



Embedding Macroregional Strategies in the Regulatory Framework post 2020

Position paper



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PROVINCIA AUTONOMA DI BOLZANO - ALTO ADIGE

KEY MESSAGES

- Macroeconomic Strategies (MRS) are politically established frameworks and display a clear added value in making European policy goals more visible and understandable to citizens on the ground. Thus, they can provide practical answers for the current debate on the future of the EU.
- However, due to insufficient coordination of the MRS with existing financial instruments in terms of political priorities, targeting of budgets, organization and administration, MRS are currently limited in their ability to unfold their full potential.
- A better embedding of MRS into EU policies post 2020 would contribute to improve the impact of MRS as a political framework. Inter alia, operational programmes should be encouraged to better support macro-regional projects.

INTRODUCTION

Joint territorial challenges call for accommodating European policies on an adequate level. MRS have become an integral part of the EU policy framework. They help to address a number of important policy instruments and to gather stakeholders in multi-level governance structures for joint development processes. Practically, they contribute to respond to the current political developments, making EU goals more visible, understandable for people and applicable for political actors, stakeholders and citizens.

Up to now, 4 MRS came to life since 2009, engaging 19 EU and 8 non-EU countries and 270 million citizens. All MRS have been elaborated in close cooperation with the states and regions concerned, based on official communications of the European Commission¹ and endorsed by European Council decisions. Most recently, the European Parliament highlighted the added value of MRS and called for greater synergies to promote coordination and complementarities between the ESIF and other funds and instruments relevant to the strategy pillars².

¹ COM(2015) 366

² 2015/2324(INI)

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Based on the political recognition of the importance of MRS, references to MRS were already made in the current regulatory framework, notably the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. Article 27 stipulates that ESIF programmes shall set out the contribution of the planned intervention to the MRS in accordance to the need of the programme area, as set out in Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

In contrast to the high political relevance, however, MRS still remain “light” instruments which are meant to play a key role of policy coordination. At the same time, they cannot fully develop their potential because there are not enough programmes and resources available for funding promising MRS projects. The embedding of MRS in the EU policy framework and in the equivalent framework for non-EU countries and subsequently in corresponding funding programmes is not fully explored for various reasons:

- Some of the MRS were set into force at a time when EU programme preparations have already been very advanced.
- References to MRS and contributions to implement them differ greatly in the various programmes and range from ex post earmarking to strategic coordination. Moreover, different funding instruments have their own intervention logic, timelines, thematic focuses, decision making procedures, technical support structures, etc.
- The possibilities for mobilizing support for MRS governance structures are rather limited and not sustainable.

THE FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

To make best use of the potential of MRS and to explore their full potential as a political framework, thus meeting the overall expectations to the highest possible degree, there is clear need for action for better embedding of MRS into EU policies post 2020. The overall aim is to enable stronger synergies between MRS, regional multilateral agreements and EU Programmes directly managed by the European Commission, such as Horizon 2020, Erasmus+, Creative Europe, COSME, LIFE, CEF and the EU Fund for Strategic Investments.

We call for specific synchronisation rather than new policy initiatives and a more coordinated use of available funding at all levels tailored to support the MRS. This would enable MRS to play a driving role in the future development of the EU currently being discussed at European level. MRS are practical examples of how regions that want to work together on shared challenges and common interests can jointly pursue a shared European perspective more efficiently. Thus, they are a perfect answer to the current political developments in Europe and can provide substantial input for the future debate on EU27 by 2025 recently launched by the European Commission with its White Paper on the future of Europe.

More specifically, the following improvements are suggested:

Enhanced recognition of MRS in legislative documents

- MRS should be considered in the processes of drafting future legislation and programmes.
- The political relevance of MRS objectives has to be underlined and a clearer definition in the EU regulatory framework and the equivalent instruments for non-EU countries is needed. It should be stressed that MRS are an integral part of the relevant EU, national and regional strategies and this needs to be reflected in the future policy framework. This may apply to programmes under the shared responsibility of EU and Member States, where appropriate, but also to programmes and financial instruments under EU centralized management and programmes coordinated by non-EU countries.

Improve the institutional framework for implementing MRS

- The success of MRS depends on the possibilities for promising projects to benefit from funding opportunities, including from EU programmes. This demands a strategic coherence with EU and national programmes, resulting in stronger alignment of the respective targets and intervention priorities.
- Provisions for cooperation possibilities between operational programmes should be enhanced, where appropriate.
- In line with their high political relevance, MRS require adequate positioning and coordination within the European Commission.

Better addressing of available funds to implement the goals of MRS

- Where appropriate, Operational Programmes should be encouraged to better support macro-regional objectives and projects, e.g. by means of improving the exchange of information, enhancing coordination between relevant actors, streamlining priorities and project selection and specifically addressed calls.
- Possibilities for the support of MRS governance structures should be made available in a flexible and sustainable manner.
- Thanks to their geographical coherence with MRS and their cross-border mission, INTERREG programmes, especially transnational programmes, should play a key role in funding MRS projects. Thus, they should adequately support and be aligned to the strategies.

Brussels, 6. April 2017

Freistaat Bayern, Presidency 2017 of the EU Alpine Strategy (EUSALP)

Land Baden-Württemberg, Presidency 2015 of the EU Danube Strategy (EUSDR)

Land Tirol, Presidency 2018 of the EU Alpine Strategy (EUSALP)

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