

## European Macro-Regional Strategies and Approaches: Baltic Sea and Danube Experiences and the New Perspective for Adriatic-Ionian Cooperation

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**Abstract** *European Union aims to extend the stability and democracy area within and outside the current EU borders. To this purpose the reduction of inequalities between different regions represents one of the Union main goals. The Macro-Region strategy represents an innovative pragmatic model of multilevel governance that involves in an open and shared dialogue all of the actors according to an integrate approach: EU, States, regional and local authorities and the civil society. The authors trace the European legislative path in this field highlighting how the strategy could represent the sunset of the sector-based approach in the resolution of Macro-Regional urgent issues.*

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### **European strategies and policies**

Since 1986 the European regional strategy<sup>1</sup> has been aimed to the achievement of a concrete economic and political cohesion. With the adoption of the Single European Act<sup>2</sup> (SEA) in 1986 it occurred formally the overcoming of the Community conceived as a simply free trade market area, through the introduction of a specific title dedicated to the Economic and Political Cohesion, in the perspective of the recognition of regional dimension as a fundamental element of European policy. In this occasion it has been stated that the Community “shall aim at reducing disparities between the various regions and the backwardness of the least-favoured regions”.<sup>3</sup>

From then on through an articulated political and legislative path, in which the European Community (later the “Union”) acts with its own institutions, it has been modeled a strategy that has defined progressively its goals and aims in harmony with the other European policies. This path is complex and started with the creation of the European Regional Development Fund in 1975, the reform of Structural Funds in 1988, the institutionalization of regions at European level, the constitution of the Committee of the Regions and lastly the Lisbon Treaty and the re-launching of the new Europe 2020 Strategy that introduced a third dimension of the regional policy: the territorial cohesion. This goal strengthens the idea of a more integrated regional policy, able to pay attention to every potential and effective admission in EU, highlighting the issue of territorial evolution in Europe and the Union’s external borders.<sup>4</sup> In a nut shell Europe 2020 targets<sup>5</sup> are: i) to fully use the strength of each territory within a perspective of a sustainable and balanced development of the whole European Union; ii) to manage concentration: cities increase innovation and productivity but also pollution and social ostracism; iii) to better link territories with the aim to let people live where they want and to guarantee them accessing public services, efficient transportation systems, trustable energy nets and broadband internet; iv) to develop new cooperation instruments between countries and regions through a transnational cross-border perspective for the resolution of those issues whose nature and dimension exceed the national area. The European strategies for Baltic Sea<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Compare: Drevet, J. F., “Histoire de la politique régionale “ and “McCormick, J., “The European Union : politics and policies “.

<sup>2</sup> The Single European Act: [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/emu\\_history/documents/treaties/singleeuropeanact.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/emu_history/documents/treaties/singleeuropeanact.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 130A.

<sup>4</sup> For a critical approach to the borders meaning and significance see: Topaloglou L., “Border Regions Typology”.

<sup>5</sup> For more details about Europe 2020 targets visit the following website: [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/targets/eu-targets/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/targets/eu-targets/index_en.htm).

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, *European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea region*.

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/baltic/com\\_baltic\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/baltic/com_baltic_en.pdf)

and Danube Region<sup>7</sup> represent two practical examples of this new approach. Europe 2020 strategy orients the future of European policies toward the promotion of sustainable growth, innovation and occupation and to this purpose it promotes a more integrated territorial cooperation. This target is financed by European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and provides support to the cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. The financial fund of these programs is equal to the 2.5% of total resources provided for the 2007-2013 period. In addition to the group with juridical personality in charge of strengthening the transnational cooperation (GECT), there are other instruments to promote regional development across the EU external borders, in collaboration with potential and effective candidate countries and extra-EU countries. In fact, for the 2007-2013 period the European territorial cooperation's target (former INTERREG initiative) covers three types of programs: 52 cross-border cooperation programs within the EU borders for a contribution of 5.6 billion of euros; 13 transnational cooperation programs that cover wide range of cooperation areas such as Baltic Sea, Alps and Mediterranean regions financed with 1.8 billions of euros; the regional cooperation program together with three linking programs (Urbact II, Interact II e ESPON) addressed to all member countries for the information and best practises exchange between regional and local bodies of different countries (445 millions of euros). In particular cross-border cooperation aims to reduce the lack of territorial balance through specific strategies defined in detail for each of the 52 programs. The number of issues undertaken is wide and it covers entrepreneurial support, the development of an integrated natural resources management, the improvement of connections between rural and metropolitan areas, a better access to transportation and communication networks, the improvement of a shared use of infrastructure and equal access to job opportunities. With regard to the transnational programs, it is also scheduled a strong collaboration between regions of different European countries on communication nets, flood management, connections for international trade and development of a sustainable market. Lastly, interregional cooperation works at pan-European level, improving links to develop good practice and to facilitate the exchange and the transfer of information and results between regions with successfully experiences.

Therefore, the reduction of inequalities between different regions represents the main goal in a Union that aims to extend the stability and democracy area and the reached economic level beyond the current European borders. The gap between regions is determined by different factors such as pre-existent disadvantages caused by the geographical and geopolitical isolation, recent economic and social transformations, the inheritance of central economic planning systems<sup>8</sup> as well as a combination of these and other factors.

The impact of these obstacles is observable in different manifestations such as social marginalization, scarce instruction quality, high unemployment and lack of suitable infrastructures. The resolution of such issues represents the European cohesion policy's goal that is focused on three main purposes: territorial cooperation, regional convergence and solidarity, regional competitiveness and employment.

### **Macro-Regions**

With regard to regional policy, two terms have recently polarized the debate within European context: territorial cohesion and multi-level governance<sup>9</sup>. In fact, both of them are included in the "Territorial Agenda" adopted by Member States in 2007, in the "Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion" published by the Commission in 2008 and in the "White Paper on Multilevel Governance" approved by Committee of the Regions in 2009. This is the political climate in which a new European regional strategy has been planned. The European strategy for Macro-Regions, in experimental phase, represents an innovative approach for a closer interregional cooperation within and outside EU borders<sup>10</sup>. The pilot experience of a Baltic Sea region strategy introduced in practice the concept of Macro-Region<sup>11</sup> defined in this occasion by European commission as "an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges." Macro-regions do not have an independence status or ad

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<sup>7</sup> European Commission, *European Union Strategy for the Danube region*.

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/danube/com2010\\_715\\_danube\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/danube/com2010_715_danube_en.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> See: Herrschel T., "Borders in post-socialist Europe".

<sup>9</sup> See: Muñoz J., "Institutional trust and multilevel government".

<sup>10</sup> For an overview about the European Neighbourhood and Partnership policies see: Canciani, E., "European Financial Perspective".

See also Comelli M., "From Boundary to Borderland".

<sup>11</sup> For a critical approach to the Macro-regions topic see: Stocchiero A., "Macro-Regions of Europe" and Telo M., "The European Union and Global Governance" For an history about the meaning and significance of state borders and their changes over space and time compare also: Anderson J., "Borders, Border Regions and Territoriality".

hoc institutions nor they overlap with regional or national existing identities. The geographical borders of these regions can vary depending on the type of issues existing at Macro-Regional level. For instance, some regions could overlap. Therefore a region could be part of one or more Macro-regions simultaneously.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region launched by the European commission in June 2009 – and confirmed by the Council in October – is today considered as a model for other potential Macro-Regional approaches. For a second region that develops around the Danube, the European Council asked in June 2009 to the Commission to elaborate a strategy within the end of 2010. Successively, the Commission adopted in December 2010 the document known as “EU Strategy for the Danube Region”. Those steps inspired the debate about other potential Macro-regional areas internal and external EU borders. This happened for the North Sea-English Channel region, for the Alpine region and for the Adriatic-Ionian area. Similar considerations have been advanced for Mediterranean Sea which represents a fundamental strategic area for EU.

The European Commission played an active role in the elaboration of a Macro-regional strategy and now it suggests this strategy as an innovative pragmatic model for other regional areas. This kind of approach represents a concrete and original example of multilevel governance that involves in an open and shared dialogue all of the actors: European Union, States, regional and local authorities and the civil society according to an international and interrelated approach. The need to rationalize and optimize the management of some common resources (as, for instance, the energy), or the need for coordinating the efforts for the resolution of common issues (such as the fighting against the organized crime), are at the base of the Macro-Regional model, that identifies in the integrated approach the key of transnational and cross-border territorial cooperation.

For instance, the promotion of economic and political stability, as a premise to the integration, is placed at the basis of the project launched for the Adriatic-Ionian region<sup>12</sup>.

The eight All (Adriatic and Ionian Initiative that includes today Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Montenegro, Italy, Serbia and Slovenia) member countries<sup>13</sup> established several goals at the base of their cooperation: the creation of a prevention system to fight Adriatic Sea environmental pollution, the construction of a coordinated system for civil defence in the management of fires and natural calamities, the rural development, the intensification of trade relationships and the creation of an efficient tourist service network. Cooperation is also aimed to the valorisation of cultural identities of all member countries and to the rationalization of human and financial resources.

In the All project the multilevel approach is integrated with a multidimensional orientation aimed to develop the involved territories through the harmonisation of economic, cultural, social and institutional cooperation. The declared purpose of the initiative is finalized to integrate the existing European strategies for Macro-Regions with the Adriatic-Ionian Region strategy, bringing a significative contribution not only for the region itself but also for the whole European Union's territory.

Adriatic-Ionian regional cooperation could be materialized in the third example of Macro-Regional approach, able to provide a concerted solution of common issues due to the interaction and the open comparison of different actors at European, governmental, regional, local and civil level.

### ***Regional European actions for Baltic and Danube Macro-regions before and after the enlargement process in EU***

The European Council adopted the European strategy for the Baltic Sea region<sup>14</sup> (SUERMB) on December 2009<sup>15</sup>, confirming the conclusion dated 26 October of the same year. The strategy schedules an integrate structure for the resolution of common issues<sup>16</sup> (as, for instance, the urgent environmental matter), involving the Baltic Sea area. In the conclusions the Council confirmed its will to give impulse to the economic, social and territorial progress of the region, highlighting that these goals should contribute to the growth of competitiveness of the whole Union. To this purpose the Council invites all actors involved to act fast in order to assure a full realization of the strategy which would represent the

<sup>12</sup> For more details about Adriatic-Ionian Initiative visit the All website: [www.aii-ps.org](http://www.aii-ps.org)

<sup>13</sup> At the time of the foundation, the countries were six (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia), today eight (plus Serbia and Montenegro). Visit the Italian Foreign Affairs Minister website about the International organizations: [http://www.esteri.it/MAE/EN/Politica\\_Estera/Aree\\_Geografiche/Europa/OOII/](http://www.esteri.it/MAE/EN/Politica_Estera/Aree_Geografiche/Europa/OOII/).

<sup>14</sup> For a complete overview of the region's policies see Galbreath D. J., “Continuity and change in Baltic Sea region”.

<sup>15</sup> For more details about the European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region visit the European commission/Regional Policy website: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/cooperate/baltic/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/baltic/index_en.cfm).

<sup>16</sup> See: Bengtsson R., “EU Strategy for Baltic Sea”.

first concrete approach of Macro-Regional type. In order to reach the fixed goal the Commission has been asked by the Council to present a "strategy state of the art" report within June 2011. The Baltic Sea is surrounded by eight EU member States and Russia<sup>17</sup>. The strategy for the Macro-region aims to coordinate together the actions of States, regions, EU, pan-Baltic organizations, financial institutions and NGOs for a sustainable and balanced development of the region. To this purposes there have been developed a communication and an action plan including 80 high profile projects, some of which have already started. The four strategy pillars are aimed to make this part of Europe more: sustainable from an environmental point of view, prosperous, accessible and able to attract capitals and resources, safe and protected. The idea of elaborating a specific strategy for the region is dated 2004, when European Union reached the number of 25 member countries for a total of 380 millions and 800 thousands of inhabitants. Since then, eight of nine coast side Baltic Sea countries are EU members. The Macro-Region's concept took place from the "bottom", since it has been carried out by the countries of the Baltic area. National governments and a euro-parliamentarian intergroup submitted to the Council and the Commission a new strategy for the development of the area. The environmental threats escalation, the discrepancy in the economic growth and the insufficient accessibility to an efficient transport net, represented the principal issues to be solved urgently.

These kind of challenges could be faced only through an active collaboration of all the interested countries within the frame of a more vast European cooperation. The strategy - now in its implementation phase - generated concrete actions optimizing and rationalizing the use of financial and human resources and achieving positive results. It is worth underlining that there were used no additional financial or human resources as well as new legislation or ad hoc institutions. It is important also to highlight that there have been tested new successful working methods repeatable for other European Macro-Regions.

The strategy could represent the sunset of the sectoral approach in the resolution of Macro-Regional urgent issues shared by the EU members. The enthusiasm generated by the new approach gave impulse to European Commission's initiative that in a communication of December 2010, "EU Strategy for the Danube Region", drawn the guidelines for a Danube region strategy. Member States embraced this strategy during the General Affair Council on 13 April 2011 (Council Conclusions).

The Danube region includes 8 EU member countries (Germany - Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria- Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Bulgaria and Romania), and 6 extra-EU countries (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Moldova and Ukraine). The strategy is open to other regional partners and it should be compatible with Black Sea perspectives<sup>18</sup>, in which flows into the Danube. The region, that counts more then 100 millions of inhabitants and it represents one fifth of EU's area, has been subjected to several changes. Thanks to the last two enlargements in 2004 and in 2007, the Danube became the most international river in the world and for a considerable part of it a European Union's space. The region presents a very high potential and in order to respond to new challenges it is mandatory outlining a new perspective that intensifies the efforts to resolve with a sustainable approach the economic crisis and the geopolitical tensions and national conflicts<sup>19</sup>.

More urgent challenges are linked to the environmental protection, the socio-economic development and the transport and safety corridors modernization. Moreover, more efforts must be done to improve energy systems and connections, research and innovation systems and to optimize the utilization of the enormous fluvial patrimony of the area.

The Danube represents a strategic and central area both for neighbour and Asian countries. A European strategy for the whole region is an integrating part of Union's main goals in harmony with Europe 2020 strategy's previsions. The strategy is focused on life quality improvement for citizens and it aims to create a better link between inhabitants, their ideas and needs. Within 2020 nobody should be forced to leave his/her region in order to get better instruction, occupation and prosperity perspectives. The strategy should be able to allow this region to fully enter in the 21st century, making it more safety, trustee and eventually of the most attractive European areas.

### **European strategy for Adriatic-Ionian region**

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<sup>17</sup> For an elaboration on EU-Russian Borders see: Kononenko V., "New departures on the EU-Russian Border?" For further perspectives about the Baltic States and region in the European and international relations see Smith D.J. (ed.), "The Baltic States and their Region"; about the concept of the Baltic region as "hinge" between EU and Russia, particularly see inside, Holtom P., "The gatekeeper "hinge" concept and the promotion of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian new / postmodern security agendas" pp.313-322.

<sup>18</sup> See: Asmus R. D., "The Black Sea and the Frontiers of Freedom".

<sup>19</sup> About the national minorities' factor - mainly the Hungarian minorities - in the Danubian region, see Romsics I., "Geopolitics in the Danube Region: Hungarian Reconciliation Efforts, 1848-1998".

Right after 1989, while in central Europe it has been opened a new phase aimed to overcome the cold war's effects, South Eastern Europe has been overwhelmed by the conflicts conflagration in Yugoslavia and by the financial and institutional crisis in Albania. Ten years later, European Union promoted an action aimed to support the end of wars in western Balkans with a "Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe"<sup>20</sup> (today "Regional Co-operation Council").<sup>21</sup>

Within the Pact cooperation, during the Tampere Meeting held on October 1999, Italian government presented enthusiastically the new Adriatic-Ionian initiative.

However it would be necessary to wait until May 2000 to see officialised the initiative, when in Ancona - during the Adriatic and Ionian Sea Development and Safety Conference - gathered Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the six coast countries (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy e Slovenia). At the end of the Conference Ministers of Foreign Affairs undersigned the "Ancona Declaration"<sup>22</sup> in which it has been affirmed the importance of regional cooperation as an instrument to promote economic and political stability in the Adriatic-Ionian area. In 2002 Serbia-Montenegro entered in the initiative and after the scission (2006) both States decided to keep the membership.

Today All's composition is unchanged for a total of eight members. The initiative, that has been supported in particular by Italy and Greece, was born from the observation of the existence of interregional and transnational issues that bonded together Adriatic Sea side countries. Therefore these countries not only share a common historic and cultural heritage but they also share huge responsibilities for the protection and the control of their own Sea. Common problems mean long term solutions decided and achieved by all parts involved. The interested countries provided and scheduled a stronger commercial, rural, cultural, environmental and touristic cooperation.

This idea is linked to the awareness of markets interdependence<sup>23</sup> and to the necessity of involving in all actors to give a strong impulse to the Europeanization process with respect to national and regional specificities. Another incentive came in 2004 when Slovenia became a European member.<sup>24</sup> Simultaneously also other east side All members (Albania, Bosnia -Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro e Serbia), although following different times and modalities, started an approaching path towards EU in the frame of the Stabilization and Association Process and in the perspective of a future European integration.

All executive body is the Adriatic-Ionian Council composed by Foreign Ministers of member States that is summoned by rotation at ministerial level at the presence of European commission. Council's agenda and priority discussions are prepared during periodic meeting between Senior Officials. Every year is inaugurated a new presidency according to a perspective of direct and active participation of all State members. Italy succeeded Greece in 2009 until May 2010, when it has been Montenegro's turn. Currently is Serbia that holds the presidency. In June 2008, on Regione Marche recommendation, it has been inaugurated in Ancona the Permanent Secretariat. Aim of the Secretariat is to guarantee continuity in the passage of presidencies and to assure a "project oriented" trend, acting as a catalyst of member States proposals.

All was born from the idea that only a shared dialog between all parties can contribute to the creation of a long-term agreement. To this purpose the goal is focused on the involvement of local bodies and civil society, to create a strategy that doesn't need new funds, new institutions or legislation (according to the Macro-regional approach experiences), but able to optimize the existing resources through new and stronger synergies between actors. In this way the active participation of Universities, Chambers of Commerce, SMEs, industrial districts, regions and the scientific and cultural world is of fundamental importance for a positive result of the initiative. Of great interest in this regard is also the UniAdrion project that covers a university virtual network connecting athenaeums and research centers of the whole region and supporting researchers, teachers and students mobility within All States. Another important cooperation channel is represented by the Chamber of Commerce Forum of Adriatic-Ionian Region<sup>25</sup>.

The initiative's targets and intervention sectors can be catalogued in five macro-areas that represent a general cooperation frame open to successive developments: SMEs, tourism, rural development, culture and inter-university cooperation, environmental and fires protection. Obviously, the next step for All is the elaboration of an integrated European strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Macro-Region composed today by European and pre-adhesion countries. The

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<sup>20</sup>Visit: <http://www.stabilitypact.org>

<sup>21</sup>Visit: <http://www.rcc.int/>.

<sup>22</sup> "The Ancona Declaration": [http://www.aiips.org/images/stories/documents/the\\_ancona\\_declaration.pdf](http://www.aiips.org/images/stories/documents/the_ancona_declaration.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> On the markets and stock markets interdependence see: Égert B., "Interdependence between Eastern and Western".

<sup>24</sup> To this regard see: Mihelj S., "Symbolic borders of Europe in Slovenia".

<sup>25</sup> For more details visit All website [www.aii-ps.org](http://www.aii-ps.org).

goal is focused on the constitution of the Macro-Region in 2014 in order to try to include it in the European strategy for 2014-2020<sup>26</sup>. Last presidency passage held in Brussels, on recommendation of Mercedes Bresso, President of Committee of the Regions, represented an important opportunity to give visibility to the initiative in the European frame.

The proposal of European Strategy is based on 2020 goals: sustainable growth of marine patrimony, SMEs and commerce, seas and fish protection and cooperation between coast guard and civil defence. In the Italian strategy for the Macro-region is scheduled also a "Baltic-Adriatic corridor" to make one day the Adriatic Sea the connection between Indian and Chinese products that go up towards Europe. Adriatic-Ionian basin today represents a "close sea" and the perspective is that it will become a European "internal sea". European countries that are All members received officially mandate by all initiative's members to advocate Adriatic-Ionian's cause in the European context. In February 2011 the President of Marche Region, Gian Mario Spacca, has been nominated speaker for the opinion's formation on Adriatic-Ionian Macro-region by the Politic Commission of territorial cohesion of Committee of the Regions. In October the Committee asked for the extension of the integrated policy to the Adriatic-Ionian basin in order to reach the goal of territorial cohesion contained in the Lisbon Treaty.

European commission is in charge of starting in 2012 the debate on the region's maritime strategy. The goal of a European's recognition of the cooperation started eleven years ago is estimated for 2014, when it will be scheduled the alternation at European executive level of Italy and Greece. The Region presents all required elements to act as a Macro-Region to improve an integrated approach able to face common challenges. The surplus value of the All strategy is represented by a strong political signal addressed to Western Balkans countries for a concrete collaboration towards a future integration in the European house to which they naturally and historically belong. European future goes through Balkans<sup>27</sup> and in a Union that pretends to be a model of integration and cooperation for the construction of a peaceful area, Adriatic-Ionian Macro-Region represents an important chance to assure stability in all European and extra-EU countries.

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<sup>27</sup> See: Basic N., "Transnationalism in the Balkans".

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