

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

for the Stakeholder Consultation on the CoR Opinion *"Towards a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean"*

Rapporteur: Nikola Dobroslavić (HR/EPP)

(1 June 2022)

BACKGROUND

The Mediterranean region, home to more than 500 million inhabitants, has always been a strategic area for the EU. It is particularly vulnerable to global warming and environmental challenges, as well as socio-economic challenges, which cannot be addressed by one country alone. The Mediterranean region has also great potential that could be further exploited for the benefits of all its members (e.g tourism, renewable energies).

Macro-regional strategies (MRS) bring together regions from Member States and third countries confronted with a common set of challenges and ensure a coordinated approach to address those challenges. They have achieved meaningful results, in particular as regards environmental protection¹.

The CoR opinion will explore and make concrete recommendations on how a macro-regional strategy could allow Mediterranean countries and regions to cooperate more efficiently, promoting the synergy of European programmes. Operational tools are needed to build concrete action plans and implement joint projects, based on the priorities identified through existing cooperation platforms, such as the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) or the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). The idea of a macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean is not new and has been discussed in the past among EU institutions and stakeholders², but the urgency of the challenges and a favourable political context support giving a new impetus to this initiative. Last year, the ARLEM also called for a Green Deal for the Mediterranean. Issues to be considered as regards the creation of a macro-region in the Mediterranean include the coordination with already existing cooperation framework, its scope, its governance and the key thematic priorities to be addressed.

KEY MESSAGES:

The CoR opinion could communicate the following key messages:

1. Macro-regions have a key role to play in promoting and enhancing economic, social, and territorial cohesion both in the European Union and in neighbouring countries. They offer a framework for more coherent cross-border cooperation across different tiers of government (national, regional, and local).

¹ See the conclusions of the European Commission in its 2020 EC report on the implementation of Macro-regional strategies

² See the Resolutions and reports from the European Parliament, the 2014 report of the ARLEM on a cohesion policy for the Mediterranean, EESC Opinions ECO/342 and ECO/332 as well as the works of the CPMR/CIM

2. A Mediterranean macro-region can be used to jointly tackle issues affecting both member states and non-member states and enable reform processes in candidate countries.

The Role of the Mediterranean and key Challenges faced by the Region

3. The Mediterranean area is a unique cultural, economic, and biological area, home to half a billion people, of which a third lives in coastal areas. One fifth of the global marine production occurs in this area. The Mediterranean is especially affected by global warming, especially regarding water supply and food security.
4. Despite a common cultural heritage, the Mediterranean is an area of great social and economic differences. Yet, it is beset by common economic, climate, and security challenges which necessitate a framework for common action. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need for coordinated cross-border action to tackle global risks.
5. A macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean would build upon existing initiatives on local and regional level but further weave them together into a coherent framework. This new framework would, in line with the Commission's European Green Deal work towards a Mediterranean Green Deal.

An Integrated Approach

6. The macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean will not replace existing strategies such as the Adriatic-Ionian macro-regional strategy and the WestMED initiative but create opportunities for a more streamlined and coordinated approach, as already identified by the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).
7. A Mediterranean macro-regional strategy will have to cover all three major subareas of the Mediterranean (Western, Eastern, and Adriatic-Ionian) and all three shores (north, east, and south).
8. This new regional integration will need to be a gradual and voluntary one, considering specific political and diplomatic challenges in parts of the region.

Key principles of a macro-regional strategy

9. A future Mediterranean macro-regional strategy should reflect the principle of multi-level governance.
10. The governance framework should include a general assembly, an executive board, and thematic action groups.
11. The governance should be guided by an annual rotating presidency, alternating between countries from the north and south shores of the Mediterranean.
12. The presidency should follow an annual work programme, while a technical secretariat should assist the presidency.

Key Challenges and priorities of a macro-regional strategy

13. A Mediterranean macro-regional strategy should start out with a couple of key shared points of concern.

14. The focus should be on climate change effects, especially pertaining to the issues of islands and coastal areas, marine pollution and biodiversity, circular economy, prevention of natural hazards, and greenhouse emissions.
15. The European Commission should jumpstart the macro-regional strategy through pilot action on zero pollution in the Mediterranean in 2022.
16. Following up on the pilot action, further steps should be taken, in line with the New Agenda for the Mediterranean, promoting a) balanced economic development built around ecosystems, b) human development regarding culture, education, health, employment, education and social inclusion, and c) digital infrastructure and transport interconnectivity.

Action Plan

17. A macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean must be based on an operational action plan.
18. Project can be funded through the European Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI, € 7 billion), as well as the European Territorial Cooperation programmes such as Next-MED, EUROMED, ADRION, and MARITTIMO.
19. Further funding can be achieved through Commission programmes such as Horizon Europe, LIFE or Erasmus+, which are open to non-member states. In addition, the Partnership for Research Innovation in the Mediterranean (PRIMA) and the bilateral instruments set up by the European Union in the neighbourhood can be used.
20. Project could be also funded through international donors such as the World Bank and the European Investment or the Anna Lindh Foundation.
21. A further contribution can be achieved through decentralised cooperation programmes on national, regional, and local levels.
22. The macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean can gain momentum through governance mechanisms for coordination of European territorial cooperation programmes (2021-2027).