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TECHNICAL PAPER FROM THE CPMR GENERAL SECRETARIAT

BRIEFING PAPER

COMPARISON OF THE "SEA BASIN" AND "MACRO-REGION" APPROACHES IN THE EUROPEAN MARITIME AREAS

Introduction

Since 2005, when the European Commission launched the Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP), the geographical scale of the "sea basin" i.e. the regional seas of the EU including Macaronesia, the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean, has gradually come to be recognised as an appropriate scale on which to implement this policy. At the intersection of numerous European policies – environment and ecosystems, transport, coastal management, maritime spatial planning, etc. – the sea basin certainly appears to be an appropriate area across which actors and instruments can be coordinated, a space that is compatible with the sought-after integrated approach, and one that has the potential to best exploit the EU's maritime assets.

The concept of the "macro-regional strategy" has appeared more recently: at the December 2007 European Council, which invited the European Commission to "*present an EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region*" to help "*address the urgent environmental challenges related to the Baltic Sea*", and this "*without prejudice to the integrated maritime policy*"¹. Defined as "*an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges*"², the macro-region is essentially perceived as an instrument of governance aimed at improving the coordination between, and thus the effectiveness of, the different policies implemented across a given area. The macro-regional strategies therefore have a much broader scope and deal with more than just the maritime aspects of the area. The European Council's instigation of a similar reflection concerning the Danube area, and the development of similar initiatives by actors in areas such as the Alps, are a clear illustration of this.

The Baltic Sea example does however show that certain macro-regional areas can encompass, or even be centred on, the EU's regional seas. The development of "integrated strategies" for the North Sea, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean, as well as for "sub-basins" such as the English Channel or Adriatic Sea, highlights the close links between the concept of sea basins and that of macro-regions. It also pinpoints the necessary coherence that will have to be established in the community instruments developed to support these two approaches.

In this context, and in order to help move the reflections forward, this document presents an inventory of the existing initiatives in the different European areas.

¹ Conclusions of the 14 December 2007 European Council, points 58 and 59

² http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/pdf/macoregional_strategies_2009.pdf

I) IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES

The Strategy for the Baltic Sea

The Baltic, an inland sea, was the subject of the EU's first macro-regional Strategy, launched at the initiative of the December 2007 European Council. Without prejudice to the scope of activities of other international organisations in the area (such as HELCOM and the Council of Baltic Sea States), the Strategy's Action Plan, implemented in practice since 1 January 2010, comprises 4 pillars and 15 priority areas, each developed through 80 "flagship projects".

The strategy takes a holistic and highly integrated approach, in which maritime issues are systematically taken into account. Alongside the 4 pillars, a "horizontal action" covers the implementation of the strategic directive for the marine environment. The link with the Baltic area transnational cooperation programme is made explicit, and each of the current 22 transnational projects comes under one or another of the four pillars.

The Action Plan stipulates that *"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. In addition, coherence with the Integrated Maritime Policy will be assured."*

The Action Plan has only been in operation for a few months, and it is therefore too early to draw any precise and definitive conclusions. However, there appears to be a consensus on the following points:

- In spite of the quite significant participation of the Regions during the prior consultation phase, the Member States now have a preponderant role in the implementation phase. For example, only one priority area is being coordinated by a Region (tourism, coordinated by Mecklenburg-Vorpommern);
- The lack of synchronisation between the launch of the strategy and the multi-annual programming period of certain European policies has restricted the strategy's effectiveness because of the difficulties in applying for funding under certain community funds, in particular the Structural Funds;
- Despite the area's proximity with Russia, Norway and Iceland, the strategy remains for the most part focused on its EU dimension, cooperation with non-EU countries falling more within the scope of the Nordic Dimension. The Strategy's external dimension needs to be strengthened in order to make it more effective.
- Although the Baltic Sea may be seen as a model for the other sea basins, each of these has its own special features. The Baltic Strategy rests on long-standing cooperation structures that already have considerable experience, the equivalent of which do not exist in the other potential macro-regions.

The Strategy for the Danube

In June 2009, the European Council invited the Commission to prepare a Strategy for the Danube by the end of 2010, having as its objective the sustainable development of this area. The strategy is currently in preparation, along the lines of the process by which the Baltic Strategy was developed. A national contact point has been established for each Member State concerned, and the Strategy has the support of the European Parliament's "Danube" Intergroup. At the close of the current consultation phase, it is hoped that an Action Plan will be adopted by the Council during the first half of 2011, under Hungary's presidency of the EU.

Centred on a major European river basin, the Danube is a particularly large and extremely diversified area. It covers 19 countries, 6 of which are not EU members, and must take into account relations with other major rivers (the Sava and the Rhine) as well as other nearby sea basins (Black Sea, Adriatic), especially in such policy fields as transport and the environment.

The specific, transnational problems of the region are numerous (disparities in development, inadequate infrastructure, environmental challenges, risk prevention, etc.). The Commission proposes three major priorities: to reinforce the potential for social and economic development, to preserve the environment and prevent risks, and to improve connectivity and communication systems (multimodal transport). The inter-dependency and integration of these three dimensions will be taken into account. The Commission's

proposal to base the strategy on these three priorities as pillars for the macro-regional strategy appears to have the support of the majority of stakeholders consulted.

II) APPROACHES BEING DEVELOPED IN OTHER EUROPEAN REGIONAL SEAS

The Mediterranean

Numerous initiatives are being developed in this vast and complex area. While the *Mare Nostrum* remains the focus of the Mediterranean world, the strategic and political challenges being addressed have a much wider scope than strictly maritime questions, although these remain essential for this large sea basin.

Over and above existing political fora such as the Union for the Mediterranean, many Mediterranean stakeholders are today in favour of the development of an EU macro-regional Strategy for this area. A number of factors, however, make the preparation and implementation of such a strategy extremely complex:

- The European side alone of the Mediterranean which would be concerned by an EU strategy is six times larger than the Baltic;
- The relationship between the European strategy strictly speaking and the Euro-Mediterranean area as a whole – in particular the southern shore – makes the situation more complex. One idea would be to invite the countries of the Southern shore to take part in the strategy but without making their participation a prerequisite for its implementation. It is unlikely that all the Mediterranean countries would agree on all the priorities; it could be possible therefore that not all priorities concern all States. The Mediterranean area could also be divided, as the Atlantic has been, into sub-areas, for example Adriatic/West/East or, simply, East/West.
- The cultural, rural, and agricultural aspects (among others) of the Mediterranean call for a response with a potentially vast scope of action, much wider than the maritime dimension. Ultimately, a real integrated strategy for the Mediterranean would have to involve numerous other instruments in addition to the IMP (ENPI-CBC, CAP, etc.).

In parallel, DG Mare published a Communication last September entitled *“Towards an Integrated Maritime Policy for better governance in the Mediterranean”*³ which is meant to *“complement the various sectoral actions that the EU promote”* and calls for an *“overall stronger co-operation with non-EU Mediterranean partners”*.

Europe’s Atlantic seaboard

The approach taken by the stakeholders of Europe’s Atlantic seaboard – in particular regional actors – in favour of an *“integrated strategy”* focuses essentially on this area’s maritime dimension, even though a recent survey carried out by the Atlantic Arc Commission among its member Regions showed that regional actors’ expectations of such a Strategy was that it should not be focussed solely on maritime issues and that it should not exclude the hinterland (network of medium-sized towns and cities, actions in rural areas, etc.).

The recent enlargement of the EU to the East has accentuated the peripheral dimension of the Atlantic. Transport (short sea shipping, motorways of the sea, and connections with terrestrial networks) is seen as a key issue. The impact of climate change, especially on the coastal areas, and environmental protection also call for determined and coordinated action extending beyond national borders. But the Atlantic regions also have many high-potential assets and sectors – renewable marine energies, nautical tourism/water sports, maritime transport, marine research, etc. – which could be exploited under a European strategy.

Given that the Atlantic is an open sea basin, a macro-regional strategy would probably also imply the division of the area into sub-basins (English Channel, Bay of Biscay, etc.) and the adoption of a functional approach in defining the borders with other neighbouring macro-regional approaches. Its situation implies that any strategic approach involving Europe’s Atlantic seaboard would also have to include a reflection on cooperation with other continents, especially North America.

³http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/pdf/brochure_mediterranean_fr.pdf

The North Sea

The CPMR's North Sea Commission and the Committee of the Regions' North Sea – Channel Intergroup have started discussions on the possibility of a macro-region around this basin along similar lines to that planned for the Baltic Sea. The priority areas for such a strategy are currently the subject of a stakeholder debate. However, a broad consensus appears to have been reached that one key issue is the management of the maritime space.

The North Sea basin is relatively homogenous from the point of view of its ecosystem, climate, geology, and the use that is made of the maritime zone. Maritime transport is one major issue, especially the question of how to reconcile increasing freight volumes (which also relieve land networks), as a competitive activity, with the conservation of the marine environment. The link between a possible macro-region and the tools of transport policy (TEN-T) and environmental policy (the application of EU directives in particular) is seen as indispensable. The basin as a whole also has relatively homogenous needs in terms of research, energy, adaptation to climate change, etc.

A proposal has already been made for an integrated energy transmission network connecting the zones that make up the North Sea area. Topics addressed by other projects include climate change (in particular the impact on flooding and rising sea levels), comprehensive and coherent data collection by the Member States in order to facilitate coordinated decision-making (IMP, fisheries policies, integrated coastal zone management, etc.), management of the maritime space (management of the particularly dense traffic flows in the North Sea).

The Black Sea

Since the EU enlargement in 2007 the Black Sea has taken on a strategic importance for the Union. It remains strongly impacted by external relations (Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, etc.) that are often difficult in a complex geopolitical context. The economic and political developments in the region are very different from one country to another, and cooperation initiatives already under way are often made complicated by long-standing conflicts.

Nonetheless, cooperation around this basin started in the early 1990s, and has gradually distanced itself from the post-Cold War context. A common identity is slowly emerging and trade between the basin and its surrounding areas is growing. However, it remains a region of wide economic, cultural, historic and geographic diversity. In addition to this, the EU maintains very different kinds of bilateral relations with the non-EU countries around the basin: neighbourhood policy with Ukraine, accession negotiations with Turkey, strategic partnership with Russia.

Numerous cooperation initiatives are already in place (Euroregion created in 2008, Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Commission's Black Sea Synergy). The Euroregion has for example submitted four projects under the neighbourhood policy: traditions and culture, expertise network, Black Sea Menu (tourism), and Black Sea Cruise (creation of a cross-border ferry link). Overall, however, cooperation projects in the Black Sea basin suffer from insufficient funding and inadequate administrative and institutional means at the level of the public authorities, particular the sub-national authorities.

III) "SUB-BASIN" APPROACHES

The Adriatic Sea

The possibility of a macro-regional approach in the Adriatic Sea has been evoked by a number of stakeholders although in a form that is less advanced than in the other basins. There appear to be two opposing visions of the shape of a possible macro-region: one focusing on the sea basin⁴, while the Alps-Adriatic Working Community envisages an "Alps-Adriatic-Pannonia"⁵ macro-region.

⁴ http://www.cor.europa.eu/COR_cms/ui/ViewDocument.aspx?siteid=default&contentID=f994f93d-2100-4d0b-ad46-2cd42ae23392 and http://www.cor.europa.eu/COR_cms/ui/ViewDocument.aspx?siteid=default&contentID=5402eb14-e19a-4c15-aec8-1536b501155b

⁵ http://www.alpeadria.org/english/index.php?did=Arge_Alpen_Adria_Vollversammlung_2009_ENG.doc

Cooperation in this area already exists and is institutionalised, in particular in the shape of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII), which was set up in 2000 and has had a permanent secretariat since June 2008. This initiative operates on an essentially inter-governmental basis, although there are links with other regional organisations such as the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities. The AII plans to submit a macro-regional strategy to the Commission based on the Baltic Sea model.

Coastal zone management, security, and strengthening cooperation with candidate countries appear to be among the priorities necessary for greater cooperation in the Adriatic. It is proposed to address a large number of issues, not all of which are maritime-related; these include rural development and cooperation between universities, etc. Although no timetable has been fixed for the time being, it is nonetheless envisaged that the Strategy be adopted in 2014 during the Greek or Italian presidencies of the EU.

The English Channel

The reflection on a strategic approach in the English Channel is being coordinated by Arc Manche, in particular through the CAMIS (Channel Arc Manche Integrated Strategy) project, funded by the Interreg IVA France (Channel) - England Programme. The project seeks to establish the Channel area as a pertinent area for cooperation and strategic action on the European scale. In this maritime area characterised by the densest concentration of maritime traffic in Europe, the project addresses questions such as maritime spatial planning and cooperation experiments relating to the IMP. More generally, the CAMIS project aims to be the driving force in the experimentation of coordinated implementation of the IMP.

The Arc Manche concerns a geographically smaller area than the other strategies. But the homogeneity of the Channel area and the close inter-dependency between players on both sides of the Channel, gives this basin strong potential as a testing-ground in particular with a view to an integrated maritime policy for this area on questions of maritime governance (maritime spatial planning, managing conflicts of use). All the actions envisaged in the project focus on maritime issues.

The concrete tools envisaged for this experimentation in coordinated maritime governance are: an integrated maritime strategy for the Channel area, a Channel Forum to serve as a platform for exchanges and dialogue between the area's stakeholders, a Channel Area Scientific Committee, and a Channel Area Resource Centre.

IV) SUMMARY OF MARITIME MACRO-REGIONAL PROJECTS IN EUROPE:

	Process under way	Characteristics of the area concerned	Priorities envisaged
Baltic	Action plan being implemented since January 2010.	Tradition of cooperation via numerous inter-governmental institutions. Almost an enclosed EU sea since enlargement. Pollution is a major problem; there are important East-West disparities; and relations between EU and Russia is another important issue.	4 pillars: the environment, prosperity, accessibility and attractiveness, security.
Danube	Consultation by the Commission prior to the adoption of an Action Plan early in 2011.	Very extensive macro-region, large number of States involved including several non-EU States. Strong potential for infrastructure improvement (increase in traffic and to reduce pollution). Links to be defined with other rivers and basins.	Likely priorities will include disparities in development, the environment, and infrastructure (especially transport).
Mediterranean	Discussions on the Med programme, significant support from certain regions.	43 States potentially concerned, a large number of them non-EU States. Existence of the UfM alongside. Problems concerning the hinterland are particularly important.	Improved coordination with Southern non-EU countries, management of risks, climate change.
Atlantic	Survey of regions carried out (Atlantic Arc), strategy document presented in Gijón.	An open area, particularly internationally (reflections on trans-Atlantic trade in particular), question of its peripheral situation.	Reflection by sub-basins, proposal concerning a dual approach: protection / exploitation of the Atlantic area.

North Sea	Discussions in NSC and COR.	Congested maritime area with high risks linked to climate change.	Energy, transport (management of maritime transport flows, connections with the hinterland).
Adriatic	A number of sometimes diverging initiatives.	Pre-accession States, an area situated between several other macro-regions (Danube, Mediterranean, Alps).	Coastal management, tourism, management of risks.
Black Sea	Gradual setting-up of tools (Euroregion, Black Sea Synergy).	Numerous and different types of relations with non-EU countries. Latent conflicts, weak institutional capacity of the Regions.	Economic development, environment, water management, tourism.
English Channel	CAMIS strategic project.	Relatively small area, homogeneous in terms of characteristics and challenges. Numerous experiments under way with regard to the IMP.	4 priority areas: maritime governance, Channel Area Resource Centre, clusters and benchmarking, transport and intermodality.

V) CONCLUSIONS

Any creation of a European macro-regional strategy in any of these sea basins would have to be preceded by a prior consultation and study phase to analyse the specific features of the basins concerned and identify those areas in which a macro-regional approach would contribute added value to already-existing transnational cooperation initiatives and the IMP.

Although the launch of any macro-regional strategy will need Member States' agreement, the local and regional authorities can contribute their expertise, which is based on their knowledge of the specific features of the territory and their proximity to local needs. From this point of view, it can be said that whichever of the approaches is adopted – sea basin or broader macro-regional strategy – neither will be possible without the active participation of the territories, especially the Regions.

Lastly, thought should also be given to the possibility of ultimately adopting a macro-regional approach for the outermost regions. Macaronesia and the Caribbean could, for example, be considered coherent areas for reflecting on strengthened cooperation. Their specific characteristics – peripherality and insularity, nature of links with neighbouring non-EU countries – do however create a specific context, to which the macro-regional concept would have to be adapted.