Thematic Workshop 3:

"Preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment"

Chair:

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Background: What is a Macro-regional Strategy?

A Macro-Regional Strategy is an **integrated framework** to address common issues of EU Member States and non-EU Countries located in the same geographical area, which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation.

This includes **challenges**, which can only (or more efficiently/effectively) be tackled through regional cooperation (e.g. environmental, or connectivity issues) and **opportunities**, where increased cooperation is of mutual interest (e.g. tourism, research, innovation, or capacity building).

Macro-regional strategies operate with no additional EU funds, no new institutions and no new legislation. Actions which will be identified in the framework of the Strategy as benefitting from a strengthened (macro-regional) co-operation, would need to be financed by EU, national or private funds. This requires more **coherence between existing funds, structures and policies**.

How the future EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region will look like?

Following a request from the European Council of December 2012, the European Commission is called to bring forward an **EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region** before the end of 2014. The new Strategy will build on the experience gained in the existing Baltic Sea and Danube macro-regional strategies, and will incorporate the Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas (adopted by the Commission on 30 November 2012).

After an intensive **stakeholders' consultation** across the region carried out by the participating countries and the European Commission, and taking into account the recommendations of the evaluation of the macro-regional approach (adopted in June 2013), the European Commission is proposing that the new Strategy focuses on a limited number of areas of mutual interest, where the **added value** of cooperation is clear and justified.

In its initial stage, the Strategy will be concentrated on the four following P**illars**:

1) Blue Growth
2) Connecting the region
3) Environmental quality
4) Sustainable tourism

Objectives and structure of the workshop

This workshop will be focused on the **Pillar 3 'Environmental quality'**.

After a presentation of the outcomes of the stakeholders' consultation by the representatives of the co-ordinating countries for this Pillar (Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina), the expert engaged by the Commission will give her view on the environmental challenges and opportunities for cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian region.

The participants will be encouraged to reflect on the proposed **scope, priority topics** and **potential actions** in this particular Pillar of the future EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

What is the issue?

There are very many environmental issues faced by countries of the Adriatic Ionian region. Some countries of the Region are confronted with a particularly daunting task with respect to environmental protection, when at the same time also facing a number of economic and social issues which need to be addressed. However, not all of the issues, even if highly relevant for a country in question, will be of relevance at the macro-regional level. The EUSAIR focuses on those environmental issues where macro-regional cooperation can have high added value compared with individual action taken by countries.

Challenges and Opportunities

The main needs to be addressed by the Pillar are:

1) **Protecting the marine environment**
   a) **Threats to marine biodiversity** from overfishing, habitat destruction and destruction of breeding grounds, invasive alien species and inappropriate aquaculture, which has resulted in negative impacts for fish, marine mammals, seabirds and virtually all plant and animal life in the seas.

b) **Pollution of the seas**: Pollution of the seas is caused by maritime transport, eutrophication resulting from fertilizer run-off from agricultural lands particularly in the North Adriatic and pollution from rivers resulting from insufficient waste water treatment, pollution from aquaculture, pollution from oil-chemical industry and natural gas exploration. This has negative impacts in particular for wildlife and also for human uses of the sea (especially tourism). In addition, marine litter from land-based sources and abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear has negative aesthetic impacts and negative impacts on wildlife. Moreover, a significant part of the sea basin is by its nature (swallow and closed waters on the three East-North-West shores) and the vessel traffic congestion, at risk of serious damages due to human hazards (e.g. large scale pollution events from oil spills and natural gas exploration).

2) **Protecting terrestrial biodiversity, habitats and ecosystems**
Several countries of the Adriatic-Ionian Region are home to the same terrestrial ecoregions, which stretch across borders. Cooperation is particularly relevant for protecting large carnivores with habitats stretching across much of the macro-region, and for migratory birds along the Adriatic Flyway.

Climate change adaptation, as well as Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Maritime Spatial Planning, are horizontal activities which are relevant in addressing several of the needs listed above.

Addressing the environmental issue and taking actions could make a contribution to achieving several EU environmental goals which are set out in the A*cquis*, particularly those contained in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Water Framework Directive, Waste Directive and the Birds and Habitats Directives.

By addressing threats to both marine and terrestrial biodiversity, habitats and ecosystems, the EUSAIR is also expected to contribute to the achievement of the target of the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

How cooperation can help? Strategic topics/actions

In particular in the field of the environment, cooperation is essential for addressing the challenges. As many of the issues are of transnational relevance, solutions should imply a transnational dimension. A good cooperation framework should avoid that efforts made by some are undermined by failures of other. It is important to encourage rules to agree joint decisions (including a real political support at the highest level), tools to monitor the progress, and a commitment to implement EU Directives and the Barcelona Convention and its protocols. Protecting the environment without proper cooperation mechanisms will not lead to the needed changes, as the environment is a shared common good. For instance, efforts to protect species breeding in countries of the European Union are undone if it is not ensured that they are protected to the extent possible also during migration. In the same way, nature management would be optimized if these eco-regions could be treated within a transnational framework.

1) **Protecting the marine environment**:
   a) **Marine biodiversity**: In particular, the sound management of the marine biodiversity relies on cooperation, e.g. with regard to (a) the quality for marine and coastal environments and (b) the system for protected marine and coastal areas. Possible fields of actions may involve 'setting up of cooperation networks for the monitoring, care and recovery of species and the development of action plans for safeguarding them', 'data exchange and the transfer of good governance', 'the creating of trans-border, open-water protected areas', 'cooperation on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)'
   b) **Pollution of the sea**: A cleaner see can only be achieved if all parties contribute to reducing the pollution of the sea, e.g. through reducing eutrophication, enhancing waste water treatment and addressing the issue of marine litter. Possible fields of actions may involve 'addressing oil spill problems with coordinated prevention plans and emergency plans at macro-regional scale', 'defining an action plan for marine litter and establishing operational protocols related to litter monitoring', 'setting up harmonised methods for prevention, reduction, and recovery of waste at sea', 'coordinated fight against eutrophication, targeting at source the loads of eutrophication substances.

2) **Transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity**:
   The sound management of territorial habitats and biodiversity relies on cooperation as ecosystems and habitats stretch beyond national borders. The contribution of the Adriatic-Ionian Region to biodiversity in Europe is significant, and protecting it is of EU interest. Possible fields of action may involve similar actions as mentioned for marine biodiversity, e.g. 'setting up of cooperation networks for the monitoring, care and recovery of species and the development of action plans for safeguarding them', 'data exchange and the transfer of good governance', and 'the creation of trans-border protected areas'.

Proposals for actions need to consider the low starting point in several countries as well as the low administrative and financial capacity for implementation.

All actions related to environment need to address in a **horizontal way** the following issues:

- Assistance with approximation and implementation of the EU Environmental *Acquis* where this is linked with the actions and objectives of the EUSAIR;
- Capacity building and exchange of knowledge to assist the development of environmental governance at national level (amending of laws, implementation and monitoring of implementation, inspections and enforcement, joint decision-making processes to face major human and natural hazards);
- Filling existing gaps in knowledge, information and analysis;
- Promoting scientific research into the state of the environment, drivers of environmental degradation, and innovative solutions
- Communication and public participation to ensure awareness of environmental issues among stakeholders, especially the general public and SMEs, and to enable solutions to be found which are sustainable not only environmentally, but also socially and economically.

Links to other Pillars

The EUSAIR, as an integrated strategy encompassing four Pillars, provides the opportunity to address environmental issues in an **integrated way**. This is, for certain environmental issues, a step forward compared with current approaches which are often narrowly focused on environmental issues. Typically, international environmental agreements do not extend to addressing all the sectors which may be responsible for driving environmental degradation. The Mediterranean Action Plan, the Integrated Maritime Strategy, Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Marine Spatial Planning provide an exception to this, for marine environmental issues.

For terrestrial environmental issues, the type of integrated approach which is being used in the maritime context is not as common within the region. There are various environmental issues which will need to be integrated into other Pillars of the strategy.

Environmental actions under other Pillars could focus **energy grid interconnections** between countries to enhance the use of **renewable energy** and **energy storage** at a macro-regional level, enhancing attractiveness of regions to promote **sustainable tourism**, and integrating **climate change mitigation**, **climate resilience** and **biodiversity** proofing into transport infrastructure planning and investment.

Some guiding questions for the discussion:

- **Would you agree with the topics identified as of macro-regional relevance?**
- **Which actions would you consider most important? Which ones can have a bigger impact?**
- **Which type of projects would fit in the scope of this Pillar? Are there any projects which can be implemented in the short term?**