EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)

3rd Meeting of the Thematic Steering Group (TSG) for Pillar 3 – Environmental Quality, Portoroz, SI, 10-11 November 2015

MINUTES/OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

Venue: Conference room Aurora I+II in Congress Centre of Grand Hotel Bernardin
Obala 2, 6320 Portorož, Slovenia

Chairs: Pillar 3 Coordinators Mr. Mitja Bricelj (SI) and Mr Senad Oprašić (BiH)

Participants: See Annex 1

MINUTES

All eight countries were represented at the meeting, either through their designated TSG-3 members or through their representatives.

Items 1 and 2: After the Pillar Coordinator Mitja Bricelj (SI), the country hosting the 3rd TSG-3 meeting, welcomed participants, prior to its adoption, the agenda was re-structured as follows at the request of IT: **Item 5** became **Item 3** to allow the representative of the Managing Authority of the ADRION Programme to be present at the discussion of priority actions and hence get a better idea of the logic informing TSG-3's work.

Upon proposal by the Commission, **Item 3** (Implications for the functioning of TSG-3 of decisions taken by the GB on 7 October 2015) was moved to **Item 10** (AOB), whilst **Item 6** (specific criteria for labelling projects relating to the approved priority actions) became the new **Item 5**, also discussed on Day 1.

 New Item 3 – former Item 5 (Decision reg. four priority actions): In line with a request emanating from the Governing Board at its meeting in Zagreb on 7 October 2015, the Commission invited TSG-3 to agree on a shortlist of actions, drawn from the Action Plan, on which it would concentrate in an initial testing period. Prior to the meeting, the Pillar Coordinators had circulated a proposal based on and combining actions included in the list that resulted from the 2nd TSG-3 meeting in Sarajevo, with subsequent amendments from IT and **GR**. It also took into account proposals from the other countries submitted in the template they filled out subsequent to the meeting. In reply to a question from **HR** reg. the methodology contemplated for setting targets for priority actions, the Commission explained that for meaningful targets to be set, preliminary work aimed at setting indicators and at establishing reliable baselines for these indicators needed first to be conducted. **GR** pointed out that the phrase "also beyond territorial waters" could cause legal uncertainties given the fact that it is not an internationally agreed language. However, in order to be constructive, we can accept the inclusion of this phrase.

Item 4 (ADRION Programme**):** The representative of the Managing Authority of the ADRION Programme delivered a Power Point Presentation explaining the process through which the programme would be implemented and projects selected. He announced that a call for proposals would be issued by February 2016 at the latest subsequent to a meeting of the first monitoring Committee on the 17 and 18 November 2015 and a launch event on 9-10 December 2015. The Coordinators for Pillar 3 would be invited to attend the latter event. Since the amount available under the first call was only 25 million €, the types of projects that could be supported would mainly be soft actions, e.g. networking, methodological development, pilot actions, feasibility studies or joint management plans for a duration of up to 24 months. Since the first call could not involve 'closed targeting', the shortlist of priority actions just discussed could prove very useful for ensuring that the call would nevertheless target EUSAIR needs. **HR** welcomed the ADRION programme and emphasised the importance of keeping in mind selection criteria applied under the programme and other funding mechanisms (among others country-specific OPs and Interreg programmes as well as IPA-programmes) when setting criteria for identifying and labelling projects of macro-regional importance.

New Item 5 - former Item 6 (Decision on specific criteria for projects under the four priority actions): The Commission underlined that, prior to specific criteria for identifying and labelling projects as projects of macro-regional importance from TSG-3's peculiar vantage point, the six broad criteria - in effect eligibility criteria - should be fulfilled. The Commission also reminded that the table clarifying how these criteria can be interpreted in practice was re-circulated prior to the meeting. For **IT**, the six broad criteria formed a very good basis for identifying valuable projects and did not therefore see the need for setting specific criteria. It was, however, of utmost importance that all four TSGs applied the six criteria in the same way, **IT** suggested that the ten Pillar Coordinators sign a Memorandum of Understanding to this effect and that a shared, but independent mechanism be set up for checking if the projects promoted under each pillar complied with the six broad criteria. Also for **HR**, specific criteria had no added value. **GR** agreed with this approach. **SI** echoed this position by stating that it might prove counterproductive to set narrow thematic criteria since this could limit the scope of projects, carried out under Pillar 3, to 'sectoral' projects e.g. such targeting protected areas. This country felt that TSG-3 had a special responsibility in promoting projects demonstrating positive externalities for the other pillars to be expected from the ecosystem approach[1] and the principle of sustainable development across the entire EUSAIR territory, notably in terms of cost-efficient ecosystem services. He also reminded that, as the only body expressly working for good ecological status in the Region and approaching it as a seamless entity, TSG-3 was a place for generating truly innovative ideas.

The Commission pointed out that the ecosystem-based approach was embedded in the EU Strategy for Biodiversity and also reminded TSG-3 that, as stipulated in the introduction to the EUSAIR Action Plan, the projects retained are generally expected to reinforce existing EU policies, notably EU environmental legislation. Under the second broad criterion (transnational, if not macro-regional, scope or impact), **GR** requested that projects involving only two countries be considered eligible as well. Otherwise, valuable projects in which **GR** and **AL** cooperated on preservation of transnational terrestrial habitats would be excluded. Additionally, **GR** asked for

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[1] The ecosystem approach broaches any issue in a non-fragmented way, looking at it as part of a complex network of interactions and interdependencies amongst living organisms and between these and their physical environment. From this follows that, rather than perceiving and addressing a given problem as pertaining to one policy area only, possible mutual impacts of different policy areas are considered as well as their impact on the structure and functions of the ecosystems in which they play out.

clarifications regarding the word "preferences" in the recommendation of the third general criteria "be realistic and credible", in order to avoid any exclusion of actions /projects having only public financial sources.

Referring to the GB discussion on 7 October 2015, the Commission reminded of the importance of linking specific criteria for identifying and labelling projects to indicators against which progress can be monitored and assessed.

HR asked to be kept abreast about the discussion on criteria held in the other TSGs.

During the discussion, **Item 8** (First discussion on criteria for ranking (weighing) projects under the same priority action) became de facto part of Item 6. For **IT,** ranking (weighing) projects against each other risked raising difficult discussions between different groups of countries. **HR** advised against 'letters of recommendation', as applied under the Danube strategy. For **IT**, the fact that EUSAIR only covered 13 Italian regions entailed a general problem: as candidates for 'privileged treatment' on the part of OP Monitoring Committees during project selection processes, projects labelled under EUSAIR risked being ill-received by Italy's remaining regions.

Item 7 (First exchange on project ideas relating to the four priority actions): TSG-3 generally felt that the projects included in the Action plan constituted a good starting point. Among additional project ideas, **HR** mentioned large cetaceans in the Adriatic and mapping of all marine Natura 2000 sites; **SR,** the Dinaric Arc for terrestrial habitats' transposition to large roaming carnivores in the Region of know-how reg. large migrating herbivores in Northern Europe and building on Healthy Seas projects reg. illegal and unregulated fishery; **AL,** common implementation of protocols for coastal protected areas; **ME,** a project looking at the most vulnerable marine protected areas for which management plans were still missing as well as pilot actions on green boating. **SI** Pillar Coordinator observed that such projects would need to involve also TSG-2 and TSG-4. **IT** pointed to projects under the Barcelona Convention with focus on clean-up/removal of marine micro-litter, the impact of which would be greatly enhanced if a common methodology and data-sharing could be worked out, development of a large-scale contingency plan involving all participating countries bordering the A-I sea basins and projects under MedWet which could favourably be transposed to relevant parts of the Region, notably via joint platforms shared by **SI/HR** and **BiH**.

The representative of the Italian Regions presented a proposal starting from achievements and tools developed by SHAPE project (Shaping a Holistic Approach to Protect the Adriatic Environment between coast and sea). Involving all 8 Countries of the EUSAIR plus the PAP/RAC, this proposal would be a step towards MSP and ICM at sea basin level by helping fulfil the ICZM Protocol and the EU Directive on MSP. By helping identify the gaps in marine knowledge (Adriatic Atlas to support ICZM&MSP http://atlas.shape-ipaproject.eu/), prioritise the list of gaps and start to fill the priority gaps, the proposal could potentially fit under Priority Action 1 (Enhancement of marine knowledge with respect, among others, to protected coastal areas).

The **SI** Pillar Coordinator emphasised that now was the time to think outside the box, leaving behind a purely sectoral approach.

Item 9 (Cross-pillar issues: table of contents for background paper on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and matrix on cross-pillar interdependencies). When presenting the table of contents for a paper on MSP, **IT** underlined that among central issues to be addressed were: (a) synergies with the work under TSG-1, (b) the link between the two directives of MSP and ESA, (c) how best to fill gaps in terms of knowledge' (d) how best to develop a shared methodology for devising and implementing maritime spatial plans; (e) the question of multiple scales, including the possibility of drawing up several plans, all of which would contribute to targets set for the two sea basins and (f) recommendations for the future.

GR presented an input highlighting among others the need for MSP to be present in all four pillars in an horizontal way as all the issues have spatial impacts, the necessity of a multi-scale approach for MSP (Strategic, regional and downscale), the strengthening of capacity building and the fulfilment of certain prerequisites in order to have proper actions. **GR** promised to circulate this input among TSG-3 members.

When presenting the **matrix** showing inter-Pillar interdependencies starting from the - still tentative and revisable targets included in the Action Plan, **IT** underlined that it was meant to offer a basis for reflection. **IT** also emphasised that whilst no box was highlighted in red, thereby confirming that no gross incompatibility had been detected between the tentative targets set under the different pillars, the orange colour nonetheless acted as early warning of possible inconsistencies between these targets. Activities contained in the orange boxes were not to be entirely excluded but some caution was needed when setting quantified targets for them. In this sense, the matrix could prove useful for assessing the degree to which projects under all 4 pillars comply with the sixth broad criteria (be coherent and mutually supportive), hence facilitating decision-making. **BiH** expressed its support for the approach. **GR** pointed to the need for internal consultation among the pillars. Additionally, **GR** accepted the use of this matrix as an information tool to identify the interactions among pillars and not as a document for adoption of the indicative targets, since there are some uncertainties regarding these targets (e.g. target 3.1a).

Referring to the interdependencies between the four pillars and in virtue of the principle of precaution, **IT** proposed that a note be prepared for the next GB proposing that grounding in an ecosystem-based approach should become a criterion also for projects considered under the other three pillars.

SI Pillar Coordinator proposed to have a specific inter-pillar meeting on the MSP paper back-to-back with next TSG meeting in Bologna (March 2016).

Item 10 (AOB and next steps)

The Commission informed TSG-3 about the main outcomes of the GB meeting in Zagreb on 7 October 2015. As far as the functioning of TSGs is concerned, a key message was that, for TSG meetings to be productive, good preparation was crucial. These meeting could favourably be held also in countries other than the Pillar Coordinators' countries as this would stimulate the other countries and raise awareness of the Strategy in the hosting country whilst allowing the other TSG-3 members to become better acquainted with the conditions prevailing in this country. Another message was that, in order to enhance the visibility of TSG-3's work, it should develop its own communication strategy both inside countries and across the Region. Finally, as far as inter-Pillar coordination was concerned, three avenues were recommended: (a) via the newly created intra-net, to which all TSG-3 members now have access; (b) via periodical technical meetings gathering Pillar Coordinators and convened according to needs; (c) via ad hoc attendance, as appropriate, of members of other TSGs based closest to the venue of the TSG meeting concerned (these members to report back to their respective 'home' TSG).

As for the Facility Point (FP), strenuous efforts were underway to make it operational by to have it ready to be launched at the 1st EUSAIR Forum in May 2016.

HR underlined that, next to logistical help to assist the Co-Chairs, it was urgent for the FP to deliver technical help, notably by providing thematic expertise for evaluating projects.

The Commission finally reminded that all TSGs would be required to draw up an annual report to be submitted to the EUSAIR GB in the beginning of next year and that a template would be circulated shortly to this effect.

OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

Items 1 and 2: Agenda: Modified agenda adopted with the following modifications in the order in which the different items would be dealt with: **Item 5** became **Item 3** to allow the representative of the Managing Authority of the ADRION Programme to be present at the discussion of priority actions and hence get a better idea of the logic informing TSG-3's work. **Item 3** (Implications for the functioning of TSG-3 of decisions taken by the GB on 7 October 2015) was moved to Item 10 (AOB), whilst **Item 6** (specific criteria for labelling projects relating to the approved priority actions) became the new **Item 5**, also discussed on Day 1.

The minutes of the 2nd meeting of TSG-3 were formally adopted. So were the Rules of Procedure for TSG-3 on Day 2 (Annex 2).

New Item 3: A shortlist of four priority actions was approved on Day 2 after **AL** lifted its reservation (Annex 3).

 Item 4: Pillar-3 Coordinators to be invited to attend the launch event on 9-10 December 2015 in Bologna.

New Item 5 and former Item 8: On the basis of the discussion, broad agreement was reached on the following 3-tiers methodology for filtering project proposals:

1. **Level-1** (compulsory and in all cases): The 6 broad criteria set out in the EUSAIR Action Plan, together with the table clarifying how these criteria can be understood.

2. **Level-2** (compulsory and in all cases): Level-1 criteria further refined on the basis of the TSG-3's peculiar perspective (proposed list in Annex 4).

3. **Level-3** (optional): Specific thematic criteria, assessed, as necessary, with the help of independent experts (proposed list in Annex 4).

The idea of ranking projects pertaining to the same priority area was generally deemed counterproductive. Voluntary self-restraint and political understanding reg. a reasonably-sized bunch of projects on which to concentrate in an initial phase was deemed preferable by far.

Item 7: All TSG-3 members to submit by the end of the month (**deadline**: **end of November**) project ideas pertaining to the four priority actions that could help flesh out/expand multi-country projects forming part of existing partnerships or networks or be linked to projects planned in fellow EUSAIR countries. On this basis, the Pillar Coordinators to compile a consolidated list to be circulated prior to the next TSG-3 meeting and, during this meeting, to be subject to joint screening, possibly with the help of experts, and subsequent approval.

HR and **RS** to send the links for mentioned project ideas.

Item 9: Regarding the table of contents for a paper on MSP, TSG-3 mandated the Co-Chairs for TSG-3 to take contact with the Co-Chairs of TSG-1 with a view to discussing how best to prepare a common output to be presented at the first EUSAIR Forum. The SI Pillar Coordinator also invited TSG-3 members as well as the Commission to send their comments to the table of contents by the end of the month for a consolidated version to be discussed with the TSG-1 Coordinators.

The members of TSG-3 to send , **by the end of November 2015,** their comments reg. the matrix on interdependencies and synergies between the different pillars, starting from the targets proposed as examples in the Action Plan. This matrix, amended in light of the comments received, to be approved by written procedure prior to being submitted to and discussed as a

basis for reflection at the next technical meeting for Pillar Coordinators and National Coordinators to be held back-to-back with the next GB meeting.

10. AOB /next steps

1. A template for the TSGs' first annual report to the GB to be circulated shortly. The following points would need to be addressed:

- Governance arrangements set up;
- Practical outcomes so far (identification of priority actions; specific criteria for identifying projects);
- Main challenges encountered and lessons learned, both in terms of organisation and substance;
- Next steps.

2. **1st December 2015**: 3rd meeting of TSG-1, Athens,

3. **9-10 December 2015**: Launch event for ADRION Programme, Bologna

4**. Last week of February 2016:** 2nd technical meeting of Pillar Coordinators and National Coordinators and 3rd meeting of the Governing Board, Brussels;

5. **9-10 March 2016**: 4th meeting of TSG-3 Bologna.

6. **12-13 May 2016**: 1st EUSAIR Forum, Dubrovnik