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CPMR POLICY POSITION

OPINION FROM THE CPMR POLITICAL BUREAU

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MACRO-REGIONAL AND SEA BASIN STRATEGIES - PREPARING THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION -

INTRODUCTION

In June 2012 CPMR set up a Macro-Regions Task Force within its General Secretariat, linked with its six Geographical Commissions¹. Ever since it was first set up, CPMR has been conceived as a structure bringing together the different population catchment areas surrounding the various European maritime basins and which are potential macro-regions. CPMR therefore supports the development of macro-regional strategies, provided that they respond to the demands of the territories concerned.

This policy position summarises the key messages formulated by all the Regions involved in the Task Force. Its aim is to provide a real contribution from the Regions towards the preparation of the European Commission's Communication, due to be published in June 2013, which is expected to clarify the role of the macro-regions, assess the added value of the concept, and set out recommendations for the future.

I. A FLEXIBLE DEFINITION TO BENEFIT THE TERRITORIES

First, CPMR wishes to draw the European Commission's attention to the need to simplify and clarify the definition of these European strategies so as to avoid creating further confusion.

1. For CPMR, macro-regional strategies (MRS) and sea basin strategies (SBS) both adhere to the same philosophy, pursue the same objectives, fall within the same European policy framework, and have the same spectrum of actions within the territories concerned. Both types of strategy enable multi-sector and multi-level collaboration across national borders; they must therefore be flexible and allow for intervention that is of benefit to the territories concerned. The aim of such strategies is to develop core projects with a high community added value and which will improve European territorial cohesion and create sustainable growth in the territories.

II. A RENEWED GOVERNANCE FOR A RENEWED TERRITORIAL PACT

CPMR wishes to underline the leading role of the regional authorities that are in direct contact with the realities of the territories. Combined intervention by local and regional authorities, Member States and the European Union can only be effective if it is **based on a renewed territorial pact**, which combines and reconciles bottom-up and top-down initiatives.

2. Macro-regional and sea basin strategies are innovative in that they promote a new form of governance between different policy-making and decision-making levels. Article 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)² recognises that representative bodies and non-governmental organisations have a role in preparing Partnership Contracts. **CPMR proposes that the European Commission, on the basis of this article, ensures that relevant organisations such as the CPMR**

¹ Baltic Sea Commission, North Sea Commission, Atlantic Arc Commission, Intermediterranean Commission, Balkans & Black Sea Commission, Islands Commission. www.crpm.org

² Article 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation [COM(2012) 496] following agreement on 19 December 2012.

Geographical Commissions are involved in the preparation and implementation of macro-regional strategies and sea basin strategies.

3. Over and above the improvement of this partnership between representative bodies, non-governmental organisations, the regional authorities and the European authorities, **it is vitally important that the Regions should be at the centre of the preparation process, and subsequently of the decision-making process and the implementation of these European strategies.** Where certain Member States are reticent about making a firm commitment to implementing these strategies, the Regions concerned must become involved and spearhead the implementation of major core projects at macro-regional level. In addition, Regions that monitor and take part in transnational projects are particularly well placed to identify which projects can most effectively be capitalised on.
4. Macro-regional and sea basin strategies must remain European strategies and must not become “re-nationalised” once their Action Plan has been adopted. It is of capital importance that the Member States take on board the challenges surrounding the European strategies so that national investment can be aligned with the macro-regional Action Plans. In the same way, at regional level, the regional Operational Programmes should be drawn up in line with the Action Plan. **However, to maintain consistency in European intervention, CPMR wants the European Commission to play a central role in coordinating the actions of the different stakeholders involved in the preparation and in the implementation of MRS and SBS.**
5. The European Commission also has a crucial role to play in **monitoring the implementation of the strategies** (checking Partnership Contracts and Operational Programmes, mid-term review, modification of the Action Plan, etc.). **In this regard, CPMR advocates adjusting the European Commission’s intervention in line with the maturity of the strategies.** The Commission may for example play a driving role at the start, when the strategies are first launched, but it may thereafter concentrate on supporting and coordinating the initiatives, once the regional stakeholders have actually started to implement projects.
6. Whilst we advocate good governance between the different policy-making and decision-making levels, it is no less important to emphasise the **need for good governance systems to be set up within the European Commission itself.** It is the Commission’s role to coordinate the actions of local, regional and national stakeholders as well as those of the private sector. However, the actions of the different Directorate Generals also need to be coordinated internally, so that the guidelines agreed in the Action Plans find an echo in the different sectoral funds and programmes managed by the Commission itself (Horizon 2020, Integrated Maritime Policy, Life +, Connecting Europe Facility, COSME, European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, etc.). **CPMR therefore advocates the setting-up of a “Macro-Regions Task Force” comprising representatives from the relevant DGs of the European Commission.**

III. SIMPLIFIED IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS TO ENCOURAGE ACTION

To achieve a practical result – projects that actually create jobs and sustainable growth in the population catchment areas concerned – the macro-regional strategies will need simple and efficient tools.

7. The Common Strategic Framework (CSF) represents a real opportunity for the macro-regional projects. The CSF establishes a direct link with these European strategies by indicating that any of the Structural Funds can provide support for macro-regional priorities³. The new programming tools proposed in the General Regulation (CPR)⁴ must be clarified and made operational so that they can contribute to the implementation of the MRS and SBS. In this regard, **CPMR asks the European Commission to draw up specific guidelines on how the CSF funds can be used to implement projects in the framework of the macro-regional and the sea basin strategies.**
8. Over and above the CSF funds, it is vitally important to explore the possibility of combining CSF funding with funding from the EU’s sectoral programmes (such as Horizon 2020 for research), as well as national and/or regional funding, in order to improve the synergy between the various funds. Public-private partnerships are also forms of investment that can facilitate the rapid and

³ Articles 11 and 14 and Annex I of the Commission’s proposal for common provisions for the Structural Funds: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2014/proposals/regulation/general/general_proposal_en.pdf

⁴ Integrated Territorial Investment, Joint Action Plans, Community-led local development, etc...

efficient implementation of macro-regional projects and should therefore be explored and encouraged. CPMR therefore asks the European Commission to clarify the way in which funding from these different sources can be used in combination, and calls for a simplification of the procedures concerning the mobilisation of funds that operate with different management methods.

9. In the framework of improving synergies between EU policies and funding in the macro-regional areas, the smart specialisation platform⁵ launched by DG Regio could be of use to the managing authorities in their task of defining regional investment priorities. **CPMR therefore asks that this platform be mobilised to establish synergies between the investment priorities defined at regional level and those defined at macro-regional level.**
10. Macro-regional and sea basin strategies are innovative forms of cooperation between territories which may or may not be members of the EU. They can help create growth and jobs, and enhance territorial cohesion. Innovative tools should be designed and developed to respond to this policy aim. The macro-regional strategies must not remain simply a paper exercise once their Action Plans have been adopted. **To avoid this, CPMR encourages the launch of calls for projects under the European Commission's sectoral programmes aimed specifically at the areas covered by the MRS and SBS. CPMR also calls on the European Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) to develop innovative and not overly complex financial instruments to facilitate investment in the priorities defined by the MRS and SBS.**

IV. A STRONG EU BUDGET FOR INVESTMENT IN THE HEART OF THE TERRITORIES

In a context in which the peripheral Regions of Europe have been particularly badly hit by the economic and financial crisis, the European macro-regional strategies provide a structured framework for targeted investment addressing common challenges identified by the regional, national and EU authorities. Their main sources of funding are the budget for European territorial cooperation and the Cohesion Policy budget.

11. CPMR regrets the drastic reduction in the budget line for European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) as a result of the cuts in the Cohesion Policy made by the Council during the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework. Whereas the Commission had proposed a budget of 11.8 billion Euros in its revised proposal in July 2012, this envelope was reduced to 8.9 billion Euros in the Council conclusions of 7/8 February 2013, a reduction of almost 25%. CPMR cannot but be alarmed by these budget cuts. **In this regard, CPMR is in contact with the European Parliament to ensure its support for a higher budget for European Territorial Cooperation during the trilogue which will aim to reach agreement on the MFF.**
12. CPMR takes note of the widely accepted "Three No's" Rule (no new financial resources, no new legislation, and no new formal structures) for the implementation of the macro-regional strategies. **CPMR supports the aim of improving synergies between EU policies by using existing funding and focusing it on the priorities defined in the Action Plans of these strategies.** However, the experience of the strategies currently in place shows that it is necessary to allocate a specific budget to kick-start the initiative, in order to identify the major core projects that could be developed in the territories. Up until now, the European Parliament has allocated amounts from its own budget under the heading of "Preparatory Actions" (1.2 million Euros for the Atlantic for example for 2012 and 2013). CPMR would like to see a more systematic use of start-up aid for MRS and SBS and particularly with support from transnational cooperation programmes. **CPMR therefore asks that the European Commission allocate a part of the technical assistance budget of the Structural Funds⁶ to go towards the implementation of the emerging MRS and SBS.** In addition, the CPMR asks the European Commission to consider the neighbourhood dimension of these strategies and to evaluate the support which could be given through the sea basin cross-border cooperation programmes in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Instrument.
13. Following this start-up phase, the strategies will enter the operational phase, which should see the launch of the core projects. Still in line with the "Three No's" rule currently in force, no specific budget will be allocated to fund these major projects. In this context, and in order to facilitate the

⁵ See <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

⁶ For example in the case of the Baltic, a budget of 2.500,000 Euros was adopted by the European Parliament for 2012 under the budget heading 13.03.31 "Technical assistance and dissemination of information on the European Union strategy for the Baltic Sea Region": <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:057:0001:0166:EN:PDF>

implementation of these projects, **CPMR calls on the European Commission to exercise greater flexibility in the use of EU funds.** In this regard, CPMR supports the joint proposal from the European Parliament and the Council aiming to allow the so-called “more developed regions” to use the ERDF to finance “basic infrastructure” in the framework of a major cross-border or interregional project carried out in partnership with one or more other Region(s) from a different category (“transition regions” or “less developed regions”).

14. To address the problem of the increasing scarcity of public funding at all levels, **CPMR advocates more pre-financing for macro-regional structural projects.** This is in contrast to the Council’s current position, which aims to reduce pre-financing rates for the next programming period. CPMR would like to see this rate increased in the case of major investment projects that respond to the EU priorities of the MRS and SBS, in order to facilitate the start-up of macro-regional projects of this kind, which have a very high European added value.
15. CPMR calls on the European Commission to draw the attention of the managing authorities to the existence of **Article 60** (implementation of operations outside the programme area) **and Article 87** (arrangements for interregional and transnational actions with beneficiaries located in at least one other Member State) of the Common Provisions Regulation⁷ and to explain exactly how these articles can be used to help fund macro-regional projects. **These are useful and interesting new provisions which should be carefully clarified so that the regions can make the best use of them.**

CONCLUSION

Through this policy position, CPMR puts forward clear proposals aiming to facilitate the implementation of the macro-regional and sea basin strategies in the territories.

CPMR wishes to encourage an open-minded approach to the concept of the “macro-region”. This new concept should not be restricted to its definition; those responsible for its implementation should be encouraged to innovate so as to improve the coordination between policies, funding, the territories, and public or private stakeholders and operators, wherever the macro-regional level is the most appropriate level for intervention. The concept should facilitate the setting-up of major core projects that address common challenges faced by different European territories and which extend beyond their national borders. In this sense, the macro-regions truly promote European integration and are an important asset in terms of the preparation of the future EU policies.

⁷ See the Proposal for a Regulation:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2014/proposals/regulation/general/general_proposal_en.pdf