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The external dimension of the European Union macro-regional strategies in the Mediterranean

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1. WHAT IS A EUROPEAN MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGY AND THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION

The concept of macro-regions was born from an initiative of the Baltic countries. The national governments and an informal group of members of the European Parliament (the Europe Baltic Intergroup) from the Baltic States have undertaken constant efforts to propose a new transnational development strategy for this region to both the European Council and Commission. The Swedish government took an important part in the promotion and the political lobby. The strategy was adopted by the European Council in October 2009 during the Swedish Presidency. Decisive factors included the explicit political will of the national governments of the area and the promotion of consensus at diverse levels. Moreover, legislative, institutional and financial pressure was not placed on the European Union (EU) in order to avoid any potential hostilities from Member States not pertaining to the area of interest.

The European Commission has taken part in the definition of the strategy of the macro-regions; and now (in 2011) supports its implementation in the Danube area and works for building a macro-region in the Adriatic-Ionic area. This strategy opens doors to new opportunities of territorial development, while placing emphasis on several fundamental political issues. The macro-regional strategy seems to constitute a pragmatic approach to the need of finding new modalities of rendering public policy more efficient in a vast transnational area with a multi-level coordination, better coordinating existing institutions and resources. But it is also an innovative political experiment. The macro-region represents a new governance level “*located between the nation state and the supranational community*”¹. It involves local, regional, national and Community levels in a transnational and interlinked geographic scale. And it is an innovative political experiment in linking internal and external dimensions for supporting more territorial cohesion also along the borders of the EU with accession and neighbouring countries.

The concept and strategy of the macro-region is illustrated in the Communication from the Commission concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region² and in the following Council Conclusion³; it is published in a paper drafted by the European Commission⁴ and reiterated in the Guidelines of future social cohesion policy⁵. The strategy is a very soft (and weak) political institution because is based on 3 NO: 1) No new legislation: macro-regional strategy requires no new ad hoc legislation; 2) No new funding: macro-regional strategies require no ad hoc funding by the EU; 3) No new institutions: macro-regional strategy does not plan to create and empower ad hoc institutions. Notwithstanding these indications, the EU macro-regional strategy is a form of soft political institution in terms of dialogue and coordination because it involves governments at diverse levels in many countries, overcoming traditional national boundaries.

In this sense, the macro-region is a strategy that contributes to the “Europeanization” process, where every institutional level takes part in a positive-sum game: the local and national levels are protagonists in the establishment of a space and in the achievement of a goal linked to regional development crossing frontiers, making it possible to deal with common problems with a beneficial

¹ Schymik Carsten e Krümrey Peer, *EU Strategy for the Baltics Sea Region. Core Europe in the Northern Periphery?*, Working Paper FG1, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, 2009.

² Commission of the European Communities, 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, 10.06.2009.

³ Council of the European Union, Brussels, Council Conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, 27 October 2009.

⁴ European Commission (2009), *Macro-regional strategies in the European Union*, [http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/pdf/macoregional_strategies_2009.pdf].

⁵ Pawel Samecki, European Commissioner in charge of Regional Policy, Orientation Paper on Future Cohesion Policy, December 2009.

impact for all participating parties, contributing to strengthen the unity of Europe. The strategy is multi-level and multi-actor given that it aims to include various stakeholders. This strategy has been proposed amidst the framework of territorial policy of social cohesion in the EU. But it also involves the neighbouring and accession countries. Europeanization extends its wing on external countries through the macro-regional strategies.

The definition is as follows: the macro-region is “an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges (...) geographic, cultural, economic or other” (European Commission, 2009: 1 and 7). This definition addresses functional macro-regions, which are defined in function of common cross-border challenges and opportunities that require a collective action (aspect highlighted in regards to environmental problems where the action of a single actor yields no efficient result, thus requiring a combined involvement of a converging action of various actors). The adoption of a functional approach gives rise to possible variable geometries in the definition of the macro-regional scales, meaning that different spatial scales can be defined in accordance to the function. Nevertheless, the macro-regional area must obviously always encompass an inferior number of Member States in comparison to the whole of the EU. It covers also external countries because of functional linkages among territories.

Specific trans-national interdependencies, material and immaterial flows, hard and soft linkages, qualify the geographical scale of the macro-regions irrespective of national and EU boundaries. The macro-region can involve third countries, accession and neighbouring countries, linked by proximity functions. 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, particularly in the external relationship dynamics.

In the Danube region the political conditions are positive. The Danube macroregional strategy is particularly interesting because it comprises eight EU Member States plus 4 accession countries and 2 neighbouring countries (Ukraine and Moldova). 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”⁶. 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”⁷. 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. This macro-region makes sense if it involves accession

⁶ 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].

⁷ *German Policy Paper on an EU Strategy for the Danube Region*.

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

candidate and pre-candidate countries. The geopolitical stake concerns the creation of a macro-region that covers a vast area constituted by 3 EU member states and 5 accession countries (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia).

2. THE ADRIATIC-IONIC MACRO-REGION BUILDING AND ITS EXTERNAL DIMENSION

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 an already existing and coherent political process 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 Frattini⁸.

The Adriatic-Ionian macro-region is different from the Baltic one. It has a strong external dimension because 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”⁹. According to the under-secretary for Foreign Affairs, Senator Alfredo Mantica, “... not only does a macro-region *strengthen cooperation, facilitating consensus built on topics of common interest between territorial realities of Member States pertaining to the same area, but it contributes, with 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 Thessalonic Agenda that should be covered in the last stretch*”¹⁰. The macro-regional strategy could have a strong temporary external dimension that should become an internal dimension of the EU in

⁸ [http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Approfondimenti/].

⁹ [<http://www.emg.rs/en/news/region/120973.html>].

¹⁰ 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).

future years. 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. However, it does not make sense to create a macro-region in the Adriatic without the adhesion of the Western Balkan countries. The 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 the process that should achieve a first important result in 2014 during the Italian and Greek presidencies of the European Union¹¹. These presidencies should promote the approval of the Adriatic-Ionic Macro-region by the European Council. During the first months of 2010 a sequence of high level political commitments 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"*¹². The governments of Italy, Slovenia and Greece have agreed 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 in public and private sectors and encourage stakeholders, especially regional authorities, companies, universities and civil societies 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"¹³.

The proposal was also presented at the EU summit in Sarajevo on 2nd June 2010 to support the enlargement process. In 2011 the foreign ministers of the countries involved in the AII met in the EU Committee of the Regions and signed the "Declaration of Bruxelles" declaring that they fully support the EU macro-regional strategy and its implementation in the Adriatic-Ionian area. During the meeting the European Commissioners for Maritime Affairs and Environment agreed on the opportunity to create this macro-region and the Committee of the Regions discussed a "Working document of the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy on Territorial cooperation in the Mediterranean through the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion", presented by the President of the Marche Region.

In June the political commitments of the Italian, Slovenian and Greek governments reached a relevant result: the European Council has indicated the perspective "to continue work in cooperation with the Commission on possible future macro-regional strategies, in particular as regards the Adriatic and Ionian region"¹⁴. Following this statement, new initiatives of EC DGRegio and DGMare are foreseen to facilitate the exchange of information, the debate, the consensus building and the setting up of a real multilevel governance for the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region.

Over the next few years the Italian government together with Slovenia and Greece will be committed in an important diplomatic effort to draft the Action Plan and to persuade the different

¹¹ 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>].

¹² Final Declaration, 8th Meeting of the Presidents of the Parliaments of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative. Bari, 29 April 2010.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ European Council, Conclusions, 23/24 June 2011.

European Member States to consider the creation of the macro-region in the Adriatic area with a positive attitude, showing opportunities of common benefits.

A European architecture of macro-regions could be drawn. Designing the areas of the macro region 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"¹⁵. Furthermore, a corridor between 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 in order to establish 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"¹⁶.

Meanwhile, the actors are discussing ideas to draft the Action Plan and to create specific partnerships on flagship projects which 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.

Finally, the creation of the macro-region is also a national multilevel affair. 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 Marche region, for example, hosts the headquarters of the AII in Ancona. Furthermore, a specific Foundation with the regional participation has been set up in order to sustain the macro-regional process¹⁷. Diverse stakeholder networks are funded by the regions through decentralised and territorial cooperation and follow the macro-regional process.

All the Italian regions with an Adriatic shore are involved in the process. They communicate with the central government and put forward suggestions to improve the elaboration of a common paper of proposals for an action plan of the macro-region. Other Italian regions that have no borders in the Adriatic sea are interested in the macro-regional construction, but they are trying to understand how to participate and on which functionalities. After two years (2010-2011) of interactions, the Conference of the Italian regions voted unanimously to support the political initiative of the Italian central government for the Adriatic-Ionian macro-regional strategy¹⁸.

¹⁵ Non Paper, Croatia's priorities and cooperation in the Danube region.

¹⁶ [<http://www.ceinet.org/content/mission-and-objectives>].

¹⁷ See <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/Cooperazione/Dalle-regioni/Iniziativa-Adriatico-Ionica-costituita-la-Fondazione-86842>.

¹⁸ See <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/Cooperazione/Dalle-regioni/Macroeconomia-Adriatico-Ionica-la-Conferenza-delle-Regioni-approva-la-strategia-97368>.

3. THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF AN HYPOTHETICAL MEDITERRANEAN MACRO-REGION

In the case of the Mediterranean, the macro-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 perceived by the public opinion as obstacles, such as on culture and religion. A transnational public policy to overcome these shortcomings is needed.

The efficacy of a macro-regional strategy in a vast basin area as the Mediterranean depends on the real participation of all the partners, from the North and from the South. The internal and external sides are strictly interconnected in a common area. Proximity and transnational flows link territories of both rims. The Mediterranean basin can not be divided and split into different sub-regions. If it is a functional macro-region dedicated at achieving common objectives and to resolving common needs, it requires a collective and cooperative action which lessens the rigidity of the borders.

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 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 carried out 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 Euro-Med geopolitical issue because it involves the political relationships with accession and neighbour countries. The Mediterranean macro-region at basin scale could cover 8 EU Member States (Gibraltar of UK, Spain, France, Italy, Slovenia, Greece, Malta and Cyprus) plus 6 accession countries (Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina, possibly Serbia and Kosovo, Albania, Turkey) and 10 neighbourhood countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia).

The debate on the opportunity to create a macro-regional perspective also in the Mediterranean case has been centred on the need to counterbalance the prominence of Northern and Eastern Europe areas and to overcome the fragmentation and poor results of policies, programmes and projects at European, national and local levels. Regions affirm that inter-governmental schemes as well as UfM and the Barcelona process have not been successful initiatives¹⁹. Regions are trying to identify strategic projects in transnational and cross border programmes and some are going to be implemented, hoping to increase the efficacy (see for example the strategic projects financed in the

¹⁹ See the Medgovernance report on “3 scenarios for a Mediterranean macro-regional approach”, by Jean-Claude Tourret and Vincent Wallaert, Institut de la Méditerranée.

MED operative programme of transnational cooperation)²⁰. On the contrary UfM has not been able to initiate strategic projects.

Diverse networks and policy options exist for responding to the transnational Mediterranean issues. For example, an integrated maritime strategy is proposed by the DGMare of the EC. Many territorial cooperation projects have created networks of actors to support innovation dynamics among small and medium sized companies to increase job opportunities²¹.

Summing up, poor and problematic functionalities show clearly environmental, social and economical challenges and needs at transnational level in the Mediterranean. The political answers have been ineffective until now. A new multilevel governance is needed to overcome policy fragmentation and to identify real strategic interventions, enhancing and combining the synergies of the most significant projects and networks. But do political conditions exist in the Mediterranean space?

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 strong policy to overcome conflicts and differences, overlapping with other 'high-politics' initiatives such as the UfM/EMP.

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 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. The Arab spring in 2011 has increased political differences among states in democratic transition (Tunisia, Egypt and possibly Libya, as well as Morocco and Jordan), states with internal conflicts (Syria but also Lebanon), frozen states and states presently in conflicts (Algeria, Israel with the Palestinian Authority). In this sense, the prominence of transition and security issues, and political divergences indicate the impossibility to imagine a macro-regional strategy for the whole Mediterranean basin in the short time. On the other hand, these divisions are already blocking the high politics of UfM/EMP.

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 local authorities. Southern Mediterranean local authorities should have capacities and funds to spend in trans-national flagship projects. On the contrary, the 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 hands of the central government. The paradiplomacy of the Southern Mediterranean local authorities has very little scope. Their external relations and cooperation capacities are highly constrained. The experience suffered in the implementation of the ENPI MED CBC operative programme demonstrates the difficulty to involve SMC in multi-level and trans-national cooperation.

On the other hand, the Arab spring might change the scenario. New transition governments in

²⁰ [<http://www.programmemed.eu/index.php?id=5175&L=1>].

²¹ See the "Benchmarking report "of the Medgovernance project by Battistina Cugusi and Andrea Stocchiero, CeSPI.

Tunisia and Egypt as well as in Morocco and Jordan are promoting more democratic policies that also involve decentralisation processes. Local authorities, municipalities, governorates and regions, should be strengthened with capacities and resources. This process is coherent with the perspective of a macro-regional building that requires a multi-level governance.

However, the process is in its first stages and uncertainties persist. In the short time, before 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. The renewal of the Neighbourhood policy elaborated by the EC in 2001²² offers more resources and initiatives that can help build these pre-requisites. It supports the implementation of “*pilot regional development programmes to tackle economic disparities between regions*” that goes in the direction of a new cohesion policy in the Mediterranean, as well as the realisation of “*Comprehensive Institution-Building programmes to provide substantial expertise and financial support to build the capacity of (...) those institutions most needed to sustain democratisation*” such as local authorities.

Furthermore, the letter of the former French Foreign Minister, Michèle Alliot-Marie, to the High Representative of EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, indicates the possibility of establishing a Mediterranean macro-region in the framework of a UfM re-launching. “*we can envisage to synthesize and better articulate the whole of the UE actions towards the Mediterranean in the framework of a macro-regional strategy (« macro-région méditerranéenne »), according to the spirit of the macro-regional strategy in the Baltic Sea or in the Danube, integrating the objectives of the Union for the Mediterranean*”²³.

The question is about how to articulate the macro-regional perspective with the EU external policies. The scale of a Mediterranean macro-region should be integrated in the wider scale of the UfM/EMP, and with IPA and ENPI, producing a multi-scalar framework. A comparison between a possible Mediterranean macro-regional strategy and the UfM is useful in understanding similarities, differences and possible integration opportunities. The table compares the main characteristics of the UfM policy with those of the macro-regional strategy.

²² Communication “A new response to a changing Neighbourhood”, of the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the European Commission (COM(2011) 303).

²³ [<http://www.rpfrance.eu/spip.php?article1349>].

Comparison of UfM policy with a hypothetical Med Macro-regional strategy

| | Aim/ Rationale/ Contents | Regulation/ Institution | Dimension | Geographical areas covered by the projects | Funds | Regions and local auth. |
|-------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| UfM | Inter-governmental agreement to upgrade Euro-Med political level with co-ownership and concrete (big) projects 43 countries | YES | More external – Barcelona Process | Variable geometry: regional, sub-regional, trans-national according to administrative political concept | ENPI + IFIs + private resources | Arlem Consultative role |
| Med macro-region | Multi-level commitment to achieve common transnational objectives with action plan and flagship projects 24 Med countries | NO | More internal – Cohesion Policy | Trans-national area: regional or sub-regional according to functionality concept | Cohesion Policy + sector policies + IFIs + private resources | Participation in multi-level governance (coordination of priority areas and flagship projects) |

The comparison shows the possibility to separate or integrate the macro-regional strategy inside the UfM policy. Some speculations can be put forward. A first static and realistic hypothesis is to separate UfM from the macro-regional perspective because the first is mainly an external policy while the second is first of all an internal EU process linked to the cohesion policy. Furthermore, the political and temporal conditions as well as the institutional asymmetries between the two rims of the Mediterranean do not permit a convergence and integration of the political schemes in the short time.

A second dynamic and pro-active hypothesis is to integrate the macro-regional strategy in the UfM, because the first is specialised on territorial cohesion policies (urban/rural planning and regional development, creation of territorial and transnational economic and social networks) that is, a competence field so far not covered by the UfM.

A third hypothesis is a deepening of the previous: it conceives the macro-regional strategy as a bottom-up policy able to complement the top-down approach of the UfM. The inter-governmental and supra-national dimension of the UfM could be accompanied by an institutional and societal building process aimed at strengthening sub-national and horizontal governance schemes supported by a macro-regional strategy. In this sense a macro-regional strategy would acquire a strong political meaning, representing an investment on democracy building in the Mediterranean.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Macro-regional Strategy is a new soft political institution for transnational territorial cohesion. It responds to real needs in a vast geographical area trying to coordinate diverse multi-level programmes and funds. Thus the real problem it faces is about the scarce coordination and more fundamentally the limited political will to collaborate between central and local governments of the diverse countries pertaining to a common area.

Furthermore, it has an important external dimension because the strategy is based on the concept of geographical functionalities that overcome national and EU borders. The complexity of the coordination problem is even stronger when it also involves third countries.

The success of EU macro-regional strategies depends firstly on the political will of Member States, and secondly on the political interest of third countries to take part in this project. But their interest is constrained by the geopolitical vision the EU has on its external relations.

Third countries are divided by the EU external policy in accession and neighbourhood countries. Accession countries have a direct and strong interest in the macro-regional process because it sustains their integration in the EU. Conversely neighbourhood countries may be milder towards the macro-regional strategy because the incentive is negligible and very difficult to achieve.

This division is evident in the Mediterranean scenario. Balkan accession countries are participating in the building of the Danube and Adriatic-Ionic macro-regional strategies. On the contrary, Southern Mediterranean countries, neighbours of the EU, are trapped in the inefficiency of the UfM/EMP, in conflicts and different political transition processes that make a macro-regional perspective in the short time unrealistic .

Furthermore a hypothetical Mediterranean macro-regional strategy has to be articulated with the UfM/EMP and the Neighbourhood policy, which are in a critical phase of restructuring to face the new Mediterranean political transition.

The building of real democratic conditions, especially at territorial local level, and a more effective Neighbourhood policy are pre-requisites for a real external dimension of a hypothetical Mediterranean macro-region. European regions and local authorities are called to increase relationships and networks with South Med companions to prepare political and institutional conditions of a macro-regional strategy. The renewal of ENPI should invest more resources and capacities to sustain democratic transition at national and local level, involving regions, local authorities and citizens.