10.6.1 Social conditionality must be strengthened within the MRS, so that development projects are also assessed for their level of inclusion and fairness, with a particular focus on respect for the principles of equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

10.7 Demographic challenges such as the ageing population and rural depopulation require proximity policies. The EESC considers investing in quality of life, decent work and essential services to be a priority, promoting local economies and providing incentives for young people to stay in their home regions.

10.8 The EESC promotes instruments such as EGTCs, Euroregions and local energy communities, which could help to implement the MRS through shared solutions in the areas of environmental management, sustainable mobility and climate adaptation, fostering institutionalised cooperation.

10.9 In the area of communication, the EESC notes progress but also shortcomings. The visibility of MRS needs to be increased outside of the institutional channels by harnessing local media, youth networks and economic stakeholders. Citizen agoras and macro-regional youth forums should be bolstered.

10.10 The EESC advocates for an active role for MRS in the EU enlargement process, serving as laboratories for integration between institutions, businesses, universities and civil society. It reiterates the need to create one or more MRS in the Mediterranean, in line with the recent Pact for the Mediterranean drawn up by the European Commission.

10.11 The EESC believes that the conditions to create transparent, responsible and corruption-free governance in the institutions involved in the macro-regional strategies must be available.

11. **Macro-regional strategies in the context of the new cohesion policy: challenges and responses**

11.1 The new MFF 2028-2034, with the possible change to cohesion policy, poses risks to MRS because the national structure of partnership plans could weaken their transnational dimension, limit cooperation and centralise programme management.

11.2 Given that each Member State will have its own partnership plan, strategies and priorities may diverge, complicating the coordination of the MRS. Joint projects risk being delayed due to funding cycles not being aligned, while regions with weaker governance might be less able to weigh in on national plans and access funding, exacerbating inequalities.

11.2.1 The EESC believes that key actors involved in the MRS should seek to:

- ensure that macro-regional priorities are integrated into national and regional partnership plans, by interacting in a timely manner with governments and including cross-border cooperation;
- draw up strategic documents with clear objectives, measurable indicators and necessity tests, reinforcing their own position in negotiations;
- promote cross-border cooperation in national/regional plans, with specific allocations and monitoring for joint and environmental projects;
- avoid a formal consultation of civil society and the social partners, instead providing real mechanisms for participation and representation.

12. **More on EUSAIR**

12.1 The EESC welcomes the revision of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, acknowledging the progress achieved in the first ten years of implementation. Updating the action plan, broadening priorities and strengthening the monitoring system are essential steps that need to be taken in order to be able to address new geopolitical and environmental challenges.

12.2 The Committee underlines the importance of a high-level, long-term political commitment on the part of participating countries. Coherence and effectiveness in achieving the strategic objectives and in strengthening macro-regional cooperation will only be possible through shared and stable governance.

12.3 The EESC fully supports the new action plan that proposes practical and innovative solutions to seize the economic, social and environmental opportunities in the region. It also calls on the Commission to keep playing an active role when it comes to technical and financial support, so that the strategy can deliver tangible benefits for the people and regions involved.

12.4 **The pillars of the Strategy**

12.4.1 The EUSAIR, based on five economic, social and environmental pillars, promotes cooperation and sustainable development. The revised action plan strengthens its coherence and introduces innovative solutions.

12.4.2 Transport and energy – improving road and rail infrastructure, fostering sustainable mobility and a competitive port system. Strengthening energy security, integration of renewables and decarbonisation.

12.4.3 Environment – tackling climate change, pollution and loss of marine and coastal biodiversity. Promoting cross-border cooperation and the sustainable management of natural resources.

12.4.4 Sustainable tourism – managing tourism flows in a balanced way, supporting rural tourism and promoting the Mediterranean diet. Fostering competitiveness and sustainability in the agri-food and tourism sector.

12.4.5 Greater social cohesion – addressing demographic imbalances, unemployment and poverty. Enhancing youth inclusion, skills and participation by developing an ecosystem conducive to social innovation.

12.5 **Horizontal and cross-cutting topics**

12.5.1 The revision of the action plan identified topics that could potentially stand alone, but that overlap with other areas; in order to avoid fragmentation, they were integrated as cross-cutting topics. The EESC welcomes this choice as it strengthens the coherence, synergies and effectiveness of policies.

12.5.2 Enlargement, which has become a priority since the war in Ukraine, is supported by the strategy as it helps candidate countries to align with EU standards. Effective governance requires solid administrative capabilities and institutional coordination. The plan also promotes research and innovation, supporting SMEs, start-ups and smart specialisation strategies.

12.5.3 Climate neutrality is based on a circular economy that reduces waste and environmental pressures, integrating renewable energy, green technologies and sustainable tourism. Green rural development reinforces resilient communities, while digitalisation creates innovative hubs and related networks for the benefit of citizens and businesses.

12.5.4 The EESC stresses the need for more effective and regular governance for the Adriatic and Ionian Region strategy. The revised plan strengthens the approach to results, makes use of the various institutional levels and, through the rotating presidency and thematic groups, ensures implementation and coordination, fostering the involvement of civil society and young people.

Brussels, 3 December 2025.

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee
Séamus BOLAND
