Discussion paper

for the technical meeting with ESIF/IPA (Managing) Authorities
'Initiating a sustained dialogue between EUSAIR and the ESIF/IPA programmes'

Dubrovnik (Croatia) - 12 May 2016, 09: 00-11:30 h.

The aim of the technical meeting is to gather the EUSAIR key implementers (National Coordinators, Pillar Coordinators, Thematic Steering Groups members), the relevant ESIF/IPA programme authorities (Managing Authorities, NIPAC, Operating Structures) and the Commission services (DG REGIO, EMPL, AGRI, MARE, NEAR including EU Delegations in participating (potential) candidate countries) to discuss how EU programmes and the EUSAIR can be brought closer together. This meeting is meant to initiate a sustained dialogue between the EUSAIR and the ESIF/IPA programmes for the mutual benefit of both the Strategy and the programmes.

Introduction

Macro-regional strategies do not come with a specific allocation of funds (either EU or national). Their implementation should take place by aligning and mobilising all relevant available funds in the macro-region: EU, national, regional, local funds, International Financial Institutions as well as private funds.

With regards to EU funds, according to the relevant EU regulations[1], the programmes under the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II) can support projects of macro-regional importance.
The objectives of the macro-regional strategy(ies) in which the country(ies) / region(s) participates should be part of their overall strategic planning (ESIF: Partnership Agreement, Operational Programmes, Cooperation Programmes; IPA: Country/multi-Country Strategy

---

[1] **ESIF, e.g.**:
Regulation No 1303/2013 (Common Provision Regulation)
Art. 11: "Common Strategic Framework – Content", paragraph (f);
Art. 15: "Content of the Partnership Agreement", paragraph 2(a)(ii);
Art. 27: "Content of programmes", paragraph 3;
Art. 96: "Content, adoption and amendments of OP under the investment for growth and jobs goal", paragraph 3(e);
Annex 1: Section 7.1(4), Section 7.3.
Regulation No 1299/2013 (European Territorial Cooperation)
Art. 3: "Geographical coverage", paragraph 3;
Art 8: "Programming", paragraph 3(d);
IPA II, e.g.:
Regulation No 231/2014 (Basic act)
Whereas (7);
Art. 9: "Cross-instrument provisions", paragraph 5.
Regulation No 447/2014 (Implementing regulation)
Art. 4: "Principle of ownership", paragraph (2)

Papers, Country/multi-Country Action Programmes, Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes), i.e. the objectives of the macro-regional strategy(ies) should have been "embedded" in the programming documents

The relevant ESI and IPA funds should support, where appropriate, the implementation of the macro-regional strategies. This can happen, for instance, through projects joining up with, or complementing actions in one or more countries in the macro-region addressing the same challenges or opportunities, preferably those actions or projects which the macro-regional governance structures (notably the Thematic Steering Groups) have prioritised ("labelled").

Close coordination and interaction between the macro-regional key implementers and the programme (managing) authorities is crucial in this regard. As a result, programme (managing) authorities should be able to assess the macro-regional value of a project against the macro-regional objectives and against the added-value of the project both for the macro-region and for the country/region concerned.

1. "Labelling" procedure

This is a procedure through which the EUSAIR Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs) assess projects which, via priorities they identified, contribute significantly to meeting the Strategy's objectives and hence deserve a 'EUSAIR' label.

To be "eligible" for EUSAIR, projects shall meet the following six broad criteria (referred to in the EUSAIR Action Plan).

> a) They should address identified priorities, meeting well substantiated needs and be widely supported.
> b) Their scope or impact should be transnational, if not macro-regional[2]
> c) They should be realistic and credible.
> d) They should build on existing initiatives and have reached a fair degree of maturity;
> e) They should pay attention to the cross cutting aspects identified in the EUSAIR Communication and Action plan;
> f) They should be coherent and mutually supportive.

If the 'candidate' project meets all six "eligibility" criteria, it can undergo an assessment against guiding principle/specific criteria set by the Thematic Steering Group aiming at ascertaining its contribution to the Strategy's objectives. In case of multiple candidates, this process could lead to a ranking of projects where only the 'best' (according to agreed criteria) will be awarded the EUSAIR label.

In order for the "labelled" projects to be considered for support under ESIF/IPA funds, early cooperation between the EUSAIR Thematic Steering Groups and the relevant programme (managing) authorities is essential. This would allow e.g. to jointly set the criteria to be used for assessing, and eventually selecting, those projects which contribute to meeting the objectives of both the EUSAIR and the ESIF/IPA programme. This joint approach would optimise chances for the selected projects to be supported by the ESIF/IPA funds (in possible conjunction with other source of financing).

---

[2] Mind: a national/regional project could have a direct impact on (i.e. is for the benefit of) the macro-region.

2. Support to EUSAIR projects via ESIF/IPA programmes

As discussed above, in order for a EUSAIR project to benefit from support under ESIF/IPA funds, Thematic Steering Groups should clarify with authorities in charge of programmes, thematically and territorially-relevant to projects lined up for a EUSAIR label, prospects for having these projects supported under the programmes concerned.

<u>Streamline project selection in ESIF/IPA programmes</u>

It is important that programme (managing) authorities (including monitoring committee where relevant) develop and apply specific project selection criteria, as and where appropriate, to integrate the macro-regional dimension and help funding projects of macro-regional importance or those contributing to the macro-regional objectives. This action should be carried in cooperation with the relevant Thematic Steering Group.

To support projects of macro-regional importance, the following examples can be followed where appropriate and relevant:

a) Programmes can finance targeted **EUSAIR labelled projects identified *ex-ante*** by the TSG in cooperation with the programme (managing) authorities. This 'top-down' approach could concern so called "strategic project[3]". The added value of these projects for both the macro-region and the relevant ESIF/IPA programme must be clear and visible.

b) Programmes can design and launch **targeted calls for proposal** in support of projects of a macro-regional importance or impact within one or more programme Priority Axes and/or one duly justified limited geographical area. The design of the targeted calls for proposals (scope, objectives, eligibility and selection criteria) should be done in cooperation with the relevant EUSAIR Thematic Steering Group. Award of the EUSAIR label to projects selected through this competitive process should typically be decided on a case by case basis by relevant Thematic Steering Group in cooperation with the relevant programme authorities.

c) In the context of **open calls for proposals**, extra (bonus) points can be assigned to projects contributing to Strategy objectives. Here again, the design of the call, namely the specific criteria which would led to allocation of extra points, should be done in close cooperation with the relevant EUSAIR Thematic Steering Group. A variant of this approach is to grant extra (bonus) points by default to projects (eligible under the call) to which the TSG awarded the EUSAIR label.

It should be noted that the approaches described under b) and c) are those stipulated in the Annex I to Regulation No 1303/2013 (ESIF Common Provision Regulation) at point 7.3 "Contribution of mainstream programmes to macro-regional and sea-basin strategies".

As a result of the process under b) and c) above, programmes could potentially generate projects (e.g. in a single country or region) of interest for the macro-region, which could be integrated *ex-post* in the macro-regional strategy. This possibility is more likely for projects selected according to point b), as described above.

Examples of guiding principles which could inspire the programme (managing) authorities in the design of selection criteria are included in annex 1 to this paper.

---

3 Let's define a "strategic project" as a discrete initiative included (top-down) in the relevant ESIF/IPA programme from the outset or during programme's life by decision of the monitoring committee. A typical example could be a specific infrastructure. According to this definition, a "strategic project" is opposed to a project selected through a call for proposal (bottom-up)

Guiding principles

The programme authorities should be able to design selection criteria and assess projects based on certain **principles** to assess the macro-regional relevance of a given project, such as[4]:

RELEVANCE TO MACROREGIONAL OBJECTIVES
Does this project *contribute to one or more objectives of the Strategy?* (The objectives are generally presented in the Action Plan of each macro-regional strategy).
RELEVANCE TO MACROREGIONAL ACTIONS AND POLICIES
Is this project *relevant/linked to any project prioritised ("labelled") by the TSG? of the macro-regional strategy?.* Is this project *consistent with EU policies/strategies* relevant to the macro-region?
ADDED-VALUE FOR THE MACROREGION
Does this project alone *demonstrate a macro-regional interest?* Is this project part of a *joint, or coordinated action or initiative* (e.g. joint action with other countries or regions)? Is the project *complementary* to such actions or initiatives? *Is it linked to projects in other countries of the same macro-region***?** (Note: A project may be part of a larger macro-regional – incl. transnational or cross-border - project and only a smaller fraction of that project to be implemented in the eligible programme area). Is this project *a follow-up (continuation) of another project* funded previously within the macro-region or within a transnational programme related to the macro-region?
PARTNERSHIP AND TRANSNATIONALITY
Is this project *part of any transnational partnership* within the macro-region? Is the project *supported by such partnership?* Is there any evidence (in the application) of *cooperation with other partners in the macro-region* (including those outside the eligible programme area) now or in the future?
ADMINISTRATIVE / INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY
Does the project *improve or share institutional/administrative capacity* in the macro-region?

The above questions are only a general guidance which can be broken down into more specific questions as appropriate: R&D, business support, transport, energy, environment, tourism, etc., adapted to the needs of each programme.

---

[4] Indicative and non-exhaustive list