Evolution of EU macro-regional strategies: present practice and future prospects, especially in the Mediterranean

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted an own-initiative report drafted by François ALFONSI (Greens/EFA, FR) on the evolution of EU macro-regional strategies: present practice and future prospects, especially in the Mediterranean.

The main recommendations contained in the report are as follows:

On macro-regional strategies in general: the report recommends that, in view of their clear European added value, macro-regional strategies should receive **more attention in the framework of European territorial cooperation**, to be reinforced as of 2013.

Members take the view that the overview provided by a macro-regional strategy would make territorial cooperation projects and the EGTC more beneficial, and that this would enhance **synergies with the major EU strategies**, such as the trans-European transport network or the Integrated Maritime Policy. They consider that it would also be easier to involve other European policy instruments, such as those proposed by the EIB.

The committee recommends basing macro-regional strategies on **multilevel governance**, ensuring the involvement of local and regional authorities and of the greatest possible number of partners and stakeholders, such as representatives of civil society, universities and research centres, in both the elaboration and the implementation of macro-regional strategies in order to increase their ownership at local and regional level.

Members also take the view that the macro-regional strategy could steer the European Neighbourhood Policy and/or pre-accession policy towards being more effective.

On current macro-regional strategies: Members welcome the evidence that the macro-regional strategy for the **Baltic Sea** is of major benefit to Europe. They call for this strategy to be the subject of a complete evaluation based on objective criteria and measurable indicators for each of the priority areas.

The Commission and the Council are called to support fully the approach taken with the **Danube basin**, which should also be evaluated and regularly monitored.

On future macro-regional strategies: the report suggests that the Commission **coordinate a consultation and dialogue process** for future macro-regional strategies. Members consider that the result of this dialogue should be a '**projected European macro-regions map**', mainly coordinated with the Member States and the regions concerned, which would not be binding and could change depending on local dynamics.

Members consider that the macro-regional strategies need better alignment of funding, more efficient utilisation of existing resources and coordination of instruments. They call on the Commission and the Council to take into account EU macro-regional strategies when deciding on budgetary envelopes such as cohesion and structural funds, research and development, and in particular regional cooperation.

Prospects in the Mediterranean: the report supports the implementation of a **macro-regional strategy** for the Mediterranean basin, so as to offer an action plan for addressing the common and problematic challenges facing the Mediterranean countries and regions and to give structure to this key area for Europe's development and integration, and calls on the Council and the Commission to act quickly on this matter.

The Mediterranean macro-region must develop in accordance with international standards on economic, social and cultural rights, in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Members consider it important, especially after the events of the Arab Spring, that the new macroregion should contribute to the definition of a new strategy with third countries for the proper management of immigration flows.

The committee emphasises that major areas of intervention for a Mediterranean macro-region should be geared to the appropriate sub-regional levels for cooperation on specific projects and include energy networks, scientific cooperation and innovation, networks for culture, education and training, tourism, trade, environmental protection, sustainable maritime transport, maritime security and safety and the protection of the marine environment against pollution, overfishing and illegal fishing through the creation of an integrated network of reporting and surveillance systems for maritime activities, the strengthening of good governance and effective public administration, so as to foster job creation.

Members consider that a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean must **coordinate existing EU funds**, particularly neighbourhood policy, cohesion policy and territorial cooperation funds to implement projects aimed at addressing common challenges such as the protection and enhancement of the Euro-Mediterranean cultural heritage.

The Commission is called upon to:

- genuinely implement **Article174 of the TFEU** through a strategic plan, with a view to overcoming the structural handicaps of island territories and ensuring the conditions for economic growth and effective social and territorial cohesion;
- adopt measures, such as an increase in the threshold for ***de minimis*** **aid for islands**, with special reference to the agriculture, transport and fishery sectors.

The report urges the Commission to determine what instruments are required to evaluate and launch any new macro-regional initiatives in the **western and eastern Mediterranean**, such as pilot projects.

It also stresses that the **Adriatic-Ionian macro-regional strategy** is a significant factor in reconciliation between territories of the Western Balkans and may assist these countries' efforts to join the EU.

According to Members, the coordination of these three macro-regional strategies – western Mediterranean, Adriatic-Ionian, and eastern Mediterranean – will enable the implementation of an overall policy for the whole Mediterranean basin that is in synergy with the priorities set out by regional and international organisations, and in particular those defined by the Union for the Mediterranean.

The committee recommends:

- the creation of networks with higher education and research institutions in the future Mediterranean macro-region. Members stress the need to strengthen the quality of teaching and research in those networks by adequately financing and supporting the Tempus and **Erasmus Mundus programmes**, especially in view of the low number of Erasmus Mundus programme beneficiaries in the Mediterranean area;

- strengthen cooperation and trade with third countries in order to improve the standing of European production on the global market, and particularly in the Mediterranean area, and thereby **promote cultural exchange**;
- launch of new initiatives to **encourage Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and democratic progress across the entire region**, particularly in light of the commitments made during the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Cinema.

Lastly, Members call on the Member States involved to encourage the cooperative spirit that has emerged during the drafting of the present report and urges the future Cypriot Presidency of the EU to support this project so that the Commission and the Council can adopt an action plan for the Mediterranean macroregional strategy as a matter of urgency.