

Elements of embedding the Macro-regional Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the Macro-regional Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) in the ESIF-programmes of the period 2014-2020;

The case of AUSTRIA

For the purpose of contributing to the ongoing exchange of information and experience among the National coordinators (NC) in the Danube Strategy and the European Commission (DG Regio, Competence Centre Macro-regions (MRS) and European Territorial cooperation (ETC)), the state of embedding the EU-Strategy of the Danube Region (EUSDR) and of the EU-Strategy of the Alpine Region (EUSALP) in the Austrian programmes of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) of the period 2014-2020 can be described as follows:

1. MSR-references in the Partnership Agreement (PA) between Austria and the European Commission on ESIF-funding (approved by the EC on 17.10.2014)

- In the Austrian PA, the particular relevance of transboundary cooperation is highlighted for Austria being a land-locked country situated in the centre of Europe and sharing borders with 8 neighboring countries. However, due to the limited ESI-funds allocation to Austria (in its relatively limited contribution to the national GDP), the necessity of thematic concentration and the specificities of the regulative ESIF-framework, the ESI-funds – besides ETC/Interreg - are not allocated for cooperation purpose in Austria. Consequently, transnational cooperation efforts are in general (and in in the MRS specific) not only mainly directed to project development for ESI-funded projects but addressing a wider range of cooperation aspects.
- The PA considers the EUSDR (and a future EUSALP) as one of the strategic reference documents for the ESIF-programming and implementation. The scope of both the EUSDR and the EUSALP is however going far beyond the thematic focus of the Austrian ESIF-programmes (which is true also for the Interreg programmes). Mutual exchange of information between ESIF-programmes and the MRS, joint strategic monitoring and reflection should be ensured during the implementation phase in appropriate ways (e.g. in evaluation exercises, reporting and information activities, etc.).

2. MRS-embedding elements in the Austria-wide operational programme "*Investing in growth and jobs 2014-2020*" (IGJ) (approved by the EC on 16.12.2015)

- The Austrian IGJ/ERDF-programme strategy identifies particular thematic synergies with the EUSDR and the EUSALP in the fields of innovation, SME support and climate change. It is expected, that project partners will consider these complementarities when developing projects. Consequently, the IGJ/ERDF-programme will also contribute to the implementation of the EUSDR and the EUSALP. A few concrete project examples have already been identified in this respect (e.g. "*Responsible River Modelling Center*")
- However, due to the basic framework conditions (see above) and the thematic concentration art. 70(2) and art. 96(3)(d) EU-reg. 1303/2013 are not applied within the Austrian IGJ-programme. No international cooperation component is foreseen in the ERDF-programme (nor in the ESF; as concerns EARDF, transnational cooperation is part of the overall approach in LEADER).
- The integration of MRS-issues into programme monitoring, reporting, evaluation and in information activities is planned in an appropriate way, where relevant.
- Specific governance arrangements in Austria are considered a good starting point for ensuring mutual exchange of information and experience and joint strategic learning during the implementation of both the ESIF-programmes and the MRS; like e.g.

double-involvement of institutions and even persons in the ESIF- and the MRS-committees; embedding and interlinking relevant national coordination meetings within the Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning (ÖROK) which is also in charge of the strategic monitoring process of the PA (*STRAT.AT 2020*). Furthermore, the office of the ÖROK is acting as Managing authority of the IGJ/ERDF-programme; the Federal Chancellery is acting as national coordinator for both the EUSALP and EUSDR and is also responsible for the overall coordination of ESIF/ERDF in Austria; etc.

3. Examples of specific arrangements for linking-in MRS in the Interreg cross-border programmes 2014-2020 with Austrian participation

- Austria participates in 7 cross-border Interreg programmes. Programme strategies and implementation rules have been individually developed in close partnership with the respective partner country. Thus, references to MRS differ from programme to programme.
- Most of the cbc programmes 2014-2020 have taken MRS into account for designing the programme strategy and intend to ensure a demand-driven relationship during the implementation.
- In the Interreg programmes Austria-Hungary, Austria-Slovak Republic, and Austria-Czech Republic and Slovenia-Austria, the application form is asking applicants for explaining the specific contribution of their project to the EUSDR; the Interreg programme Slovenia–Austria asks also for coherence with the EUSALP. This information is considered during the qualitative assessment but no specific extra-point will be allocated in this respect. In the Interreg programme Italy–Austria the application form is asking applicants to explain the specific contribution to the EUSALP and within the qualitative assessment extra-points will be awarded to the project.
- In some programmes specific provision in respect to monitoring, reporting, evaluation, information and publicity are under discussion.

4. Application of the MRS-related provisions in the transnational Interreg cooperation programmes Alpine Space, Central Europe and Danube transnational of the period 2014-2020 in Austria

- Austria follows the transnationally agreed implementation rules for the programmes Interreg Alpine space, Interreg Central Europe and Interreg Danube transnational (the MRS-specific provisions of these programmes are not specified here).
- On the national level, a multi-level and cross sectoral partnerships have been put in place for both the ESIF- and Interreg programmes and for the national embedding of the EUSALP and the EUSDR. It is the ultimate objective of national coordination to keep all relevant institutions well-informed, to share knowledge and experiences in an on-going way and to facilitate thus decision-making of relevant actors by “soft coordination”.
- Within the national institutional setting, separate national coordination platforms exist for the EUSDR, the EUSALP and for national coordination towards the transnational programmes (“*ÖROK national committee*”). However, a considerable overlap of persons and institutional representation exists and specific efforts have been made to actively involve the MRS community into the Interreg-programming on the national level. The same approach is intended during the implementation phase.
- The fact that the Austrian National Contact Point for transnational Interreg-programmes (NCP) is hosted by the ÖROK and is supporting both national coordination for the transnational programmes and for the EUSDR and the EUSALP

is considered as an additional asset for effective and efficient coordination between the MRS and the ESIF in Austria.

- National public information on ESIF-, MRS- and Interreg-programme implementation in Austria is offered on a single website which is again hosted by the ÖROK (www.oerok.gv.at).

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