

Joint meeting of Alpine managing authorities and EUSALP key implementers

Summary of the exchanges

The European macro regional strategies Week, organised by the European Commission's DG REGIO, was held from 17 to 21 February 2020 in Brussels. This week was marked by a large number of thematic conferences and seminars dedicated to the priorities of the four European macro-regions.

It is in this framework and for the purpose of the next programming period 2021-2027 that the French Presidency of the Strategy for the Alpine Region organised, in cooperation with DG REGIO, an event bringing together the various stakeholders of the Alpine region on 19 and 20 February. This event focused on the integration of the main priorities of EUSALP in the framework of the European funding programmes: structural funds and direct managed programmes.

The various exchanges between representatives of the European Commission, EUSALP and other macro-regions, as well as representatives of the managing authorities, led to the emergence of concrete and operational recommendations. The objective is to improve the coordination between the Alpine strategy and the structural funds programmes and initiatives while specifying and amplifying the existing synergies between the priorities of EUSALP and those of the thematic funding programmes.

Opening session

The introductory remarks specify the objectives of the conference in the context of the preparation of the post-2020 European programmes, the ambitions of the French EUSALP Presidency for the year 2020 and the major common challenges of the Alpine region.

In his introductory words, Jean-Pierre Halkin (Head of Unit Macro-regions, Transnational/Interregional/External Cooperation, Enlargement at DG REGIO) presented the objectives of the conference. This workshop aims on the one hand to promote greater cooperation between the EUSALP and the managing Authorities of the programmes of the alpine region and on the other hand to facilitate exchanges between the macro-regions and the various European bodies: the Parliament, the Council, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee and, of course, the Commission. The meeting of the managing authorities of EUSALP's regional and cooperation programmes should make it possible to better integrate macro-regional strategy priorities in the EU funding programmes for the post-2020 period, in order to ensure that the financial resources converge towards EUSALP's priorities.

The President of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region Renaud Muselier said that the ambitions of the 2020 French Presidency of EUSALP are gathered in the manifesto *"For a greener Alpine region"* presented by France to the Executive Board of EUSALP on 5 February in Lyon. In particular, the French Presidency endorses EUSALP's objective to make the Alpine region one of the most attractive in Europe and a model for the whole Europe in terms of sustainability and implementation of the European Green Deal. The three thematic priorities of the Alpine strategy concern competitiveness, growth and innovation; mobility and connectivity; environment and energy. In addition, the Strategy includes a cross-cutting objective aimed at building a sound macro-regional governance model for the Alpine region. . The three thematic priorities are declined into concrete projects and operational actions within 9 thematic action groups. They tackle the challenges and uniqueness of the Alpine territory, whose biodiversity, natural resources (especially water and soil) and cultural heritage must be preserved in the context of climate change. It is in this sense that the action of the European Union can be understood by the citizens.

The European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira, says that the Alps have a unique heritage that needs to be saved. And, even if they are one of the most prosperous regions in Europe in terms of business and innovation and have significant renewable energy production capacity, which is important for the pact towards Europe, the Region is highly vulnerable to climate change and some disparities still exist inside the region. She points out that the three priorities of the European cohesion policy are particularly suited to the Alpine region, with its 70 million inhabitants spread across 7 states and 48 regions. Firstly, innovation to maintain competitiveness in an increasingly globalised economy. Then the transition to a low-carbon economy, based on renewable energies and innovation. Finally, territorial cooperation. The regulations for the period 2021-2027 require the alignment of the programmes with the macro-regional strategies, which will strengthen their impact and their capacity to respond to the challenges of the Alps. The concentration of funding on strategic projects will make the action of European programmes more visible. Finally, EUSALP's willingness to improve citizen ownership and political governance will strengthen its democratic legitimacy.

What are the funding opportunities for the Alpine region in the European thematic programmes?

The interventions of the heads of thematic funding programmes (LIFE, Horizon 2020/Europe, EAFRD, Connecting Europe Facility) present the priorities, functioning and conditions to support some projects of the EUSALP priorities.

- **The LIFE Programme has financed almost 5000 projects** since its creation in 1992, many of them concerning the Alpine region. For example the WOLFALPS project on the implementation of the Habitats Directive or the Alps under Brenner 2022 project to improve air quality. These projects are examples of cross-border collaboration. **Integrated projects**, which support the implementation of regulatory plans, are a new feature of the LIFE programme and will be reinforced for the period 2021-2027. The next call for proposals will be published in April 2020 for one of the applications to be submitted in June or September.
- **The Horizon Europe Programme is based on 3 pillars** which are scientific excellence, global challenges and European industrial competitiveness, and finally innovative Europe. The programme operates **on the basis of calls for proposals**, without any geographical conditions. An opportunity for EUSALP lies in **bringing together the different actors of the European innovation system** (start-ups, universities, incubators ...). DG RTD is currently in the consultation phase to better respond to the needs on this aspect. There is also a **budget entirely dedicated** to European countries lagging behind in innovation research.
- As regards the **European Fund for Agriculture and Rural Development (EAFRD)**, the model has changed for the next programming period and is no longer part of the structural funds as it is at present. In the future Common Agricultural Policy, **the introduction of national strategic plans** (to be adopted in 2021) will replace rural development programmes, all sectoral programmes and first and second pillar aid. There is a new green architecture in the CAP corresponding to the European Green Deal, it is the reinforced cross-compliance which is compulsory for the farmers of the first and second pillars. Concerning rural development, many measures can match with the Alpine challenges, including the LEADER measure.
- **Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)** covers three sectors: transport, energy and digital. Concerning energy networks, the main novelty of **the future programming is to be able to finance a new generation of cross-border renewable energy projects**. As regards transport and digital, the next programme will focus on networks (creation, modernisation). In terms of co-funding, the programme has a derogation to finance up to 58% of cross-border projects. At

the end of the year, a work programme will be adopted for a period of 3 years and will offer more visibility to project holders.

Session 1: How to link structural funds and macro regional strategies?

During this session, the three other European macro-regions (Adriatic-Ionian, Danube and Baltic) share their experience and practices in their approach to the structural funds and thematic funding programmes.

- **Perspective of the Adriatic-Ionian macro region:** It is fundamental that all countries involved in the macro regional strategy cooperate and coordinate before the next programming period with all stakeholders (managing authorities/authorities responsible for preparing next generation of programmes, national ministries, coordinating authorities). For the Adriatic-Ionian macro regional strategy, **a road map has been drawn up on a course of action with a steering team, national coordinators and thematic action groups.** They then agreed on a set of specific priorities and some flagship projects. The thematic groups then drafted proposals which they submitted to the national coordinators so that they themselves could forward a **short list of priorities to their ministries.** On the basis of these proposals, meetings with key stakeholders were organised (managing authorities, ministries, main beneficiaries). Another element of articulation is **the coordination of calls for proposals by the managing authorities of the structural funds.** The final stage is the **organisation of a forum of managing authorities** to orient them towards the macro-regional logic.
- **Perspective of the Baltic macro region:** The embedding of the objectives and priorities of the Baltic macro regional strategy in the programmes, is mainly based on the establishment of **4 networks of managing authorities (one per fund) and a dynamic of capacity building (animated by a specific horizontal area coordinator on capacity building)** between those involved in the strategy and those involved in the structural programmes. **An interface has been created to facilitate exchanges.** Specific funding, even modest, has been allocated. **Meetings between managing authorities have been organised using Article 70** to organise these initiatives and joint projects. Thanks to a mandate, workshops are organised to deliberate on the issues, priorities and joint projects between the coordinators.
- **Perspective of the Danube macro region.** A mandate for the national coordinators was requested in order to form a **very operational taskforce and to implement a procedure to align the funding programmes with the strategy.** A first meeting has already taken place and the second meeting should lead to the adoption of this process. Also, a list of common priorities to all macro-regions as a common denominator would make this coordination possible in a more practical way. Also, an initiative has been undertaken to **create a network of ERDF managing authorities.**

Session 2: Identification of coordination modalities between the structural funds' programmes and the Strategy of the Alpine region

The objective of this Session is to highlight the links between EUSALP major priorities and the operational programmes as well as coordination initiatives between the macro regional strategy and the different EU funding programmes.

The session was inaugurated by Liliane Lucchesi (Vice-President of the Burgundy Franche-Comté Region) and Nicola de Michelis (Director at DG REGIO). Participants' interventions identify the following recommendations:

- Being the most recent of the European macro-regions, EUSALP is looking for examples of good practices that have worked out in the other macro-regions in order to establish synergies between the priorities of the Alpine strategy and those of the operational programmes;
- Today's lack of coordination could be explained by the fact that the departments in charge of the Alpine strategy on the one hand and those in charge of the management of the funds on the other are not necessarily the same in the different States/regions. To remedy this, **a dialogue between the different interlocutors should be encouraged through the creation of a network of managing authorities or the organisation of ad-hoc meetings;**
- This reinforced dialogue should enable the managing authorities and EUSALP actors to **identify concrete plans for action** such as the launch of joint/coordinated calls for proposals or the exchange of information on calls' calendars;
- The existence of a **convergence between the priorities of the Alpine strategy and those of the cohesion policy, in particular** regarding the Green Deal, should **facilitate exchanges**. However, these should **be put in place rapidly** given that **the operational programmes are already in a preparation phase;**
- As the Alpine macro-region does not have its own funds, in order to deliver on its priorities, it should seek to rely on national and regional funds but also on the EU directed managed programmes whose resources have not been sufficiently exploited so far, as well as on private financing;
- Actors of macro-regional strategies should be able to explain to managing authorities the mutual benefits of a better integration of their strategies' orientations in the operational programmes: identification of solutions to problems that cannot be solved unilaterally, high-level political backing for projects, bigger impact outside the programme territory, good project pipeline with improved absorption, higher and wider visibility by political leaders, citizens, establishing contacts with policy-makers and with managing authorities in other countries and regions, critical mass for some projects, etc.

Conclusions of the first half-day

In his concluding remarks on the first half-day, Fabrice Pannekoucke (Vice-President of the Auvergne-Rhône Alpes Region) points out that the Alpine macro-region is facing climate change and that its ambition is to fight the impacts of pollution by completing the energy transition and, more concretely, the transition towards new forms of mobility such as hydrogen or cable transportation. **More broadly, coordination activities should be put in place throughout 2020** in order to ensure that the operational programmes take into account and integrate as much as possible EUSALP thematic priorities.

Thematic workshops of the 20th February morning

During these three workshops, EUSALP Action Groups present their activities as well as their priorities for action and main needs in terms of funding. Exchanges with the managing authorities focus on possible synergies and possibilities for cooperation.

Workshop 1: Possible synergies between the Alpine Strategy and the EU funding programmes in the fields of economic development and innovation

Action Group 1 "Create a true ecosystem of innovation and research" formulates three priorities for the coming years:

- **Continue to support the technology platforms** already set up to facilitate the expression of the region's innovation potential and to reduce barriers to cooperation;

- **Set up a macro regional university system** to allow for more collaboration between universities and to take advantage of the situation of the Alpine region (between cities and mountains) in order to become a laboratory for the creation of new development models;
- **Promote the implementation of an Agro-biodiversity plan** to preserve regional heritage and develop new sustainable food chains.

Action Group 2 “Increase the economic potential of strategic sectors” then presented its 4 sub-groups and the challenges they face:

- The **Tourism** sub-group must respond to the **strong dependence on natural resources** such as snow and must allow **diversification of the tourist offer**, particularly towards health and wellness tourism and sustainable four-season tourism;
- The **Wood** sub-group aims to answer questions related to the **use of resources** as such, the **protection of biodiversity** and the **labelling of wood from the Alps**;
- The **Digital Industry** sub-group aims to **develop the economic potential of new technologies in the industrial production chain** and to propose measures to **support the digital transformation of SMEs**;
- The **Bioeconomy** sub-group focuses on the **links between clusters and SMEs** in order to enhance circular economy, intelligent specialisation and provide a framework for innovation.

Action Group 3 “Bring education and training into line with the labour market in strategic sectors” presents a two-stage plan to support dual education system:

- **Develop the mutual recognition of provided trainings** while allowing for fair comparison through a more advanced "Bologna process";
- **Promote apprenticeships in companies** from the Alpine region in order to transform apprenticeships into a real access road to the professional world.

Finally, exchanges with managing authorities identify some main orientations to facilitate synergies such as the need **to have access to clear and precise information** on EUSALP actions, the possibility to **rely on funds directly managed by the European Union** for large-scale projects, the need to **connect managing authorities** among them beyond neighbouring regions or to **rely on scientific data** produced by the Joint Research Centre.

Workshop 2: Possible synergies between the Alpine Strategy and the EU funding programmes in the field of mobility and connectivity

Action Group 4 “Promote intermodality and interoperability in passenger and freight transport” formulates three main priorities for the coming years:

- **Accelerate the shift from road to rail transport**, as the Alpine region is particularly affected by road transit;
- **Better connect people living outside TEN-T networks** by taking into account secondary transport networks in the EU funding programmes and by ensuring improved access to public cross border transport;
- **Facilitate the transition towards alternative fuels** in order to combat pollution. Several EU funding programmes support actions in this direction but most of them focus on the main corridors, leaving aside secondary corridors.

Action Group 5 “Ensure electronic connection between people and facilitate access to public services” highlights the following needs:

- **Accelerate digital transition** in the Alpine region, **especially in villages**;

- **Invest more in digital infrastructures** with the aim of having 5G coverage not only on TEN-T networks but also on secondary ones;
- Promote cross-border mobility (priority shared with Action Group 4).

Exchanges with managing authorities put forward again the need for the actors of the Alpine strategy to also **turn towards funding programmes, managed directly by the European Commission**, to support actions in the field of mobility or digital like the Connecting Europe Facility.

Furthermore, it is reported that in its recommendations for the implementation of the cohesion policy for France, the European Commission does not mention mobility as a priority. It is asked that mobility projects can be supported in mountain areas.

Workshop 3: Possible synergies between the Alpine strategy and the EU funding programmes in the field of environment and energy

Action Group 6 "Conserve and enhance natural resources, including water, as well as cultural resources" identifies the following priorities for action:

- **Reduce consumption and improve soil protection** in accordance with the declaration adopted by EUSALP on the topic;
- Strengthen **Alpine food production chains** and better **value ecosystem services** provided by landscapes, forests and biodiversity in a context of climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Action Group 7 "Develop ecological connectivity throughout the Alpine region" intends to focus on the following activities:

- **Empower local actors to become part of the GI network, including the integration of the issue of green infrastructures in the EU funding programmes** for the next programming period: Leader, LIFE as well as cohesion funds;
- **Initiate innovative GI governance mechanisms, including the test and possible set up of a TEN-G governance mechanism** based on the approach applied to TEN-T networks.
- **Improve peat land preservation across the Alps**, important issue for adapting to and mitigating climate change.

Action Group 8 "Improve risk management and better manage climate change, in particular through the prevention of major risks" identifies the following priorities:

- Ensure **multifunctional and environmentally friendly management** of mountain forests, also by **strengthening the adaptation of forests to changing climate conditions** and addressing the risks of forest fires;
- **Develop tools to improve the management of natural hazards at local level**, in particular regarding transfers of good practices.
- **Digitalisation and networking information for governance support**

Action Group 9 "Make the Alpine region a model in terms of energy efficiency and renewable energies" underlines the following priorities:

- **Create an Alpine Energy Observatory capable of collecting data related to consumption and energy production** in the different regions composing EUSALP;
- Encourage the setting up of **energy communities** that involve civil society and citizens at the local level in the energy transition;
- **Improve the management of energy in small and medium-sized communities** by setting up shared consulting services and expertise.

During the exchanges, DG Environment mentions the Commission's growing interest in green infrastructures. **DG CLIMA**, that is working on a new European strategy dedicated to the adaptation to climate change, expresses its interest in the activities of the Alpine macro-region on environmental issues and **proposes the setting up of in-depth exchanges** for the purpose of the launch of a public consultation on the new strategy of the European Commission in March and the organisation of a workshop on the topic in June.

Managing authorities express the **need to know more about the different projects, which are being implemented throughout the Alpine macro-region** and their results. EUSALP Action Groups are also identified as suitable frameworks for an exchange of good practices in terms of successful projects between the different member countries and regions of the Alpine macro-region.

Conclusion of the Conference: first recommendations that have been made

The final exchanges between the participants led to the extraction of several operational recommendations to improve the coordination of EUSALP macro-regional priorities and these of the operational programmes:

- **Publish the contact details of the Alpine managing authorities and the main EUSALP actors** in order to facilitate the development of links and exchanges.
- **Use the EUSALP website, particularly its virtual platform (In the framework of the Alpgov2 project communication activity), in order to encourage interactions between macro-regional actors and the managing authorities** of the operational programmes. And in particular propose the sharing of the first versions of the operational programmes and of indications on how they integrate EUSALP orientations;
- **Organise thematic meetings** with the participation of technical experts and stakeholders, during the year of EUSALP French Presidency and later on, in order to **facilitate technical coordination** on EUSALP priority topics;
- **Set up a network of an Alpine managing authorities and intermediary bodies** in the States concerned **with the aim of looking for possible synergies**, identifying flagship projects to be supported, exchanging on calls' schedules, etc.;
- Ask EUSALP Action Groups to regularly inform managing authorities of the projects identified, as for instance the flagship ones is.

