

# EU Macroregional Strategies

Thank you for inviting me to this closing session, it is a pleasure and an honour to be here.

I would like to start my reflection going back to some years ago, before the accession of the 10 new member states of the EU, to tell you that I got highly impressed by a lady from the Baltic Republics interviewed about her feeling on entering the EU saying “I do not expect any benefit for myself or my generation; this is for our children and grandchildren”.

Well, let me say that lady had a long term vision which national governments often lack and sometimes even EU bodies.

In fact, bearing in mind that interview, when the first macroregional strategy was launched some years later I was not astonished at all it was the Baltic Strategy and the main goal was an environmental one, which is the first concern when thinking of next generations.

I was not astonished either when the EC was given the mandate by the Council to elaborate on the Danube strategy, not only because a colleague from the Representation of Baden Württemberg in Brussels had given me well in advance the first draft of the sentence to be put in the council conclusions, but rather as I knew to what extent our friends from the Danube area were committed to this project, and at that time I thought it would have been a common project.

Unfortunately, due to several reasons, it was not possible at that time to join the strategy as full member even if Friuli Venezia Giulia Region was entitled from a geographical point of view to do so as it makes part, at least for a little portion of its territory, of the Danube River Basin, but I am very happy to see that, thanks to the engagement of the University of Trieste and its proactive attitude in the Alps Adriatic Rectors’ Conference and its close cooperation

with the Danube Rectors' Conference, what had seemed for a while a lost opportunity has now turned into a very fruitful reality, that we are witnessing today, here in the Gorizia site of the University of Trieste.

Still, we have to ask ourselves whether macroregional strategies are worth our unconditional support and commitment.

First of all, as you are perfectly aware, macroregional strategies have been developed under the "3 no" principle: no to new rules, no to new bodies, no to additional budget at EU level.

This is for sure true from a technical, I would even say from a theoretical point of view, but what in practice, in particular as long as access to European funding is at stake?

In a few months we are going to enter the new programming period – 2014/2020 – with some important novelties for the cohesion policy: conditionality first of all (both ex ante and macro) – unfortunately no time here to go more in depth into this highly debated subject –, but also ex post evaluation and performance bonus. In addition EU 2020 targets on employment, Research, climate change and energy, education and social inclusion, will be the guiding principles for expenditure on structural funds, like for every other EU policy, as highlighted very clearly in your team works.

Furthermore we will have to compete on a level playing field for the programs directly funded by the EU, like Horizon 2020.

All this happens in times of budget constraints and increased attention at all levels for the effectiveness of public money expenditures, that will make competition for EU funding harder and harder.

Is there any further need to demonstrate that wide area strategies will indirectly imply a higher rate of success and more absorption of EU funds, thus overcoming – de facto – the criterion of no-additional budget for macroregional strategies?

Acting together in the framework of a macroregional strategy with an interdisciplinary approach seems to me the only win-win approach for our territories and it is of the utmost importance that this is the mission of the DIAnet Project, while **sustainable competitiveness** seems to me – in times of crisis and high rates of unemployment, especially for youth – to be the vision.

At present further macroregional areas are (or seem to be) in the pipeline, and among them the Adriatic-Ionian initiative. Italy can act as a bridge between North and South, West and East, and Friuli Venezia Giulia in particular, thanks to its long lasting tradition in international cooperation dating back to the period of the iron curtain (in the Alps-Adriatic Working Community – an actual macroregion ante litteram) can play a role of hinge between Danube and Mediterranean areas and between Alpine and West Balkans areas.

The regional high education system and the University of Trieste in particular have been very proactive in interacting with the Danube area via its close cooperation between Alps Adriatic Rectors' Conference and Danube Rectors' Conference, carrying out a common work on the "knowledge society" pillar of the Danube strategy and I have had the honour to be a direct witness of this best practice mentioned by the European Commission itself in the Danube Action Plan.

Coming back to the added value of macroregional strategies, somebody could be also worried on how to strike the balance between subsidiarity and need for "critical mass", possibly implying less autonomy, but I would say that responsible multilevel governance is the right answer: we have to face challenges that do not stop at regional borders nor at national ones: climate change, pollution, energy supply are only some examples but also health-care, transports, research need interregional and transnational coordination, in other words "macroregional policies", whatever we want to call them.

This means that even if working together in a wider perspective could imply that we lose some "room for manoeuvre", still it remains the only path to take, the only responsible choice when thinking for our children and grandchildren sake, like that lady from the Baltic Republics said some 10 years ago, and should make us conclude "beyond any reasonable doubt" that: **YES, macroregional approach deserves our full engagement.**

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