

Advocacy Guidance and Strategic Orientations

on the role of EU Macro-Regional Strategies

in the EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034

Brussels, Belgium

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Preamble

EU Macro-Regional Strategies (EU MRS) serve as flexible and established cooperation frameworks, bringing together EU Member States, partner countries and stakeholders across different governance levels. In this context, they contribute to strengthening the alignment between EU priorities, territorial needs and programme implementation, while fully respecting the existing institutional and regulatory frameworks as well as national positions.

By linking territorial needs with policy priorities and cooperation processes, MRS contribute to more coherent programming and delivery, supporting the translation of macro-regional priorities into concrete measures, implementation support, capitalisation of results and policy follow-up.

This document provides a consolidated guidance paper based on the proposals submitted by the four TRIO EU MRS Presidencies (EUSAIR, EUSALP, EUSDR, and EUSBSR) in June 2026. It aims at bringing together converging orientations from EU MRS with a view to supporting reflection on their potential role in the future EU policy and funding frameworks.

This guidance is of voluntary nature to the consideration of each individual EU MRS Member State and highlights areas where a coordinated approach across EU MRS can provide added value.

Important stakeholders in this regard could be:

- European Commission (DG REGIO, DG ENEST, DG RTD, DG MOVE, DG ENER, DG ENV, DG MARE, DG EMPL and other relevant services)
- European Parliament
- National and regional programming and managing authorities
- External action instruments, including the Global Europe framework
- EU Cohesion Policy stakeholders, MRS National Coordinators, Thematic Coordinators and Steering Group Members

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Against the background of discussions on the future EU budget and the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034), the EU MRS TRIO Presidencies have identified possible messages and orientations that individual member states can take as point of departure on their own accord:

- Underline the importance of keeping EU MRS closely connected to overarching EU priorities as reflected in the EU budget, to maintain coherence, enhance impact and ensure their long-term strategic added value and relevance. In this context, it is noted that EU MRS are recognised in the proposal for a regulation establishing the ERDF, including INTERREG, notably through Article 7(1b) and Article 8(1b). The emphasis on taking macro-regional thematic priorities into account and on involving relevant actors in partnership from the outset of the programming period is highlighted in this regard.

- Highlight the opportunity offered by national and regional programming frameworks to embed territorial, transnational and cross-border perspectives in funding priorities, where relevant and appropriate, by drawing on EU MRS as existing and proven cooperation frameworks. EU MRS could be systematically considered during national programming processes, where relevant and appropriate, and EU programmes under direct administration – including those to be integrated into instruments such as the European Competitiveness Fund, encompassing Horizon Europe and LIFE, as well as the future AgoraEU instrument – could establish appropriate interfaces with EU MRS, ensuring that centrally managed funds build upon the territorial priorities and cooperation networks already established at macro-regional level.
- Ensure that the governance structures of EU MRS are prioritised at a level that allows them to effectively carry out their coordination and implementation tasks, via transnational Interreg or other relevant channels, and awareness and communication activities to strengthen EU MRS recognition. Adequate coordination is a prerequisite for EU MRS to fulfil their function as connectors, multipliers and policy facilitators. This will allow EU MRS to continue offering comprehensive support for multi-level stakeholder engagement, policy dialogue, knowledge exchange, capitalisation and scaling of project results also in the next programming period.
- Recall that EU MRS constitute an existing, EU Member State and partner country-driven coordination framework that supports the implementation of EU priorities at the macro-regional level, including by contributing to EU enlargement objectives and strengthening cooperation with candidate and neighbouring countries. EUSAIR and EUSDR, in particular, serve as practical platforms for co-governance, co-planning and co-investment between EU Member States and candidate countries, providing the technical working groups, shared competencies and cooperation structures needed to support practical convergence and address the acquis. Close coordination between EU MRS and the relevant European Commission services could be considered when structuring EU enlargement support through the Global Europe instrument, enabling a more participatory and place-based approach to accession support.
- Underline the strategic significance of territories with specific geographical characteristics – including coastal, riverine, mountain, border regions and sparsely populated areas – for Europe's cohesion, sustainability, and prosperity. In this regard, the EU MRS act as multi-level platforms supporting cooperation across borders, sectors, and governance levels. As transnational frameworks, MRS align policies, investments, and reforms with EU priorities, provide a place-based dimension to policy implementation, reduce fragmentation, and support cooperation among Member States, regions, and partner/candidate countries while fully respecting existing institutional and regulatory frameworks as well as national positions. Cities within the EU MRS play a key role in transnational cooperation, as laboratories for policy experimentation and good practice exchange and as transport, energy, knowledge and social innovation hubs.
- Underline that EU MRS can further enhance coherence across funding programmes by facilitating exchange among managing authorities, secretariats, and project implementers, aligning project pipelines, scaling results across borders, and providing a platform for policy dialogue and mutual learning. By maintaining an overview across sectors and funding sources, EU MRS can connect stakeholders to translate EU priorities into territorially relevant investment pipelines and cross-border solutions, ensuring individual investments contribute to broader shared objectives. Furthermore, where relevant, EU MRS act as joint frameworks for coordination and division of labour among various cooperation bodies and regional organisations and thematic networks. In this role, they can help bring the expertise, capacity

and results of established cooperation structures closer to funding sources, while also increasing the potential of those funding sources to generate wider territorial and policy impact.

- Highlight that a consideration of EU MRS could contribute to improved policy coherence across thematic sectors and governance levels, enhanced effectiveness and visibility of EU investments, and the development of scalable, sustainable solutions. By better linking policy development with practical implementation, MRS can support a more integrated and impact-oriented approach within the EU policy framework.