

Statement of the Danube Civil Society Forum on the future of Macro-regional Strategies in a post 2020 EU Regional-and Cohesion Policy

Since 2009 the European Union established with four macro-regional strategies (MRS) in the Baltic, the Danube, the Adriatic-Ionian and the Alpine regions a new tool for an integrated territorial policy addressing the special needs and tapping the full potential of the macro-regions.

In order to consolidate the work and functioning of the four MRS, the macro-regional strategies have to be appropriately embedded in the post 2020 multiannual financial framework.

In order to do so, the Danube Civil Society Forum, a platform for civil society cooperation in the EUSDR, regards the following aspects as crucial for a successful implementation of MRS post 2020.

· Multi-level governance

The Commission has stressed the importance of multi-level governance for the success of MRS [Commission Staff Working Document on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies [SWD (2016)443].

A better involvement of different partners at all levels will contribute to reinforcing cooperation and coordination in the region. Structured transparent and regular involvement of a wide range of actors, but not limited to universities, local, regional and national authorities, NGOs, business, regional organisations etc. will strengthen MRS at all levels, while the multi-level governance concept of MRS has helped to strengthen ties and to deepen a dialogue between different actors at all levels of governance. This is a process of mutual benefit reinforcing good governance and democracy in the regions.

- Participation of Civil Society

2014 the Commission reported the need to strengthen the involvement of stakeholders, including parliaments at different levels, regional governments and civil society [Report from the Commission concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies, COM (2014) 284 final] and the Council recommend a strong involvement of civil society and consultative networks or platforms [Council conclusions on the governance of macro-regional strategies 2014]. Participation is also a key principle of the EU and enshrined in the Treaties. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for regional policy also to be politically active in the Member States and in dialogues with citizens, by presenting and communicating our common agenda, listening to ideas and engaging with stakeholders. Within the EUSDR the Danube Participation Day in connection with the National Participation Days have proved to serve the goal of civil society inclusion. Macro-regional strategies can be seen as instruments to communicate the territorial dimension of economic and social cohesion.

- **Adequate financing**

The Joint Statement of Ulm on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (29 October 2015) the Ministers in charge of EU Funds, European Affairs or European Integration from the participating States and Regions and the European Commissioner for Regional Policy agreed that the EUSDR requires alignment of policies and funding with the Strategy.

This means using all possible funding sources on national, regional or local level and building stronger synergies between EU Macro-Regional Strategies, regional multilateral agreements and EU Programmes. These programmes directly managed by the European Commission (alignment of Funding) are crucial to establish and safeguard adequate financing of MRS. This is of particular importance for NGOs; especially - but not only - in countries with low levels of cohesion there is a need for tailor-made instruments e.g. small project funds and seed money, which would strengthen the involvement of local actors and civil society in the development of all MRS. Thus we ask the European Institutions to enhance coordination and the exchange of information at all levels and adapt programmes and funds to the needs of relevant stakeholders of the MRS.

- **Conclusion**

Post 2020 Regional- and Cohesion policy has to reflect MRS and the key elements of MRS, governance and implementation: multi-level governance and participation of non-state stakeholders including civil society.

MRS have the potential to contribute significantly to better governance, quality administration and further development of democracy. The Danube Civil Society Forum suggests that best practice models of participation and inclusion of non-state actors such as the Participation Days in the EUSDR, adopted by the EUSBSR already, should become in an adequate form standard for MRS in general.

We suggest to support, in the ongoing planning of the European Cohesion Policy +2020, the development of easily accessible and manageable funding instruments that refer to MRS. Cohesion Policy can only be successful, if civil society and local actors are granted the flexibility, trust and financial incentives they need to implement the goals of common European interest with initiative, creativity and in the interest of public welfare. There for adequate financing, including micro-financing accessible for grass-roots NGOs and smaller local authorities should be introduced.

Therefore, the Danube Civil Society Forum calls for the upcoming legislative framework as well as the next multiannual financial framework to fully reflect the added value and the potential of macro-regional strategies for the European Integration, potential future enlargements and for fostering welfare democracy and social inclusion in Europe.