



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

MEMO

Brussels, 18 June 2014

Q&A on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)

Why do we need an EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region?

- The Region faces several challenges which will be tackled more successfully together than on a purely national or local level. Striking socio-economic disparities (e.g. in terms of GDP per capita and unemployment rates); a lack of research-to-business networks; shortcomings in transport links (road, rail and air) and vessel traffic congestion; inadequate interconnections of electricity grids; unsustainability of fisheries; environmental threats such as marine pollution, the preservation of a highly diverse marine environment and the adverse effects of climate change (in the form of rising sea levels, flooding, drought, soil erosion and forest fires); and insufficient institutional and administrative capacity.
- But there are also some promising opportunities that can be capitalized on, including: the Blue economy - notably sustainable seafood production and consumption, maritime, coastal and cruise tourism as well as innovative blue technologies; or the potential for improved land-sea connectivity and intermodal transportation to increase the competitiveness of hinterland economies. The Region is one of outstanding natural beauty and rich cultural, historic and archaeological heritage with potential for sustainable, responsible and diversified tourism.

Better coordination and cooperation between the countries and regions concerned is needed to address shared challenges and better exploit opportunities. On this basis, the European Council of December 2012 requested the European Commission to present a new macro-regional strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region before the end of 2014.

Which countries are involved in the Strategy?

The Region is a functional area primarily (but not exclusively) defined by the Adriatic and Ionian Sea basin. Home to more than 70 million people, the Region plays a key role in strengthening geographical continuity in Europe.

In its current shape, the Strategy builds on the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative¹, which concerns eight countries: four EU Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia) and four non-EU countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia).

¹ The intergovernmental Adriatic-Ionian Initiative was launched in 2000 with the aim of strengthening regional cooperation, promoting political and economic stability and thus creating a solid base for the European integration process.

Will it be open to other countries?

The Strategy remains open to other partners in the Region.

Why does the EU need to be involved in this? Where is the added value?

The EU is in a good position to facilitate and coordinate cooperation, especially in the Strategy's initial phase. However, leadership of the Strategy should come from the countries and regions involved themselves.

Involvement of the EU will facilitate a cross-sector approach consistent with different EU policies. It will highlight possible complementarities and synergies between policies and programmes currently carried out in the Region. It will help aligning and mobilising the wide range of funds and programmes currently available in the Region to support the achievement of the Strategy's goals.

There is already a wealth of experience in this area: the existing [Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas](#) is an integral part of this new broader macro-regional strategy. The new Strategy can build on the lessons learnt from **the other two current macro-regional strategies** ([EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region](#), [EU Strategy for the Danube Region](#)). In this context, the involvement of the EU can also lead to synergies between the EUSAIR and the other macro-regional strategies, in particular with the Danube Strategy which includes five EUSAIR countries and addresses transport, energy and the environment as key fields of action.

See also: the [Report on the added value of the macro-regional Strategies](#) (June 2013)

What are the main objectives of the Strategy?

The two general objectives of the EUSAIR are: to promote sustainable economic and social prosperity of the Region through growth and jobs creation, by improving its attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity, while preserving the environment and ensuring a healthy and balanced marine and coastal ecosystems.

And crucially, to contribute to the EU integration of the participating Western Balkan candidate and potential candidate countries, by bringing together countries with much shared history and geography.

The idea is to identify concrete joint priorities for the macro-region, making the best use of existing institutions, policies and funds and setting realistic goals for maximum impact.

What areas will it cover?

The following four themes/pillars have been identified:

1. **Blue Growth**, aiming at boosting innovative marine and maritime growth by promoting jobs and business opportunities in the Blue economy;
2. **Connecting the Region**, aiming at improving connectivity in terms of transport and energy;
3. **Environmental quality**, focusing on coastal and marine biodiversity and pollution of the sea, as well as on transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity; and

4. Sustainable Tourism, aiming at developing the full potential of the Region in terms of innovative quality tourism while boosting businesses and creating stable jobs

Capacity building –including communication-, research & innovation and SMEs development are cross-cutting aspects, whereas due account is to be taken of mitigation of and adaptation to climate change effects as well as of efficient disaster risk management (including prevention) as horizontal principles underpinning all actions carried out under the four pillars.

On what basis were the four themes selected?

The four themes were first identified in meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the participating countries with Commissioner Hahn in November 2012. From September to December 2013, a stakeholders' consultation was held across the Region on the content of the future Action Plan of the Strategy, with the aim of reflecting the real needs of the inhabitants of the area. The contributions gathered were further discussed at a [Stakeholder Conference of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region](#), jointly organised in Athens on 6-7 February 2014 by the Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission.

What exactly is the relationship between the Maritime Strategy and this new one?

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region largely builds on the Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas adopted on 30 November 2012. It shares the same geography, many challenges and main growth and jobs opportunities, and adds a new dimension of cooperation between partners on the coastal hinterland.

Maritime and marine issues are fully mainstreamed into the four pillars of the EUSAIR, notably with reference to: Research & Innovation on blue economy and maritime clusters; sustainability of fisheries; diversification and sustainability of aquaculture; maritime governance; marine knowledge, biodiversity and Marine Protected Areas; pollution of sea (eutrophication, marine litter and major oil spills); maritime traffic congestion; surveillance and short-sea and deep-sea shipping; island connectivity; maritime and coastal tourism sustainability and seasonality. Strong emphasis is also given to building capacity in candidate and potential candidate countries so as to progressively comply with EU rules and standards such as the Common Fisheries Policy, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Maritime Spatial Planning Directive.

What are the concrete benefits for the Adriatic and -Ionian Region?

The strategy builds on existing initiatives and proposes new ones designed to:

- Ensure the sustainable use of sea and coasts and the coexistence of different economic activities by making 100% of the waters under national jurisdiction subject to Maritime Spatial Planning and 100% of the coast lines subject to Integrated Coastal Management;
- Improve the sustainability of fisheries by adopting and implementing multiannual fisheries management plans at sea-basin level for all threatened stocks;
- Increase safety and security at sea by monitoring maritime traffic through a single shared system and a joint contingency plan for oil spills and other large-scale pollution event;
- Minimise eutrophication and improve the quality of the sea water by reducing marine litter, nutrient flows and other pollutants;

- Protect biodiversity by covering at least 10% of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas with Marine Protected Areas;
- Facilitate nautical and cruise tourism through mutual recognition of nautical licenses and easier visa procedures between countries.
- Increase off-season arrivals by 50% to even out and sustainably manage yearly tourist flows.

Who can benefit from the Strategy?

All macro-regional stakeholders can benefit from the Strategy, including: local, regional and national administrations, universities, clusters, SMEs, civil society organisations and associations, private partners, and international investors. And, above all, the citizens living in the Region.

How will the Strategy be paid for?

Although the Strategy does not come with extra EU financing, the EUSAIR will mobilise and bring together existing EU and national funding instruments.

In particular the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) as well as the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) for 2014-2020, provide significant financial resources and a wide range of tools and technical options.

EU Funds and programmes of relevance for the specific pillar to be covered include, inter alia:

- The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and Horizon 2020, which targets **Blue Growth** as one of its focus areas for RTD, can lend key support to the implementation of actions and projects under the theme Blue Growth.
- For **Connecting the Region** the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) 2014-2020 supports the development of high-performing, sustainable and efficiently interconnected trans-European networks in the field of transport, energy and digital services.
- For the **Environmental quality**, funds under the EU's LIFE programme, which are also open to non-EU Member States.
- **Sustainable Tourism** can benefit from the EU's COSME programme for Small and Medium Sized Business.

Other finance is also available, notably from the Western Balkans Investment Framework, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and other International Financial Institutions. These funds and instruments should create significant leverage and attract further funding from private investors.

How will the Strategy be implemented? Who does what?

Experience with existing macro-regional strategies shows that good and stable governance is crucial to get the most out of this kind of cooperation. The recent [Commission's Report on governance of Macro-Regional Strategies](#) of 20 May 2014 identifies two main needs in order to bring clearer results and greater impact: stronger political leadership and effective decision-making, and greater clarity and better organisation for day-to-day actions.

The Report clearly places the onus on participating countries themselves to take the prime responsibility for ensuring that the Strategy and its accompanying Action Plan are implemented in practice.

A pair of countries – one EU Member State and one non-EU country - coordinated the development of the Action Plan for each pillar:

1. Greece and Montenegro on "Blue Growth",
2. Italy and Serbia on "Connecting the Region"
3. Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina on "Environmental Quality",
4. Croatia and Albania on "Sustainable Tourism".

Effective and straightforward governance structures will be put in place as soon as the Strategy is endorsed by the Council.

Technical and operational tasks will be supported by the future Adriatic-Ionian transnational cooperation programme under European Territorial Cooperation goal.

What is the role of the Commission?

The Commission will act as a facilitator to the process of developing and implementing a coherent Strategy for the Region. This entails offering strategic support by identifying shortcomings that need to be addressed at political level, as well as suggesting resolution of implementation stalemates. It should ensure coherence, notably through mainstreaming of the macro-regional approach into EU policies and funds. The Commission will also liaise as appropriate with existing institutions (e.g. the EIB) that can deliver an important contribution to the implementation of the Action Plan.

What are the next steps?

The Communication and the accompanying Action Plan are transmitted to the European Parliament, the Council, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. After endorsement by the European Council, expected during the second half of 2014, the implementation of the Strategy can start. However, the mainstreaming of the Strategy into the Operational Programmes for the European Structural and Investment Funds and for the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for 2014-2020 is already taking place.

[Communication and Action Plan on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region](#)