

**The geopolitical game of the European Union
strategy for macro-regions:
Where does the Mediterranean stand?**

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INTRODUCTION

The setting up of the European Union (EU) strategy for the Baltic macro-region has opened a new debate on the opportunity to replicate it in other contexts. The European Commission is supporting the creation of a similar strategy in the Danube area. Italy, together with Slovenia and Greece, has launched a proposal to establish a new macro-region in the Adriatic-Ionian basin involving Western Balkan countries which are candidates and potential candidates for accession in the EU. Other regions and local authorities (LAs) are proposing the elaboration of strategies for macro-regions in the North Sea and Atlantic. The Mediterranean basin represents another space where diverse stakeholders feel the necessity to improve the trans-national governance for achieving more impact on development. A strategy for the Mediterranean macro-region, or several strategies covering different areas in the Mediterranean basin (from the Adriatic-Ionian to Western Mediterranean), are scrutinised.

The paper aims at contributing to the debate, trying to put forward some initial answers to the questions raised in a previous study¹. First it analyses the implications of the supposed added value of the macro-regional strategy in terms of integrated approach which implicates a governance challenge. Secondly it examines the balance to strike between efficacy and legitimacy needs of a macro-regional strategy, deepening the question about its connection with territorial cooperation programmes and the possible overlapping between flagship and strategic projects. Thirdly, the geopolitical dynamics that are framing constraints and opportunities to create a strategy for a Mediterranean macro-region are discussed, analysing the launching of the proposal for a strategy in the Adriatic-Ionian basin. The external and internal dimensions (the community challenge²) of the macro-region are investigated considering the positioning of the diverse Mediterranean countries. Finally, the analysis allows us to put forward some policy recommendations on the limited feasibility of a strategy for a Mediterranean macro-region, and it indicates other possible actions for improving the role and the impact of territorial cooperation in the area.

1. THE ADDED VALUE AND CHALLENGE OF TRANS-NATIONAL AND MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

The macro-regional strategy added value is the integrated approach, namely the multi-level and trans-national governance for an effective coordination of EU, national and regional instruments and financing of flagship projects. The innovation concerns the building of a new governance for achieving more efficacy in facing common challenges and opportunities. The macro-region represents a new governance level “*located between the nation state and the supranational community*”³. It involves the whole of local, regional, national and Community levels as well as

¹ See Stocchiero Andrea, *Macro-regions of Europe: old wine in a new bottle?*, CeSPI and Medgovernance project, CeSPI working paper 65, April 2010 (pag. 9 and 10).

² “The basic logic of the strategy is to single out a limited part of the EU and treat it in special ways against the background of acute needs for protection and development. Such an effort however requires the solidarity of all EU members, not only those that are littoral states of the Baltic Sea. ... It may simultaneously be a challenge to cohesion and solidarity, and a built-in risk for fragmentation if different regional projects get launched and are agreed to by EU partners on a *quid pro quo* basis. ... there is a challenge in convincing the entire EU that the Baltic is a special case to be dealt with in a new way. Expressed in other words, the commitment of the entire EU needs to be secured”. Rikard Bengtsson, *An EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: Good Intentions Meet Complex Challenger*, Sieps - Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, European Policy Analysis, Septemer, Issue 9-2009 (pag. 7).

³ Schymik Carsten and Krumrey Peer, *EU Strategy for the Baltics Sea Region. Core Europe in the Northern Periphery?*, Working Paper FG1, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, 200 Schymik Carsten e Krumrey Peer, *EU Strategy for the Baltics Sea Region. Core Europe in the Northern Periphery?*, Working Paper FG1, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, 2009.

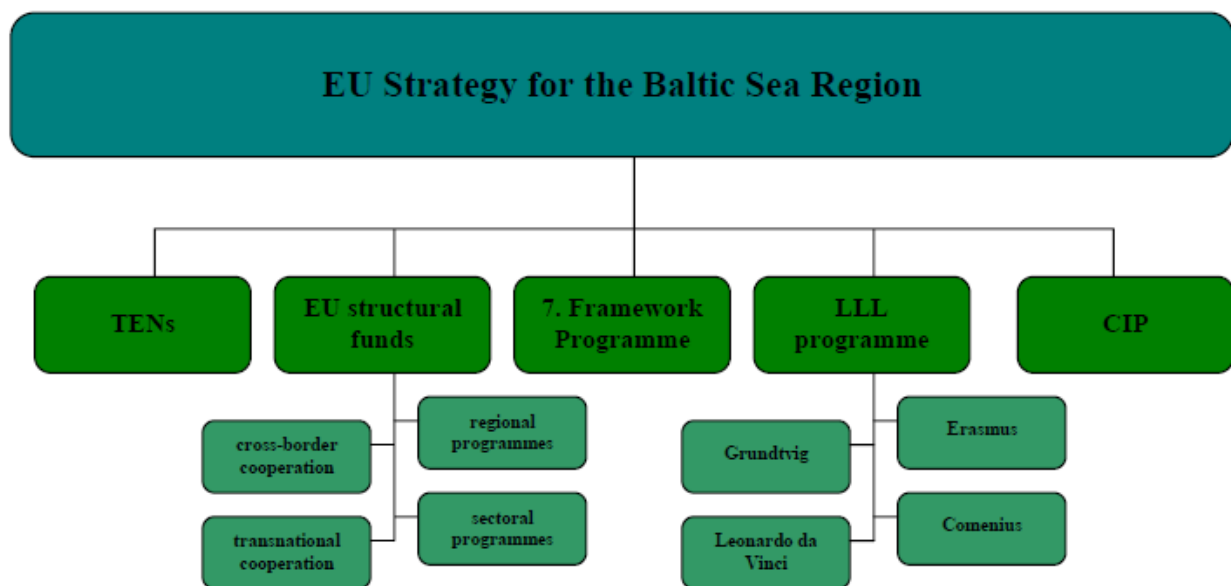
civil society and private stakeholders in a trans-national and interlinked geographic scale. It is a new multi-level and multi-actor approach on trans-national territorial development:

- To manage interdependencies in vast areas defining an EU common strategy with an action plan
- To increase cooperation and coordination focussing on the identification, financing and implementation of flagship projects, according to the partnership principle (i.e. each level of government should participate in the financing).

In reality the added value represents both a governance and an efficiency challenge (Bengtsson, 2009: 6 and 7). It has yet to come. The Baltic strategy is in course of implementation. The process is in its early stages, and so far no results have been analysed. It is a test case.

It is essential to underline that creating a common public policy in a vast area means the setting up of a trans-national governance where each level of government (central, regional and local) participates and is willing to share power and to pool resources. The real added value of the macro-region consists in the convergence of diverse political wills and resources in the implementation of flagship projects in a common space (figure 1 presents the pooling of different programmes and funding in the Baltic area).

Figure 1: the pooling of different programmes and funding in the Baltic area



Source: Jacek Ryba, The EU Strategy for the Baltic sea region. History revisited or new opening?, UKIE analytical paper series n.19: 13.

The core of a trans-national approach should be the implementation of shared actions capable of protecting and improving common goods (environment, social cohesion, global competitiveness of the macro-region), as well as to maximise positive and minimise negative externalities of national and local policies in the vast area. In principle, in a trans-national approach a government should be ready to change and harmonize its domestic policies with those of the partners in order to achieve common objectives, as well as it should be willing to co-finance projects implemented in territories belonging to other nations but with important impacts on its own country. The solidarity and common benefits principles are applied in macro-regions of the EU (but also with accession and neighbour countries as we'll see later). The basic issue is on the political willingness of the governments to share pieces of their sovereignty.

An intertwined issue is multi-level governance. Considering the different decentralisation and de-concentration processes, and the concurrent competences in the EU Member States between the different levels of government, the added value should be a real multi-level collaboration between the central, regional and local authorities. However, the major role in the macro-regional strategy is performed by central governments in so far as they are the main actors in the European Council, in Community multi-level governance, in the national decentralisation and de-concentration processes, and in foreign policy. The “*coordination, monitoring, reporting and facilitation*” functions as well as “*the identification of co-ordinating bodies at the level of priority areas and lead partners for flagship projects*” are managed by the European Commission (EC) but “*in partnerships with the stakeholders*”⁴. And central governments exert the main decision-making role in the partnership. “*Coordination of each priority area should normally be allocated to a Member State which would work on its implementation, in close contact with the Commission, with all stakeholders involved, especially other Member States, but also Regional and Local Authorities, Inter-Governmental and Non-Governmental Bodies.*”⁵

Central governments are the nodes of the macro-regional governance system. They have a general oversight power through the High Level Group⁶ created for reporting to the European Council about the progress of the Strategy for the Baltic sea macro-region. They are to be coordinated by the EC in the trans-national relationships between the states, but EC coordination is only a soft power as “external facilitator” and “impartial honest broker”⁷, and is not mandatory. Furthermore, central governments are not passive players in lobbying for identification of priorities, and if they have to co-finance flagship projects from their own resources, they have a decisive say in the decision making process. Central governments play the major role in national decentralisation and de-concentration processes, they supervise and coordinate regional and territorial policies, and above all they have many more capacities than LAs and Regions in external and diplomatic affairs, which are essential functions in framing trans-national policies. In the end, the relative political weight power is more in the hands of central governments than in those of the EC, LAs and other stakeholders. Primarily, the macro-regional strategy lays in the political wills of the central governments.

But that does not mean a re-nationalisation of EU policies because the macro-regional strategy is a trans-national political construction. The building of a macro-region is not an easy process. It may take a long time to come true. It requires a strong trans-national and multi-level collaboration with the Commission as a “neutral” and “*primus inter pares*” partner. A coalition of intents of the Member States participating in the macro-region must be forged. They must plan and implement internal and external activities to create the conditions for the setting up of the macro-region: internal activities to create a national system made up of different ministries in charge of sector policies, of Regions and LAs, and of social and economic stakeholders interested and committed in the implementation of the macro-regional strategy; and external activities to negotiate with the companion national systems the identification of priorities and flagship projects. External activities also concern relationships with Member States that are not part of the macro-region but who should be positively involved in the strategy (i.e. corridor development between EU macro-regions).

⁴ Commission of the European Communities (a), Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, COM(2009) 248 final, Brussels, 10.6.2009: 10 and 11

⁵ Commission of the European Communities (b), *The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Action Plan*, Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions {COM(2009) 248} {SEC(2009) 702} {SEC(2009) 703}, May 2010: 3.

⁶ Council of the European Union, Brussels, Council Conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, 27 October 2009.

⁷ European Commission (c), Macro-regional strategies in the European Union, [http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/pdf/macoregional_strategies_2009.pdf: 4 and 6].

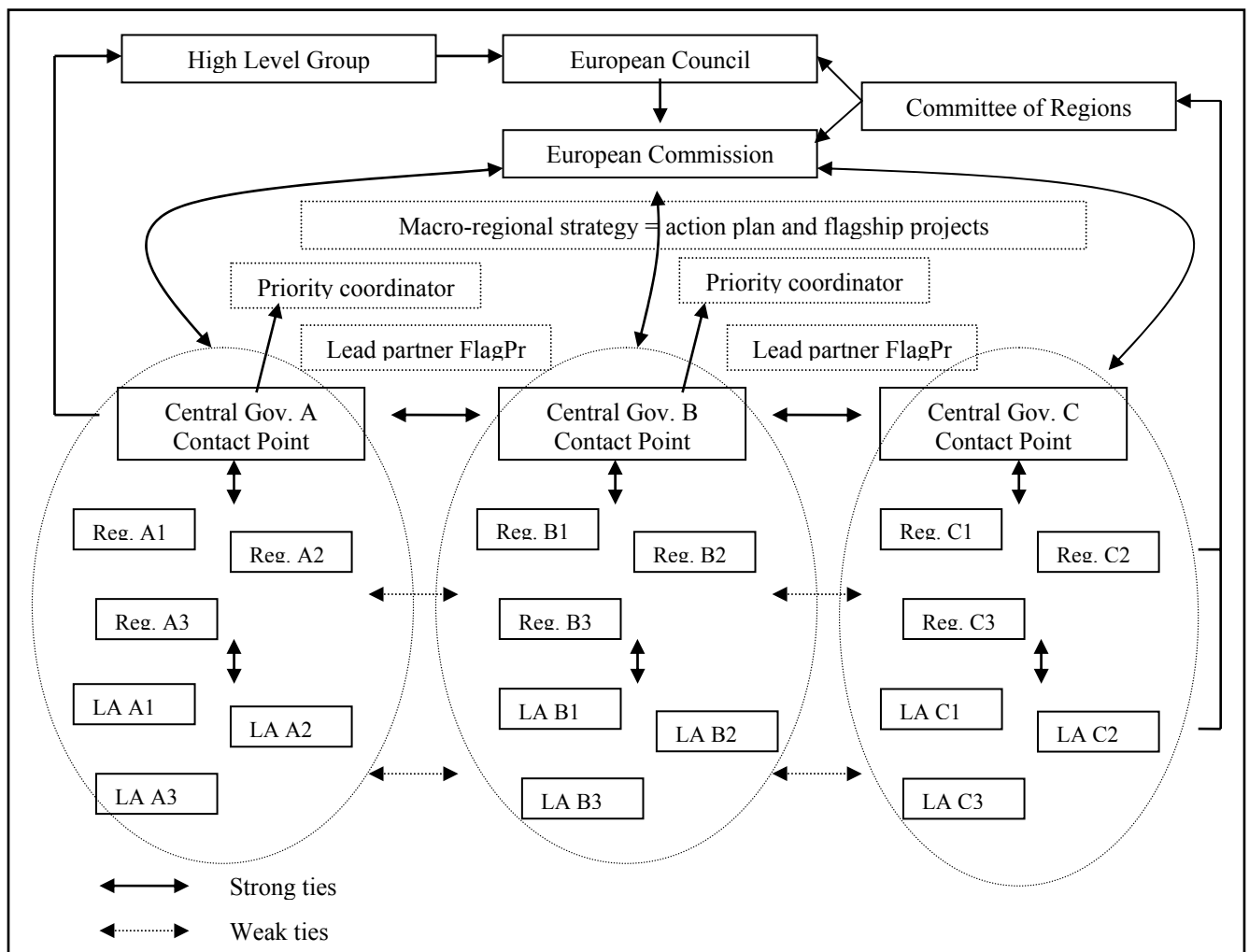
Regions and local authorities can participate in putting forward proposals for the elaboration of the strategy and on flagship projects. They have many years of experience in territorial cooperation and the capitalisation of the main initiatives may be very useful in identifying problems and opportunities for the drawing up of flagship projects. Furthermore, Regions have relevant competences delegated by the central governments (especially in countries such as Italy and Spain) which motivates the necessity to involve these actors in the strategy from the beginning. But it should be recognised that generally they have fewer capacities than central governments to promote trans-national coordination, identify and implement flagship projects. They do not have strong networks (at least in the Mediterranean area). Regions and local authorities are not consolidated partners. They have different political positions and perceptions. A figure showing strong and weak ties among the diverse actors of the macro-regional strategy may be sketched (see Figure 1). Strong ties link vertically central governments downwards with Regions and LAs and upwards with the EC, the High Level Group and the European Council. Strong ties also link horizontally central governments of diverse countries (A, B and C), while the horizontal links among Regions and LAs are weak. Regions and LAs are represented in the Committee of Regions that keep official relationship with EC and the European Council.

On the other hand, in principle, Regions and LAs are fundamentals in the bottom-up political construction of the macro-regional strategy. They should have a basic democratic function to play as well as the commitment to enhance territorial competences and social and economic participation in the elaboration and implementation of flagship projects. Furthermore, their role is more and more necessary for preventing and handling problems and conflicts that can come up in designing and implementing “hard” projects, which can generate Not in my back yard (Nimby) syndromes⁸. The problem is that these functions should not be taken for granted. Democratic governance mechanisms are lacking also at the local level.

However, if the real added value of the macro-region strategy is in multi-level and trans-national coordination, the role of central governments should not be to the disadvantage of the regional and local authorities. The approach should be really collaborative in a positive sum game, where **both** central state governments and local authorities gain power to positively affect trans-national commonalities. The strategy on the macro-region should not be conceived as a new way to re-nationalise the politics but to trans-nationalise it.

⁸ It refers to the social phenomenon of local population contesting the implementation of top-down policies in their territories, for example of projects that may cause environmental problems and reduce the local perceived well-being, even if some compensation measures are foreseen. Various social and environmental movements protest against what they consider highly invasive transportation infrastructures (see for example the case of the high-speed railway in Val di Susa), the establishment of nuclear plants or of highly pollutant industries and toxic-waste dumps.

Figure 1: the EU macro-regional governance



2. IS THE MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGY A TASK SPECIFIC OR A GENERAL-PURPOSE APPROACH? BETWEEN EFFICACY AND LEGITIMACY

The macro-regional strategy sets out to integrate different policies, programmes and funds. However, the cohesion policy represents the main framework of application because the objective is to sustain territorial cohesion in vast areas. The strategy is strictly correlated to territorial cooperation. Territorial cooperation has three different geopolitical areas of intervention: cross border cooperation (CBC), trans-national cooperation and inter-regional cooperation. The macro-regional strategy concerns vast areas that correspond to trans-national cooperation.

Both operate at trans-national level. But differences exist in terms of governance. The strategy for the macro-region merges the Community level with central, regional and local authority levels, while territorial cooperation is more focussed on regional and local authority levels. The strategy should mobilise resources from different instruments and funds, while territorial cooperation has its own operative programmes and resources. The strategy should integrate the flagship projects in Community, central and regional policies, overcoming the weakness of the territorial cooperation that is the scarce integration and mainstreaming of its fragmented projects in national and regional policies.

In this sense, the macro-regional strategy emerged from dissatisfaction with the inter-governmental, trans-national and cross border cooperation in the Baltic area. Even though the territorial

cooperation was elected as the third objective of the cohesion policy, the practitioners point out some weakness such as: “ ... *the small size of the areas concerned (NUTS3), which are too small for large-scale projects (...) the trans-national programmes are also handicapped by a system of governance that is often ill-adapted to strategic decision-making and by a low degree of involvement of member States in the delivery of projects. As results the number of “structuring” projects is considerably reduced. (...) each programme is also hampered by the excessive red tape involved.*”⁹, and cooperation actions are not integrated in Regional Operational Programmes. Territorial cooperation shows a high fragmentation of projects and the inability to evaluate the impact.

However, the discontent is more general. A territorial cooperation fatigue is palpable in the framework of a more general dissatisfaction with the cohesion policy. The Barca Report says that “*the state of the empirical evidence on the performance of cohesion policy is very unsatisfactory (...) the most evident weaknesses ... are: a deficit in strategic planning ...; a lack of focus on priorities and a failure to distinguish between the pursuit of efficiency and social inclusion objectives; a failure of the contractual agreement to focus on results ... a remarkable lack of political and policy debate on results in terms of well-being of people, at both local and EU level, most of the attention being focussed on financial absorption and irregularities*”¹⁰.

Cooperation fatigue couples with enlargement fatigue. In fact, another motivation for the launching of the macro-regional strategy is the European widening and stressful stretching to 27 Member States. The enlargement has increased deepening needs and particularly demands to spur more social and territorial cohesion. The political objective is to create a more united Europe, increasing social and economic convergence. With Europe enlarged to 27 Member States, the geographical, social and economical dimensions are wider and scattered; a risk of relative fragmentation versus concentration exists; tighter relationships are needed. A claim for a greater commitment towards EU deepening before the materialisation of new enlargement perspectives is demanded.

Cooperation fatigue also pertains to the external assistance level. The Donor Community has launched the Paris principles on aid effectiveness to improve the international cooperation policies for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals¹¹, and the EU is trying to contribute by passing “*From rhetoric to action, hastening the pace of reforms*” of aid policies¹². In this framework, also the Euro-Mediterranean policy is going through a critical period that is lasting for a long time, and “... *the margin of manoeuvre has been narrowed by the cooperation fatigue which has emerged in the last two years, in particular as conflicts and political interference have prevented the Union for the Mediterranean to advance and the cross border cooperation programme to be implemented as planned*”¹³. That discontent on cooperation policies, and more generally on public policies, is amplified in times of financial and economic crisis.

Thus, the macro-regional strategy represents a tentative answer to promote social cohesion with more efficacy than traditional territorial cooperation in EU trans-national spaces. Diverse

⁹ CPMR “What opportunities do territorial cooperation and the macro-regional strategies represent for cohesion policy after 2013?”, Technical Paper from the CPMR General Secretariat, April 2010 (pag. 2 and 3)

¹⁰ Barca Fabrizio, *An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy. A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations*, Independent Report prepared at the request of Danuta Huber, Commissioner for Regional Policy. April 2009. (pag. xv and xvi).

¹¹ OECD, *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action*, 2005/2008.

¹² Commission of the European Communities, *The EU - a global partner for development. Speeding up progress towards the Millennium Development Goals An EU Aid Effectiveness Roadmap to Accra and beyond From rhetoric to action, hastening the pace of reforms*, Commission Staff Working Paper accompanying the Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions {COM(2008) 177} {SEC(2008) 431} {SEC(2008) 432} {SEC(2008) 433} {SEC(2008) 434}, Brussels 2008.

¹³ Martin Ivan, *The Europe 2020 Strategy and the Mediterranean: Challenges and Prospects for Territorial Cooperation*, working document Medgovernance project, Seville 14-15 June 2010: 18.

stakeholders are pushing to achieve concrete results through the implementation of flagship projects with strong impacts. The macro-regional strategy should not be a simple sum of fragmented projects such as happened so far with territorial cooperation. It should be founded on the concept of functionality that allows the identification of specific needs, priorities of action and flagship projects. The approach should be task-specific rather than general-purpose¹⁴.

But the task is difficult because there is no common standard for identifying flagship projects. The same problem is observed in the different experiences of territorial cooperation programmes which are striving to define what is a strategic project. In the web site on the EU strategy for the Baltic sea macro-region¹⁵ some examples of projects are presented, but they do not seem very different from projects financed by trans-national cooperation programmes in other geographic areas. More efforts should be dedicated to unveil what flagship projects are.

The debate on what are flagship and/or strategic projects overlaps and involves territorial cooperation, and it opens another question about the link that should be forged between the macro-regional strategy and territorial cooperation. In fact, both the strategy for the macro-region and the territorial cooperation operative programmes share a common commitment to identifying and implementing bigger projects with stronger impacts. But what is the difference between the strategic projects of territorial cooperation and flagship projects of the macro-regional strategy? Which complementarities and coordination could be established?

Traditionally, territorial cooperation had the objective of creating a fabric of relationships and of exchanges of practices between territories divided by borders. Recently a significant effort has been dedicated to the identification and implementation of strategic projects in order to increase the impact on territorial cohesion. But the resources are not sufficient for realising “hard” interventions such as infrastructural, technological or environmental investments. Furthermore, the multi-level partnership is weak. The strategic projects are captured by regions and local authorities. The involvement of central governments and international organisations is rare.

On the other hand, the increasing linkages between diverse territories can create the maturation of the institutional framework of the macro-region. Territorial cooperation may have the task of supporting those linkages (especially with new Members States but also candidate, pre-candidate, and neighbour countries)¹⁶ and of identifying strategic projects (or feasibility projects of relevant public investments) that could be translated into flagship projects of the macro-regional strategy.

Probably in the future a division of labour could be defined: the macro-regional strategy should focus on “hard” projects and territorial cooperation on “soft” projects such as institution building, democratic governance and harmonization of rules and policies. Another option is the opportunity to merge territorial trans-national cooperation into the macro-regional framework, avoiding the confusion between strategic and flagship projects, and reducing the red tape.

However, territorial cooperation maintains an important role in setting the bases for a bottom-up approach which is necessary for supporting the legitimisation of strategic and flagship projects. Strong environment, social and economic needs and interests are top priorities for coordinating financing for important investments. Evident and real needs and functionalities to manage

¹⁴ Hooge L. & Marks G., *Unraveling the Central State, But How? Types of Multi-level Governance*, *American Political Science Review*, 97/2:233-243, 2005: 9, cited in Clara Mine Baad Berkkan, Ulrik Kjolsen Olsen and Lena Tempel, *Macro-regional Strategies in the EU. A new form of Governance?*, Roskilde University 2009: 34.

¹⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/projects_en.htm.

¹⁶ Moreover, the CPMR General Secretariat underlines that: “in a context of widespread disenchantment with Europe, the continued promotion of this kind of “ground level” cooperation across the whole continent is essential”. And new territorial cooperation at the international level could be envisaged: “Growing globalisation now offers territorial actors opportunities that extend far beyond Europe’s borders. The special relations that already existed with neighbouring EU territories are being strengthened, while an increasing number of cooperation initiatives between European territories and those of other continents are emerging.” CPMR, “What opportunities do territorial cooperation and the macro-regional strategies represent for cohesion policy after 2013?”, Technical Paper from the CPMR General Secretariat, April 2010: 3.

interdependencies in a vast area, and in some cases emergencies requiring a trans-national approach, should motivate the creation of a macro-regional strategy. They should be recognised and negotiated among the diverse stakeholders.

In the case of the Baltic area, public consultation has oriented the EC to draft an action plan composed of “15 priority areas (...) organised into four thematic ‘pillars’ and one horizontal section, (...) implemented through detailed strategic and cooperative actions, (...) and example of flagship projects are presented” with some of them labelled as fast track. “About eighty flagship projects are listed in the accompanying Action Plan”¹⁷. Clearly, this elaboration shows a general-purpose approach that is inconsistent with the task specific approach that should represent the added value of the macro-regional strategy. This is the “efficiency challenge” of macro-regional strategy discussed by Bengtsson (2009: 6).

A two-step approach is conducted: first, the creation of a consensus for legitimising the macro-regional strategy; second, the negotiation of flagship fast-track projects for achieving concrete results.

A consensus building effort to legitimise and sustain the Baltic sea macro-regional strategy has been conducted by the EC. The majority of the stakeholders, and particularly the most important voices (i.e. central governments, LAs, social and economical organisations) have taken part in the process. Different views on the priorities have been aggregated. “For instance, the main priority for Sweden is accepting environmental challenges connected with the Baltic Sea Region, whereas Estonia’s principal priority is territorial integration (understood as establishing more functional connections between the East and West parts of the Baltic Sea Region and improvement of industrial infrastructure)”¹⁸.

Notwithstanding the application of the general-purpose approach in the consultation process, the time has come to focus and decide what flagship fast-track projects should be implemented. Whatever the collection of priorities and the relative range of projects may be, it is a political decision that depends on the governance challenge. The decision to implement specific flagship projects poses a legitimacy and democratic question. Who does decide what is strategic? In the macro-regional governance framework commented above, the pivotal role of central governments appears evident. In this sense other stakeholders, such as regions and LAs, are demanding more voice (Stocchiero, 2010: 6 and 7).

Decision-making should involve governments at different levels, and probably, if the flagship projects are highly relevant, they should be debated also in the representative bodies (i.e. parliaments and regional councils) and with civil society organisations. It should not be overlooked that flagship projects decided at top level without informing territorial stakeholders might clash with local and trans-local constituencies. In a multi-level and trans-national perspective the local dimension has a political importance. That points to the need to build a trans-national democracy. The EU democratic deficits could be partially covered, nurturing public debates on common interests in vast areas. Territorial cooperation jointly with macro-regional strategy may have an important function for creating democratic processes to support the legitimacy of strategic decisions. More transparency and accountability should be assured.

All that indicates how the macro-regional strategy is a political construction “*in which commonalities are not a precondition for how the region functions in practice*”¹⁹. Moreover, it is possible to create strong cross-border cooperation among regions in countries that do not necessarily share a common history or culture. On the contrary, ‘a history of alienation’ between regions can actually provide the starting point for cooperation. In this sense, the importance of

¹⁷ [http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/index_en.htm: 3 and 4].

¹⁸ Anna Wojcik, Cooperation in the Mediterranean Region. Experiences for the Baltic Sea Region?, UKIE Analytical Paper N.19.

¹⁹ Perkmann, M., *Cross border regions in Europe: Significance and Drivers of Regional Cross Border co-operations*, European Urban and Regional Studies, vo.10, 2003: 157, cited in Berkkan, Olsen and Tempel, 2009: 29.

history and culture should not be underestimated, but should be understood as 'dynamic' rather than 'fixed'. The argument is that it is the common challenges that create the basis and willingness for cooperation." (Berkkan, Olsen and Tempel, 2009: 29)

3. THE MACRO-REGIONS BETWEEN THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS

In principle, macro-regions are not defined by administrative boundaries but according to functionalities. Specific trans-national interdependencies, material and immaterial flows, hard and soft linkages qualify the geographical scale of the macro-regions. In the cases of the Baltic and Danube macro-regions the scales are delineated by natural common goods: the hydrographical basins of a sea and a river. Natural macro-regions have no internal and external administrative and political dimensions. But this is not the case with the EU strategy for the macro-regions: even if it is elaborated on functionalities, political conditions continue to be relevant and particularly in the internal and external relationship dynamics.

The EU macro-regional strategy is explicitly linked to the cohesion policy. It has an internal dimension. But in an interconnected world and concrete trans-national spaces, also internal policies inevitably have an external dimension. Each EU strategy for macro-regions has an external side. It may have different meanings according to the political situations. It may reinforce the Member States against a complicated neighbour, and/or it may increase internal cooperation in order to also gain the cooperation of external countries. For example, in the case of the Baltic sea region the "Baltic Europe" Intergroup of the European Parliament called for a close co-operation between EU Member States in the field of security towards Russia²⁰ as well as for the opportunity to piloting the Common Economic Space with Russia²¹.

In the case of the Mediterranean, the region is perceived as strictly linked to the Southern countries. The Mediterranean is not an internal sea of the EU, but it is a shared common good with Southern countries. There are strong interdependencies on environment, agricultural and social (migration and labour markets) issues as well as on energy and transport. On other sectors the economic and institutional linkages are weak, such as on innovation and research or perceived by the public opinion as obstacles, such as on culture and religion.

The macro-regional strategy can have a real impact on Mediterranean trans-national issues only if it is connected to policies and concrete interventions of the Southern countries. Thus, the building of a Mediterranean macro-region should be based on a parallel process of cementing the EU internal trans-national and multi-level cooperation while creating linkages with external countries. That is both more internal cooperation and more external collaboration.

However, this approach should not create confusion among internal and external policies and it must take into account the real political conditions of the Mediterranean area. First of all, the

²⁰ "Russia's military is still in a transition phase with conventional capabilities in accordance with the CFE Treaty but maintains the ability to use force and also deploy tactical nuclear weapons in the region. The condition and age of much of the weaponry in Kaliningrad is also of significant environmental concern. Of further concern is the large scale dumps from the Second World War of chemical bombs and shells on the sea bed. The routs of any proposed pipeline should be checked by more than one interested State. Therefore the EU, reflecting the interests of all Member States without discrimination, should request detailed studies about the security of energy supply. Any plans of the Russian Navy to increase naval patrols along the route of any pipeline should be discussed at the highest levels." Baltic Strategy Working Group of 7 MEPs, *Europe's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region*, 2005: 21.

²¹ "The EU and Russia agreed on the 10th May, 2005 on a road map for the common economic space. This very comprehensive map includes tens of concrete goals from an EU-Russia investment agreement to the harmonisation of legislation to create a common market. The problem is that the concrete solutions are all open-ended. One may reasonably ask could there be opportunity for a regional pilot?" Baltic Strategy Working Group of 7 MEPs, *Europe's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region*, 2005: 17.

macro-regional strategy is an internal political construction in the framework of the cohesion policy and major efforts are directed at creating strong collaboration between the Member States coordinated by the EC with the involvement of local authorities and of the different stakeholders. Secondly it should find connections with the EU external policies in the Mediterranean: the Union for the Mediterranean and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (UfM/EMP), the Neighbourhood policy with the ENPI, the enlargement policy with the IPA. An example of the connection is the introduction of the CBC in ENPI and IPA realised in the last years.

In this policy framework, the opportunity to create a Mediterranean macro-regional strategy depends on geopolitical factors and processes both internal and external to the EU. It is an European geopolitical issue because it generates a Community challenge issue, and it is also a geopolitical game because it involves the political relationships with accession and neighbour countries.

So far macro-regional proposals concern areas of Northern and Eastern Europe. In principle, a balanced approach is needed to avoid contentions from Member States of Southern and Western Europe, to support a polycentric development and the territorial cohesion of all of Europe. Linkages between macro-regions in the diverse vast areas should be investigated for creating an articulated and united Europe. The Mediterranean area should participate in the macro-regional geographic distribution and Southern Mediterranean countries (SMC) should be linked to the macro-regional strategy if the achievement of a greater efficacy is needed. But do political conditions exist?

3.1 The external side: the neighbourhoods

The possibility to create a whole Mediterranean macro-region depends on who are the neighbourhood countries and what are the relative geopolitical stakes. A brief analysis of what is happening in other macro-region processes may help in understanding the Mediterranean case.

In the **Baltic** area Russia is the most important neighbourhood country. It is a global player that negotiates with the EU worldwide issues. Problems and opportunities of the Baltic area are one of the manifold factors of EU-Russia relationships. For this reason the EU has a strategic partnership with Russia. Consequently the participation of Russia in the Baltic macro-region depends on a bigger and more complicated game. The Baltic macro-region can appear as a micro-region perspective for Russia because it is linked to other geopolitical and military issues of global interest (i.e. military influence and control and exploitation of natural resources in the Northern area between the U.S.A., Canada, the EU and Russia). The macro-regional 'low politics' is connected to foreign and military "high politics", and it cannot work if other issues are not taken into consideration. The real and necessary participation of Russia in the Strategy of the macro-region is a consequence of a higher geo-political game that is the EU strategic partnership with Russia and Russian relationships with the U.S.A. On the other hand, the Strategy could be useful for raising "local" problems to the higher level, putting them in the agenda of the EU-Russia relationships. However, so far Russia has not been a key player in the elaboration of the Strategy for the Baltic sea area.

In the **Danube** region the political conditions are very different. The strategy is linked to the EU enlargement process towards the Western Balkan countries. The candidate and pre-candidate countries are strongly interested in the accession process. For example, *"The Republic of Serbia has great significance in the future realisation of the aims contained in the Joint Overall Strategy for the Danube Region. By inclusion of the Republic of Serbia in the development of the strategy and its subsequent implementation, contribution is given to: the economic development, integration of sectoral policies of the Republic of Serbia into the EU development plans, improvement of bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and all other countries in the Danube River Basin. Through its participation in the development process and subsequent implementation of the Strategy, the Republic of Serbia confirms its strategic commitment for its effective*

*membership in the European Union*²². EU Member States have more prudent positions, but the unavoidable external dimension of the strategy is recognised. The German policy paper underlines that “*participation of non-EU countries is crucial if the desired objectives are to be achieved*”, but “*such participation must not blur the strategy’s focus, shifting it to the EU’s external relations rather than the Danube region*”²³. However, the macro-regional strategy represents another parallel mechanism for reinforcing the accession process.

The same arguments of the Danube Region apply in the **Adriatic-Ionian** macro-region proposal advanced by Italy, Greece and Slovenia. The geopolitical stake concerns the creation of a macro-region. This makes sense if it involves accession candidate and pre-candidate countries (a specific chapter is dedicated to the issue further ahead).

The **Mediterranean** represents a great hydrographical basin with evident interdependencies, but from a geopolitical point of view it is a divided area between not only the EU, Eastern and Southern countries, but also among the Eastern and Southern countries themselves. The strategy for a macro-region cannot disregard the divisions and cannot propose itself as a policy to overcome conflicts and differences, overlapping with other ‘high-politics’ initiatives such as the UfM/EMP. In the Mediterranean the external dimension of the macro-regional strategy could not be internalised.

A division is generated by the EU enlargement process between those countries involved in the accession process and the other countries that will remain neighbours. The proposal launched by Italy, Greece and Slovenia to build an Adriatic-Ionian macro-region rests in the enlargement process and it splits the Mediterranean area into three hypothetical macro-regional spaces: the Eastern Mediterranean, the Adriatic-Ionian, the Western Mediterranean.

But other fundamental divisions inhibit a hypothetical whole Mediterranean macro-region: the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as well as conflicts and tensions between several political, military and religious movements, innervated in SMCs and between their governments; tensions are between Algeria and Morocco, Lebanon and Syria. In this sense, the prominence of security issues indicates the impossibility to imagine a macro-regional strategy for the whole Mediterranean basin. On the other hand, the divisions are already blocking the high politics of UfM/EMP.

The real stakes are linked to the UfM/EMP and the neighbourhood policy, their inefficient coordination and ability to contribute to peace and human development processes. The proposal of a strategy for the Mediterranean macro-region would create even more and useless confusion in the heads of the Southern Mediterranean presidents and prime ministries, as well as it would show European confusion and crisis in approaching the Mediterranean issues.

From the point of view of SMC, a macro-regional strategy does not have a strong appeal. First, the macro-regional strategy is a multi-level cooperation that requires the presence of regional policies (structural funds) with involvement of the LAs. Southern Mediterranean LAs should have capacities and funds to spend in trans-national flagship projects. On the contrary, in SMC decentralisation policy is in its infancy. Social and economical development policies are managed by central governments. Funds and fiscal resources are centralised. The territorial cohesion approach is scarcely implemented. Second, a trans-national strategy requires the participation of both central and local authorities. But the foreign policy and international cooperation capacities of SMC are in the central government’s hands. The paradiplomacy of Southern Mediterranean LAs has very little scope. Their external relation and cooperation capacities are highly constrained. The experience on ENPI CBC demonstrates the difficulty to involve SMC in multi-level and trans-national cooperation.

²² Participation of the Government of the Republic of Serbia in the development of an overall European Union Strategy for the Danube Region, Non-Paper, Unofficial Version, 28 January 2010: 3.

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/documents_en.htm].

²³ *German Policy Paper on an EU Strategy for the Danube Region*.

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/documents_en.htm].

Prior to imagining a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean having a strong external dimension, a policy dialogue for promoting the setting up of a cohesion policy in SMC is needed. The strengthening of ENPI CBC and of decentralisation processes in SMC are pre-requisites for the macro-regional perspective.

3.2 The Adriatic-Ionian macro-region in-between Europe and the Mediterranean

The proposal to set up a macro-region in the Adriatic-Ionian area emerges from a recent history of dramatic clashes and long peace building initiatives in the ex-Yugoslavia countries, reconstruction and institution building programmes, increasing social and economic relationships, new trans-national and cross border co-operations, the formation of institutional networks at different levels such as the Adriatic Euro-region, the Chamber of Commerce Union, the University Union, the Adriatic City Forum, and bilateral and regional foreign policy actions in the process of EU enlargement.

The Italian government is linking the proposal to create the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region with an inter-governmental agreement started in 2000: the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII). This Initiative comprises all the States surrounding the Adriatic and Ionian seas. It aims at setting up the political conditions to promote the development of the area and the accession in EU of the Western Balkan States.

The macro-region may exploit and strengthen a political process already existent and coherent with the building of a more united Europe. It is a strategy that corresponds to a geopolitical interest as well as geo-economical opportunities. Transport corridors, energy pipelines and green energy production, trade and investments, human mobility, and environment protection are sectors where there is the need to implement strategic projects with big investments. The vision is to develop an area at the centre of strong inter-connections between the Mediterranean and Central Europe, the Eastern and Western sides of Europe.

The proposal of the macro-region is part of the Italian foreign policy towards the Balkans. It is coherent with the “*road map in 8 points for accelerating the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkans*” elaborated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Frattini²⁴.

The Adriatic-Ionian macro-region is different from the Baltic one. It aims at accompanying the accession of the Western Balkan candidate and pre-candidate countries in the EU. The Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Frattini said that “*The final aim of this ambitious plan is to integrate the Western Balkan countries into the EU*”²⁵. According to the under-secretary for Foreign Affairs, Senator Alfredo Mantica, “... *not only does a macro-region strengthens cooperation, facilitating consensus building on topics of common interest between territorial realities of Member States pertaining to the same area, but it contributes, in a synergic approach, to deepening the relationships with territorial realities of neighbour countries, inside and outside the EU ... An important added value of the Adriatic-Ionian strategy is the fundamental political signal to the Western Balkan countries of renewed attention and concrete collaboration perspective ... towards their future adhesion to the European home ... The creation of an Adriatic-Ionian macro-region would constitute the necessary political incubator of a process started with the Thessalonica Agenda that should be covered in the last stretch*”²⁶. The macro-regional strategy would have a strong temporary external dimension that should become an internal dimension of the EU in future years. It does not make sense to create a macro-region in the Adriatic without the adhesion of the

²⁴ [http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Approfondimenti/].

²⁵ [<http://www.emg.rs/en/news/region/120973.html>].

²⁶ Il Sottosegretario di Stato degli Affari Esteri, Intervento del Sottosegretario degli Affari Esteri Senatore Alfredo Mantica al Forum “European macro-regions. Integration through territorial co-operation”, Bruxelles, 13 aprile 2010. (Translation by the author).

Western Balkan countries. Development of the area is strictly interdependent with the managing of the security problems which link countries and territories.

The Italian government is investing in a process that should achieve a first important result in 2014 during the Italian and Greek presidencies of the European Union²⁷. These presidencies should promote the approval of the European Council on mandating the European Commission for the creation of the Adriatic-Ionic Macro-region. During the first months of 2010 a sequence of high level political commitments have set the march of the macro-region's creation. On 29th April the Presidents of the Parliaments of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative approved a final declaration that *“Request the European institutions, while awaiting the completion of the accession negotiations, to develop a European Union macro-regional strategy for the Adriatic and the Ionian Sea, in the southern flank of Europe, similar to the strategy already begun for the Baltic Sea macro-region”*²⁸. The governments of Italy, Slovenia and Greece agree on the process and have involved the Western Balkans countries.

In Ancona on 5th May 2010 the Adriatic Ionian Council signed a common Declaration for the creation of the macro-region. The representatives of the Governments of Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia were *“... convinced that the Adriatic-Ionian Region, ..., it is to be developed into a European macro-region of security, stability and prosperity ... that the Strategy, through its features of inclusiveness and comprehensiveness, will also be highly beneficial for non EU member States, especially for candidates and EU potential candidates ... (and) affirm our readiness to ... play an active role, engage public and private sectors and encourage stakeholders, especially regional authorities, companies, universities and civil society for the successful preparation of a future EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region ... (and) to examine the possibilities and the conditions for promoting on the EU level a future EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region”*²⁹.

The proposal was also presented at the EU summit in Sarajevo on 2nd June to support the enlargement process. The horizon is of medium-long term. Probably Croatia will be part of the EU before 2014, but the accession of the other Western Balkan countries is to be expected later.

Over the next few years the Italian government with Slovenia and Greece will be committed in an important diplomatic effort to persuade the different European Member States to consider the creation of the macro-region in the Adriatic area with a positive attitude, showing opportunities of common benefits.

An European architecture of macro-regions could be drawn. Designing the macro-region's areas requires the strengthening of corridors between them. The creation of the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region should take into consideration the linkages with other macro-regions and particularly with the Danube macro-region in the making. Croatia proposes its territory as the link between the Adriatic and the Danube macro-regions. *“Croatia defines itself as an Adriatic, Central European and Danube country. An additional dimension it can offer within the framework of the future Danube Strategy is to be a “bridge” between the Danube area and the Adriatic i.e. the Mediterranean. This may provide such prospects to the overall cooperation within the Danube area that can contribute to the special development of the Danube countries, particularly to the strengthening of trade, transport and transit, as well as tourism”*³⁰. Furthermore, a corridor between

²⁷ Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini has announced the formation of a new Adriatic-Ionian macro region by 2014, on the model of the Baltic Sea macro-region which has already started operating, and the Danube region which is yet to be launched. [<http://www.emg.rs/en/news/region/120973.html>].

²⁸ Final Declaration, 8th Meeting of the Presidents of the Parliaments of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative. Bari, 29 April 2010.

²⁹ Declaration of the Adriatic Ionian Council on the support to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region. The 12th Adriatic Ionian Council. Ancona, 5 May 2010.

³⁰ Non Paper, Croatia's priorities and cooperation in the Danube region.

the Adriatic and the Baltic areas is projected to link the trade flows coming from the Mediterranean and Asia to Central and North Europe.

The Italian government is committed to approaching the Member States in Central and Eastern Europe to identify common and complementary topics of the two macro-regions for establishing a coherent development. The Central European Initiative is the inter-governmental framework that can support the synergy between the two macro-regions. In fact, *“The CEI projects are aimed at providing political as well as operative complementarities to the countries of Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe”*³¹.

In the meanwhile the actors are discussing ideas to create specific partnerships on flagship projects that can be financed by merging Structural Funds with IPA. Consequently there is the need to negotiate the EU financial perspectives while promoting regulations that facilitate the possibility to converge different instruments, also of external assistance, in supporting flagship projects in the macro-regions.

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with the Ministry for Economic Development are undertaking to organise the national inter-sector and multi-level governance. Coordination among the different sector ministries (infrastructure, agriculture, environment, culture, research, etc.) has been set up to discuss strategic projects and funding opportunities. Moreover, the Foreign Affairs and Economic Development Ministries are promoting the participation of all Italian Regions even if, so far, the Adriatic regions are more involved and are the protagonists. The Marches region, for example, hosts the headquarters of the AII in Ancona.

3.3 The internal side and the Community challenge

The balance between external and internal dimensions of the strategy for a macro-region also depends on the Member States and the “Community challenge”. Different member countries have different interests depending on where they are geopolitically positioned.

The scale of a macro-region is a vast area with functional nexus. In the case of Italy there are interests in the creation of macro-regions in the Alps, and in the Adriatic-Ionian and Mediterranean areas. As we have seen, the Adriatic-Ionian area is a political priority for the Italian government. It jumped at the opportunity to link the inter-governmental Adriatic-Ionic Initiative with the strategy of a macro-region in the same area. The accession of the Western Balkan countries in the EU is an Italian geopolitical interest, matched by the Greece and Slovenia governments. The Adriatic-Ionic may be considered as a future internal EU sea as well as the Baltic sea.

The other Member Countries, France and Spain, have so far not officially expressed their preferences on the geopolitical mapping of the macro-regions in the EU. They are however cautious. For example, the representative of the Spanish Presidency of the EU stated that *“Macro-regions, being a partial grouping of territories, could break the communitarian principle of shared implementation, according to the co-operation principle (...), the real regional dimension in the EU is the community. (...) Cohesion and territorial solidarity are the basis of the regional policy and not inter-regional competitiveness. (...) The ‘resulting legitimacy’ should be accompanied by the ‘democratic legitimacy’ in a framework of solidarity ...”*³².

Some Northern regions are lobbying the Spain government for an Atlantic macro-region. The French and Spanish governments are considering different opportunities, but they do not express much enthusiasm in creating a Mediterranean macro-region due to the possible overlapping or misunderstanding with the UfM.

[<http://www.ceinet.org/content/mission-and-objectives>].

³² Speech by Isabel Moya Pérez, representing the Spanish Presidency of the EU at the Forum on Macro-Regions, Committee of the Regions, 13 April 2010. Translation by the author.

A Community challenge exists: real and prospective macro-regions are all located in the North-Eastern part of the EU. They could stimulate a multi-speed Europe. Consequently, a comprehensive EU strategy on the macro-region's geopolitical distribution is requested by some stakeholders. On the other hand, the same regions pertaining to CRPM and ARE should question themselves on which criteria should guide the creation of macro-regional strategies because a competitive race to put forward macro-region initiatives is taking place, with potential conflicting effects among the different regions. Does European territorial and social cohesion also depend on an equitable distribution of the macro-regions? Is it necessary to define a global approach on macro-regions in Europe in order to reduce the competitive race and safeguard the solidarity principle?

This question should be downgraded if the pragmatic and prudence approach sustained by the European Commission is taken into account. The macro-region creation should be a process of test cases, of trial and errors. If the strategy works it can be spread to other EU trans-national areas where it is needed.

On the other hand, the need of not creating territorial disparities and preferences also explains the principle of the 3 NOs. The strategy of the macro-region does not create regulations and institutions, and specific financial resources are not allocated to support its investments. The macro-regions do not have more resources and specific institutions, but the opportunity of putting in place a more efficient and effective strategy. In principle this opportunity, if it works, is open to all the European Union territories depending on the political specific trans-national conditions.

An "*a priori*" and deductive approach to creating policy has been substituted by an empirical and pragmatic approach. In this way an institutional path-dependency effect does not apply: the EU does not want to create a new institutional machine, the macro-regions, with the risk of perpetuating itself without efficacy. If the strategy of the macro-region does not work, it may disappear without losing institutional and financial resources. Its efficacy fundamentally depends on the political willingness of the diverse players sustained by the soft coordination power of the European Commission. It will be implemented only if a real coordination of instruments and financing will come about. The strategy should be strictly linked to efficacy and efficiency criteria.

It is possible that in the next few years the strategy will disappear completely or it will apply only in some areas. This may give rise to a Europe with different speeds, but it does not depend on an unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. The political answer to the Community challenge should not be to stop the macro-regions that are working, but how to create the conditions for the catching-up of weak trans-national areas.

However, in order to avoid a meaningless competitive race to create macro-regional strategies in different EU areas, the EU should communicate clearer messages. The 3 NOs should be rigidly confirmed to discourage the proposals of macro-regions based on expectations to access new financing in the next programming period.

The funding of the flagship projects should come mainly from structural funds integrated in a coherent way with other instruments. The setting up of a new budget line dedicated specifically to a macro-regional strategy is not a good solution. That is because it would create competition and preferences among different vast areas, which could end with an old-fashioned "*a priori*" distribution of financing with scarce impact. Furthermore, a new separate budget line would cause new coordination problems with other programmes. The added value is the challenge to create a real coordination of different funds with a multi-level merging. The Community as well as central governments, regions and local authorities should fund together the flagship projects.

The commitment to programme a replication of macro-regions if they work and when there is a concrete opportunity with compliance criteria should be established.

On the other hand, the functioning of the strategy cannot rest only on the political willingness of governments and stakeholders. Incentives should be established to stimulate and award with supplementary financing flagship projects identified by the strategies of the macro-regions, and/or with obligations to earmark part of the national and regional budgets to those projects.

This kind of orientation and regulation should be assumed in the next EU financial perspectives and at a transversal level in the different Community instruments and policies: in the cohesion policy (Strategic Community Guidelines) as well as in environment, integrated maritime and transport (TEN-T), research and competitiveness policies (CPMR 2010: 6 and 7). Also external policies and instruments, such as IPA and ENPI, could foresee articles in their regulations to recognise a preference to finance flagship projects. The resources should come from both CBC and action plans.

The political and budget commitment of central and regional governments is even more important than the Community one. If the added value of the macro-regional strategy consists in the multi-level and trans-national coordination of strategic initiatives, central and regional governments should sustain the flagship project with their own resources. The application of the partnership and additionality principle should be compulsory.

4. IS IT POSSIBLE TO CREATE A WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGY?

The previous arguments indicate that in the near future a whole Mediterranean macro-regional strategy is not feasible and sustainable. The SMC would not understand the proliferation of governance initiatives: from EMP to the Neighbourhood policy up to the UfM and then a strategy for a macro-region. The EU would show a confused policy framework. Furthermore, a fundamental difference exists between the SMC and the Western Balkan countries: the latter have a clear direction to follow, accession in the European Union. The macro-regional strategy may accompany the accession process. It can be a parallel instrument of the enlargement policy, but it does not have a concrete political sense in the case of the external relationships with the Southern Mediterranean rim.

These considerations support the idea that it is better not to create confusion. The strategy for the macro-region should not be proposed to the SMC. It is firstly directed to the European countries and territories. But a flexible approach could be imagined. An internal macro-region could be composed, for example, by Western Euro-Mediterranean countries while the SMC can decide to participate in the implementation of single flagship projects according to a “*menu a la carte*”.

A pragmatic and realistic approach should be adopted. An internal Western Mediterranean macro-regional strategy does make sense because there is the need to improve the impact on trans-national issues: maritime security, environmental protection, adaptation and mitigation of the climate change effects, water and energy grids, transport corridors, knowledge pipelines, networking clusters and districts, etc. A strategy is needed because CBC and trans-national cooperation, Euro-regions and European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation are not coordinated and projects are fragmented. Economies of scale are lacking and pilot projects are not replicated and do not have a multiplication effect. They are scarcely mainstreamed in regional and national development plans. Other European programmes do not converge in supporting trans-national cooperation. Also in the Western Mediterranean an integrated approach is lacking.

But, till now, Member States have no favourable positions. The Italian government is committed to creating the political conditions for setting up the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region strategy. The French and Spanish governments are more interested in the external dimension of the Mediterranean. Regions and LAs are looking for a common stance but with different opinions. Some leading Regions and LAs support the idea because they are already committed to trans-national cooperation in the area. For example, LAs involved in the Arc Latin association have expressed their interest in creating the strategy. Regions participating in the IMC/CPRM are analysing the opportunities. On the other hand, social and economic stakeholders are completely absent.

Consequently, first of all it seems indispensable to invest in creating the political conditions, the social, economical and institutional alliances, and linkages with European and national interests. Consensus building and lobbying activities are needed. Territorial cooperation may play an essential role in setting the bases for a real bottom-up approach to support the legitimisation of future macro-regional strategies. More effort should be dedicated to strengthening the linkages between different actors and networks, and a common public discourse on trans-national goods in the Mediterranean should be promoted. More transparency and accountability in the drawing up of operative programmes and in the capitalisation of projects may help in building the political conditions. Shaping a trans-national democracy may represent a new objective of territorial cooperation for the creation of macro-regional strategies.

Consensus may be built by converging stakeholder interests in the identification of common and shared basic needs that request strategic or flagship projects at the trans-national level. The initial experience of the strategic projects in the Med trans-national operative programme and in the ENPI CBC programme must be carefully supported and capitalised. These projects can motivate the creation of the Western Mediterranean macro-regional strategy, involving more decisively central governments. They can pre-figure the elaboration of “hard” flagship projects. However, the Western Mediterranean macro-regional strategy is a proposal that may be feasible only in a medium term, given the present-day conditions.

In the meantime, Mediterranean Regions and LAs should enter into the negotiation of the new EU financial perspectives, refusing the establishment of an eventual specific budget line dedicated to macro-regional strategies. Instead they could request a regulation for recognising financial awards to strategic and flagship projects in which funding from multi-level institutions and diverse programmes have been merged. This will incentive the coordination between central and sub-national governments at trans-national level, creating the conditions for a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean as well as in other vast EU areas.

This debate on the macro-regional strategy can sustain a common understanding of the need to set up a comprehensive vision on the future of the Mediterranean area. A logical framework is proposed.

The first point concerns the political perspective of the trans-national cooperation, i.e. the achievement of territorial cohesion in the Mediterranean in the framework of the globalisation process. A policy dialogue among the many stakeholders should be sustained to share the basic meanings of the concept. ARLEM represents a new dedicated political instrument of regions and LAs that should be complemented by a social and economical forum. The Economic and Social Council at the Euro-Mediterranean level should be strengthened and linked to ARLEM. Stakeholders representing environmental common goods and rights should be involved too.

These democratic instruments should find a common political stance for sustaining the mainstreaming of the territorial cohesion concept and of the correlated strengthened trans-national cooperation in UfM/EMP as well as in the Neighbourhood policy. The action plans of neighbour countries should mainstream the territorial cohesion approach in sector policies integrating trans-national and cross border cooperation. It means connecting territorial cooperation (CBC, trans-national and inter-regional cooperation) in a coherent and coordinated common strategy, strengthening their integration in regional and national policies both in Euro-Mediterranean countries as well as in SMC.

The forum and networks of stakeholders should be strengthened to improve the ownership and participation in the mainstreaming of territorial cohesion in regional and national development plans. A trans-national democracy should be stimulated.

Specific methodologies and analysis should be dedicated to the capitalisation of trans-national cooperation for learning how to increase efficacy. The follow-up of the involvement of the SMC in the identification and implementation of specific strategic projects in ENPI CBC should be carefully observed because it can generate important lessons. This kind of service could be linked to

ARLEM. The capitalisation could nurture public debate and the political discussion in order to legitimise the trans-nationalisms in the Mediterranean.

In fact, a re-thinking of the territorial objective and its management should be commenced for facing its weaknesses: the scarce mainstreaming in national and regional development policies, the project fragmentation and volatility of results, the insufficient synergy and stability of the networks, the lack of capitalisation and evaluation, the excessive red tape, and the impossibility to internationalise the cooperation outside EU borders in a context of growing globalisation³³.

The mainstreaming of territorial cohesion in the Euro-Mediterranean policies and the re-structuring of the territorial cooperation should be coordinated and connected to the various multi-lateral and bilateral initiatives. Useful ideas and processes may also come from inter-governmental initiatives such as in the case of the AII for the macro-regional strategy. For example, in the Western Mediterranean the 5+5 dialogue may represent an opportunity for identifying new proposals that can nurture trans-national cooperation. The Italian government has the next presidency of the 5+5 dialogue and it has the intention to organise a meeting of the Prime Ministers and Presidents. The Italian government should propose a permanent secretariat to sustain a more active process of dialogue in diverse sectors: energy, transport, migration and labour market, education and culture. Probably the 5+5 dialogue could commence a discussion on the realisation of a strengthened trans-national cooperation (and of a macro-regional strategy) in some topics.

Bilateral relationships may also influence the creation of new policies and projects at the trans-national level, first and foremost if the issue is a basic need on which a strong consensus and common benefits among the partners are real. For example, cooperation on civil protection in the Mediterranean has a precedent in a bilateral agreement of Italy with Egypt. Now it is an initiative supported by the European Commission and it is a strategic project of the UfM. In this sense each country and stakeholder can participate in generating new positive ideas and processes that converge in strengthening the multi-level and trans-national cooperation for improving Mediterranean development.

In the Mediterranean the generation of feasible ideas and the strengthening of processes at different levels should take priority over institutions and schemas that claim to tidy up and organise the entire framework. Conflicts paralyse general agreement and big plans. A variable geometry of projects and governance initiatives supported by a trans-national democracy seems more fruitful in the Mediterranean scenario. Territorial cooperation can play a decisive role if political awareness is raised.

³³ For a discussion about opportunities to reform territorial cooperation see CPMR 2010: 3 and 8.