

Energy priorities: potentials for cross macro-regional collaboration

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Report

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Cross EU macro-regional strategies meeting on energy thematic was organised by Interact Programme in close cooperation with thematic coordinators of the EU Strategy for Alpine Region, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (all Strategies together referred as MRS) and Danube Strategy Point.

The meeting was aiming to kick-off the exchange of experience and mutual learning across the MRS on cross-cutting issues of energy theme. Besides, the event addressed a question on how to better connect efforts undertaken by thematic coordinators of the MRS, the EU and national institutions in charge of delivering the EU Energy and Climate Policies. Moreover, the participants were invited to elaborate on potential activities for further collaboration across the MRS.

Macro-regional strategies: potentials, efforts and delivery

The event underlined a mission of MRS to elaborate more targeted solutions to address shared territorial challenges. MRS aim to solve real macro-regional issues that no country can solve alone. MRS involve various stakeholders, representing different multi-level governance levels, and require aligning different funding sources. Therefore, MRS implementation is a complex process requiring to establish joint transnational development processes; MRS delivery through single short term projects is not sufficient. Joint transnational development processes (e.g. 'flagships' in the EUSBSR, 'example projects' in the EUSALP or 'actions' in the EUSDR) through their implementation become 'home' for projects, chains of projects, networks, platforms, thematic working groups, that altogether create more significant impact.

To manage the above mentioned transnational processes, MRS thematic coordinators¹ become 'architects' in planning and delivering various activities. Further discussion among participants was built on presentations of the work done and planned by the MRS thematic coordinators in each MRS. Although thematic in MRS differ; the work of coordinators is very much alike. In addressing shared MRS challenges, MRS thematic coordinators deal with several parallel processes, engage with different stakeholders and ensure delivery of various activities.

Based on the discussion at the event, the following observations and conclusions can be highlighted:

- There is a potential for closer collaboration between Directorates-General of the Commission and MRS thematic coordinators (representatives of Directorate-General for Energy and Directorate-General for Climate were present at the event. For example, High Level Groups by the European Commission could be better exploited to identify and also address MRS relevant thematic. Collaboration between the Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP) and EUSBSR is recognised as mutually beneficial. There is a potential for establishing cooperation between the EUSDR and EUSALP and Central and South-Eastern European Connectivity (CESEC).
- It was underlined that there is a potential for MRS to contribute to a more efficient implementation of the [EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change](#) and its action plans. It has the potential for more consistency, synergies, facilitating information exchanges, saving resources and avoiding duplications.
- The MRS coordinators were presented work of the [Austrian Institute of Technology](#). The Institute addresses several MRS relevant thematic, implements projects responding to current and future trends in sustainable energy supply that could contribute to MRS.
- Looking in cross-MRS collaboration, a 'Comparative study on the governance structure and energy policies in EU macro-regional strategies' is conducted by the Centre of European Policy Studies. The Study is contracted by EUSALP AlpGov project, Action Group 9 'Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy', EUSALP. The study concludes that there are similar thematic areas (like, energy efficiency, energy security, integrated internal energy markets, climate actions) that could open for cross-MRS collaboration. Moreover, cross-MRS exchanges could, for example:
 - foster security, solidarity and trust;
 - address insufficient current capacity for cross-national planning;
 - work out cooperation mechanisms;
 - elaborate joint projects.

¹ Policy area coordinators in the EUSBSR, priority area coordinators in the EUSDR, action group leaders in the EUSALP and pillar coordinators in the EUSAIR.

Taking into account the state of play of MRS, ideas and suggestions presented, the meeting participants jointly brainstormed on where the cross-MRS collaboration could be further developed. The groups identified potential topics for cross-MRS cooperation, those being:

- retrofitting of existing multifamily buildings;
- energy efficiency (management) in public buildings;
- enhanced energy efficiency in small and medium enterprises.

Furthermore, the participants were discussing desired long and short term effects (impact) of identified potential topics (above); expected results; outcomes; activities and resources needed. Moreover, participants elaborated on what would need to be done at a cross-MRS level and at a level of each MRS (including identifying joint transnational development processes required to be set up at the level of the MRS and stakeholders that could bring about the change). Interreg programmes are important stakeholders here that are supporting establishing new networks and cooperation.

The exercise was guiding the discussion at the event, but even more, it was meant to provide an example of how MRS can be delivered. The participants were provided scanned copies of the group discussion outcomes shortly after the event. For inspiration and clarification, a description of the EUSBSR flagship under the policy area 'Education' of the EUSBSR 'S2W-BSR Integrate NEETs: Theory of change' was shared.

The event provided participants not only new contacts and general overview on how MRS are addressing energy thematic but also allowed to test a way (method) to think about macro-regional processes. Opening the event, participants were asked to identify a keyword for this event: collaboration, innovation, inspiration and new ideas, were mentioned. Further exchanges, synergies and better understanding on MRS were added. We believe an exchange kicked off at this event would grow into more cooperation across MRS. Implementation of the MRS is certainly a creative process requiring lots of innovation. The participants also highlighted the importance to 'build MRS infrastructure', alignment of relevant funding being one of those. The discussion about embedding MRS relevant priorities in the European Structural and Investment Funds programmes, including Interreg, post-2020 has started. First steps for more embedding have been taken already in each MRS and across MRS. Similar processes are organised in all MRS to identify most relevant macro-regional priorities (shared transnational challenges) and initiating dialogue with those in charge of the programming processes post-2020. A short reference to the ['2019 European Semester: Country Reports'](#) was provided to the event participants for their further considerations and use in funding dialogue.

Taking into account the MRS implementation is a complex process implemented in an agile environment all stakeholders are important to be involved and take their active role.

Annex: Presentations ['Energy priorities: potentials for macro-regional collaboration'](#).