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*Macro-regional Strategies in Territorial Cooperation:
The future of European Regional Policy*

Veronica Favalli

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Scienze Internazionali e Diplomatiche
SCUOLA di SCIENZE POLITICHE - Sede di Forlì

TESI DI LAUREA
in
Regionalismo e Federalismo nell'Unione Europea

PECOB

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Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures	7
Acronyms	7
Introduction	9
Chapter 1. Regions in Europe	11
1.1 Essential concepts: region, regionalization and regionalism	11
1.2 The development of a European Union's Regional Policy	17
1.3 Toward a Europe with the regions?	21
1.4 Multi-level governance in the EU policy-making	26
Chapter 2. Compendium on European Territorial Cooperation	31
2.1 Three types of territorial cooperation: cross-border, transnational and interregional	31
2.2 Historical lessons on the evolution of cross-border structures	32
2.2.1 Euroregions, Working Communities and other Cooperative Organisms	34
2.3 The realization of a European Union's Policy for Territorial Cooperation	36
2.3.1 The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation	40
Chapter 3. The EU Macro-regional strategy: Genesis of a new policy tool	45
3.1 The emergence of the concept of macro-region within the framework of the EU Regional Policy	45
3.2 Macro-regional strategies: definition and characteristics	48
3.2.1 The Institutional building of a macro-region	50
3.2.2 Distinctions between macro-regions and other instruments for territorial cooperation	51
3.3 An overview of existing EU macro-regional strategies	53
3.4 Macro-regional governance and the role of regional and local authorities	59
3.5 Financial perspectives for macro-regional strategies	62

Chapter 4. Defining future macro-regional strategies:	
The Adriatic and Ionian region	65
4.1 Distinctive features of the Adriatic and Ionian region	65
4.1.1 History of territorial cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian region	67
4.2 The Adriatic and Ionian macro-regional strategy	69
4.3 Financial perspectives for the Adriatic and Ionian Strategy	74
4.4 State of play and future prospects of the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region	76
Chapter 5. An evaluation on macro-regional strategies: challenges and opportunities	81
5.1 An assessment on already implemented macro-regional strategies	81
5.2 Main challenges to overcome and potential fields of tension	82
5.3 Lessons learned: conditions to ensure the success of a macro-regional strategy	87
Conclusion	95
Annex	98
Bibliography	101

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1: Regional channels of access to the EU	25
Table 2: Main types of European structures for territorial cooperation	44
Table 3: Main characteristics of a macro-regional strategy	64
Table 4: EU macro-regional strategies	79
Table 5: SWOT analysis for the EU macro-regional strategies	94
Figure 1: Governance system of the EUSBSR	58
Figure 2: Macro-regional strategy areas in Europe	98
Figure 3: Countries covered by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region ..	99
Figure 4: Countries covered by the EU Strategy for the Danube region	100
Figure 5: Countries covered by the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian.....	100

Acronyms

AER	Assembly of European Regions
AEBR	Association of European Border Regions
AIE	Adriatic Ionian Euroregion
AII	Adriatic Ionian Initiative
AIR	Adriatic-Ionian Region
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BSR	Baltic Sea Region
CBSS	Council of the Baltic Sea States
CF	Cohesion Fund
CODCR	Conference of Danube cities and Regions
COE	Council of Europe
CoR	Committee of the Regions
CPMR	Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions of Europe
DR	Danube Region
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund and Rural Development
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EC (EU)	European Commission
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
EIB	European Investment Bank

EP	European Parliament
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ENPI	European Neighborhood Policy Instrument
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EUSAIR	European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
EUSBSR	European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
FAIC	Forum on Adriatic and Ionian cities
FORUMAIC	Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce
HELCOM	Helsinki Commission
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IR	International Relations
LRA	Local and Regional Authorities
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MLG	Multi-level Governance
MRS(s)	Macro-regional strategy(ies)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
SEA	Single European Act
SEE	South East Europe Programme
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UniADrion	Adriatic-Ionian Network of Universities

Introduction

A new policy tool for territorial cooperation has recently emerged in the EU Cohesion Policy: the macro-regional strategy. The first experiment was launched by the European Commission in June 2009, with the presentation of the “EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region”; shortly after, in December 2010, there followed the launching of the “EU Strategy for the Danube Region”. These strategies enclose wide transnational areas, called “macro-regions”, that offer a series of opportunities, but also raise problems and challenges that need to be commonly addressed through an effective coordination of all levels of government and through the involvement of all socio-economic actors present on that given territory. This relatively new model of cooperation is observed with interest by other territories that would like to import it, too. The Adriatic and Ionian macro-region, for example, is finally establishing the “EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Sea” after more than fifteen years of territorial cooperation and diplomatic efforts. But what exactly is it that guarantees the success of macro-regional strategies?

This thesis aims to contribute to the current debate on the new concept of EU macro-regional strategies. The objective of this work is to investigate the potentialities of these political strategies, to analyse the importance of the pre-existing structures they emerged from, to highlight the peculiarities that distinguish them from other forms of territorial cooperation so far known within the framework of the EU Regional Policy and to examine all the critical aspects. What are the concrete objectives of the launching of macro-regional strategies? Can the macro-regional approach veritably contribute to enhance the effectiveness of the EU Cohesion Policy? And finally, do these new instruments after all bring *added value* to the European Union as a whole? The present research tries to find an answer to all these questions, paying special attention to the role that *sub-national entities* play in the early stages of the drafting and implementation of macro-regional strategies. Ample space will be given to the process leading to the emergence of the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region, the conditions of departure of this strategy, its promoters and the current debates related to this topic.

The paper is organized in the following way:

Chapter 1 will frame concepts that are essential for understanding the application of macro-regional strategies as instruments for territorial cooperation. A definition of “region”, “regionalism” and “regionalization” will be provided, along with a brief historical analysis of the relationship established between the European Union on one side and the region on the other. A particular attention will be accorded to the changing role of the latter with the establishment of a comprehensive Regional Policy within the European Union.

Chapter 2 will provide with a *compendium* on European territorial cooperation, in order to easier identify the main differences between macro-regional strategies, of the one part,

and “traditional” interregional, cross-border and transnational cooperation structures, of the other part. The reference to the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) and other forms of cooperation, such as the Euroregion, was imperative for this paper, as these are the latest Community responses (before the elaboration of the macro-regional concept) created to overcome the hardships resulting from the organization and management of territorial cooperation within the European Union.

Chapter 3 will concentrate entirely on the macro-regional phenomenon. It will explore the emergence of this concept within the framework of the EU Regional Policy, analyse the institutional building of a macro-region and expose the most important distinctions between macro-regions and the other instruments for territorial cooperation. Moreover, it will show an overview of two well-established macro-regional strategies and particularly it will focus on their governance structure, the role of regional and local authorities and their financial instruments. The study concentrates only on the Baltic and Danube Strategies because these have been the first comprehensive macro-regional initiatives, while the others, such as the Alpine Strategy, either are running slow or are marginal for the objectives of this paper. In this section, extra attention is dedicated to the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), especially to those elements that, in the opinion of the European Commission, have most contributed to its successful development. Their detailed examination helps to define the essential issues that are to be addressed in the development of new macro-regional strategies.

Chapter 4 will entirely deal with the Adriatic and Ionian macro-regional strategy (EU-SAIR). After a brief overlook on the history of the territorial cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian region, this section will shed light on the on-going political and technical debates regarding the EUSAIR, it will present its protagonists and chronologically elaborate the main stages that have led to its definition. Though the building process of this particular macro-region is still at the early stages and political discussions at all levels are still being carried forward, this section will reveal the opportunities that EUSAIR could bring to the entire Adriatic and Ionian region and help to clarify its future financial perspectives.

Chapter 5 will highlight the critical aspects of the macro-regional approach and point out the solutions for the alleviation of the fields of tension. The dissertation will finally conclude with considerations on the research carried out and an outlook on the possible future evolution of the macro-regional approach.

Chapter 1. Regions in Europe

1.1 Essential concepts: region, regionalization and regionalism

In order to offer a conceptual base for the present dissertation, it is necessary to establish some fundamental concepts. First of all, we have to define the notions of “region”, “regionalization” and “regionalism”, along with the analysis of the economic, social and political aspects (understood both as *policies* and *politics*) that have led to the development of the EU Regional Policy and to the new EU policy-making system.

Although the term “region”¹ comes from the Latin *regio*² and was once used in the administrative language of the Roman Empire, it has long since been widely used in geography. The concept has spread into the twentieth century among social sciences to imply “socio-territorial systems larger than the local community and distinguished differently from the national government. A region originates, for the most part, by the emergence of a sub-national level that has gained increasingly decision-making importance as a factor of efficiency for planning processes” (Hrelja 2009: 30).

Today, the term can be used to indicate the inherent subdivision of a state (sub-national regions), but it can also be used to designate groups of contiguous states at a continental level (international regions, macro-regions). The meaning of region varies according to the context and the different economic, institutional and socio-cultural realities, as well as to the area of study. Various disciplines, in fact, identify different types of regions: geographical regions, historical regions, natural regions, economic regions, political and/or administrative regions (as a body), sociological regions etc.

Many scholars and international organizations have coined their own definition of region. The Assembly of European Regions (AER), for example, defines what a region is in the “European sense”, meaning “the territorial body of public law established at the level immediately below that of the state and endowed with political self-government” (Assembly of European Regions 2006: 12).

Keating underlines that this definition is politically loaded and sensitive because the very definition of a region as a framework and a system of action has implications for the distribution of political power and the content of public policy. According to the author, a region is necessarily “a territorial demarcation with its own institutional system, either in the

¹ In this dissertation, the concept of “region” (lowercase) indicates, in a general sense, any component of the level that is immediately below the nation state within which the unit is located, while the concept of “Region” (uppercase) refers to the administrative and territorial entity of the Italian public system.

² ETIMOLOGY: *regio* (stem of *region*) “direction, line boundary, equivalent to *reg (ere)* meaning to rule, to govern”. See Oxford English Dictionary - Oxford University press.

form of a regional government or set of institutions operating in a territory” (Keating 1997: 383). As we will see later, a region also has other far-reaching implications; it may constitute itself as a protagonist in national and international politics, geared toward the achievement of a broadened social and economic reality.

The AER stresses that, in order to exercise self-government, there is a need for the subnational government to be legally empowered to make regional decisions on funding, allocation of resources and provision of services. Moreover, in terms of institutional organization, to be effective, the regions should also have a representative assembly and an executive body on a well-defined territory (Assembly of European Regions: 14).

On the other hand, Caciagli underlines that AER’s definition is quite limited. Firstly, because it excludes territorial subnational entities without autonomy and secondly, because across Europe there are some regions that don’t identify themselves within precise administrative and political borders - circumstances in which the historical and cultural meaning of region emerges. A region, in fact, traditionally includes territories where there are communities with their own identities, often different from the country where they reside. A coherent system of cultural, ethnical, linguistic, religious and political ideology allows the population of a region to build its distinctive traits and occasionally historical and cultural regions do not correspond with their political and administrative structures (Caciagli 2006).

This point has been emphasised by the Council of Europe in 1978 and by the European Parliament in 1988. The former pointed out that “in the first place, the region denotes a *human community* located in the largest territorial unit of a country” (Council of Europe 1978: 51-54); for the latter, “a region is a territory which geographically constitutes its own entity (according to different judicial and political forms e.g. autonomous communities, nationalities, etc.) or a set of territories, in which there is a certain continuity and whose population possesses certain common elements (language, culture, historical tradition and interests related to the economy) and desires to promote its cultural, social and economic progress” (European Parliament 1988).

Thus, regions commonly develop in three contexts: functional, administrative and cultural (Keating 1998: 17). From the institutional point of view (the one that matters for the state and for the EU), a region is the largest political and administrative entity within a state. It is not a natural entity, but instead, a *historical, cultural and social construction*, with its own given territory, political space, and system of governing institutions. It is, therefore, only by appreciating the conjunction of the various essential aspects of a region within a territory that it is possible to understand the regional phenomenon and its great importance.

To better clarify the concept, Keating considers that a region can be looked at as a territory, as a political space and as a civil society organization. A region, as a *territory*, could be defined as a territorial entity, intermediate between the state and the local government. Several levels can be discerned: provincial-scale regions, metropolitan regions, big cities with their hinterlands unified by economic and transport linkages, as well as by systems of functional interdependence. Furthermore, a region is considered a *political space* when it provides an arena for political debate, a frame for judging issues and proposals, a space recognized by citizens as a level where decisions are made. Unfortunately, this does not always correspond to democratically elected governmental institutions or political autonomy. Final-

ly, a region corresponds to a *civil society* and a regional government; it undoubtedly operates better when there is a well-developed *sense of identity* and reciprocal *confidence* within the territory (Keating 1997: 390). In Europe, there are a number of countries in which regions have strong historical and cultural bases³. We will see in the next chapter how this plays a paramount role in defining today’s regional and territorial cooperation structures across the continent.

Regional structures vary across Europe⁴. Often these structures, and as a consequence subnational borders, reflect cultural traditions and linguistic peculiarities. The AER is very clear on this point: “regional boundaries should not be drawn without referencing natural boundaries of communities of interest thereby avoiding the creation of arbitrary regions which are of little relevance to citizens” (Assembly of European Regions 2006: 12). In practical terms, however, in some part of Europe regional structures have been put in place without considering historical roots. In many Eastern European countries⁵ for example, the so-called regional structures are in fact little more than arms of central government. Or regional structures act solely as organs of the state without any local democratic representation⁶. As stressed by the Assembly of European Regions, in those territories the acceptance of local government amongst the population has proved in many cases less successful. Lastly, some countries don’t have an internal homogenous regional structure⁷. Thus, regions have different *statuses* - in accordance with their historical, political, social or cultural characteristics. This implies that, within one country, regions can have different financial resources and competences (Assembly of European Regions 2006).

The relevance of regions in European politics dates back to the Second World War, although, the issue had already been introduced during the interwar period when the idea of a “Europe of the regions” was circulating in several French intellectual circles (Caciagli 2001: 9).

After a long period of devotion to nationalist ideologies, the European states, ravaged by two world wars, began to build and strengthen local and regional structures through various *social and administrative reforms*. They made a greater popular participation within the political process possible. This political turning point, however, was accompanied by the awakening of *regionalist ideas* - as a response and a reaction to a long period of totalitarian state administration and massive centralization. Consequently, a new regional administrative level was added to those of the state and of the municipalities. The decentralization of powers has increased the importance of local decision centres, essentially transforming regions into containers of local culture and administrators of the will of the central state (Hrelja 2009: 31).

³ Examples therefore can be found in Sweden, where the *Counties* find their origin in the 17th century as areas for the king’s administration, and in Poland, where the first *Voivodships* were created already in the 14th century.

⁴ The degree of autonomy given to regions depends on the national legislation or on the constitution of the respective countries. For example, in Spain regionalism is almost constitutional, while in France it is statutory: France recognizes the regional specificity of Alsacia, Corsica and Normandy, without granting them autonomy. In Italy there is a true constitutional regionalism, which recognizes the historical specificity of each region.

⁵ Albania, Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia (Autonomous Republic of Adjara), Hungary, Moldova, Russia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine.

⁶ Armenia, Azerbaijan (except Nakhichevan), Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Georgia (except Adjara) and Lithuania.

⁷ E.g. In Italy regional structures are enshrined within the constitution, whilst in France they appear only in primary legislation.

According to Strassoldo, the factors and dynamics that affected the development of the *first wave of regionalism* in the 1960s and 1970s in Western Europe are manifold. First of all, the increased level of secularization and education of the masses (in addition to more income, culture and mobility) led to a growing demand of *democratic participation* and a re-evaluation of the importance of local traditions versus past national bourgeois culture. The discredit of nation-states after the wars made for an arousal of the awareness that these medium sized countries were too small to claim real sovereignty and too large to meet their citizens' growing demands for participation (Strassoldo 1973: 14). In fact, citing de Rougemont, "the nation-state, primary root of wars, is too large to guarantee the rights of democratic political involvement of its citizens and to guarantee their social needs, and at the same time too small to meet the economic and political challenges of modern industrial societies; therefore a new political order based on "meso-level units" could reconcile the personal rights of freedom" (De Rougemont 1978). Moreover, during the same period the idea of defending *ethnic and linguistic rights* started to spread, due to the oppression and exploitation of minorities made possible by the centralism of nation-states within the territories at the periphery of the capitalist world, which suffered from economic underdevelopment. Many ideologies inspired forms of *regionalist movements* and the relationship of inequality between the centre and its periphery provided them with elements of identity⁸ (Caciagli 2001: 10).

During these first regionalist developments in the 1960s and 1970s arose the concept of "regionalism", a *cultural and socio-political movement* that differs in its organizational forms and often is expressed through a political party. The main goal is to defend the ethnic, linguistic and historical aspects (the culture) of a population that occupies a territory within a nation-state. The demands range from more autonomy within the structure of the existing state through to complete independence (*Ibidem* 2001: 8).

The *global economic change* has been a key factor that influenced the direction in which regionalism evolved. In the late 1980s and 1990s Europe experienced the so-called "new regionalism" movement, which was rather based on an *economic rationale* than an identity one. The increased *global interdependence* undermined the ability of nation states to control the economic development processes within their territories; moreover, many countries in Western Europe faced a *crisis of governability*, weighed down by a bureaucracy unable to support the complexity of the welfare state, and globalization caused the loss of many of their governments' functions. The complexity of social, environmental and economic problems required the development of solutions, which could respond to the situation on the ground. This could not be achieved effectively by a central government, sometimes unable to adapt its policies to a myriad of different situations within its territories (Assembly of European Regions 2006). Therefore, the *technical and economic regionalism* became more and more consistent during that period. States started to consider *regional decentralization* as an efficient factor necessary for rational territorial planning. "Many national governments identified decentralization as the only sensible solution to this problem. In one

⁸ According to Caciagli, the most famous one was the "Theory of Dependence" which combined the fight for the defence of culture and national identity with the critiques of the models of economic development and social organization of the time. So, demands for autonomy were focused on the need to protect and promote regional culture, language and identity and their final objectives ranged from reformism to radicalism and separatism (Caciagli 2001: 10).

word, devolution became a matter of survival for the modern welfare state" (Bullman 1997: 9). Therefore, the state's intervention in the economic and social affairs started to drastically increase and to be territorialized through the promotion of *ad hoc* regional policies for the distribution of wealth, taking into greater account underdeveloped areas. New types of policies have been launched out of the need for more balanced economic development and those have been implemented by decentralizing and increasing the power of local authorities, and by putting greater emphasis on regional and local infrastructures (Hrelja 2009).

The spread of *regional policies* is connected to the concept of "regionalization". The notion embodies the implementation of institutional reforms that gradually change the architecture and policy of centralized states, putting into discussion the form and the system of government of a nation by transferring competences and functions to its peripheral structures (Caciagli 2001). Regionalization ranges between the processes of "decentralization" and "federalization" and leads to the creation and strengthening of *regional sub-state institutions* that lie in between the state and the province, the municipality or the district (Keating 1997). Contrary to the process of federalization, which, if successful, can lead to a federation (a system based on a constitution), regionalization comes into existence through a legislative decision (where regions can be formed, created or dissolved by using a simple majority of a legislative assembly). Consequently, the autonomy of minorities can be easily strengthened, but by the same token there is the risk that it could be reduced with a simple majority, because of the lack of a constitutional power (Ivan 2004).

According to Caciagli, regional reforms implemented in some Western European states have been the biggest innovation for their national legislation and institutions since the end of the Second World War (Caciagli 2001). More changes have occurred in the development of regional democracy in the past 25 years than in any other equivalent period in history. While at the end of the 1960s a great number of states in Europe had centralized governmental structures and the regions that existed were mere administrative divisions of the state with no self-governing autonomy (exceptions being Germany, Austria and Switzerland), today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, regionalization has spread and been affirmed, making strong centralized states the exception in Europe⁹.

As seen, the empowerment of the autonomy of the region and the growing of its *political weight* is due to the interaction between internal and external inputs: it is the result of a "push from the top", coming from national functional needs, and a "push from the bottom", caused by the activism of specific territorial identities. In fact, regional reforms entered the political agenda of many European states also because of the shove given by *regional or local movements* (moderate or radical) that were able to organize themselves in *political parties*, gaining a national and supranational dimension. This is the reason why many reforms concerning autonomy and self-government have indeed been made for the preservation of specific *identities*.

Thus, regionalization and regionalism are two complementary concepts; nevertheless, Ricq clarifies that, "while regionalization is a process imposed from "up to bottom", having as main actor the state, regionalism is a process which starts "from bottom up" and which

⁹ Even the most centralized states of Europe, such as Great Britain and France, launched a decentralization process in the early 1980s (Caciagli 2001: 14).

is initiated by certain communities living in the interior of a sovereign nation state” (Ricq 1982: 122-123).

As the *locus* of decision-making had moved further away from the citizens, there was a need for a balance and this was obtained by creating new decision-making structures that could take charge of local and regional issues. Besides a strengthening of regional identities occurred, a sort of backlash due to the homogeneity often associated with the globalization processes. These new horizons raised anxieties, fears and the need to find or rediscover an identity that has more limited boundaries. Therefore, since the 1980s we have seen: strong challenges against the central government, a review of the *regional traditions*, a more attentive safeguarding of local languages and dialects, a claim for a new, original model of economic development and social relationships that have given way to a more intense demand for political participation and democratization (Keating 1998).

As reported previously, the region is not only the larger territorial unity within a nation-state, it is also characterized by a historical, cultural, geographical and, at the same time, by an economic *uniformity* which makes the population cohesive in achieving its common goals and interests. This cohesion is essential for the regional community. The advocates of regionalism strongly contend that *the region does not weaken the state*, but actually facilitates its tasks and allows it to concentrate more efficiently on its responsibilities. Moreover, regionalization facilitates the *humanization and personalization of the administration*, placing it more under control of the citizens and directly elected authorities (Ivan 2004). As the representatives of the Declaration of Bordeaux stated, regionalization does not only promote *in varietate concordia*¹⁰, but it is one of the main contributors to Europe’s unique identity and democracy (Council of Europe 1978). One year before Bordeaux the Conference of the European Ministers responsible for local communities, convened in Lisbon, stressed another important statement in support of regionalization in Europe, noticing that the European integration is linked with regionalization and power-sharing. The European ministers stressed that “regionalization could be a way of adjusting the economic and social disparities between different parts of Europe” (Council of Europe 1977).

In the 1990s a kind of “international regionalism” arose and joined these processes that had their origin in the European supranational integration and the development of European regional policies (Hrelja 2009). Starting with the *second wave of regionalism*, were not the continent’s geographically and economically ultra-peripheral regions that were grasping the flag of institutional autonomy and regional identity, but the rich regions that blew up the issue within the national states. They kept the regionalism issue alive and have significantly contributed to its arrival on the agenda of the European Union (EU) through social movements and new political parties that had their *raison d’être* in a specific territory¹¹. This phenomenon has extended throughout all Western Europe and today there is no single European state without its own regionalism, even though it is sometimes done in an artificial way (Assembly of European Regions 2006). As a result of all these processes, subnational insti-

¹⁰ *In varietate concordia* is a Latin expression and means “united in diversity”; it is the official *motto* of the European Union since 2000.

¹¹ Examples can be found in Bavaria (Germany), Scotland (Great Britain), Flanders (Belgium), the regionalist movements of Pays Basque and Cataluña (Spain) and the Italian *Lega Nord*.

tutions have become stronger and are increasingly aware of their role and potential strength, even beyond national borders.

1.2 The development of a European Union’s Regional Policy

As seen in the previous paragraph, the concept of region changes depending on the historical period. In the 1980s the concept of “functional region” as a form of organization for spatial planning¹² became important, gradually the *economic values* of the region have been stood out and the territorial system has been placed in the context of economic development, increased trade, affirmation of liberal economy and free market (Hrelja 2009: 56).

As we will analyze in detail in the next paragraph, in recent decades regions’ willingness to participate more actively to the institutional structures and decision-making processes has greatly grown¹³ since the European Union has gradually recognized the importance of regions, their role in solving common problems and their ability in reaching democratic decisions without losing their own identity¹⁴.

The first steps in the direction of a EU Regional Policy were made in the 1950s in the context of the European Economic Community. In 1957 the signatory states of the Treaty of Rome referred (in the preamble) to the need to “strengthen the unity of their economies and to ensure their harmonious development by reducing disparities between the various regions and the backwardness of the least favored”¹⁵. To achieve this aim, two financial instruments have been launched, namely the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF). Successively a third one has been created, namely the European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF) in 1975 (Hooge 2005: 28-29).

The EU Regional Policy is built on the assumption that redistribution between richer and poorer regions is needed in order to balance the side effects of the European common market.¹⁶ The distribution policy of funds is based on the notion of “regional territory” and on the “principle of solidarity”, which basically requires supporting the poorest regions. The funding method was at first based on the allocation of community budget in favor of regions

¹² During the 1970s, the EU introduced a single coherent statistical system for dividing EU’s territory; the “region” has been classified, without taking into consideration subnational institutional structures. This system is called NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) and it is now an essential instrument for the European Union’s Structural Fund delivery mechanisms. Europe’s regions are hierarchically divided into three levels that do not necessarily correspond to the administrative divisions within the Member States’ territory. For more information on NUTS classification and for the list of NUTS regions, see: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/nuts_nomenclature/introduction>.

¹³ The right has been officially recognized by the Treaty of Maastricht, when the Committee of the Regions was established in 1993.

¹⁴ The idea of a “Europe of the Regions” has been recovered and revised as a possible political project in opposition to De Gaulle’s “Europe of Homelands” and to the “Europe of States”.

¹⁵ Source: The Treaty of Rome (1957) available on: <http://ec.europa.eu/archives/emu_history/documents/treaties/rometreaty2.pdf>.

¹⁶ Source: European Commission - Regional Policy - Inforegio: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/history/>.

lagging behind. Initially resources were allocated on a “quota” basis to Member States and were used exclusively to part-finance national regional policies in development areas designated by those Member States. This approach gave the European Commission little scope to influence the national policies and the whole responsibility was left to national governments. However, as we will see, subsequent reforms distinguished themselves not only by an increased allocation of resources, but also by significant shifts in the power play between the European Commission, national and subnational authorities (Hooghe 2005: 32). In any case, given the economic situation in the European Community, these measures proved to be inadequate: “contrary to forecasts, the establishment of the internal market had failed to even out the differences between regions” (European Commission 2008a: 8).

In 1986 the Single European Act (SEA) let the *regional dimension* become a fundamental component of the European policy-making and finally placed *regions at the centre* of European politics. According to the SEA, “economic and social cohesion” between states and subnational entities is the necessary condition for the realization of the single market and the single currency and it is imperative to avoid that market and currency would harm the “harmonious development” of the whole European Community. In order to give more input to the process, in the same year the European Parliament adopted a resolution officially recognizing the *role of regions* in Europe as regionalization was considered to be a “factor of democratization and cultural valorisation, as well as a mean for achieving a deeper social and economic cohesion” (European Parliament 1988).

The year 1988 has been a turning point in the history of the European Regional Policy, mostly brought about by the side effects of the 1980s’ enlargements¹⁷. The SEA inserted the “Economic and Social Cohesion” among the EU objectives (alongside with the completion of the “Single Market”) by adding Title V to Part III of the EEC Treaty; moreover, it brought about an overhaul of the distribution and management of structural funds, integrating them into an overarching Cohesion Policy and introducing some new key principles. Firstly, by putting a *greater focus* on the poorest and backward regions¹⁸; secondly, by providing a *legal basis* and, therefore, a new approach to regional policy that was previously only structured on the combined resources of the three existing Structural Funds (ERDF, ESF and EA-GGF-Guidance section). This gave the Commission the power to formulate regulations for the management of *regional development programmes* and to undertake responsibility in the creation and financing of regional projects (Leonardi 2005: 35). The reform introduced also the “principle of partnership” that requires the participation of relevant European, national and sub-national actors at all stages of decision-making, planning, programming, implementing and monitoring processes¹⁹.

¹⁷ Greece (1981), Portugal and Spain (1986) joined the Community. In general the enlargements have always been a driving force leading to a reform of the EU Regional Policy; this because new regions increase the EU’s diversity, not only in socio-cultural but also in economic terms, considering the fact that some of the new Member States’ regions (especially border regions) are economically much less developed compared to the others (especially those of the old Member States) (Engl 2007: 18).

¹⁸ “In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Community shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic and social cohesion. In particular the Community shall aim at reducing disparities between the various regions and the backwardness of the least-favoured regions” (Art. 130a of the SEA).

¹⁹ European Commission (2008:6) – DG REGIO, *From Projects to Programmes, Inforegio Panorama, EU Cohesion Policy 1988-2008, Investing in Europe’s Future*, ed. Raphael Goulet, June 2008, p. 10.

Finally, in order to reach well-defined goals in the long run, *multi-annual programmes* have been launched and a greater strategic orientation of investments was attempted. The Commission would no longer manage a large number of projects without the involvement of national and regional authorities, which are supposed to take *responsibility* together and in accordance with the principle of partnership. Therefore, Member States and regions commenced to take part in the management and programming phases of the structural funds. The assistance has been focused on geographical areas facing specific structural problems (areas undergoing industrial restructuring, urban areas, rural areas, areas dependent on fishing and areas suffering from natural or demographic handicaps) following six Priority Objectives²⁰.

The tools of EU Regional Policy, as said, singled out sub-state authorities in order to work together on the elaboration of aid and development programmes: national governments could not monopolize the representation of the interests of the European Union anymore, including those of the regions (Assembly of European Regions 2006).

The Treaty founding the European Union, which entered into force in 1993, finally incorporated “Territorial Cohesion”²¹ into the *acquis*, becoming a “Community Level Policy”, alongside with the “Economic and Monetary Union” and the “Single Market” (Articles 158-162 of the TEU, former 130a-130e).

The reform of 1993 introduced a new financial instrument, the Cohesion Fund (CF), designed for those member states whose Gross National Income (GNI) per inhabitant is less than 90% of the EU average; it is aimed at reducing economic and social disparities and promoting sustainable development especially in the environment and transport sectors. The reform inserted the “principle of subsidiarity”, aiming at ensuring that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizens: “except for cases where the EU has exclusive competence, action at European level should not be taken unless it is more effective than that carried on at national, regional or local level” (Article 5 of the TEU). Subsidiarity is closely bound up with the principles of “proportionality” and “necessity”, meaning that any action taken by the Union should go beyond what is necessary for the implementation of the objectives of the treaty²². Moreover, the policy’s Objectives have been reduced from six to three²³. Finally, the Maastricht Treaty established the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and confirmed the rearrangement of the distribution of responsibilities between the Commission and the Member States: the Commission gained an important role in the setting of the over-

²⁰ Underdevelopment (obj. 1); industrial decline (obj. 2); long-term unemployment (obj. 3); youth unemployment (obj. 4); adaptation of agricultural structures (obj. 5a); development of rural areas (obj. 5b).

²¹ The *First Report from the Commission on Economic and Social Cohesion* of 1997 elucidates the concept “cohesion” and the general features of the Cohesion Policy. While the European Commission’s interpretation of the European social organization is based on its confirmation that it is a social market economy which aims at the combination of the market forces, freedom of opportunity, enterprise, solidarity and mutual support, cohesion policy’s “sole aim is to achieve greater equality in economic and social opportunities as the policy is composed of solidarity and mutual support” (Hooghe and Marks 2001: 117).

²² The principle is invoked in the preamble to the Maastricht Treaty: “[...] RESOLVED to continue the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity”. It is enshrined in Art 5 of the EC Treaty, which refers to the principle of subsidiarity as a regulator of relations between the Union and the States. Source: The Treaty of Maastricht (1992) available on: <<http://www.eurotreaties.com/maastrichtec.pdf>>.

²³ Structural adjustments for NUT 2 least-developed areas (obj. 1); supporting economic and social conversion of areas encountering structural problems (obj. 2); assisting the adaptation and modernization of policies and systems of education, training and employment (obj. 3).

all priorities for structural fund assistance, whereas the central governments and subnational partners took a larger role in the implementation and monitoring of the funds. During the 1990s the resources for EU Regional Policy have been doubled in order to equal a third of the EU budget.²⁴ It is important to stress that Structural and Cohesion Funds are not a pure redistribution of the available resources but aim at the creation of “added value” through effective and efficient use; the ultimate purpose of the policy is, in fact, to ensure the development of poorer regions up to the point that they will no longer need the support of the Community as they will be sufficiently competitive and dynamic, stand “on their own feet”, by themselves (European Commission 2008a: 30-31).

The 2004 European enlargement made some important changes in the governance of the structural funds necessary. “Economic growth and greater cohesion” has become the most important target of the Community’s policy. For the first time in the history of the European Union, the share of the EU budgets dedicated to regional policy measures has exceeded the budget allocated for the Common Agricultural Policy (Angeleri, Vesan 2008).

In the 2007-2013 financial perspectives, Cohesion Policy amounted to 35,7% of the total EU budget (€348 billion)²⁵, 62% of which should finance projects linked to the Lisbon Agenda for Growth and Employment²⁶.

In the last programming period the policy has been further reformed: the “Convergence Criteria”²⁷ were set out to replace the former Objective 1, aiming at promoting growth in the least-developed Member States’ regions; Objective 2 and 3 were combined under “Regional Competitiveness and Employment” whose goal it is to strengthen competitiveness and attractiveness in all EU regions and finally the “European Territorial Cooperation” was introduced (Angeleri, Vesan 2008).

As we will see more in detail in the next chapter, for the first time regional and local actors had the opportunity to establish officially recognized “cooperation groupings”, eligible to create cross-border projects. Thus, as their mobilization was arguably promoted and strengthened, the *transnational cooperation* of subnational actors obtained *legal recognition*.

“More growth and jobs for all regions and cities of the European Union”. This was the message at the heart of the programming period 2007-2013 for the European Union’s Cohesion Policy and its instruments. Within this framework Cohesion Policy encourages regions and cities from different EU member states to work together and learn from each other through joint programmes, projects and networks bringing about the new idea that *regional development* could be more effective through the means of *cooperation*.

²⁴ Source: European Commission - Regional Policy - Inforegio: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/history/>.

²⁵ Source: European Parliament <http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/regional_policy/index_en.htm>.

²⁶ The Lisbon Strategy, set out by the European Council in March 2000, was an action and development plan devised in 2000, for the economy of the EU between 2000 and 2010. Its aim was to make the EU “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. For more details, see European Parliament website: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm>.

²⁷ The main aim of the convergence criteria is the speeding up of the convergence of the least-developed Member States and regions defined by GDP per capital of less than 75% of the EU average.

The current EU Cohesion Policy, that makes up to €351 billion available, continues to invest in Europe’s regions, cities and in the real economy. It is now the EU’s principal investment tool for turning the “Europe 2020 Agenda” into a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth²⁸. For the current programming period is requested a stronger *result-orientation* and has been established a new *performance reserve* concerning all European structural and investment funds²⁹. Finally, efficiency in Cohesion Policy is linked to good economic governance in order to encourage the compliance of Member States with the EU’s recommendations under the European Semester³⁰.

1.3 Toward a Europe with the regions?

The Rome Treaty, describes regions as “territorial entities of economic imbalance” and not as bodies able to put forward an autonomous action at the European level. As seen, the new course started with the re-launch of the European integration process in the second half of the 1980s and with the evolution of the European Regional Policy, when European institutions officially recognized the legitimacy of regional representation at the EU level and when these started to encourage collaboration between sub-national authorities, establishing a new way of doing politics in Europe. However, the autonomous activism of regions has origins that date back in the past.

As we saw in the previous paragraphs, since the late 1970s there has been a general reorganization of the political space in Western Europe and European regions have increased their economic weight, gaining more rights and powers within their states and becoming capable of ruling in the context of globalization and Europeanization³¹. Regions have changed their role and political weight and emerged in two senses: as political arenas and as actors in national and European politics. Aware of their role, regions started to develop a very strong *political initiative* within the framework of the European Union and *vis-à-vis* the European Union itself. On the one hand they have developed a multiform *network of cooperation*, on

²⁸ For more information: <http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm>.

²⁹ To sum up, nowadays the EU Regional policy comprehends five Structural Funds: the formerly mentioned ERDF, the ESF, the CF; the Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD); the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF); and four financial instruments for providing technical assistance (Jaspers & Jasmine), improve access of SMEs to micro-finance (Jeremie) and support urban development (Jessica); a Solidarity Fund (EUSF) for the assistance in case of major natural disasters. And finally, an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) in support of EU candidate and potential candidate countries. Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/index_en.cfm>.

³⁰ Source: European Commission – Regional Policy – Inforegio: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/future/index_en.cfm>.

³¹ The term varies when dealing with policy, politics and policy-making. In general it designates the way actors of a political system adapt their strategies and organizational modalities to the process of European integration. More in detail, “a process of construction, diffusion, and institutionalization of formal and informal rules of procedures, policy paradigms, styles, “ways of doing”, as well as shared beliefs which are first defined and consolidated in the formation of policies and politics of the European Union, and subsequently incorporated into national logic of discourse, identities, political structures and public policies” (Radaelli 2003: 30).

the other hand they have also created organizations for the defence of their rights, until the Union itself has not designated a specific institutional form for the representation of regional interests.

The question of the *role of regions in Europe* arose in the aftermath of World War II. Here we don't refer to the programmes of some political parties or intellectual groups ("Europe of the regions") but to some political initiatives, albeit rather symbolically than institutionally speaking initiatives to develop a higher recognition of the role of regions in Europe. First of all, it is noteworthy that as far back as the 1950s the Council of Europe was the first organization to make room for subnational representations, when local autonomies were extremely weak and regional authorities were very far from creating international bodies for the cooperation between regions and municipalities³². In 1978 the Council of Europe published the Bordeaux Declaration, where it affirmed *verbatim* "the road to Europe has to pass through the regions, a fundamental element of a country's richness". According to the declaration, the region is the only authority that can fully *express cultural diversity and enhance the economic development* of a state; regional institutions are, therefore, the *pure expression of democracy*. Thus, the right of European citizens to express themselves through a region is a right and expression of the European person's identity (Council of Europe 1978: 51-54).

Although the Council of Europe is a much wider and much less important organization than the European Union and its initiatives do not have a binding political value, the Declaration was an important benchmark for the regions and has had a symbolic importance for the future development of the EU regional policies. Another important association that contributed to shaping the idea of a "Europe with the regions" is the Assembly of European Regions (AER). Established in 1985, the AER is a forum for interregional co-operation that lobbies for regional interests on the European stage and now reunites around 300 regions from 26 countries (Brunazzo 2004: 638). In 1996 it released a declaration claiming a series of rights for European regions, such as the right to enter into agreements and international treaties, the recognition of regional actors in the European policy-making, the establishment of the principle of subsidiarity as a guiding principle - all rights that would have been accepted in the framework of the European Regional Policy. The AER works to safeguard the needs of the regions, ensuring that they remain a driving force for political, economic and social development, with a view of accomplishing a multi-layered Europe - a true "Europe with the regions"³³.

As previously noted, the European Parliament formally recognized the role of European regions in its Regionalization Community Chart. What is important to stress here is that the document invited all European countries to formally institutionalize regions. In its resolution the Parliament recognized the need to extend the process of regionalization within the European Community and at the same time highlighted that this cannot be done without institutions. Just as Ricq points out, "institutions make a constitutive element of the regional identity, through which a group builds and develops its sense of belonging to a well-determined area

³² E.g. The Council of Local and Regional Authorities was established in 1988 with advisory functions.

³³ According to Piattoni, while the "Europe of the regions" literature postulated a causal correlation between the growing Europeanization and the strengthening of regional identities, the "Europe with regions" reduced the causal claim to a mere correlation, with the EU acting as an additional structure of political opportunities that only some regions are willing and able to exploit effectively" (Piattoni 2009: 173).

and a well-defined territory" (Ricq 1982: 125). So, the European Parliament finally recognized that the *institutionalization of regions* must be based on the internal judicial order of the states. And not only that, but also a European treaty should stipulate the basic principles of this institutionalization. Based solely on these conditions, regions could be legal entities and their organization would be based on people's will - the very logic of democracy.

Thanks to these numerous sources of input, since the 1980s individual regions have started to find ways to access the EU decision-making *arena*. Today the means of accessing this arena are multiple and according to Brunazzo, they vary mainly because of their source of legitimacy. Channels have been established by European legislation (i.e. Treaties) that are accessible to all member states and to each of their sub-national territorial institutions. Ways have also been implemented through the adoption of national legal acts that characterize the individual member countries. *Regional channels* of access to the Community institutions vary also according to the relationship established between the regions of each country and the European institutions. In fact, they can be *direct*, when regions are in direct contact with the EU institutions, and *indirect*, if this ratio is mediated by the national government (Brunazzo 2004: 22-23). In order to have a voice in the EU affairs and EU bodies, regional authorities opened *representative offices* in Brussels. The first *bureau* of a local authority has been that of the City Council of Birmingham in 1984. Since then the phenomenon has continued to spread. In the second half of the 1980s representatives of the German *Länder*, the British Communities, French regions and the Spanish *Comunidades Autónomas* settled in Brussels. Between 1993 and 1994 there was an exponential increase in the number of these delegations. Today, according to the database of the Committee of the Regions, the regions active in Brussels through the means of their *liaison offices* are 372³⁴. This *active regional representation* proves what is called the "euro-lobbying". Along with the dialogue with the EU institutions, they defend the political and technical interests of the respective regions, they offer suggestions to their headquarters and illustrate the European procedures and mechanisms, in order to create relations with other regions and facilitate the participation in European programmes. The significantly high number of *bureaux*, the extent of their duties and the intensity of their work confirms a growing awareness of the regional governments of the importance of their *direct participation* in the European integration and decision-making process (Keating 1997).

As mentioned above, the implementation of the provisions for socio-economic cohesion introduced by the SEA, has "Europeanized" the bulk of regional policies in all Member States and led to the creation of sub-national institutions for the allocation and implementation of these kinds of policies. Thus, by the mid-1980s national governments were no longer the exclusive arbiters of the regional development policies within their borders. What was still missing was the right and opportunity for the regions (and other expressions of sub-national government) to be represented at the European level in an institutional and official form. That gap was filled with the provisions of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty that set up the Committee of the Regions (CoR). Thus, by 1994 the nature of the institutional process at the European level had completely changed. Regions were no longer impeded from interacting with European administrative and political organs in pursuing their interests. They

³⁴ *Liste des bureaux régionaux basés à Bruxelles*, Committee of the Regions website (last update: 05.12.13).

had a new-found “voice” in the formulation of socio-economic policies at the European level and they had increased responsibilities within their territory, reinforced also by the devolution of policies³⁵ (Leonardi 2005: 35-36). The treaty increased the regulative competences of the EU, broadening its direct political influence in economic, environmental and cultural sectors of regional governments; moreover, it introduced the “principle of transparency” that would guarantee regions the status of beneficiaries of the EU regional development policies (and not of the state treasury). The “subsidiarity and partnership principles” and also the “system of planning and match-funding” enlarged the room for sub-national bodies’ bargaining power (Keating 1997: 388).

Hence, today regions have two main institutionalized ways of direct access to the EU level: firstly, the Council of the European Union (*ex* Council of Ministers), where article 203 (*ex* Art. 146 TCE) authorizes sub-national bodies to participate in the activities of the Council regarding matters of regional interest or of their exclusive competence; secondly, the formerly mentioned CoR, “a European consultative body of representatives of regional and local authorities” (Art. 263, *ex* art 198 TCE), which officially highlights the role of sub-national governments in the context of the European institutional framework, continuing the experience of the Council for regional and local authorities of 1988 (Piattoni 2003). Thanks to the CoR, the regions finally gained a *constitutional rank* within the European arena. They would like it to become, in tandem with the Parliament and the Council, the “Third Chamber” of the Union, or even the “Senate of Europe”, a body of territorial representation, similar to the German *Bundesrat* - an institutionalized “third level” of the European architecture, after Europe and the nation-states, fully realizing the “Europe of the Regions” project (Caciagli 2001). However, the CoR is still unable to exercise strong political influence due to its internal chasms (institutional/geographical and political) and its limited powers. As a result, the European Regional Policy of the 1990s has increased the role of regional governments and of regional political classes to the detriment of their respective central authorities. After the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties a *new government system* has been established. The treaties created a context that prompted the member states’ central governments to cede power to the sub-national levels, to involve them in the planning and implementation of the programmes. As a consequence, European regions have acquired a growing *awareness* of their role within and outside European borders and ceased much more opportunities to “bypass” their national governments. This awareness is naturally stronger where regions have already an institutional legitimacy inside their corresponding national states and where regional or federal reforms have been realized.

Anyway, it is important to stress that all of these processes have yet to compete with many *obstacles*: the Union still does not have a jurisdiction to regulate the relations between member states and sub-national entities; there is still a weak regional institutional representation at the EU level (in the Council there are present only regions with legislative powers

³⁵ Since 1989 the internal structure of nation-states underwent through dramatic changes. Belgium has moved from regional to federal system. Italy has reinforced the autonomy of its regions through policy innovations and constitutional reforms. France began to devolve sub-state powers in the area of regional planning and development. In the UK the existence of the EU cohesion policies helped to mobilize regionalism movements i.e. Scotland and Wales while Ireland or Greece instituted a kind of “administrative framework” mostly due to the influence of European policies for the allocation of structural funds (Leonardi 2005: 36).

in their national constituencies and the CoR does not have any legal power to make binding decisions); the resistance that member states put up against the strengthening of this “third level” and their interference in the control of structural fund allocations (most of the time regions fulfil only an executive function in their fund allocations) (Caciagli 2006: 219-220).

But the *activism* of regions does not stop. From the 1990s onwards regions went through an “Europeanization process”, changing many of their governmental and administrative sectors in order to autonomously accede and handle the new resources. Fund allocations stimulate an intense regional activity both “vertically”, by establishing direct contacts with the European Commission, and “horizontally”, enforcing the collaborative relations between European regions. Through the formerly mentioned European legislative and institutional paths regions have the opportunity to pursue their own policies, to access new resources, to have a margin of freedom in their allocation. This has *enforced regional identities* and the *solidarity* among regions in Europe, leading to a sort of “integrative European regionalism”. Regions’ governments always seek new markets, new forms of financing and new technologies, the recognition and diffusion of their cultures, they try to raise their international political profile and find new means for gaining more political weight.

As we will see in the next chapter, in order to overcome the shortage of regional representation at the EU level, sub-national authorities started to engage in a complex system of “paradiplomacy”³⁶ that let them override their national ministers of foreign affairs by developing transnational connections and creating organizations to represent and defend their interests on the international arena. Of course regions remain on an intermediary level, (both territorially and functionally) and their powers depend on their ability to integrate various levels of action, on their knowledge and mastery of decision-making networks, but these nets of European and regional initiatives are creating a new type of integration and a new way of doing politics in Europe.

The following table shows how regions could influence the EU policy-making.

Table 1: Regional channels of access to the EU

Access	Main source of legitimation		
		European	national
	direct	Committee of the Regions	Sub-national offices; Interregional associations; Transnational networks.
indirect*	Council of the EU	Regional representatives (permanent representations)	

³⁶ Paradiplomacy refers to the foreign policy capacity of sub-state entities: their participation, independent of their metropolitan state, in the international arena in pursuit of their own specific regional and international interests. Source: <<http://bcjournal.org/volume-10/paradiplomacy.html>>.

* It is indirect because the regional minister represents the State and not his constituency.

1.4 Multi-level governance in the EU policy-making

As we can deduce from the political processes and policies analysed in the previous paragraphs, the EU structure has evolved to such an extent that it constitutes nowadays a particular *polity* in which actors from different institutional levels meet and co-participate in the decision-making process.

In the early 1990s Marks applied the concept of “Multi-level Governance” (MLG) to analyse the novel structure of the EU after the emergence and development of the EU Cohesion Policy. Since then the concept has been enlarged and is now used to describe the functioning of the entire EU policy-making system. It is an attempt to generate a novel understanding of European integration: a *model of governance*³⁷ that goes beyond the neofunctionalist and intergovernmentalist dichotomy. The Commission provides a general definition of governance, conceived as “a set of rules, processes and behaviours that affect the way in which powers are exercised at the European level, particularly as regards to openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence” (European Commission 2001). Marks defines MLG as “a system of *continuous negotiation* among nested governments at several territorial tiers (supranational, national and local) resulting from a broad process of institutional creation and decisional reallocation that has pulled some previously centralised functions of the state up to the supranational level and some down to the local and regional level” (Marks 1993: 392).

The debate on the sophisticated and multifaceted institutional structure of European institutions, Member States and subnational authorities is extremely controversial and can be dated back as far as the late 1980s, when the Commission began to build a new policy-making model regarding relationships on the sub-national level between member states’ governments and those between states and European institutions themselves. As a consequence, it created a “governance at multiple levels” that leads to “the simultaneous activation of all centre-periphery, domestic-foreign and state-society dynamics” (Piattoni 2009: 174) within which all actors are involved in the decision-making process characterized by *non-hierarchical aspects* and *constant formal and informal interaction and cooperation* (Caciagli 2006: 123). Therefore, the fundamental assumptions of multi-level governance can be summarized as follows: i) *shared authority* and policy-making influence across multiple levels of government and between a multiplicity of parties whose relations are considered of mutual influence; ii) European integration as a *polity-creating process*; iii) collective decision-making processes shift *locus* of political control away from national governments³⁸.

³⁷ An appropriate definition of the term “governance” is necessary in order to reach a better understanding MLG. According to Bevir, the term refers to “all processes of governing, whether undertaken by a government, market or network, whether over a family, formal or informal organization or territory and whether through laws, norms, power or language. [...] this processes and decisions seek to define actions, grant power and verify performance” (Bever 2012: 1). Governance differs from government in the fact that it focuses less on the state and its institutions and more on social practices and activities.

³⁸ While national arenas remain important in the formation of preferences of national governments, the MLG model

As a consequence, the European Union evolved into a “European space”, in which its European institutions, national governments and sub-national institutions take part in the decision-making process in a cooperative manner; as Keating points out, “traditional roles and relationships radically changed and the process of decision-making is no longer a matter of bilateral exchange” (Keating 1997: 395).

Especially, Hooghe and Marks identified two models of multi-level governance, that offer two alternative answers to the main problems of cooperation and coordination (Dühr 2011b). The first model is the one that is built around human and territorial communities and is, for generic purposes, characterized by a greater dispersion of the authority, by the presence of fixed and stable institutions, that are little connected between each other, and by “nested” governments. The second model, on the other hand, is built around specific problems and objectives and works through actions and policies handled by flexible and affiliated institutions, which operate in a specific and functional way. The first model is defined as *territorial governance*, characterized by a rather monocentric and hierarchical structure, where institutions operate in a stable and rigid way and where there is no integration between the public and private sector. The second one, the so-called *functional governance*, is characterized by a polycentric structure, where institutions operate in a smooth and flexible way, also through a substantial integration with the private or non-profit sectors (Hooghe, Marks 2001).

Berionni stresses that in order to deeply understand the MLG, it is also necessary to consider both the vertical and horizontal dimension. The *vertical dimension* refers to links between higher and lower levels of government, including institutional, financial and informational aspects. In this perspective, the strengthening of local capacities and the incentives to improve the effectiveness of sub-national levels of government are crucial issues for a *really good governance*. The *horizontal dimension* refers to cooperation agreements between regions, municipalities or other sub-state entities. These agreements are becoming increasingly popular as a means for improving the efficiency of local public services and for the implementation of common development strategies (Berionni 2012: 742).

As we have seen, the concept of multi-level governance is deeply connected with the EU Cohesion Policy and its fundamental principles, including solidarity, subsidiarity and partnership. As Danita Hübner expressed at the 4th Cohesion Forum in Brussels in 2007, “the MLG system, on one hand fosters economic efficiency and development through cooperation between the European, national and regional levels, while, on the other, *firmly anchors the policy in the Union’s territories and hearts of its citizens*”. Thus, Cohesion Policy and Structural Funds, inserted in the framework of the partnership principle and multi-level governance, represent a link between the EU and the regions, but also a source of *mutual democratic and social legitimacy, effectiveness and efficiency*. On one hand the EU has the opportunity to gain the trust of the population by showing itself close to sub-national levels’ needs, on the other hand, within the regions, the local representatives are able to assert their *political role* by approaching supranational policies (Hrelja 2009: 62). By adopting the SEA provisions, the Europeanization of the EU regional development policy has significantly changed the nature of relations between institutions; it has consequently led to the reali-

rejects the idea of sub-national actors that are only inserted in the national context (Hooghe, Marks 2001: 3-4).

zation that sub-national institutions are significant players in EU policy-making, enlarging their “room for manoeuvre” regarding both the participation in the formulation and the implementation of EU policies. In a multi-level system state, authorities, as much as EU institutions, are merely the nodal points of a *complex network* in which local and regional authorities (LRA) are situated. The CoR underlines this point by saying that LRA are extremely important for Europe’s development and currently have significant powers in key sectors (such as education, environment, economic development, town and country planning, transport, public services and social policies); not to mention their economic weight, representing 16% of EU GDP, 1/3 public spending, 2/3 all public investment expenditure, 56% public employment³⁹.

On 25 March 2007 the heads of state and government of the EU member states recognized in Berlin the general scope of multi-level governance, stressing that it is one of the main keys for the success of the European integration process. In fact, thanks to the cooperation between various tiers of government, *Europe is stronger, its institutions more legitimated, its policies effective and its citizens feel more involved* in the implementation of the Community agenda. Nowadays European policies are no longer structured in an exclusively top-down manner and multi-level governance is not simply a question of translating European or national objectives into local or regional action. Instead, measures have been taken to integrate the objectives of local and regional authorities within the strategies of the European Union: “tasks are shared in order to achieve common goals in concert”⁴⁰.

During the 1990s Marks forecasted (similar to what neofunctionalists representatives reported) that the MLG model would definitely *undermine* the control and authority of central governments through a centrifugal process, where the EU’s supranational bodies, and in particular the Commission, would be capable of exerting independent influence in forming alliances with sub-national bodies, shifting therefore authority “upwards” to the EU level and “downwards” to the sub-national level (Marks 1993: 407). Actually nowadays, as we can deduce from Table 1, even though there are frequent *direct interactions* between the sub-national and the supranational level (in particular with the Commission), the EU still seems to be dominated by nation-states and it is evident that sub-national regions follow to a large extent the agenda of the respective nation-states.

But *a new Europe is emerging*; it is neither a federal Europe, based on the notion of a “Europe of the regions”, nor is it an intergovernmental Europe, which is based on the primacy of the nation-state (i.e. a “Europe of the States”). The general structure of the EU has not been finalized yet; important new forms of governance in the frame of regional and territorial cooperation policy are emerging and, as we will see, have an impact also on other EU policy fields (Öner 2011: 48).

The *global economic and financial crisis* underlined the importance of governance and the need for local and regional authorities to be closely involved in shaping and implementing Community strategies; the reason being that they implement nearly 70% of Community

³⁹ For more details: Committee of the Regions (2009) Committee of the Regions (2009), White paper on Multi-level governance, Own Initiative Opinion 89/2009, June 2009, Brussels, <<http://www.dexia.be/fr/particulier/press/pressrelease20090205-localauthorities.htm>>.

⁴⁰ Declaration on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome, Berlin, 25 March 2007.

legislation and hence play an essential role in the European Economic Recovery Plan. Furthermore, in a context of increasing *scarcity of public funds*, attempts could be made to rationalize common policies and centralize resources, despite the fact that *globalization* reinforces the relevance of multilevel governance. The current EU’s capacity to adapt to the new global context actually largely depends on the ability of its regions to react, act and interact and it is also for these reasons that the EU Commission has launched a *new and ambitious model of governance*: the EU macro-regional strategy (Committee of the Regions 2009).

Chapter 2. Compendium on European Territorial Cooperation

2.1 Three types of territorial cooperation: cross-border, transnational and interregional

Regions in Europe traditionally follow three paths to increase their political, economic and cultural weight in Europe: a “vertical integration” that has the purpose to obtain from the European Union the legitimacy of institutional representation; the creation of organisms for the representation and defence of interests in front of the central governments and the EU institutions; and finally a “horizontal integration” that has as main aim to the tightening of connections by implementing multidimensional networks of cooperation.

Cooperation among regions is primarily motivated to promote economic, social prosperity and grow by improving the attractiveness and competitiveness, like the search for new investments, technology transfers and markets for the exports and connectivity, such as the improvement of common infrastructures and transport systems (Caciagli 2006). An important role in this contest is played also by the common identity, proximity and the identification of mutual problems and interests (Lepik 2009).

In Europe three main forms of territorial cooperation can be identified. *Cross-border cooperation* is the direct collaboration between regional and local authorities (situated directly at the border or close to it, therefore usually called *cross-border regions*⁴¹) in every sector of regional activity. This type of cooperation is generally well organized due to the existence of a long regional and local tradition. *Interregional cooperation* is the cooperation between regional and local authorities in particular sectors and between selected actors. It deals with the exchanging of experience between regional and local bodies of different country members of the EU in order to build networks to develop good practices and facilitate the exchange of experience by creating successful regions. This kind of cooperation can take place anywhere on the territory of the member states and of partner countries. Lastly, *transnational cooperation* is the one occurring between states (eventually with the participation of regions) in a specific sector. It covers larger areas of co-operation such as the Baltic Sea, the Alpine, the Mediterranean, the Adriatic and Ionian region (Morata 1997: 17-18). As we will see in detail in this chapter, these three types of territorial cooperation have been included into the European Policy for Territorial Cooperation as a component of the Regional

⁴¹ De Rougemont defines cross-border regions, as “virtual regions, connected by geography, history, ecology, ethnicity and by economic possibilities, but blocked by the sovereignty of the states lying across both sides of the frontier” (de Rougemont 1978: 127).

Policy Framework, sustained by structural and cohesion funds. Especially in Europe international cooperation between local and regional authorities has become over the years an essential element of the overall system of “network governance”.

Cooperation between territorial authorities in Europe became more intense during the 1980s and especially during the 1990s, mostly as a result of the deepening and widening of the European integration process (European Single Market, Economic and Monetary Union), because of the fall of the “Iron Curtain” and the *stimulus* derived from the launching of new Community programmes that aim at supporting a European-wide co-operation between territorial authorities. These factors significantly enhanced the utility and intensification of such contacts (Association of European Border Regions 2001). Anderson observes that the EU could be viewed as a causal factor for the development of cross-border activities between regions, notably through the diminishing importance of borders and the growing of regional representation at a supranational level (Anderson 1997). As a matter of fact, cross-border agreements and aggregations between European regions have multiplied thanks to the European policies and instruments that finance and promote cooperation between regions and provide socio-economic improvements for Europe as a whole. However, various scholars disagree whether the European Union should be considered as the major driving force behind the emergence and spread of cross-border structures across Europe.

According to Lepik, the EU’s impact is often overestimated because one tends to obscure the fact that cross-border cooperation is driven “from the bottom up” and the fact that regions have had a long history of signing cooperation agreements, anterior to the launching of a real territorial policy by the European Union (Lepik 2009).

2.2 Historical lessons on the evolution of cross-border structures

Only a few years after the Second World War local authorities have already taken first initiatives, such as bilateral town “twinning”, in Western European countries. In the 1960s and 1970s these initiatives gradually expanded till a real boom occurred in the 1990s (Association of European Border Regions 2001: 17). The success of cross-border partnerships gave birth to a highly complex system of administrative structures, different in terms of dimension, number of participating sub-national entities, legal personality and modes of decision-making. Generally speaking, cross-border structures are arrangements for the cooperation between units of local or regional government across the border of two or more different countries, built in order to promote common interests and enhance the living standards of the populations within the limits of the geographical scope of cooperation (Angelieri, Vesan 2008). Groups of border regions began to develop cross-border cooperation and to look for collaboration with their counterparts in an organized way, in order to overcome unnatural historical barriers generated by wars between national states and redress imbalances caused by the barrier effect of national borders; they had to find a way to deal with

large numbers of misguided investments and everyday absurdities resulting from uncoordinated activities of national authorities (Association of European Border Regions 2000). At the beginning regions started to look for *informal collaboration* with their counterparts in economic, social and cultural matters, establishing cross-border structures like informative branches, centers for the promotion of cultural exchanges, for the protection of the environment and for the building of common infrastructures (Caciagli 2006).

As cross-border cooperation developed, it required a continuous support from territorial structures, and as it turned out to be the motor for effective cooperation, some form of institutionalization became necessary. Cross-border community associations in specific areas of common concern were the earliest form of cross-border structures. These have led to the subsequent formation of permanent and multi-purpose umbrella organizations of various types. As we will see in the next paragraph, the first cross-border bodies were gathered under the name of “Euroregion” (or “Euroregio”).

Starting from the 1970s other forms of cross-regional cooperation structures have developed across Europe under different names: “Council” (i.e. Kvarken Council), “Conference” (i.e. Lake Constance Conference), “Working Community” (i.e. Working Community of Western Alps), “Committee” (i.e. Öresund Committee) or similar terminologies (Lepik 2009). However, this has been a *slow process*, largely due to the many *obstacles* encountered: considerable differences in the national administrative systems - particularly marked is the case of the powers (jurisdiction, competencies), in the resources (finance and personnel) and in the decision-making traditions of local and regional government authorities. Moreover, local and regional authorities encountered constraints in many cases - they concerned the right to transfer competencies or liabilities to cross-border bodies, with or without the approval of the national authorities⁴². Cooperation was also conditioned by the differences in the economic levels, in the fiscal systems, by residual custom obstacles and above all by the capacity of regions to move in the international arena, but this relied on the powers that the central governments conferred upon them. For some European regions those powers remained limited, and this because “many central governments still assume that inter-regional co-operation activities are part of their international relations and therefore one of their prerogative” (Weyand 1996). For example, German and Austrian *Länder* and also Belgian regions have always found themselves in a privileged position, due to their right to stipulate international treaties; again in other European national systems the international activities of regions are subordinated to the observation and the control of central governments.

However, this didn’t prevent a great number of regions from establishing relations with other subnational entities. In 1992 the French government authorized his regions to establish cross-border and interregional agreements, within the limits of the competences assigned to them by national law. In Italy the Constitutional Court has authorized regions to carry out international promotional activities and to approach technical, economic and cultural cooperation with a verdict in 1996⁴³. The reform of the Italian Constitution in 2001 ultimately recognized to the regions the power to conclude international agreements with states and the Memorandum of Understanding regulated anew the agreements between sub-national bod-

⁴² Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), *Institutional aspects of cross-border cooperation*, 1999, p.3.

⁴³ Italian Constitutional Court, verdicts n. 425/1996; 343/1996.

ies. In both cases the only limit set was that the activities shouldn't interfere with the foreign policy line of the national government (Caciagli 2006).

In order to overcome those difficulties, sub-national authorities started to set up wide *European regional associations* among non-contiguous territories, both with an open membership (the Assembly of the European Regions) and based on specific geographic or other *criteria* (the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions or the Association of European Border Regions). The aim of these associations was to collectively represent the sub-national interests and to gain more bargaining power *vis-à-vis* national governments and Community institutions; their ultimate and broad goal was, of course, to promote the concept of *regional democracy* in Europe and the role of regions in the political process. Moreover, as Angelieri and Vesani pointed out, those organizations contributed to highlight the role and value of decentralized regions as active subjects and potential points of convergence and development, the role they play in going beyond the idea of a “multi-speed Europe” or a “two-speed Europe” - that has at its centre an area that is one of the richest in the world, while its periphery is still forced to play a secondary role and to have a more slow development (Angeleri, Vesani 2008).

Nowadays, European *cross-border structures* differ with reference to their purpose, competencies and capacities (including, as we will see later on, their grade of involvement in European cross-border and interregional programmes i.e. INTERREG initiatives). The following paragraph will offer an overlook over the typologies of existing bodies, their historical evolution and their main characteristics.

2.2.1 Euroregions, Working Communities and other Cooperative Organisms

As said, the first institutionalization of cross-border cooperation occurred in the late 1950s, when pioneering groups of border regions launched and developed permanent cross-border cooperation activities in an organised way, finding practical solutions under private and/or public law. The Euroregion at the German/Dutch border was the first genuine cross-border structure, established in 1958. After this, other associations were brought into being; under the common denomination of “Euroregion” the Community integration process started among the six founding members. The European Commission itself denoted these cooperation experiences as “micro laboratories of European integration” (Angeleri, Vesani 2008, p. 23). Yet, as Lepik points out, “the existence of institutionalized cooperation does not imply the existence of a Euroregion *per se*” (Lepik 2009: 267).

Although they are not identical in the legal form or organization, these structures for cross-border cooperation share many *common characteristics*, in particular: they are permanent, they have a separate identity from the one their members have and their own administrative, technical and financial resources, as well as internal decision making process. The geographical area is typically determined by the extent of socio-economic integration and not only by administrative units. Therefore, cross-border Euroregion bodies are not a new tier of local or regional government, but an interchange point for existing public and private

sector bodies for all regional and local activities of a cross-border nature, while the implementation of most of the actions included in cross-border plans and programmes is done according to national procedures. Euroregions don't have political powers and their work is limited to the competencies of the local and regional authorities that constitute them (Association of European Border Regions 1999).

The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) has identified a list of 185 Euroregions currently operating in Europe⁴⁴. Most Euroregions or similar bodies are established on the German borders with the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Poland, the Czech Republic, France and Denmark. But there are also Euroregions on the Belgian/Dutch border (i.e. Euregio Scheldemond), Italian/Austrian border (i.e. Euregio Tyrol), Greek/Bulgarian border (i.e. Euroregion Nestos/Mesta) and on the French/Spanish border (i.e. Euroregion Midi-Pyrénées).

Yet, there are not international cross-border treaties covering a particular border. The necessary steps for establishing a Euroregion-type could be summarized as follows: firstly, associations of regional and local authorities (municipalities, counties, etc.) are formed specifically for cross-border purposes on both sides of the border under national (public or private) law; secondly, the associations conclude an agreement for cross-border cooperation (typically under private law), covering at least an equal representation in the governing body (council, committee), stipulating the financial contributions of the associations to a common budget and appointing a common secretariat (Association of European Border Regions 1999: 11-13).

Having organizational structures and their own financial resources, Euroregions are, therefore, able to address a larger variety of cross-border topics, like health, research and development, education and training, waste management, environmental protection, tourism and leisure, rescue and security, transport and communication infrastructure, mobility of people and business cooperation (Lepik 2009).

Another important cross-border structure is the *Communauté de travail* or “Working Community”. This community is based on legally non-binding agreements of cooperation among several regions in structurally disadvantaged areas. In a large number of cases regional or local authorities agree to cooperate by signing a protocol of cooperation or “twinning” typically without its own legal personality (Angeleri, Vesani 2008). One of the oldest aggregations is the Community of the Central Alps (Alpe Alp), which brings together ten Italian, Austrian, Swiss and German regions; then the Community of the Eastern Alps (Alpen-Adria) was launched, where next to regions of Austria, Italy and Germany, there appear regions belonging to Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary. The Western Alps, in turn, formed the COTRAO, which brings together Italian, French and Swiss regions. And still another is the Working Community of the Pirenées (Proto 2008: 8-9).

Other organisms for territorial cooperation are the associations between regions that have specific common characteristics, such as a long and thriving industrial tradition, like the community of the “Four Motors for Europe” (Catalonia, Baden-Württemberg, Rhine-Alps and Lombardy). There are even communities, such as RETI, managing industrial decline, that are without a permanent structure but collaborate only for specific initiatives in

⁴⁴ Source: AEBR portal under “Regions list” <http://www.aebr.eu/en/members/list_of_regions.php>.

the fields of science, R&D, education and professional training. Finally, another type of cross-border structure worth mentioning is the *Regionalrat* (Regional Council). It brings together elected politicians from regional authorities coming from both sides of the border; they meet in thematic working groups for the realization of strategic planning activities (such as studies), and/or the development of specific projects (Association of European Border Regions 2001).

It has to be said, however, that although many of those structures were established in the early 1960s, they became active only in the late 1980s. According to Lepik, the main *obstacles* to the success of a Euroregion were the following: insufficient support and trust from national institutions, inability to recruit and retain qualified staff, limited organizational capacity, lack of authority, insufficient funding, lack of interest from the universities and the business. Those problems were most of the time attributable to the role definition and articulation of responsibilities among the parties (Lepik 2009). But what is most important to highlight is that “the cooperation structures saw their scope for action very much limited because of the absence of a common legal framework at the European level” (Angeleri, Vesan 2008: 23). Therefore cross-border structures needed to find their place in the framework of the European legislation.

As we will analyze in the next paragraph, the institutionalization process of cross-border cooperation has greatly accelerated since the late 1980’s thanks to various factors: the support of international organizations such as the Council of Europe and the Assembly of European Regions, internal changes in the EU and the “widening” and “deepening” of the European integration process, further enlargements of the EU, political changes in Central and Eastern Europe and new EU initiatives and funding programmes designed in support of cross-border cooperation (Association of European Border Regions 1999: 5).

2.3 The realization of a European Union’s Policy for Territorial Cooperation

The Council of Europe has been the first international organization to recognise the right of “territorial communities”⁴⁵ to cooperate beyond national borders at a supranational level. In 1980 it promoted the signature of the so-called “European Outline Madrid Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities”.

The Madrid Convention provided the first *legal framework* for cooperation agreements and set out a range of “model agreements” for both local and regional authorities, as well as for states. It still represents one of the main international political agreements on cross-regional cooperation. The convention was integrated by two protocols, respectively in 1995 and 1998. The *first protocol* has expressly recognised the right of territorial communities to conclude, under certain conditions, transfrontier cooperation agreements, the validity, in domestic law, of decisions made within the framework of cross-border co-operation agree-

⁴⁵ According to the Madrid Convention, the expression “territorial communities or authorities” shall designate communities, authorities or bodies exercising local and regional functions and shall be regarded as such under the domestic law of each State (Art. 2).

ments and the legal personality of any co-operation body set up under such agreements. The contracting parties commit to encourage any initiative of territorial authorities inspired by the “model agreements”, listed in part two of the convention. Those models are grouped in two categories: inter-state agreements on the one hand, and contracts between local authorities, on the other (Engl 2007). According to the convention, the fulfilment of these obligations is subject to a number of limiting clauses. For example, “the cross-border agreements shall not alter the existing powers of the territorial authorities as they are defined in the respective domestic legal orders” (Art 3), meaning that the fulfilment of the International Law Convention could be limited by national law. The *second protocol* has sought to provide an adequate legal framework aimed at assuring an effective cooperation among local territories. It has extended the principles, which were set down in the convention and established in the first protocol, also to the cooperation among territorial non-neighbouring communities (Council of Europe 1990).

As we already stressed in the previous chapter, the motives that explain the diffusion of cooperative experiences among European sub-national authorities are manifold: to gain efficiency, to encourage strategies of “resource synergy” among partners, to promote and lobby at national and European levels. But since the late 1980s one of the main reasons for stimulating cross-border cooperation has been related to the access to *new financial resources* of the European Union’s structural funds.

With the launch of the Single Market in 1985, *disparities* between regions became more visible, especially the economic *difficulties* of border regions. But at the same time, border areas offered *potentialities* for the development of the European Community as a whole in many fields - in transport, business, tourism, labor market and education. Therefore, to avoid the risk of a clash in those areas, the need to move from pilot actions to a long term and more strategic policy for territorial cooperation became evident: financial support for the implementation of long-term programmes and solid cross-border projects were the only way to overcome historical, legal, economic, social and cultural differences between neighboring countries. Border regions became, therefore, a “laboratory for European integration” (INTERact 2010: 6).

In 1990 the European Commission launched the Community initiative INTERREG (INTERNational REGions initiative) within the framework of the Cohesion Policy sustained by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)⁴⁶. The main aim of INTERREG was to overcome the barriers represented by national borders and achieve a balanced development and a harmonious integration inside the European territory. The objective was consistent with the Cohesion Policy’s overall goal: *reduce disparities* between the different levels of development amongst the EU regions and diminish the backwardness of the least favoured ones. The first pilot programme, INTERREG I (1991-1993), launched 31 operational programmes along internal borders, particularly in the fields of infrastructure, tourism and environment (Association of European Border Regions 2000).

The programmes were divided into two broad categories. The *first category* represented a “bottom-up approach”; the programmes in there were based on the many years of experience the existing cross-border structures (such as the Euroregions) had gathered. Accord-

⁴⁶ Article 10 of the ERDF Regulation (EEC No 4254/88 of 19.12.1988).

ingly, within these and similar borders, the development and management of the implementation of the programmes was done by the Euroregions in partnership with the member state authorities. In some other cases, the new Community initiative led to the creation of new structures, specifically for the purposes of INTERREG (i.e. PAMINA on the French/German border). The *second category* represented a “top-down approach”; the programmes therein were compiled by national authorities, without the involvement of cross-border structures (Association of European Border Regions 1999: 6).

The second programme, INTERREG II (1994-1999), almost doubled the number of cross-border programmes, expanding the number of projects, the cooperation fields and the geographical coverage to all border regions. This was largely due to the inclusion of eligible regions pertaining to the three new member states⁴⁷ and to former East Germany. Another important development came from the launching of Community programmes specially designed for cross-border cooperation along external borders. Two programmes have been established for this purpose: Phare CBC (1994) and Tacis CBC (1996) - both designated for the promotion of co-operation between border regions of the European Union and adjacent regions of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as for the cooperation between EU border regions and those of applicant countries. This has been the first time that Community funds have become available for non-EU regions in Central and Eastern Europe (Angeleri, Vesan 2008: 26).

In the 1990s, under INTERREG, an important role has been accorded to practically every Euroregion within the EU. Their geographical area has been designated as eligible for INTERREG II purposes and most of their organizations have been renewed in order to better perform the functions required by the management of the implementation of the corresponding operational programmes (Association of European Border Regions 1997). Morata underlines that those first European co-operation programmes generated extensive *added value* to cross-border cooperation. Firstly, they made it finally possible for regional co-operation structures to access a great amount of financial resources for the management of specific projects or issues of transnational nature; secondly, they implemented the principles that lay at the base of most of European policies for territorial development - subsidiarity, partnership and match-funding; thirdly, they contributed to the mobilization of the endogenous potential, enabling the participation of economic and social actors (SMEs, cultural and social institutions, labor unions etc.) in the territorial planning of the development policies. The last added value is the sociocultural one, with the formation of networks of academic experts, of cultural heritage and the increase of better communication (Morata 2007: 12).

In the programming period 2000-2006, INTERREG III became one of the four “Community initiatives” (along with EQUAL, LEADER+ and URBAN) - aid or action programmes set up to complement structural fund operations in specific problematic areas within the general framework of the Cohesion Policy. INTERREG III was divided into three specific strands: strand A dealt with cross-border cooperation between neighbouring sub-national authorities; strand B concerned transnational cooperation between national, regional and local authorities and finally strand C was devoted to interregional cooperation between non-neighbouring sub-national authorities (Angeleri, Vesan 2008).

With the new EU Cohesion Policy for 2007-2013, INTERREG changed its name to Eu-

⁴⁷ Austria, Finland, Sweden.

ropean Territorial Cooperation (ETC) and finally became one of the three key pillars of the European Regional Policy, in accordance with the political priorities set up by the Lisbon and Göteborg European Summits. As a consequence thereof it was given more visibility, an improved legal basis, closer links with existing strategies, but also higher expectations for its achievements (INTERact 2010: 7-8). The priorities are very similar to the previous ones, enabling, thus, the continuity of ongoing cooperation actions (Committee of the Regions 2007).

All in all, nowadays the European Policy for Territorial Cooperation comprehends three major components. The first component concerns *cross-border co-operation* that aims at transforming regions located on either side of the internal or external borders of the European Union into strong economic and social poles. Cross-border actions that are particularly encouraged consider the fields of entrepreneurship, improving the joint management of natural resources, supporting links between urban and rural areas, improving access to transport and communication networks, developing joint use of infrastructure, administrative cooperation and capacity building, employment, community interaction, culture and social affairs. Cross-border cooperation is essentially about “filling the gaps”. It does so through agreed cross-border “analysis and response” strategies, specifically formulated and tailored for each border region. The second component concerns *transnational cooperation* that promotes joint activities among greater European regions, including the ones surrounding sea basins (the Baltic Sea Region, the North Sea, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Area) or mountain ranges (the Alpine Space); it facilitates coordinated strategic responses to common challenges, like flood management, transport and communication corridors, international business and research linkages, urban development and others. The third component concerns *interregional cooperation* that provides a framework for the exchange of experiences between local and regional actors all across Europe in order to put into operation the EU’s strategies regarding growth, jobs and sustainable development. In addition, it aims at reducing disparities by matching less experienced regions with more advanced ones in various policy fields, such as innovation, demographic change, energy supply and climate change (European Commission 2011).

The programming period 2007-2013 introduced also two new instruments for territorial cooperation: the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) that supports cooperation between EU regions and regions in pre-accession countries and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) that supports cooperation between EU regions and regions of EU external neighbours⁴⁸. With a Community contribution of almost €7.8 billion for the sole internal borders and approximately €9.4 billion, adding IPA-CBC and ENPI-CBC funding, territorial cooperation has reached a new comprehensive scale, with 75 cross-border programmes, 13 transnational programmes, one interregional programme and three networking programmes⁴⁹ covering policy areas in the field of transports and accessibility, environment and natural risk, collective services, culture and tourism, research and innovation, or economic development (INTERact 2010: 8).

Regardless of the ambitious objects of the new forms of cooperation structures and Eu-

⁴⁸ Source: INTERACT website. For further information: <http://www.interact-eu.net/etc/etc_2007_13/4/2>.

⁴⁹ ESPON, URBACT, INTEACT. For more details: <http://www.interact-eu.net/etc_2014/european_territorial_cooperation/486/14849>.

ropean initiatives, some scholars (Perkmann, Sum 2002; Morata 2007) complain that the results haven't fully met the expectations. This is due to the many *obstacles* that still don't facilitate collaboration between regions: inadequacy of the legal, financial and human resources in respect of the problems addressed; coordination costs and difficulties in matching different administrative traditions; insufficient involvement and participation of key actors of the society (i.e. business sector) (Morata 2007: 13-14); furthermore, many local and regional actors do not have much experience with cross-border activities and often do not have enough knowledge regarding the available tools (Engl 2007: 19). Such difficulties can, *inter alia*, impede the establishment of suitable cooperation structures and the implementation of EU-funded programmes.

To overcome these difficulties in the organization and management of territorial cooperation and to equip territorial cooperation with a stable legal framework, necessary to guarantee contents and continuity to this experiment of "supranational integration", there has been introduced a distinct legal instrument: the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)⁵⁰ (Engl 2007: 18).

2.3.1 The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation

In July 2006 the Commission adopted a new cooperation instrument at Community level for the creation of cooperative groups in order to further facilitate and improve the effectiveness of cross-border, transnational and/or inter-regional co-operation between regional and local authorities. The legal basis of this regulation can be found in Article 159(3) of the EC Treaty, which allows the adoption of specific actions outside structural funds⁵¹ in order to ensure economic and social cohesion (Committee of the Regions 2007). Using the words of Danuta Hübner, "our experience with INTERREG has demonstrated the need for fully joint structures for managing such programmes. Therefore to assist program partners in this regard, we decided to propose the introduction of a *new instrument for territorial co-operation*. The adoption of this new regulation is a clear answer to the lack of an appropriate and stable legal framework aimed at organizing joint management structures for territorial cooperation."⁵²

The adoption of a European Regulation represents a remarkable advance since it establishes a *uniform framework* that recalls the main principles of the Madrid Convention and its protocols; it is applicable to all 27 member states and it is subjected to both judicial and non-judicial control mechanisms (Proto 2008: 28).

Unlike the structures that governed this kind of cooperation before 2007, the EGTC has a legal personality, which may be private or public depending on the applicable nation-

⁵⁰ Regulation 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, OJ 2006 L 210, pp. 19-24.

⁵¹ European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and/or the Cohesion Fund (CF).

⁵² Statement of Danuta Hübner, Regional Policy Commissioner, in the context of a conference on "Prosperity and Sustainability – Local Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region", held in Visby (Sweden) on 17 August 2006, available at <<http://www.interact-eu.net/1177144/1177146/0/0>>.

al legislation. What is exceptional about it is that the EGTC has the most extensive *legal capacity* accorded to legal persons under member states' national law. Compared to cooperation structures that have no legal personality, this has the possibility to act as an autonomous body, having its own budget, hiring its own staff and contracting independently. Additionally, it also means that the EGTC can be part of legal proceedings and can sue other authorities (INTERact 2008: 17).

According to Article 3 of the Regulation 1082/2006, there are *five categories* of EGTC potential members: member states, regional and local authorities, bodies and organizations of bodies governed by public law, which are located on the "territory of at least two member states"⁵³. Moreover it allows the conclusion of agreements between regions and (small) states where no region exists (i.e. Slovenia, Luxembourg). By contrast, it is not possible for entities belonging to only one member state to establish an EGTC with a third country, such as a partnership between a European member state and Switzerland (Engl 2007). The possibility for member states to participate in EGTCs constitutes an important change in territorial cooperation. Indeed member states were usually excluded from co-operation structures with legal personality. This also contributes to the application of multi-level governance and increases the strategic dimension of territorial cooperation (Committee of the Regions 2007). The creation of an EGTC may be addressed to at least for four different objectives, such as: i) administrating cooperation projects within the framework of the European territorial cooperation programmes; ii) managing co-financed projects under structural funds; iii) carrying out strategic cooperation to implement measures under Community policies other than structural policy; iv) managing cooperation projects out of any EU funding (Art. 7(3)). Another important feature to underline is that the EGTC covers *all types of European territorial cooperation*: cross-border, transnational and interregional. Thus, unlike most of the existing instruments in this field, it is not limited to cross-border cooperation, even if it is expected that the EGTC could be more often used under this first type of cooperation (proximity, limited number of partners, etc. would make it easier to set up a joint structure) (INTERact 2008).

Although the recourse to a regulation provides a uniform European framework for territorial cooperation, it doesn't produce a standardization of territorial cooperation practices all around Europe. The recourse to this new tool is in fact optional, meaning that national, local and regional authorities are not obliged to use this form of cooperation. This clause was mainly inserted in order to take into account the various existing (and functioning) forms of cross-border cooperation and should guarantee their future existence. Thus, other structures and forms of cooperation (mainly based on bilateral treaties and similar agreements) that have developed over the last decades do not necessarily need neither to be replaced by an EGTC, nor exist any impediments to the establishment of other new forms of transfrontier cooperation (Engl 2007: 21).

Besides Community law, the different phases and actions of the EGTC (its establishment, the interpretation of the convention and the statute and the financial control) can be ruled by *different legal constraints*. Indeed, the recurring reference to national law in the Regulation 1082/2006 reflects the will to adopt a flexible approach, respectful of the diversity of national situations, however this is also a limitation. The EC Regulation in fact con-

⁵³ According to the article, the participation of private actors not "governed by public law" seems excluded.

tains a clause in article 4 according to which national governments shall approve the prospective member's participation in the EGTC, "unless they consider that such participation is not in conformity with national law or that it is not justified for reasons of public interest and public policy". This means that national governments can exercise in their *ex-ante* control a veto power on the establishment of a specific EGTC. However, the INTERACT analysis underlines that this could carry the risk of *legal uncertainty* which could provoke *distrust* among the potential members of the EGTC and the national governments could make *resistances* to the adoption of EGTCs (INTERAct 2008). Moreover, as stated by Article 16, member states shall adopt laws or administrative measures to "ensure the effective application of this Regulation". In this sense Proto underlines that this regulation seems more like a EU Directive and is in *sensu stricto* not a Regulation, in fact "while the Regulation is directly applicable, a Directive foresees a sort of transposition at national level" (Proto 2008: 33). In any case, in early 2011 the EGTC's state of play of the Committee of the Regions reports that national legal provisions were adopted in almost all the member states⁵⁴. The last *limitation* of the EGTC worth to underline, consists in the fact that private law entities cannot become EGTC members.

Even with these limitations, the creation of this new legal framework represents a crucial advancement in the development of European territorial co-operation. Indeed, such an instrument offers *new opportunities* to structure a "multi-level system of governance" in Europe, beyond the administration of the INTERREG programmes or the implementation of international conventions and protocols promoted by the Council of Europe. As the Committee of the Regions outlines, "case-studies confirmed that in the framework of the EGTC, regional and local governments have further enhanced the possibilities to apply for EU funding and to participate in decision-making processes, enhancing European multi-level governance" (Committee of the Regions 2011). In addition, Angeleri and Vesan stress that "the establishment of an EGTC cannot be considered as a goal in itself, but as a means to foster and facilitate all kind of territorial cooperation in Europe" (Angeleri, Vesan 2008: 26).

By the end of 2013, 45 EGTC resulted active in Europe⁵⁵. It is too early to predict whether the EGTC model will replace Euroregions in the future or both will coexist, forming some kind of "double structure for border regions". So far, this remains an open question. Whatever the transformation of trans-border co-operation brings about, one issue remains unchanged: "the communities divided by national borders will still need help and *supranational support* to function better" (Belof 2011: 278).

With the approval of the new programming period 2014-2020 the Objective of the European Territorial Cooperation Policy has been strengthened and funding has been raised to about €11,7 billion.⁵⁶ In 2007, Euroregions and EGTC were still considered as being the major structures and tools for territorial cooperation at the EU level; by the end of the last programming period, however, *new forms of territorial cooperation* emerged, changing the way territorial cooperation has been conceived till now. While Euroregions

⁵⁴ According to the Committee of the Regions, the adoption is still pending in Austria, Belgium and Germany; because of their strong federal structures, they find difficulties to adopt a common federal law (Committee of the Regions 2011a: 17).

⁵⁵ Committee of the Regions website: <<https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/en-us/pages/welcome.aspx>>.

⁵⁶ European Commission - Regional Policy - Inforegio: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/index_en.cfm>.

and EGTCs have motivated local and regional actors belonging to distinct geographical areas to develop a shared implementation of the EU socio-administrative integration, the Europe 2020 Agenda⁵⁷ indicates that there are some policy areas that cannot be addressed by single countries or groups of regions only using the existing instruments for territorial cooperation. There is a need for *longer-term commitment* and for a *greater involvement* of stakeholders at all levels to a *broader transnational agenda*. The European Commission has therefore identified "macro-regions" as the new politico-territorial models that can further deepening the EU integration and are able to reach the objectives of the new Cohesion policy 2014-2020.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Europe 2020 is a 10-year strategy proposed by the Commission on 3rd March 2010 for the EU economic advancement. It aims at fostering a "smart, sustainable, inclusive growth" with greater coordination of national and European policies. It follows the Lisbon Strategy for the period 2000-2010. The five targets for the EU in 2020 could be summarized as follows: 1. Employment (75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed); 2. R&D / innovation (3% of the EU's GDP (public and private combined), to be invested in R&D/innovation); 3. Climate change / energy (reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 20% - or even 30%, if the conditions are right - lower than 1990); 20% of energy from renewables - 20% increase in energy efficiency; 4. Education (reducing school drop-out rates below 10% at least 40% of 30-34-year-olds completing third level education); 5. Poverty / social exclusion (at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion). More details are available on the European Commission website: <<http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/targets/eu-targets/>>.

⁵⁸ Conference on the EUSAIR and synergies with the EU Funding Programmes, CoR, 26 June 2014.

Table 2: Main types of European structures for territorial cooperation

	Euroregion	Working Community	Association	EGTC
Members	- LRAs	- LRAs	- LRAs	- States, LRA, public bodies; (small) EU States where no region exists.
Organization	- Permanent; - Separate identity from the one of their members - own administrative, technical and financial resources, as well as internal decision making; - Equal representation in one governing body (council, committee); - Common secretariat.	- No permanent structure	- No permanent structure	- Permanent; - Own budget; - Own administrative staff; - Possibility to contract independently and access directly external funding; - Autonomy in the management of its activities.
Geographical coverage	- High degree of socio-economic integration.	- Structurally disadvantaged.	- Specific common characteristics (i.e. of industrial tradition; in industrial decline).	- Belonging to at least two member states.
Activities	- Of cross-border nature; - Exclusively on common interests; - Sectors: health, research and development, education and training, waste management, environmental protection, tourism and leisure, rescue and security, transport and communication, infrastructure, mobility of people and business cooperation; - Implementation according to national procedures.	- Only of cross-border nature.	- Of cross-border nature; - only on specific initiatives; - Fields of science: R&D, education and professional training; - Occasional thematic workshops (planning, studies, projects).	- Of cross-border, transnational, interregional nature; - Administration and management of co-financed projects under EU structural funds; - Possibilities to apply for EU funding and to participate in decision-making processes.
Limits	- No political powers; - Work reduced to the competencies of the members.	- No political powers; - Lack of authority.	- Insufficient support from national institutions and private sector - Unqualified staff and scarce organizational capacity; - Insufficient funding.	- National governments shall approve the prospective member's participation (i.e. veto power); - Private law entities cannot become EGTC members.
Legal Base	Agreement under national private law; - No legal personality.	- Legally non-binding agreements (Protocols, Memorandum of understanding, Twinning).	- Legally non-binding agreements.	- Own legal personality (private or public) depending on national legislation; - Extensive legal capacity.

Chapter 3. The EU Macro-regional strategy: *Genesis of a new policy tool*

3.1 The emergence of the concept of macro-region within the framework of the EU Regional Policy

As we have analysed in the previous chapters, the EU has gradually made *regional authorities* the preferred interlocutors for the promotion of local development, considering more incisive and efficient an action that overcomes national boundaries. The EU prefers to see as protagonists contiguous territorial areas, associated by common problems, rather than entire national territories, considered separately from one other. European institutions have favoured these types of initiatives by providing specific programmes and funding.

As we saw, the *status* of regions in Europe is the result of an *historical development*. After an initial phase of exclusion, in the 1980s started a greater regional consideration, mostly due to the development of the EU Regional Policy. Through “functional regionalism” regions got to be devised as geographically homogenous areas, as targets for socio-economic interventions aimed at encouraging development and cohesion within the whole European Community. Nowadays regions are at the centre stage, able to autonomously promote comprehensive programmes and activities. Local and regional authorities (LRAs) appear therefore to be a great resource for the whole Union and it is indeed in this logical and political framework that the concept of “macro-region” emerged.

Starting with the 2007-2013 programming period, EU Macro-regional Strategies (MRSs) have been launched as part of the EU Regional Policy instruments. In particular, they refer to the latest “Objective 3”, namely “Territorial Cooperation” (ETC), through which the EU aims at “strengthening cross-border cooperation through joint local and regional initiatives, strengthening transnational cooperation by means of actions conducive to integrated territorial development (...), strengthening interregional cooperation and exchange of experience at the appropriate territorial level”⁵⁹. As proven by the European Commission from 2007 onward, the ETC Objective has recently gained the centre of the Cohesion Policy⁶⁰ (Berionni 2012: 730).

By analysing recent institutional declarations on European policies for regional and territorial development, it can be noticed that the concept of “macro-region”, although men-

⁵⁹ Reg. (EC) No 1083/2006, Art. 3, section 2 (c).

⁶⁰ E.g. European Commission (2008), *Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion - Turning territorial diversity into strength*, Brussels, 6.10.2008 COM(2008) 616 final.

tioned for the first time only in 2008 by Commissioner Hübner (Schymik 2011: 8), is increasingly spreading at the EU level and it is universally recognized as an *innovative tool for territorial cooperation*, not comparable to any of the pre-existing forms of cooperation in the current EU legal framework. As stated clearly by the Commission, “the macro-regional strategy is an approach based on territorial cohesion” (European Commission 2009a). Today, at the Community level, there is a great support to this new mode of cooperation. In recent years several member states have been even dragged into what has been described as the “*European macro-regional fever*” (Dühr 2011b). But from where does this success come from? Why did the EU feel that there was a need for Macro-regional Strategies?

As we previously saw when analysing the factors that led to the development of regionalism in Europe, we can say, using the same logic, that nowadays there are indeed specific *set of challenges*⁶¹ to be addressed that go beyond traditional administrative boundaries and that cannot be satisfactorily tackled only on a regional or national base, nor by European institutions alone and neither by joint working on a sectorial base. Those issues have to be faced through a “convergent action” from different actors and the wider society. Therefore, there was a need for a new and innovative approach that goes *beyond* all traditional policy-making logics elaborated up to now and that can address problems and grasp visible opportunities in an appropriate manner, through the means of a vast “*integrated and cohesive approach*” (Berionni 2012: 729-730). The Commission has indeed identified in the “macro-regional model” the answers to these needs.

To fully understand the value, opportunities and potentialities of the model, we will explore the key concepts and principles underlying macro-regions.

According to some scholars (Dubois, et al 2009), the definition of (macro-) region is linked to the generic definition of region, therefore, it is not the prefix that modifies the meaning. As we saw in Chapter 1, the current usage of the term “region” refers to anything from an administrative unit to a functional area.

Regions are not pre-given, but instead formed and framed through specific practices and intended actions by a set of stakeholders. Therefore, the authors stress that, “there are no pre-established steady conditions or criteria relating to the establishment of a region, including as well macro-regions” ((Dubois, et al 2009: 17).

The term “macro-region” has been “borrowed” by scholars⁶² from international relations (IR) where it is generally used to describe “*transnational cooperation* areas characterized by *functional relations* between different neighbouring countries or regions united by a certain degree of geographical, cultural and social homogeneity” (*Ibidem*: 18). The concept was used to describe both globally significant groups of nations (the EU, ASEAN etc.) or groupings of administrative regions within a country (Australia, Romania)” (European Commission 2009c). Even though the notion traditionally pertains to the IR field, its meaning has recently evolved, starting to be used by economic and political geography, as well as in the spatial planning domain (Katsarova 2012). Moreover, as we will see, nowadays it

⁶¹ E.g. environmental pollution, energy security, combating cross-border crime, immigration and security issues, upgrading of transport infrastructure, etc.

⁶² E.g. According to Nye, a macro-region can be considered as “a limited number of states linked together by a geographical relationship and by a certain degree of mutual interdependence” and to Buzan, “a spatially coherent territory composed of two or more states”. Source: United Nations University.

does not only refer to groupings of homogeneous territories, but can also refer to *heterogeneous regions* (for instance in terms of GDP).

At the end of the 1990s, along with the development of regionalization, transnational cooperation, the evolution of theories about regional economic development and new policy approaches to territorial cooperation within the EU, the concept started to spread and to be “operationalized”. Already in that period some authors started to state that the whole Europe could be seen as “a series of *overlapping* transnational macro-regions with no fixed boundaries built upon cooperation between different administrative regions in the same geographical area; (...) cooperation within a macro-region is something more than a simple territorial functional interdependence, it constitutes a new framework for regulation and development of IR” (Cappellin 1998).

In literature therefore does not exist a standard *definition of macro-region*, but different opinions and visions are shared regarding the concept. The one currently shared by scholars and practitioners has not been elaborated *a priori*, on a “theoretical level”, but has rather been shaped on the basis of the proposals emerged during the preparation of the first EU macro-regional strategy⁶³. The MRS concept and policy tool officially bore with such an initiative. The European Commission provided then its *definition* of macro-region, calling it “an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more (geographical, cultural, economic etc.) common features or challenges” (European Commission 2009a).

The aforesaid definition of macro-region carries no implication of scale; however, it is important to stress that in the EU context even though “a macro-region may involve several regions in different countries depending on the function pursued without a specific quantitative limit, the number of Member States should be significantly *fewer* than those in the Union as a whole” (European Commission 2009c). Most of the European macro-regions⁶⁴ are defined “around” specific *geographic characteristics*, such as a sea basin, a river basin, or a mountain chain (i.e. the Baltic Sea, the Danube region, the Mediterranean area, the Black Sea, the Atlantic region, the Alpine space, the Adriatic-Ionian region, the North Sea region) (Blais, Liepa 2012).

In the spirit of renewal and reconstruction of the Community’s Regional Policy, 20 years after the collapse of Central-East European planned economic systems and five years after the greatest enlargement of the EU, within a context of increasing globalization and in the need to join forces, create synergies, reduce overlaps and costs, the European Council decided to support the establishment of a *wide political framework for cooperation* within macro-regions: the EU Macro-regional development Strategy (Braun, Kovács 2011).

⁶³ The EU nowadays counts three officially recognized “macro-regional strategies”: the Baltic Sea Region Macro-regional Strategy (EUSBSR); the Danube Region Macro-regional Strategy (EUSDR) and the Adriatic and Ionian Macro-regional Strategy (EUSAIR).

⁶⁴ For a clear overview of macro-regions on the European continent (existing, adopted or just intended as political constructions, not yet operative), see: **Figure 1** (Annex section).

3.2 Macro-regional strategies: definition and characteristics

According to the European Commission, a macro-regional strategy is “an integrated framework that enables the EU and its Member States to *identify needs* and *allocate available resources* through the *coordination of appropriate policies*, in order to allow a territory to benefit from a sustainable environment and an optimal economic and social development” (European Commission 2009a).

In order to better clarify the concept, we will proceed by illustrating the main aspects and characteristics that are “at the root” of the macro-regional model.

The macro-regional approach is based on *territorial cohesion*; it is place-based, inclusive and, in principle, prepared and implemented on a multi-level basis. But a macro-region differs from a “traditional instrument” for territorial cooperation because of its underlying driving force. Macro-regional strategies are *endogenous*, focused on addressing *challenges* and exploiting *opportunities* within the area concerned. As already mentioned, the frontiers of a macro-region do not have to be precisely defined and there is no requirement that any given territory has to be part of only one macro-region, because, thanks to the common challenges and opportunities, a macro-region is able to maintain *consistency* (European Commission 2009c). This last statement takes us to the *functional criterion*, one of the basic principles of the EU Cohesion Policy.

The macro-region is considered a “functional area”, because it is *not* built around administrative or financial criteria (as could be the case for a “traditional region”, analysed in Chapter 1). It is rather socially and politically constructed, on specific common *functional objectives* that are addressed through an *integrated approach*. The macro-regional model is, therefore, a *new form of cross-border cooperation* that goes beyond the traditional logic of territorial proximity. This results in policies characterized by geographically alternating borders of “variable-geometry”, realized around a *functional network configuration* (European Economic and Social Committee 2009). Policies are, therefore, designed according to the “place-based principle”, for functional regions and physical boundaries may vary according to the relevance of the policy area in question. As *policy reasons* weigh more, functional regions may well overlap, so that a given policy can involve more than one region and a region can be part of different macro-regional strategies if they all share common characteristics or interests. Thus, the pivot point, around which a macro-regional strategy is built, lies indeed on its *objectives* that vary according to the needs of the territories concerned. The main aim of the strategy is to bring *added value* to interventions through a *better coordination* and *integration* of different actors, policies and funding programmes. Moreover, according to the Commission, a macro-regional strategy “should lead to a *facilitation* of relationships between different socio-economic interests, encouraging, and *not imposing*, the advent of new methods for achieving better *results* in important policy areas” (European Commission 2009c).

To summarize, macro-regions are *functional areas* defined according to one or more geographical, cultural or economic common features or challenges. In order to achieve its goals, a macro-region requires “a collective action of actors on the ground” meaning “the EU institutions, the nation-state, regional and local authorities on a geographical transnational scale” (Stocchiero 2010a). By working together on common problems, “through an *integrated approach* that allows a better coordination of programmes and a more strategic use of (already available) resources” (Berionni 2012), it is possible to put into practice the concepts of territorial cohesion with higher *efficacy* and *better results* in respect to a fragmented and individual work.⁶⁵

According to the first two (and currently only operating) EU macro-regional strategies, the *governing principles* obey to the so called “*three NO rules*”.

Firstly, *NO new legislation*. Formally, MRSs take the form of “communications” issued by the European Commission and endorsed by the European Council. Member States decide to implement the strategies, but no binding regulations are issued (Blais, Liepa 2012). The objectives and concrete actions are described in the official documents released by the European Commission services, meaning the “*Communication(s)*” and the “*Action Plan*” (Stocchiero 2010a). More precisely, while the Communication defines the *strategy’s guidelines*, the Action Plan outlines the *objectives* and expected *results*, pillars and priority areas, lines of action and targets, *governance structure, implementing, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms*.

Secondly, *NO new institutions*. The strategies must be implemented by existing organisations within the concerned regions. “The European Commission cannot and does not want to manage the strategy directly, as it does not have sufficient resources and local knowledge. It needs to rely on a (specific) *governance model* involving institutions and organizations from the participating regions, who know how things should be done best” (Blais, Liepa 2012). This does not mean that a macro-region does not have a proper *governance structure*. Instead, as we will see later on, the *effectiveness* of the Strategy depends mostly on its complex system of integrated governance⁶⁶.

Thirdly, *NO new funding*. No new and direct financing has been allocated to existing EU Macro-regional Strategies and they don’t have budget lines of their own. One of the key points made by the Strategies highlight the need to *adjust existing funding* to the jointly agreed macro-regional actions and projects. The principle of “NO new funding” requires a *better alignment* of funding from several existing sources (European Union, national, regional and/or local, public and/or private) established under diverse policy themes and territories and a *more efficient use* of those funding. The concept of “alignment of funding” is an original new way of thinking EU regional policies with Macro-regional Strategies. It calls for a joint overview on *priorities* and *optimization* of funding by means of *pooling resources* at the moment when decisions for the project funding are on the table. This also calls for further cooperation and effective coordination between all programmes and funding instruments, regardless of their European, national, regional or local nature (*Ibidem* 2012: 4). Many experts consider this latter statement an asset, since priorities can be selected free

⁶⁵ Marche Region, *The Adriatic and Ionian Macro-region for the development of Europe*, 2011, Ancona.

⁶⁶ A separate paragraph will be dedicated to an in-depth analysis of the macro-regional governance structure and its implementation modalities.

from any (unfair) competition; that is to say that limited funds and competition are fostered on the basis of *complementarities* (Katsarova 2012: 2).

Among the fundamental characteristics of a macro-region, the final important aspect to highlight is the fact that MRSs are designed as a *flexible framework*, able to *complement* existing EU policies (regional, environmental, agricultural, but also maritime, infrastructural, energy and innovation policies)⁶⁷ and other forms of cooperation and assistance, such as the Eastern Partnership, the Northern Dimension, the strategic partnership with Russia, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Western Balkans. Regarding the *external dimension*, the European Commission outlined, “MRSs belong (necessarily) to the EU *internal policy*” (European Commission 2009c). In particular, they operate within the frame of the EU Regional Policy. But, as stressed by Stocchiero, “in an interconnected world of concrete transnational spaces, even internal policies inevitably have an external dimension”, therefore, “third countries must be informed, involved or at least should be considered the (political and economic) effects on them if one would like to achieve the functional objective” (Stocchiero 2011). The *geographical areas* identified as macro-regions, in fact, include also countries that are not EU members or that are EU candidates or potential candidates. For example, “while for the EUBSRS the external dimension (that mainly regards the neighbouring Russia) is marginal” (*Ibidem* 2010a), in the EUDRS there are six non-EU member states, four of them candidate countries. The same argument could be applied to the future Adriatic and Ionian Macro-regional Strategy (EUSAIR), which includes the Balkans. We can conclude, therefore, that MRSs have also an impact on other EU policies, e.g. the EU Neighbourhood Policy, being “an important mechanism to strengthen the process of entry and integration of future member countries” (*Ibidem* 2010b).

3.2.1 The Institutional building of a macro-region

After having clarified which are the basic characteristics of a macro-regional strategy, it is important to understand the steps required for the establishment of this new and innovative policy instrument.

At the Community level there is no legislation “specifically aimed at regulating the matter” (Berionni 2012); nevertheless, one can reconstruct, on the basis of the European Commission Communications for the Baltic and Danube Strategies, a common and almost fixed pattern for the setting up of a macro-region.

First of all, there is the *political initiative* or “venture phase”, that sees as leading actors those local and regional authorities that have identified in their territories issues and problems that need to be addressed with a *joint action* and common strategy (*Ibidem* 2012). After this

⁶⁷ An example of complementarity with other EU policies makes itself clear in the BalticDEAL project: one of the causes of contamination of the Baltic Sea is the excessive use of fertilisers in agricultural areas along the sea; the environmental burden could therefore be reduced by altering agricultural practices (i.e. by avoiding the use of certain fertilizers). Baltic countries have already shown the way by integrating such provisions in their national legislation (Katsarova 2012: 2).

stage follows what we can call the “launch phase”, consisting in the activation and involvement of concerned national authorities that officially recognize a common *political will* to establish a macro-region. Once a *solid consensus* is reached at the inter-governmental level, the topic at hand is placed on the agenda of the European Council. The Council gives its assent if the construction of that macro-region is deemed to be *necessary*, that is *useful* in the area concerned and *interesting for Europe as a whole*. After having set some benchmarks and parameters, it recommends the Commission to draw up the documents required to give way to a macro-regional strategy. After having published a “Discussion Paper”, where major points about the Strategy are listed, the Commission launches a wide-ranging *public consultation* and collaboration with the Member States and stakeholders in the area concerned. This intensive consultation process is concluded with the adoption of an “Action Plan” that will ultimately be formally approved by the European Council. Finally, this formal “top-down” and EU driven “elaboration phase” ends up with the publication of a “Communication”, concerning the strategy at hand. The document is built around the priorities identified by national contributions in the drawing up of the action plan and the expected impacts that the planned actions will produce (Braun, Kovács 2011). The Commission shall constantly inform the European Council on the development of the strategy, proving that there is *added value* for the whole Union.

A really peculiar and important point to stress, as we will see when analysing how macro-regional strategies function in practice, is that the process of elaboration and implementation of the strategy is endogenous and “bottom-up”. The consultation process is in fact done on purpose to *include* and *involve* as much as possible the local public and private actors on the territory. This kind of approach goes in the opposite direction in respect to traditional policies that descend from a strategic “top-down” initiative, proper of the EU Regional Policy (e.g. the provision and dispense of EU funds for regional development).

In this context, it will be highlighted that *regions* reclaim (and engage) a *primary role* through all the construction process of a macro-regional strategy.

3.2.2 Distinctions between macro-regions and other instruments for territorial cooperation

What has been said so far confirms that “the macro-region, as a way of cooperation, stands out because it is able to increase the *consistency* and the coordination of various policy actions; to *rationalize* the use of financial resources and to *enhance the role of regions*”⁶⁸. In order to achieve such objectives and to give a framework, a basis and a benchmark to this new instrument for territorial cooperation, the Commission has delineated the “three NO rule” among which we can identify *flexibility* as the *leitmotiv*.

Right from the inception there has been a strong political will not to bind MRSs to a new and specific regulation, in order to allow *integration* to take place outside of obstacles, conflict-

⁶⁸ Marche Region, *The Adriatic and Ionian Macro-region for the development of Europe*, December 2011, Ancona, Italy.

ing logics or stringent constraints that might slow or halt cooperation. This choice allows us to acknowledge a *substantial difference* between macro-regional strategies and other tools recently introduced to strengthen territorial cooperation (i.e. the EGTC), which have been thoroughly analysed in Chapter 2 of this research. We recall that EGTC is “an instrument of cooperation with legal personality, introduced to endow cooperation of a stable legal framework, designed so as to overcome difficulties given by a context of different national laws and procedures that usually hinder the development of activities of supra-regional integration” (Morata 2007: 7). Thus, the decision to handle the matter through a European Regulation⁶⁹ testifies the will to give the issue a greater homogeneity and legal certainty, in order to overcome the obstacles that block the spread of territorial cooperation instruments and the realization of correlated activities. However, despite the expectations, it was not possible to achieve the goals, as new and further problems have taken over and have held back the development of the EGTC. As we saw, the main obstacle comes from the heterogeneity of the implementing rules assigned by Reg. CE 1082/2006 to Member States, which have slowed down or even prevented its realization. Another barrier that has hindered the spreading of this instrument has been the *rigidity* inherent to Community regulation. Forms of cooperation designed in this way require, in order to adequately function, a basic “elasticity”; that would allow the cooperation between multiple territories with different legal systems and that would avoid blocks, delays, bureaucratic problems, etc. Until now the juridical coordination between different national legal systems, as it is dictated by the Regulation considered, has caused several hitches. At this point emerges the complex *dilemma* of “how to ensure at the same time resoluteness and flexibility” (Berionni 2012). While in the case of the EGTC, the European legal response to the institutionalization of territorial cooperation instruments has clashed with the compatibility between different national rules, complex procedures, widespread uncertainties and discrepancies, in the macro-regional case, the absence of *ad hoc* legislation stimulates a more “malleable background”. The macro-regional governance structure is in fact consistent with the needs of a *multi-level and multi-sectoral action* and this approach eases the avoidance of tensions between powers and conflicting logics.

The *governance mechanisms* are crucial for the well functioning and implementation of EU regional policies. Thus, macro-regions should have a strong system of governance, otherwise they would likely be “written on water” or become “another label for a cooperation that already exists” (Stocchiero 2010a: 9).

Regarding the latter observation it seems appropriate to clarify the relationship between macro-regions and the other main co-operative instruments that have been analysed in Chapter 2 namely the EGTC and the Euroregion.

Contrary to an EGTC or a Euroregion, the building up of a macro-region requires the *Member States’ direct intermediation*, since it is indeed the national governments that present their “plan” to the Commission. Regarding the implementation modalities, the EGTC is configured as an actor with legal personality, but for being set up, it requires formal steps and, which as mentioned, have contributed in hindering its diffusion. The macro-region, on the contrary, is *not a new legal actor*, nor is it an operational tool to whom the management of funds or programmes is entrusted. It is a brand *new mode of cooperation*, based on a *comprehensive*

⁶⁹ Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of 5 July 2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

Strategy that sees EU institutions, states and sub-national actors acting in an integrated manner, around problems that have been detected together, qualified as overriding and that have been commonly decided to be jointly tackled. Moreover, it is important to recall that a macro-region does not bring about the establishment of new institutions, new bodies or the provision of new funds. It is a *new way of working* on programmes and resources that *already exist*.

From what we have said, it is clear that the various instruments should not overlap, but can (and should) coexist. Most of the time the Euroregion can be considered the “forerunner” of a macro-region, e.g. the Baltic Euroregion before the launch of the EUSBSR, or, as we will see in the next chapter, the Adriatic Euroregion before the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region. The Euroregion will be one of the actors operating in the macro-regional area, aimed at pursuing the following objectives: i) to contribute to the preparation, definition and harmonization of a common development strategy for the economic field, with particular attention to the areas of tourism, fisheries and agriculture ii) to provide higher education tools for public officials and stimulate the exchange of best practices among public administrations iii) to propose solutions for problems related to the transport and infrastructure sectors, as well as to the safeguard of the cultural heritage; iv) to ensure the conditions for an effective participation in EU programmes and for better access to funds addressed to the area concerned (Proto 2008). It is important to notice that along the Adriatic basin, where the set up of a macro-region is expected at the end of 2014, a Euroregion has been created, *not an EGTC*, confirming the *operational difficulties* that this latter instrument for territorial cooperation implies.

The European Commission strongly outline the *added value* that macro-regions bring to regions in respect to the other forms and instruments of territorial cooperation. According to the ex European Commissioner for Regional Policy (2009-10) Commissioner Samecki, through a MRS, “regions are better equipped to compete in the global marketplace because of their innovative and integrated way of working across a wide number of sectors” (European Commission 2009c). Therefore, this *new governance* may offer significant *opportunities* for specialization, cooperation (i.e. by networking activities) and greater efficiencies (European Commission 2009a).

3.3 An overview of existing EU macro-regional strategies

While in the previous paragraph we dealt with the general characteristics of a macro-region, this section will highlight how macro-regions do function “in practical terms”, by giving an overview on the development and structure of the first two (and currently only fully operational) EU Macro-regional Strategies: the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region (EUSBSR) and the EU Strategy for the Danube region (EUSDR).

The initiative for a strategic approach *vis-à-vis* the Baltic Sea region has been firstly elaborated with the European Parliament’s Resolution on the Northern Dimension⁷⁰. In

⁷⁰ Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/fiche_procedure.do?id=528449>.

2004, at the beginning of the first legislature after the big enlargement, MEPs from the eight Member States surrounding the Baltic Sea formed a “Euro Baltic Intergroup” to examine and discuss EU policy towards this region. One over-arching theme was the question on how to address best the economic needs of a region that had been put at Europe’s margins for a long time in contemporary history (Braun, Kovács 2011). In December 2007 the European Council, having observed and analysed the economic situation in the area, invited the Commission to present a Strategy for the Baltic Sea region by June 2009, in accordance with certain parameters: “i) to not jeopardize the integrated Maritime Policy; ii) to help in addressing urgent environmental challenges related to the Baltic Sea; iii) to contribute to the Northern Dimension⁷¹ for external aspects of cooperation” (Council of the European Union 2009). Therefore, the Commission has fuelled “an intense *process of consultation* with Member States and interested parties in the region” (Berionni 2012). During the formulation of the Strategy there have been taken into consideration also contributions from previous experiences of cooperation in the area under international organizations, such as the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), as they all were considered important actors for the development of the Baltic Sea region and the implementation of the Strategy (Kern, Gänzle 2011). The EUSBSR has been officially presented in June 2009, along with the approval of an Action plan and a Communication from the Commission (European Commission 2009a). These can all be considered the “*pioneer*” benchmark documents for future macro-regions. The institutionalization process finally ended with the formal Council adoption in October 2009, under the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The strategy includes eight EU Member States bordering the Baltic Sea⁷² and four EU neighbouring countries as “significant external partners” (Russia, Belarus, Norway and Iceland) that jointly agreed to subscribe a *common political project* in order to overcome *common problems*. For instance, the regions and countries in the Baltic Sea area are confronted with a common challenge (among others) regarding the pollution of the sea. It is obvious that such a global and multi-faceted issue needs a *joint intervention*. Reducing sea pollution requires the involvement of a variety of actors from both private and public sectors, ranging from environmental organizations to transport ministries, tourism partners and many more. A MRS is able to bring together relevant stakeholders (institutions, thematic experts and financial sources) active on local, regional and national levels to implement identified common objectives, to which each participating level can contribute in the framework of its own respective competences, resources and interests (Blais, Liepa 2012).

The EUSBSR’s main aim was not to create any new political or administrative level of government, but rather to *align* various existing policies, projects and funds around its specific objectives. In this respect it should be stressed that challenges are not the only rea-

⁷¹ The Northern Dimension (ND) is a joint policy between four equal partners (EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland) regarding cross-border and external policies covering the Nordic countries, the Baltic states and Russia. The ND Policy was initiated in 1999 and renewed in 2006. It addresses the specific challenges and opportunities arising in those regions and aims to strengthen dialogue and cooperation between the EU and its Member States, the Northern countries associated with the EU under the European Economic Area (Norway and Iceland) and Russia. Source: <http://eeas.europa.eu/north_dim/index_en.htm>.

⁷² Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Poland and Germany. For a clear panning shot, see: **Figure 3** (Annex section).

son that unite stakeholders bordering the Baltic Sea. Those territories in fact also *share* a long and successful *history of interregional cooperation* (Nordic Council, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Baltic Sea States sub-regional cooperation) - *resources* and *potentialities* that date back to the Hanseatic League of the 13th century⁷³. Thus, after having identified the main sectors on which to invest, the Commission elaborated an integrated Action Plan. The EUSBSR has been *structurally* organized according to three *Thematic Pillars* or (*Objectives*) which represent the three key challenges of the Strategy⁷⁴, all divided into seventeen *Priority Areas* for intervention. The priorities do not have to be endorsed by all participants, in fact, while for some policy areas all member countries of a macro-region are involved, for others actions/projects might be focused on a few regions (Katsarova 2012: 2). Each priority area is then accompanied by concrete *Flagship Projects*, as well as by clearly identified *Targets* and *Indicators*. Exceptionally the EUSBSR has also planned *Horizontal Actions* that complement the objectives and priority areas.

Then, in order to *implement* a MRS that presents these complex and interrelated goals without owning proper institutions and appropriate regulatory and/or financial instruments, it is necessary to adopt an effective *system of governance*⁷⁵. The Commission has therefore identified key responsible units and stakeholders that are on the lookout for the functioning of the Strategy.

The European Council, the European Commission⁷⁶ and the High Level Group have the main political role, they take the Strategy into account in relevant policy initiatives, promote the dialogue between stakeholders and contribute to reviewing and updating the Action Plan. The member states and *National Contact Points (NCPs)*, established by central governments and dependent on the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of each country involved in the Strategy, are implicated at all levels by having an active political engagement, by encouraging the *participation* of stakeholders and ensuring the *visibility* of the EUSBSR within their countries. The overall coordination of the Strategy is the task of the *Priority Area Coordinators (PACs)* (which may be central administrations or regions and inter-governmental bodies), the *Priority Area Focal Points* and the *Horizontal Action Leaders (HALs)*.⁷⁷ Those can be considered as “the *momentum* wheel” for cooperation - key responsables for the application of the necessary measures to guarantee the success of the *coordination* and the visibility of the Strategy. “With their expertise, they support actions and projects financed by various programmes and funding instruments, monitor progresses and report to the Commission for evaluation and monitoring” (Blais, Liepa 2012).

At an *operational level* there are different programmes and bodies involved. The Strategy includes programmes under Objectives 1, 2 and 3 of the EU Cohesion Policy (Conver-

⁷³ Source: Nordregio – Baltic Sea Region <<http://www.nordregio.se/en/Metameny/About-Nordregio/Research--Development/Geographical-scope-we-cover/Baltic-Sea-Region/>>.

⁷⁴ 1. Save the sea; 2. Connect the region; 3. Increase prosperity. Source: EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (last update 2013).

⁷⁵ The essential elements of the EUSBSR “governance structure” have been taken from the official website of the Strategy; for a clearer panning shot, see: **Figure 2** (Annex section).

⁷⁶ I.e. The Commission’s Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) is in charge of the overall day-to-day coordination, monitoring and reporting.

⁷⁷ *Roles and responsibilities of the implementing stakeholders of the EUSBSR and a flagship project concept*, EUSBSR website portal (last update January 2013). For additional details see: EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

gence, Competitiveness and Employment, Territorial Cooperation), as well as ENPI programmes and other financial instruments, e.g. European Investment Bank. Then, the *Flagship Project Leaders (FPL)*, meaning agencies of different types that focus only on given projects to ensure their promotion with a preferably high macro-regional impact (*Flagship Project*), contribute to fulfil the implementation of the objectives of the Strategy. Projects not labelled as “flagship”, but containing a strategy-related approach are considered as “contributing projects”. On the other side, there is the *Laboratory Group (LG) or Steering Group*, a think tank composed of members of national administrations, Commission representatives and ETC programmes. Their tasks comprise advice and recommendations on how regional programmes can best contribute to the achievement of the overall goals of the Strategy. Finally, an *INTERACT Point* supports the implementation of the Strategy by acting as a bridging organization between the PACs and HALs, the structural funds and the laboratory groups set up for this purpose. It fosters and involves territorial cooperation within the Strategy by disseminating information, managing networks and facilitating interaction between the main actors.⁷⁸

As we can see, the strategy is deeply “European” and therefore the responsibility and accountability should remain at the European level. As a consequence, the Commission shall periodically liaise with a *High Level Group* composed of all member states, the CoR and the EIB that reports to the European Council. In this regard the Council states, “the High Level Group will have to be consulted for possible amendments to the Strategy and to the Action Plan and all other major developments” (European Council, 2011). This process should be always accompanied by the *constant consultation and involvement* of the various stakeholders. As outlined by the European Council, “(...) the Commission should safeguard the involvement of all stakeholders in the area concerned at all levels” (*Ibidem* 2011).

In spite of all those efforts and expectations, some scholars such as Kern and Gänzle, have qualified the involvement of *sub-national authorities* in positions of responsibility - both during the elaboration and the implementation of the strategy - as *modest* stressing that “only in a few priority areas sub-national actors (...) have taken a lead coordinating role” (Kern, Gänzle 2011: 13). This concept will be further analysed in the conclusive chapter.

The second EU MRS concerns the Danube region. The building up of this strategy and its functioning is quite similar to the Baltic one, but there are some differences worth mentioning.

As the Baltic, the Danube region has also forerunners of territorial cooperation (Danube Commission, Danube Regions Working Group, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, the Visegrad Group) - all experiences the Strategy can be built on. The first strategic initiative came directly from two member states: in February 2009 Austria and Romania proposed a plan that would allow the strengthening of cooperation between states crossed by the Danube River. In June 2009 the European Council welcomed this proposal considering the region “a *functional area* that presents common features, challenges and opportunities” and formally invited the Commission to develop a MRS for the Danube region by the end of 2010. A consultation process was opened from February to June 2010, during which each state, with the exception of Moldova, Bosnia-Herzegovina

⁷⁸ *Roles and responsibilities of the implementing stakeholders of the EUSBSR and a flagship project concept*, EUSBSR website portal (last update January 2013). For additional details see: EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

and Montenegro, submitted *position papers*. In December 2010 the European Commission presented the EUSDR and on 13 February 2011 the European Council formally adopted the Strategy (European Commission, 2010).

Once again it became clear that EU member states were playing a *pivotal role* in the launching of the strategy-formulation, while the Commission accepted to facilitate (and actively shape) this process.

According to the Communication and Action Plan, the Danube macro-region is based on four Thematic Pillars⁷⁹ and eleven Priority Areas of intervention. However, contrary to EUSBSR, it does not consider separate “Horizontal Actions” and does not mention any coordinator of the priority areas. Only in 2011 Commissioner Hahn revealed which countries would be the coordinators of the various priority areas. Nowadays as few as *two countries or regions* lead the implementation of the Strategy in every priority area - in contrast to the Baltic Sea Strategy, where the member states coordinate certain areas *on their own*. Another difference between the two Strategies is that in the Danube Strategy there has not yet been made a distinction between “strategic and cooperative actions” (Braun, Kováč 2011).

The EUSDR and the EUSBSR distinguish themselves also on the base of their *geographical scope*. Whereas each country taking part in the Baltic Sea Strategy is geographically located on the Baltic Sea coastline, countries not located along the Danube have also indicated their intention to participate. Under these circumstances the macro-region covers the broader catchment basin of the river, giving the Strategy a chance to focus *on other projects* besides the Danube-related ones (*Ibidem* 2011). Therefore, the number of countries that participate in the Strategy is much higher and formally comprehends also non-EU territories.⁸⁰

The *driving force* for the development of the Strategy has been the *intergovernmental cooperation*, but in this case, more than the EUSBSR, “sub-national level stakeholders have played an essential role” (Kern, Gänzle 2011). Some actors have even been born in the area and have evolved precisely in view of this macro-region⁸¹. Looking at the official documents realized during the building of the EUSDR, one notices in fact that regions are clearly excluded from “high level” coordination, but they seem to gain ground on the Priority Areas “coordination level”. The Communication states, “Member States shall, *after consulting* the Commission, regional agencies and authorities concerned, be responsible for coordinating each priority area (in cooperation with third countries or regions, with the exception of the issues addressed at the national level, such as security and organized crime)” (European Commission, 2010). Nevertheless, in the *implementation phase*, the Commission reiterates once again that, “the implementation of *actions* (concrete projects with a temporal and financial leader) is everyone’s responsibility, at national, regional, municipal and local level” (*Ibidem* 2010). *Responsibility* for coordination is agreed between countries and it may happen that there are Priority Areas where responsibility is split between two or more coun-

⁷⁹ 1. Connect the region; 2. Protecting the Environment; 3. Strengthening the region 4. Building prosperity. Source: European Union Strategy for the Danube region.

⁸⁰ Member States: Germany (Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg), Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia; Accession countries: Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro; Neighbourhood countries: Moldova, Ukraine. For a clear panning shot, see: **Figure 4** (Annex section).

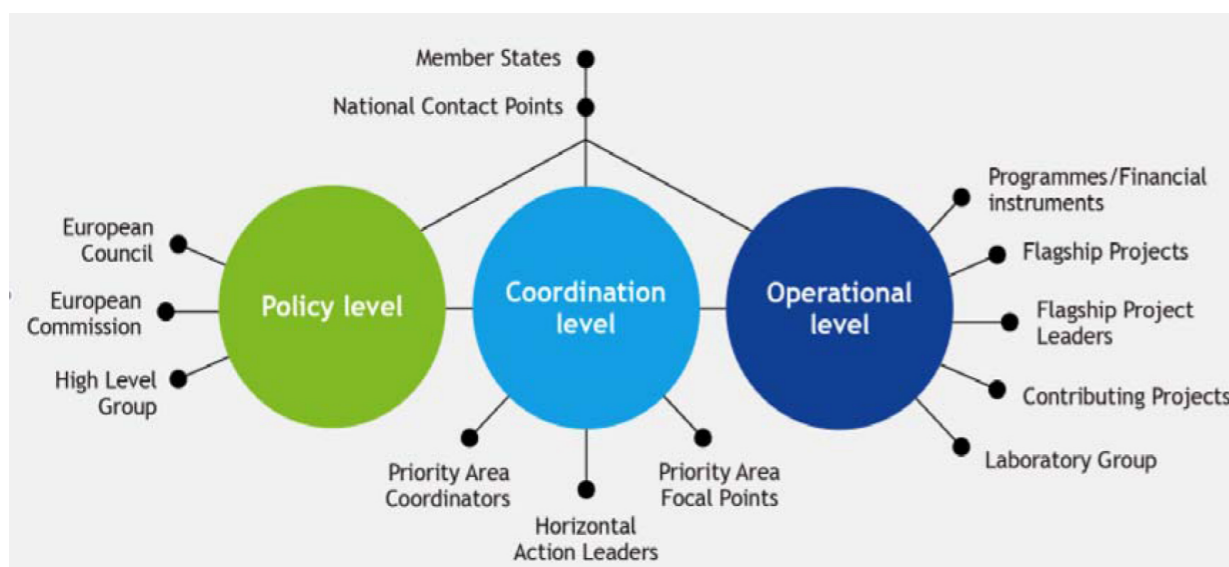
⁸¹ E.g. the Council of Danube cities and Regions (CODCR), established in June 2009 in order to better prepare its members for the forthcoming EUSDR.

tries. For example, the priority “competitiveness” in the EUSDR is jointly coordinated by the German Land of Baden-Württemberg and Croatia. With the Danube Strategy there has also been launched the habit of organizing *Annual Forum*, where to states, regional authorities, civil society, private sector and European institutions (Commission, CoR and EESC) are invited to participate, in order to discuss, consult and review the actions taken.

The Baltic and Danube experiences, even though not completely similar in their geopolitical characteristics, are broadly considered *successful* “experiments” or “best practices” due to the fact that the results of the individual projects and initiatives are positive. Therefore, the European, national and regional levels have all pondered the possibility of *exporting* the macro-regional model to other areas of the continent.

Before exploring the future of macro-regions in Europe, we will proceed by analysing more thoroughly this innovative governance model, taking into particular consideration the role of LRAs and trying to finding out its unique *added values*.

Figure 1: Governance system of the EUSBSR



Source: EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

3.4 Macro-regional governance and the role of regional and local authorities

A clear and stable macro-regional *governance structure* is the key for its success. Due to the broad *spectrum* of priorities, the geographical scope and the large number of stakeholders involved, the *implementation* of macro-strategies is challenging. But why precisely has such a system been adopted? The original debate revolved around which *model of governance* is more appropriate for a better functioning of a macro-region.

In the consultations phase three options emerged: a) no additional structure (implementation of the strategy and action plan by Member States); b) use of an existing institution (implementation of strategy and the action plan by an already existing intergovernmental body); c) the “community approach”, with the European Council that would deal with the policy guidelines and the Commission having the role of coordinator and monitor. After an assessment of the effectiveness of the various governance options, it was found that the best results could be achieved through this latter approach; three factors were taken into consideration: the institutional capacity for the implementation of the initiatives, a better coordination and coherence, a guarantee of visibility and a greater accountability (Berionni 2012: 735). Moreover, in 2009 the Commission identified that the fundamental problem of the whole EU Regional Policy instruments is not the lack of initiatives or governance structures, but rather the inability of existing structures to act efficiently because too *fragmented* (European Commission 2009b). In brief, a cooperation modality, where the EU institutions would have had a coordinating and a “high level” control power, would have ensured a more harmonious and functional action by putting the whole macro-regional structure under a common “EU umbrella”. Moreover, the Commission is able to adopt a *strategic approach* without political interests (as it might have been the case for the European Parliament), but also to guarantee a more *holistic approach*, ensuring the compatibility of macro-regionalisation with existing and future policies in a *horizontal way* (Gänzle, Kern 2011).

Regarding the *implementation modalities*, the choice made responds to a *multi-level governance model*. According to Dubois, Hedin, Schmitt and Sterling, the MLG model is perfectly suitable for a macro-regional structure because, on one hand relations between sub-state entities, states and EU institutions come into play, and on the other, relationships between territorial entities and their capacity to connect with each other are unconditionally obligatory. But the macro-regional governance is challenging and complex also because it has to be implemented both “vertically” (*on the territorial level*) and “horizontally” (*on the functional level*), being focused on few, specific and functional objectives. Indeed, the authors stress that the territorial dimension of the MRSs is designed to handle three sets of tasks which are corresponding to the MLG: a) multi-sectoral: actions are based on the coordination of a number of sectoral policies; b) multi-instrumental: the wide scope of actions in different sectoral policies require the use of many instruments; c) multi-actor: positive re-

sults can only be obtained by the collaboration between different types of actors at various governance levels (Dubois, et al 2009). As we saw in Chapter 1, in order to work, a MLG model must rely on the *joint commitment* to the cooperation objectives and on the well-defined *roles* and *responsibilities* of the stakeholders involved, which should be able to act in conjunction effectively and efficiently. In the macro-regional case this should take place on several levels of government: European, national and local. On paper, the Council of the EU would be responsible for *elaborating* policies, the European Commission would play a *strategic role* being head of coordination, monitoring, reporting and supporting the implementation and the Member States and local authorities would deal with the *direct application* of the programmes and projects (Berkkan et al. 2009).

As we saw, from the beginning the Commission did not specify detailed rules regarding the implementation modalities, but rather stressed what a macro-regional approach *should not* include, uttering the already mentioned “*three NO rule*”. The general aim was to ensure maximum *flexibility*, able to guarantee an adequate *space for manoeuvring* without a rigid framework of reference, in order to avoid *political resistances* that could hinder the “works in progress”.

Almost immediately, however, several *concerns* about this choice have been raised (Stocchiero 2010a), especially regarding the concrete possibility to give life to a macro-region without allocating specific funds. After the launch of the first official macro-region, some problems regarding the *actual operability* of the macro-regional approach came into the picture. As the CoR noted, the fact that the Communication did not pay great attention to the definition of the implementation modalities of EUSBSR was an important *deficit* that could have hindered the whole Strategy (Committee of the Regions 2010b). The CoR, therefore, urged the Commission to better clarify its management system, in order to provide more *decisiveness* along with flexibility. In 2011 also the Council suggested to the Commission to revise its orientation in this direction (European Council 2011).

In this regard, the “*three YES rule*” has been elaborated: YES to *complementarity* of funding, YES to *coordination* of institutional instruments, YES to the setting and drawing up of *new projects* (European Parliament 2012). With this new formulation the *added values* of the Strategy are clearer.

First of all, NO to additional funding. At first glance, “this aspect could be considered an element of weakness, but if we look at it by considering the *complementarity* of the multiplicity of funding and the financial instruments already available in the concerned territory, its *innovative element* immediately stands out”. As Stocchiero underlines, “the fact of not relying on specific resources *avoids distributional conflicting logics* between actors, thus stimulating them to look for *greater coordination, responsible management* and *synergy* between different existing financial (re)sources” (Stocchiero 2010a). Compared with what one would have with an individual action (i.e. by working in a fragmented and individual manner), a collective action for addressing common problems, where the EU institutions, national governments, regions and municipalities *share* tasks and functions, allows to achieve *higher efficiency* and *cost savings* (especially at a time of EU-wide budgetary and fiscal restraint, following the global economic crisis).

Secondly, NO to additional rules and institutions. This also could be seen as a shortage, but we should recall that such an *integrated approach* is always guaranteed by the “supervi-

sion” of EU bodies. As Berionni states, “it is a show already seen, where the actors, protagonists and resources are the same and what changes is the script and especially the director” (Berionni 2012). The author specifies also that, “for the well functioning and success of the show, the new director has to be able to exercise a complex and delicate role, manage and supervise in order to overcome the heterogeneity of the actors and bring more coordination” (*Ibidem*: 740). But, even though the role of the “director” is strong, the overall *success* of the show is left to the intentions and capabilities of the “actors”. As the Parliament stressed, “the functioning of macro-regions should not remain confined to a logic of *intergovernmental cooperation* managed by the European Commission services: only a governance on several levels, including in particular the *regional scale*, is able to ensure the *complementarity* with respect to other EU Regional Policy instruments” (European Parliament 2012).

The MRS is, thus, considered an *innovative policy model*, “a level of governance placed between the nation state and the supranational community” (Berkkan et al 2009). While on one hand the macro-regions should not become a new institutional body between the Union and the member states, on the other hand they assume the form of an instrument of cooperation between regions, member states and the European Union that lets regions become *real protagonists* in the design, implementation and management of EU regional policies. For these objects to be achieved in an appropriate and effective way, it would be necessary to constantly *monitor* the evolution of the Strategy in order to ensure the involvement of its stakeholders at all levels of government, remembering that the EU “supervision” alone may not be able to ensure the *effectiveness* of a system that has proven to be particularly complex. It can give a form, a new help, but then the outcome is essentially the duty of the *actors in the field* (Committee of the Regions 2013). *Good governance* means that both in the “ascending”, as well as in the “descending phase” of policy-making the collaboration between stakeholders at all levels should be done in the pursuit of “fairness”, in order to guarantee apt forms of consultation and a real involvement of bodies, closer to the *citizens*, that, we should remember, are the protagonists of the Strategy. Only in this way the right *equilibrium between flexibility and definiteness* can be found, to ensure a harmonious and effective mode of coordination for a more *balanced development* of the whole macro-region” (Committee of the Regions 2010).

The term “macro-region” can easily evoke misleading meanings. When it first started to spread in the European context, some scholars proposed to employ it as a tool for a gradual overcoming of national-states and a more appropriate division of the territory. “Super-regions”, ought to have been entities beyond the nation-states able to overcome the “nationalistic *impasse*” caused by globalization pressures, to redistribute in a more rational way available resources and to create a new “transnational identity”⁸². However, the analysis carried out in this paper, enables us to recognize that the concept will *not* give birth to a “Europe of the macro-regions”. The term macro-region does not evoke a “utopian reality” - a model that can fit for

⁸² E.g. In 1994 Delamaide proposed to create a Europe subdivided in eight macro-regions. The author states that “super-regions” present a new paradigm for looking at Europe after the Cold War. The disappearance of the Iron Curtain and the submergence of national borders in the EU in fact permit regions to reassert historical and cultural ties. These ties are in great part determined by geography that naturally stimulates the creation of region networks; around the Baltic Sea, the Western Mediterranean, the Atlantic Coast, the Danube Basin, the Balkan peninsula, the Alps and the central plain of Europe (Delamaide 1994).

all regions in Europe - but rather a *feasible project* for certain particular areas and under specific conditions, being the *concrete application of multi-level governance*.

Even though, as we saw, the “Europe of the regions” is still far away, with the macro-regional initiative the mechanisms of “bottom up” consultation and collaboration and the full inclusion of the regions into the process of EU decision-making have made good progress. The MRS, therefore, contributes to build a “*Europe in partnership*” where local and regional authorities’ responsibility is adapted to the macro-regional objectives according to the partnership principle. In this context LRAs are no longer conceived as just “intermediaries”, limited to a mere participation or consultation, but act as true “partners” (European Parliament 2008). Thus, the macro-regional model of governance could be defined as the “merger” between institutional governance and partnership.

The success of this governance model applied to the Baltic and Danube regions have inspired many other territories to create similar *models*. The next chapter will show a brief overview on the “work in progress” for the definition of a new European macro-region: the Adriatic and Ionic Strategy.

3.5 Financial perspectives for macro-regional strategies

“Macro-regional strategies cannot rely on additional EU funding or resources particularly designed for a macro-region” (Pop 2010). As said, the European Commission clearly stated from the very beginning that no additional EU money would be freed up for MRSs. Therefore, neither the Baltic, nor the Danube Strategy can count on *direct subsidies* from EU Region Policy funds: the needs and solutions have to be matched to the “available territorial resources, without prejudice to the negotiation on Cohesion Policy” (Euractiv 2010b). The macro-region is in fact *financially neutral* and relies on a coordinated approach, synergetic effects, on a more efficient use of existing EU instruments and funds, as well as on other existing resources. MRSs need to create *added value* for the EU in such a way that they should be able to utilize the opportunities offered by *current financial and legal frameworks* through more efficient actions and a closer cooperation (Dubois, et al 2009; European Commission 2008).

Dispensing without new Community institutions is a consequence of the fact that under the new Lisbon Treaty it is only possible to create such institutions through an *amendment* of the treaty. Projects can, therefore, be implemented only through a more targeted and coordinated utilization of existing instruments and funds and by a more efficient, effective and responsible exploitation of opportunities contained in *synergies* (Braun, Kovács 2011). Moreover, projects are selected by the means of specific *selection criteria* set up according to an “evaluation table”: a) *transnational relevance* (European benefits), b) market and political *failure tests*, c) relevance for the macro-region, d) adequate *interest and participation* from the public, as well as the concerned parties, e) maturity of the project (European Commission 2009a, 12).

Even though these measures could seem constrictive, in both the Baltic Sea and the Danubian region the majority of structural funds and interregional, cross-border and transnational territorial cooperation programmes already provide plentiful measures that are consistent with the Strategies. So, what have so far been the available funding sources? And what is forecasted for the incoming programming period 2014-2020?

During 2007-2013 funding sources for the Baltic Sea region were available under indirect funding through *horizontal programmes* (such as the EU Cohesion Policy) and through a wide pool of programmes and funds already operating in the region and that have been aligned for the EUSBSR implementation with a total of €50 billion. They included: EU Structural and Cohesion Funds (e.g. 18 cross-border and interregional cooperation programmes⁸³; the Baltic Sea Region Transnational Cooperation Programme); operational programmes under EAFRD and EFF; 6 programmes for external border cooperation within ENPI (e.g. Estonia-Latvia-Russia Cross-Border Cooperation); other EU programmes (e.g. Research and Technological Development, LIFE+; Eco-Innovation, Competitiveness and Innovation Framework (CIP), Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-E), Joint Baltic Sea System Research, etc.); national, regional and local funds and programmes; international financial institutions (IFIs) sources (i.e. EIB, the Nordic Investment Bank); intergovernmental funds (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Nordic Council of Ministers, etc.).⁸⁴

Regarding the Danube region, in addition to approximately €95 billion coming from structural funds, the EUSDR cooperation activities could make an extensive use of ERDF, IPA and ENPI financial instruments because of the fact that a great part of its members are non-EU members. A total of 41 cross-border and transnational territorial cooperation programmes have been (partly or entirely) put in place, amounting to €4.3 billion.⁸⁵

Even though there have been stakeholders’ calls for the introduction of a *separate budget line* for macro-regions for the new-7-year financial perspective 2014-2020 (Euractiv 2010b), the reform of the Community budget will provide a greater opportunity to *reallocate* community resources to macro-regions *even without a direct financial support* from regional funds. In October 2011 the European Commission adopted a draft *legislative package* for the Cohesion Policy 2014-2020⁸⁶, stating that ETC will be reinforced⁸⁷. Moreover, the Commission underlined that “relevant transnational cooperation programmes shall *assist* the implementation of MRSs and that member states that are part of a Strategy should (...) identify national financial instruments that could be used to this end” (European Commission 2013). In February 2014 the new Regulation has finally been approved (European Commission 2012) and MRSs have been included into the common provisions on ERDF, ESF, CF, EAFRD and EMFF, into the general provisions on the Cohesion Policy and the Regulation on European Territorial Cooperation goal. “The inclusion of Macro-regional

⁸³ E.g. Central Baltic INTERREG IV A, Latvia-Lithuania Cross-border cooperation programme, INTERREG IVC 2007-2013, EPSON programme etc.

⁸⁴ Source: EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region <<http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/funding-sources>>.

⁸⁵ Source: EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

⁸⁶ Source: European Commission - Regional Policy - Inforegio.

⁸⁷ EC Draft Common Provision Regulation, Annex 1, Article 7(2) and Draft ETC Regulation, Article 3(3).

Strategies in the Regulation on European funds represents a real opportunity for the development of macro-regions because it states that all Structural funds can support the macro-regional priorities⁸⁸.

Moreover, the Danube region, due to the fact that it comprehends also non-EU Member States, will be covered by specific programmes coming from ENPI and IPA policies (i.e. South East Europe Transnational Cooperation Programme, the South East Gateway and the Balkan-Mediterranean Programme). As stated previously in this chapter, thematic priorities of the Danube programme will be defined in line with the relevant draft EC legislation and the national priorities of partner states - always reflecting the needs of the programme area⁸⁹.

Regarding the exact amount of funding allocated to future transnational cooperation programmes 2014-2020, we are still in a negotiation phase and it is now too early to make any prediction.

Table 3: Main characteristics of a macro-regional strategy

Members	- EU institutions, nation-states (EU members, candidates and/or potential candidate countries, local and regional authorities (LRA), public and private national institutions and organizations.
Organization	- Permanent; - No new institution; - No own budget-line; - No own administrative staff; - No autonomy in the management of its activities; - System of multi-level governance: Coordination at national level: National Contact Points (NCPs); at regional and local level: Priority Area Coordinators (PACs), Priority Area Focal Points and Horizontal Action Leaders (HALs); Implementation: Flagship Project Leaders (FPL) and an INTERACT Point.
Geographical coverage	- With common characteristics (i.e. a sea basin, a river basin, a mountain chain); - Not precisely defined.
Activities	- Of cross-border and transnational nature; - Exclusively on common interests, challenges and objectives; - Multi-sectorial.
Limits	- No political powers; - Lack of authority; - Legally non-binding agreements (e.g. European Commission's Communications and Action Plan).
Legal base	No

⁸⁸ Source: Senigallianotizie.it, *Macro-regione adriatico-ionica, arriva la copertura dei fondi europei*, 20.02.2014.

⁸⁹ Source: South East Europe Programme.

* Main sectors of macro-regional activity: health, research and development, education and training, waste management, environmental protection, tourism and leisure, rescue and security, transport and communication, infrastructure, mobility of people and business cooperation.

Chapter 4. Defining future macro-regional strategies: The Adriatic and Ionian region

4.1 Distinctive features of the Adriatic and Ionian region

Before analysing the institutional steps that are currently leading to the construction of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), we should recall the definition for a macro-region, “an area that includes territories of different countries or regions associated with one or more challenges or common characteristics” (European Commission 2009a). Therefore, in this paragraph we are going to peruse which characteristics, potentialities and problems are typical of the Adriatic and Ionian region and why it needs a EU macro-regional approach.

The aforementioned region is a *functional area* primarily defined by the Adriatic and Ionian Seas basin. As it covers an important terrestrial surface area, it treats not only the marine and coastal, but, as interconnected systems, also the terrestrial areas. With the intensified movement of goods, services and peoples, generated by Croatia's accession to the EU, and with the prospect of EU accession for other countries in the region, nowadays, the role of this new macro-region has become even more prominent (European Commission 2014b). The geographic area of the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region covers exactly four EU member states (Italy and its Adriatic and Ionian Regions⁹⁰, Greece, Slovenia and Croatia), as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania, which are all at the pre-accession stage for entry into the EU⁹¹.

The *cultural, political and economic fundamentals* of the idea for an Adriatic and Ionian macro-region are rooted in its *history*, where the *sea* was perceived as connecting, rather than just dividing people. The Adriatic and Ionian region has for centuries lived intense political, cultural and commercial relations, but it has also suffered (especially during the 20th century) deep *divisions* that have particularly affected the relations along the East-West axis, weakening the *sense of unity* of its geopolitical space, to the detriment of maritime and inland trade and communications (Bianchini 2010: 3).

According to the T33 Sound Policy Report published in 2013, due to the recent historical and political heritage, the region presents *huge internal differences* in terms of economic, political and social conditions (T33 Sound Policy 2013: 10).

⁹⁰ Regions are the main protagonists of the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region regarding the Italian territory, not all are involved: Marche, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily In May 2014 also Lombardia, Trentino Alto Adige and Umbria joined. Source: CorriereAdriatico, *Macro-regione: I confini si estendono*, 21.05.2014, p. 3.

⁹¹ According to the just approved EUSAIR rolling Action Plan, “the Strategy remains open to other partners of the region” (European Commission 2014b: 3).

Overall, the region appears *structurally weak* (in respect to other areas of Europe, e.g. the Baltic Sea region) and shows strong *regional imbalances*. Western Balkan countries are among the countries with the *highest unemployment rate* and the *lowest GDP per capita* (it has been steadily rising since 1994) and, while Italy, Slovenia and Greece have mostly always enjoyed the same GDP, their situation deteriorated with the 2008 economic and financial crisis. Strong *trade relations* do exist within the area; however, trade links have decreased during the past few years and business is conducted more and more outside the macro-region. Moreover, the Adriatic region is marginalized in terms of *transport accessibility*, which means that the macro-region is partially isolated from the productive and prosperous core of Europe (T33 Sound Policy 2013: 10-16). As a consequence, businesses cannot sufficiently exploit the transnational dimension in the field of marketing, innovation or research, and particularly in the blue economy sector. Clusters, involving business, research and public sector are scarce, and so is the capacity to access new financial resources and funding instruments (European Commission 2014b). Regarding the *environmental issue*, along with a *scarce valorisation of the rich cultural heritage*, pollution is affecting the maritime and coastal ecosystems of the Ionian and the Adriatic Seas. Consequently, a damaged ecosystem brings about a loss in biodiversity, which in turn reduces the capacity of the region to adapt to climate change. As for the *political and administrative aspect*, it has to be said that, while the Italian regions, Slovenia and Croatia have a political and administrative continuity in common, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina are plagued by a *high rate of institutional instability* and *scarce public regional and local administrative capacity* and efficiency (Bianchini 2010: 4). Additionally, *corruption* in the public sphere is highly diffused and we should also remember that the most important *criminal flows* in Europe pass through the Adriatic Sea. Finally, the *low rate of economic, infrastructural and cultural cohesion* of the macro-region contributes to maintain an *unstable macro-regional identity and a slight sense of regional belonging*.⁹² Therefore, the process of building a credible and enduring macro-region will necessarily have to focus on the involvement of the *conscious participation of its citizens*: without “macro-regional citizens” it will be really difficult to build a macro-region.

Thus, herein lies the biggest challenge of this region and, at the same time, the biggest *difference* with respect to the process of regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea, for example, that doesn't have to deal with a recent *history of ethno-military conflicts* and a strong lack of sense of commonality and integration (*Ibidem* 2010: 5).

The construction of a macro-region in the Adriatic and Ionian area could help addressing the above-mentioned *challenges* and problems; it could lead to the exploitation and capitalization of a great variety of (still) unexplored *potentialities*. The *geopolitical position* of the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region could be considered as being its main asset. It includes practically half of the Mediterranean basin, it connects the two Seas and, therefore, has raised great political and economic interests over the centuries. This is why countries

⁹² According to a research undertaken by IECOB in 2011, inhabitants of the region are far from feeling part of a transnational Adriatic Ionian community. The survey, conducted among scholars and university students from the macro-region, demonstrates that nowadays “[the] macro-regional identity” is still very weak. Answering questions related to their cultural identity, just 8,3% of the participants identified themselves as belonging to an “Adriatic Ionian region”. 55% of the interviewed described themselves as belonging to the “Western Balkans” and 33,3% to “South Eastern Europe” (Bianchini 2010: 6).

like Austria, Turkey and Russia have always tried to play a role in the Balkans. In the twenty-first century these countries, along with China, are tending to (re-)exert their influence with economic means. Yet, two innovative perspectives have contained these trends: the enlargement of the EU and the European Union Strategy for the Danube macro-region. The recently implemented EUSAIR perfectly fits into this context.

4.1.1 History of territorial cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian region

Despite all the socio-political and economic differences between the countries of the Adriatic and Ionian region, they still share a *history of territorial cooperation*. This is without doubt a good starting point for the establishment of a well-functioning Macro-regional Strategy.

The *political and ideological crisis* following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the chaotic situation and the inherent instability due to the fragmentation of former Yugoslavia, the transition towards democracy and a free market economy, with the parallel reinvigoration of the well-rooted hidden hatred among the various ethnic, religious and cultural groups, have produced the well-known troubled and extremely dangerous situation in the Balkan area⁹³. Thus, the *first forms of cooperation* were primarily devoted to assist people and areas affected by the war and to promote reconstruction, modernization and development (T33 Sound Policy 2013: 7).

During the process of the European enlargement the need for a stronger *political coordination* became more evident and urgent in order to overcome the deep divisions between ethnic groups that followed the dismantling of the former Yugoslav Federation (Bianchini 2010: 3). In the attempt of containing the spreading of the *Balkan crisis*, the EU put in place several programmes to facilitate multilateral and regional cooperation among the Adriatic states; it also encouraged several “bottom-up” institutional initiatives, coming from the regional and national level.

The first one came on the occasion of the launch of the so-called EU “Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe”, during the Finnish EU summit in October 1999, when the Italian government presented the *Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII)*. The AII is based on the idea that international crises cannot be solved through violence, but by the means of mutual cooperation, in order to identify and jointly define a range of common interests in sectors such as security, economics, trade, scientific and technological research and development, environment conservation and finally, the preservation of the cultural heritage⁹⁴. The AII represented the first important institutional step toward the construction of the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region. The AII was officially established at the Summit on Development and Se-

⁹³ At the end of the 1990s the whole area was affected by a series of ruinous and uncontrollable wars and was strained by pressures of migratory fluxes, as well as by an unbounded increase of crime.

⁹⁴ Source: Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII). <http://www.balkansblacksea.org/pub/news/40_96_the_adriatic-ioni-an_initiative.pdf>.

curity for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, held in Ancona (Italy) on 19 and 20 May 2000, with the signature of the “Ancona Declaration” by Italy, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece and Slovenia, in the presence of the European Commission. As the declaration states, “strengthening regional cooperation helps to promote political and economic stability, thus creating a solid base for the process of European integration”⁹⁵. Today, the AII is an international organization that has been opened also to Serbia and Montenegro (in 2006), with a decision making body (AII Council) and a Permanent Secretariat. The AII operates in several fields of action, currently divided into four periodical round tables: 1) SMEs development; 2) transport and maritime cooperation; 3) tourism, culture and inter-university cooperation; 4) environment and protection against fire.⁹⁶

Other important initiatives helped to shape the institutional building process of territorial cooperation among Adriatic and Ionian states, regions, municipalities, universities and chambers of commerce. On April 30, 1999 the *Forum on Adriatic and Ionian Cities (FAIC)* was brought into being, an association that brings together *coastal urban areas* from the seven countries that are part of the Adriatic and Ionian region: Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and Greece. Its main objective is to build and develop the economic, social, environmental and cultural heritage of the coastal cities in the Adriatic and Ionian area, through fostering cooperation and partnerships between the local authorities of the member countries. Several projects contribute to this objective.⁹⁷ In 2001, for example, the *Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce (FORUMAIC)* was founded - a transnational, non-profit association linking the chambers of commerce of countries residing on both Adriatic and Ionian coasts: Italy, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Slovenia, Greece and Albania. Its main objective was to strengthen the cooperation and enhance the opportunities for socio-economic development in the Adriatic and Ionian region. Topics of common interest included: agriculture, environment, women’s entrepreneurship, transport, tourism, fisheries and aquaculture.⁹⁸ Besides that, an initiative of great success for the AII is also the *Adriatic and Ionian Network of Universities (UniAdrion)*, which comprehend 36 universities from nine countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. This network, founded in 2000 as part of the AII, was created to establish a permanent link between universities and research centers and to strengthen inter-university cooperation, protection, cataloguing and the promotion of the cultural heritage.⁹⁹ Finally, there is the *Adriatic Ionian Euroregion (AIE) - ex Adriatic Euroregion (EA)* - a no-profit association under Croatian private law (with no separate legal personality). Founded in 2006 for the promotion of trans-national and inter-regional cooperation between regions and local authorities of the Adriatic and Ionian basin countries, today the association counts 26 members from Italy, Greece, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania. All members are

⁹⁵ Conference on Development and Security in the Adriatic and Ionian, *The Ancona Declaration*, 19 and 20 May 2000, Ancona, Italy.

⁹⁶ Source: Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII).

⁹⁷ Source: Forum on Adriatic and Ionian cities (FAIC).

⁹⁸ Source: Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce (FORUMAIC).

⁹⁹ Source: UniAdrion.

units of territorial self-government and most of them are NUTS2¹⁰⁰. The AIE’s general objective is to support regional stakeholders (especially those experiencing the pre-accession process), to create joint initiatives and to qualify them in the implementation of the cohesion policy and the use of EU financial instruments (Proto 2008: 36-37). In particular, the AIE’s goals are: to protect the cultural heritage and environment and to boost a sustainable economic development in the field of SMEs, tourism, fishery, transport and infrastructure.¹⁰¹

Thus, the Adriatic and Ionian region has more than 10 years of *experience* in concerted cooperation - not only among the different countries in the region, but also among different regional initiatives. The *problem* is that this cooperation has not sufficiently been translated into *concrete actions and results*. Impact in real terms was lacking. For example, according to Proto, the AE didn’t have a course of action because of various political *disagreements* that have slowed down its work (Proto 2008: 38-39). Following the successful example of the adoption of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea, at the beginning of 2010 the concrete idea of a macro-region for the Adriatic and Ionian basin assumed shape. Based on the common shared need to strengthen *political coordination*, to make this basin an EU “*internal sea*” and increase its *international visibility*, on the 5th of May 2010 in Ancona, the Ministries of foreign affairs of the eight countries gathered at the 12th Adriatic Ionian Council and approved a “*strategic proposal*” for the support of the establishment of an EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian basin, along with a *roadmap*.¹⁰² Since then, national and regional authorities, forums and the AII have started to work in order to raise the “political awareness” about the need of establishing a macro-region for the Adriatic-Ionian basin, in order to bring it to the attention of the EU authorities and institutions. The first Adriatic-Ionian Council at EU level was successfully held on 23 May 2011 in Brussels, at the premises of the Committee of the Regions. Finally, the European Council has embraced the initiative on 24 June 2011, when it declared that Member States are urged “to continue to work in collaboration with the Commission, to create possible future macro-regions, particularly in reference to the Adriatic-Ionian region” (European Council 2011).

4.2 The Adriatic and Ionian macro-regional strategy

On 14 December 2012 the European Council called on the European Commission to bring forward a *EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region before the end of 2014* that will also incorporate the *Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas*, adopted by the European Commission on 30th November 2012 (European Council 2012). Nowadays the Adriatic and Ionian Macro-regional Strategy (EUSAIR) is the third formal and officially recognized macro-region in Europe.

¹⁰⁰ The first level below the state, in conformity with the European Community nomenclature NUTS, and with the administrative organization of each country.

¹⁰¹ Source: Adriatic Ionian Euroregion (AIE).

¹⁰² Source: Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII).

The Strategy's general *objective* is to “bring a new impetus for cooperation and investments to the benefit of the involved territories, by promoting sustainable economic and social prosperity through growth and jobs creation, by improving attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity while at the same time preserving the environment and ensuring a healthy and balanced marine and coastal ecosystem” (European Commission 2013c). The EUSAIR is also intended to significantly contribute to the EU integration of the candidate/potential candidate countries of the region. Like the Maritime Strategy, it concerns eight countries: four EU member states (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia) and four non-EU countries (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia)¹⁰³. Its *geographical coverage* is designed to be *flexible* and *functional*: albeit the focus will primarily be set on the coast, the hinterland¹⁰⁴ also will, according to its priorities, be covered by the Strategy.

In August 2013 a “*Discussion Paper*” was published. After extensive consultations with the stakeholders mostly living and working in the Adriatic and Ionian region, the analysis of technical data and the drafting of an *impact assessment* (concluded by the end of 2013), on 17th June 2014 there has been published the *EUSAIR Draft Communication*, accompanied by an *Action Plan*. The Strategy has been endorsed by the General Affairs Council on 29th September 2014 and subsequently by the European Council on the 24th October 2014, thus enabling the launch of the ongoing *implementation phase*.¹⁰⁵

After having contextualized the main stages of the building process of the Macro-regional Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, the content of its document-platform is ready to be examined.

The EUSAIR Communication and Action Plan adopted by the Commission are, in fact, the official benchmark documents that define the future Strategy's *guidelines, goals* and *governance model*. As with the other macro-regions, the challenges are addressed by the bias of *Priority Areas, Thematic Pillars* and *Flagship Projects*.

In line with the recommendations of the European Commission overall evaluation of the macro-regional approach (European Commission 2013a), this new Strategy will focus on a *limited number of sectors* of mutual interest and high relevance for the area. In this initial phase four Pillars are envisaged: 1. Driving innovative maritime and marine growth (Blue Growth), for the promotion of a sustainable economic growth and for the creation of jobs and business opportunities in blue economy sectors (e.g. aquaculture); 2. Connecting the region (transport, and energy networks), in order to reduce the remoteness of island and rural communities by the improvement of the governance of inland and sea corridors (including the interoperability of transport modes) and by the diffusion of energy-friendly modes of transport; 3. Preserving the environmental quality, that is preserving and protecting the integrity of the environment and the regional ecosystems by making a rational use of natural sources; and finally 4. Increasing regional attractiveness (for a sustainable tourism) primarily focused on supporting the sustainable development of inland, coastal and maritime infrastructures, while, at the same time, preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of the region (Schuh et al. 2015). As with the Baltic macro-region, the EUSAIR also have

¹⁰³ For a clear overview of the countries involved in the EUSAIR, see: **Figure 5** (Annex section).

¹⁰⁴ For the benefit of this paper, “hinterland” is understood as any territory beyond the coastal area.

¹⁰⁵ Source: European Commission - Regional Policy - Inforegio - Towards an EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

two cross-cutting issues that touch each thematic pillar: on the one hand “capacity building”, for an efficient implementation and the raising of public awareness and on the other hand support for “research, innovation and the development of SMEs”, to boost high-skilled employment, growth and competitiveness. That is to say, a better cooperation within a transnational research network can supply markets with new ideas and help develop new products and services (European Commission 2014b). The Commission highlight that in the Adriatic and Ionian region there is indeed a huge need for skilled labor force - particularly in sectors, such as the maritime domain, that of data sharing and clustering, the domain of new research platforms, of brain circulation, common training and cultural exchanges. As in the case of the Baltic and Danube Strategies before, in the EUSAIR, too, transnational cooperation in the field of education is going to play a decisive role. The achievement of this objective will require, *inter alia*: administrative simplification and harmonization; good governance; mutual recognition of common key rules; identification of skill needs and related vocational training, education and life-long learning; research, technological development and a qualified and mobile working force (European Commission 2013c).

In order to develop the EUSAIR Action Plan in a functional way, four Working Groups (WG) - one for each pillar - have been set up. Every WG is coordinated by a EU Member State, in association with a non-EU country, as follows:

EUSAIR – Working Groups		
Pillar	WG Coordinators (National)	WG Coordinators (Italian Region)
1. Driving innovative maritime and marine growth	Greece – Montenegro	Veneto
2. Connecting the region	Italy – Serbia	Friuli-Venezia-Giulia
3. Preserving, protecting, improving the quality of the environment	Slovenia – Bosnia and Herzegovina	Emilia Romagna
4. Increasing regional attractiveness	Croatia – Albania	Apulia
Cross sectorial pillar		
“Research, innovation and SMEs development”	All	Marche
“Capacity Building”	All	Marche

Source: The European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region website.

As one can see from the table, each WG involves representatives from all eight participating countries. In the period between October 2013 and January 2014 the groups carried out an extensive *stakeholders' public consultation*, inspired and guided by the Discussion Paper, in order to contribute to the drafting of the content of the Action Plan.¹⁰⁶ The aim of the consultation was to reach relevant stakeholders and to gather ideas in order to make sure that the Strategy is *realistic* in its starting points, *appropriate* in its objectives and *responsive* to the *real needs* of the inhabitants of the area (European Commission 2014c: 3). Approximately 100 public authorities, private individuals, enterprises and civil society organizations responded to the consultation and presented their views. The profile of respondents

¹⁰⁶ An EUSAIR summary report of the results of the public consultation is available under: European Commission - Regional Policy - Inforegio - EU Macro-regional strategies.

was varied: academic/research institutions, private persons, public authorities, private enterprises and international organisations. In this context, it should be noted that the responses came mainly from Italy and Greece, proving a weaker involvement of the civil society on the East Adriatic coast.¹⁰⁷ According to the consultation's *impact assessment*, the main *administrative and governance challenges* identified in the region are: differences in the economic and social development; poor coordination between regional and national levels; a still persistent "top-down approach" in national administration, versus the civil society; differing access to EU funds; cultural, historical and linguistic barriers; lack of know-how, administrative capacity and adequate human resources.

The contributions gathered have been further discussed at the Final EUSAIR Stakeholder Conference, co-organised in Athens on the 6 and 7 February 2014 by the Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. During the conference the EUSAIR *governance* aspect has been thoroughly discussed. The "three No rule" has been reiterated. Therefore, no new institution will be established and a multi-level governance approach, with the involvement of the largest number of subjects, will be a key element for the Strategy's successful implementation and a guarantee for the actual representation of the territorial interests.¹⁰⁸ In Athens, stakeholders agreed that, in order to achieve this, a *stronger coordination* among countries is needed. Different proposals have been put on the table (e.g. the establishment of a permanent secretariat and an e-governance structure). Today, according to the CoR's Commission for Territorial Cohesion, compromises regarding the matter have been found: the coordination of activities in the region will be reinforced through the creation of an "*Adriatic Cloud*"¹⁰⁹ and the reinforcing of the already existing *AdriGov project*¹¹⁰ (Committee of the Regions 2014).

Finally, another important point raised at the conference regards the *lack of administrative capacity and of adequate human resources*. The CoR noted the need to enhance skills in order to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive solutions to common problems in the fields of human resources management, international relations, etc. One possible measure would be to set up an *Adriatic Ionian Higher School of Administration*, like the French ENA (*Ecole Nationale d'Administration*), where civil servants of the Adriatic Ionian region could develop the skills and abilities needed in a multi-level governance system, enabling them to implement innovative processes in public administration (*Ibidem*, 2014: 10, point 32).

¹⁰⁷ The position towards the macro-regional perspectives varies among different countries, due to factors of internal and external policy. According to CESPI, some countries are particularly interested and actively involved in the process of definition of the macro-regional priorities (e.g. Albania, Croatia, Montenegro), while others (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina) have seldom, if ever, expressed their position on the macro-regional process in the area (i.e. no debate at national or entity level nor document or declaration). Source: CESPI (2013), *State of Art and Future Perspective, SeeNet Programme - A transnational network for the cooperation between Italy and South East Europe*, Fifth Report, October 2013, p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ Stakeholder Conference on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, Plenary Sessions and Parallel Thematic Workshops, 6 and 7 February 2014, Athens, Greece.

¹⁰⁹ A *telematics platform* that will engage all institutions, social forces, civil organizations who want to build along the path of the macro-region in order to safeguard greater speed and transparency to information (Committee of the Regions 2014: 11, point 42).

¹¹⁰ The Project "AdriGov", submitted on the 2nd Call of IPA Adriatic CBC Programme in 2013, is essentially aimed at supporting the activities of the AIE. AdriGov will capitalise on the cooperation networks, initiatives, programmes and projects, constituting an *operational support* to EUSAIR, with a view to promote an innovative model of governance by coordinating and integrating regional and local communities into the decision-making process and into the implementation of the EU Regional Policy. Source: AdriGov.eu.

As we saw, the Adriatic and Ionian macro-regional overriding approach, according to the commitments made in May 2010¹¹¹, aims at providing an *integrated framework* to foster the launch of *new projects and initiatives* around planned solutions to the common problems of the area analysed in this chapter. The current situation of the "work in progress" does not allow us to reflect on the future success of the Strategy and on the hypothetical problems of the implementation or application of the MLG model in the future "downturn phase". However, the approach shows that from the beginning EU institutions have strived to *directly involve* the society "on the ground", accepting many proposals from the public consultation process: the EUSAIR is indeed distinguishing itself for its ability to mobilise significant stakeholders through a genuine "*bottom-up process*".

The Strategy has been designed in order to offer many potential *benefits and added values* in terms of strengthening cooperation for economic, social and territorial cohesion; to offer solutions to shared problems, such as environment, energy, transport, fisheries and coastal management, rural development, tourism, culture and university cooperation, social protection and cooperation between SMEs. More in particular, the Strategy will help to enhance the *EU's attention towards its South-Eastern side*, (as happened in the past with the integration of the territories in Eastern and Central Europe) - by being a significant *factor for the reconciliation* between the countries on the *Eastern* side of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas and, at the same time, for the recognition and rediscovery of the unifying values that have identified the two shores for centuries, by being a significant factor in the *strengthening of the democratic processes* and in the *acceleration of the European integration of the Balkan countries*. (Committee of the Regions 2011b: 3). Moreover, it is worth to mention that the future EUSAIR will naturally have its *distinct identity*, but it will also be related to the inland Balkan and Danube region. There will a focus on the development of new road, rail, tube and water infrastructures, both in the East-West and in the South-North-direction which will allocate new *strategic importance* to the region, both with regard to Central Europe and to the Central-Eastern Mediterranean (Bianchini 2010).

The above-mentioned objectives will not be easy to achieve, difficulties mainly derive from the particular history of this region that differentiates itself from the other European macro-regions previously analysed in this dissertation. But, although the EUSAIR partner countries are diverse in terms of socio-economic development and geographic size, although they speak four different languages (Italian, Serbo-Croat, Albanian, Greek) and have different cultures and political systems, the Athens Conference demonstrated the persistence of an underlying feeling of being part of a "*common homeland*".¹¹² The various stakeholders actually showed a certain affinity and gave voice to their will to achieve common goals: time, languages and boundaries may have not lessened the feeling of belonging to a shared territory.

Besides, another important consideration should be outlined. Usually European institutions are limited in their possibility of *inviting and helping* interested member states in pursuing future Macro-regional Strategies, therefore, the institutional "driving force" must obligatorily come from the states and regions involved. For example, Sweden has been the

¹¹¹ Source: Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII).

¹¹² Stakeholder Conference on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region, Plenary Sessions and Parallel Thematic Workshops, 6 and 7 February 2014, Athens, Greece.

leading partner in the launch of the EUSBSR, Austria and Romania for the EUSDR. Studying the building process of the EUSAIR, one can notice that the most decisive shove did not come from a national government, but from a number of Italian Adriatic regions (predominantly Emilia Romagna, Molise, Marche) where the venue of the first Adriatic and Ionian associations (i.e. AII, EA, UniAdrion etc.) was located (Cugusi 2013). We could say that it was the Marche Region of Governor Spacca¹¹³ that assumed a kind of “centripetal role” in promoting the Strategy, with a commitment that became even more significant in the 18 months after the European Commission was mandated by the European Council to develop the EUSAIR Strategy. During this period the Marche Region coordinated the work of the CoR’s “Adriatic and Ionian Intergroup” which had to produce the policy documents for the drafting of the Action Plan. It set up, organized and hosted many studies, conferences, events and workshops on Adriatic and Ionian issues; it gathered all stakeholders at a common table to jointly find a path for the construction of a well functioning Adriatic and Ionian macro-region¹¹⁴.

The present period is optimal for the launch of the EUSAIR as the Italian government has been the *country promoter* of the Strategy during its Presidency at the Council of the European Union (1st July 2014- 31st December 2014), pushing through the endorsement of the Strategy. We should in fact remind the importance of the role of this Presidency. The Atlantic experience could be taken as an example for this purpose. During the Spanish Presidency (from January to June 2010) the Spanish government proposed to establish a macro-region among Western Europe’s maritime countries through the so-called Atlantic Strategy. According to initial plans, the new macro-region would have had to focus on environmental protection, the preserving of the biodiversity of the Atlantic coastlines, as well as on the common development of key maritime sectors (Euractiv, 2010a). However, during the Spanish Presidency the initiative did not gain significant *momentum* because the Spanish governments’ guidance was too weak in leading the elaboration process and it is indeed for these reasons that the Atlantic Strategy has failed.¹¹⁵

4.3 Financial perspectives for the Adriatic and Ionian Strategy

During the Athens Conference the public expressed several *concerns* regarding the funding opportunities of the EUSAIR. This final paragraph will try to clarify which will be the financial perspectives for this Strategy.

As said, institutional cooperation in the Adriatic began in the middle of the 1990s, first in the form of international aid, to provide rescue and relief to populations hit by war and

¹¹³ Gian Mario Spacca is the President of the Marche Region since 2005 and also President of the CoR - Interregional Group “Adriatic-Ionian”.

¹¹⁴ Source: Adriatic Economic Observer (Adriaeco), *Rafforzare l’identità comune della regione adriatico ionica*, 28.05.2014.

¹¹⁵ Stakeholder Conference on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region, Plenary Sessions and Parallel Thematic Workshops, 6 and 7 February 2014, Athens, Greece.

then to improve the development of war-affected areas. During the last 20 years this cooperation has come into the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) and has been supported by EU pre-accession and structural funds (e.g. IPAC CBC Programme). Unlike the other Strategies (the EUSBSR and the EUSDR), the EUSAIR has been implemented *exactly in the same year* of the launch of the new programming period 2014-2020; it will take, therefore, advantage of the fact that funds are still fully available. That means that future macro-regional initiatives will be shaped according to the EU programmes and consequently EU funding can easily be aligned to the EUSAIR objectives.

The Strategy is already being implemented, *inter alia*, by aligning many EU and national funding packages to the four EUSAIR pillars. This because, by endorsing the Strategy, the governments of the participating countries commit themselves¹¹⁶ to address several national and EU funds to implement the Action Plan. More particularly, it is the European Structural and Investment Fund and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) for 2014-2020 that will provide significant resources and a wide range of tools and technical options (European Commission 2009b:11). Albeit the enlargement perspectives have suffered from the impact of the current global economic crisis by generally slowing down progresses in the fulfilment of conditionality and solving internal disputes, the EU will continue to invest in the enlargement process in the framework of its 2014-2020 financial perspectives. The IPA II CBC component should be confirmed as the main financial pillar of the Enlargement Policy.¹¹⁷ Along with IPA II, the second most important funding opportunity for cooperation between Italy and the Western Balkan countries at local level is the *South East Europe (SEE) Programme* framework. SEE will probably replace the previous IPA CBC Adriatic fund. Therefore, the Adriatic and Ionian area of the SEE Transnational Cooperation Programme will be covered by two transnational programmes: the *Danube* and the *South East Gateway*, supporting together the development and implementation of the Danube and Adriatic-Ionian Macro-regional Strategies. Moreover, on 2 August 2013 the European Commission proposed to revise the geographic scope, as well as the name of one of those programmes. South East Gateway will become the “*Adriatic Ionian Programme*” in order to ensure coherence with the respective EUSAIR. In December 2013 a third transnational programme has been proposed for the Adriatic and Ionian area: *the Balkan-Mediterranean Programme*. The objectives, priorities and the amount of funding allocated to the future transnational cooperation programme for the period 2014-2020 are still in the negotiation phase. By the end of 2014 has been approved the *Adriatic-Ionian Operational Programme (OP)* and the first call for proposals has been launched in January 2015¹¹⁸.

Other funds and instruments relevant to the pillars will also be available - notably Horizon 2020 for all pillars; the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for pillar 2; the LIFE Programme for pillar 3, as well as for climate mitigation and adaptation to climate change; and for pillar 4, the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and

¹¹⁶ I.e. by designing the 2014-2020 Regional Operational Programme (ROP) ERDF Programming.

¹¹⁷ CESPI (2013), *State of Art and Future Perspective, SeeNet Programme - A transnational network for the cooperation between Italy and South East Europe*, Fifth Report, October 2013, p. 13.

¹¹⁸ Source: South East Europe Programme <http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/about_see/adriaticionianprogramme/index>.

Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME). Finally, other means are available, notably from the Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and other International Financial Institutions. According to the Commission and the Committee of the Regions, those funds and instruments should create significant leverage and attract funding from private investors, too. At the end, the Strategy will also capitalise on the work done in the domain of innovative financing by the other two Macro-regional Strategies.¹¹⁹

4.4 State of play and future prospects of the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region

The EUSAIR is operational since the autumn of 2014, and its Action Plan is periodically revised and updated as new needs emerge. In less than one year, it is therefore too early to provide prospects on the future implementation and development of the EUSAIR - for example, on how will the EUSAIR governance develop and on how existing cooperation structures will interact with each other, because *political negotiations at all levels are still underway*. Nevertheless, some forecasts on the EUSAIR's forthcoming governance development and potentialities can already be dared.

As we saw, although a number of inter-governmental frameworks for facilitating transnational cooperation are already in place (e.g. AIE and AII), a macro-regional governance structure is needed in the region, because existing structures have not been able to pursue their objectives thoroughly, showing various “*structural limits*”. In consequence of recent history and *weak institutional and administrative capacity* in several participating countries focus has rather been put on establishing *national governance arrangements*, than transnational ones. Most of these arrangements are *strongly focused on country-by-country approaches*. As they are addressing one issue at a time, more often these arrangements tend to overlook manifest interdependencies between policies and actions. According to the last policy paper published on the issue by CESPI, the final outcome is a *fragmented approach* to many of the challenges in the region and a clearly identifiable *under-performance* when it comes to analyzing their potential. A number of cooperation structures and arrangements already address, for instance, fisheries, transport or environmental issues. But to date, progress has, however, been poor in, e.g. halting the dramatic decline of fish stocks in the Adriatic-Ionian Sea. Moreover, despite considerable investments of the South-East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO) in the Western Balkans road and rail networks, flows of goods and people are still hampered by inadequate capacities and cumbersome procedures causing excessive delays at border-crossing points¹²⁰. Therefore, since the existing cooperation frameworks in the region are primarily *sector-based*, or simply *do not match the Strategy's*

¹¹⁹ Conference on EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region and Synergies with the EU Funding Programmes, Committee of the Regions, 26 June 2014, Brussels.

¹²⁰ Conference on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region and Synergies with the EU Funding Programmes, Committee of the Regions, 26 June 2014, Brussels.

geographical scope and since a joint strategic cooperation framework facilitated by the EU is still absent, challenges for joint action are likely to persist.

Requiring no changes to EU legislation, this Strategy, *inter alia*, aims to strengthen the EU politics relevant to the region¹²¹. It has the intention to support the observance of EU legal obligations, address gaps and practical difficulties that inevitably lead to accumulating delays, especially in relation to the Single Market, and tie together different policy areas for a *territorially coherent implementation of EU policies* (European Commission 2014b).

Regarding the future EUSAIR governance, we could dare to say that there will be *no overlapping* between existing governance structures if *everyone will have a well-defined role and responsibility*. As we saw, the governance of the EUSAIR will be based on the same political coordinating and operating modalities as the Danube and Baltic macro-regions. More specifically, *Adriatic forums* will be places of *lobbying* inside the macro-region and therein civil society forums could be established to raise awareness for the themes addressed by the pillars¹²² (T33 Policy Sound 2013: 35).

Moreover, for the well-functioning of a macro-region an area of inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary *political confrontation* is indispensable; this complex multi-level approach could be usefully practiced by the IAI. As seen, the IAI is already working in conjunction with higher representatives of Adriatic and Ionian organizations, such as the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce (FORUMAIC) and the university network (UniAdriion). As the European Commission wish for, it is functional that the IAI will be the EUSAIR's *key driver and coordination body*, fully devoted to the macro-regional activities, a venue for high-level political dialogue, open to all kinds of representations, not just at a governmental level; it will directly monitor the macro-political development, establishing itself its main addressees. Another political role the IAI can exercise affects the readiness to engage in dialogue with other large areas nearby (especially with the Danube macro-region, but also, to the North, with the Baltic Sea), for the creation of corridors of connection and for joint initiatives, promoting, thus, a wider European integration (Stocchiero 2014: 7). Apart from this, according to the European Commission's EUSAIR Communication and Action Plan and with the support of the INTERACT Programme¹²³, an *Adriatic and Ionian Council* could be established; this would help delivering synergies with other inter-governmental bodies, broadening its scope - the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) or the Central European Initiative (CEI) could serve as an example (European Commission 2014b: 12).

In conclusion, the EUSAIR will offer a new governance framework for approaching development challenges and upcoming potentials, which cannot be solved by the already existing structures for territorial cooperation alone. According to several study delivered by the Commission, the EUSAIR has the potentialities to offer a platform for an improved co-

¹²¹ Such as the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, the Common Fisheries policy, the EU disaster risk management policy, Trans-European Networks (transport and energy) etc. (European Commission 2014b).

¹²² For example, as for Pillar 4, it is clearly of central interest for the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce (FORUMAIC), the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities (FAIC) and the Adriatic Ionian Euro-Region (AIE).

¹²³ On 2007, the European Commission approved INTERACT 2007-13, a European Territorial Cooperation Programme that covers the whole of the European Union, plus Norway and Switzerland. The Programme is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The Programme aims to promote good governance of Community-funded Programmes that fall within the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation. It is forecasted its renewal for 2014-2020. Source: EU Regional Policy - Development Programmes.

operation between the existing sub-regional groups. It will give a new stimulus or momentum to the existing cooperation areas, necessary to be overcome, in order to more vigorously confront the existing challenges of the region, to grasp and potentiate all the opportunities arising on the territory. It will help to factor everything into an integrated framework, which will allow the EU and its Member States to identify their specific needs more clearly and to allocate them to the available resources, through a better coordination of appropriate policies and financial instruments (European Commission 2009b).

Thus, on the base of the analysis provided in this chapter, we can infer that the *added value* provided by EUSAIR consists in: i) promoting a cross-sector approach; ii) moving “from words to action” through an Action Plan; iii) mobilizing the whole spectrum of relevant existing funds; iv) supporting access and exploiting synergies with other macro-regional strategies; v) reinforcing compliance with EU legislation, as well as consolidating policies and governance for implementing the Strategy; and vi) improving coordination between the existing cooperation mechanisms.

During the closing session of the Athens Conference, Charlina Vitcheva, Director of the European Commission’s DG REGIO, outlined what the *main potentialities* were for the EUSAIR and what the Commission believed were the factors that ensured the EUSAIR a successful future. She was of the opinion that first of all, with the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII), the Strategy has benefited from over *more than a decade of intergovernmental cooperation* experience. And indeed, we have already seen that successful cooperation has already created strong links between participating countries and spin-off regional co-operation between cities, chambers of commerce and universities. Additionally, five out of eight EUSAIR participating countries are already part of the EUSDR (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia), where they could gather on-the-ground experience by participating in the functioning of a macro-regional strategy - with alignment of funding and policies assigned to pillars, objectives and priorities. Secondly, she believed that *one pillar had already been framed* under the Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Seas, adopted by the Commission on 30 November 2012 (COM (2012) 713). Thirdly, she thought that the Strategy would benefit from the advantageous timing of its launch, which coincides with the start of the 2014-2020 programming period. This would allow it to be systematically embedded in EU, national and regional programmes and to mobilize all policies and programmes in its support. Then, attention should also be paid to the fact that the elaboration process of the EUSAIR could resort to the existing macro-regional experiences and capitalize on the EUSBSR and the EUSDR - also with regard to their cooperation with non-EU countries.¹²⁴ As we will see in the next chapter, the lessons that were drawn from those previous experiences hint, for example, at the need to focus on a limited number of common challenges and/or opportunities, to secure ownership, leadership and commitment from the participating countries, but they also hint at the need to strengthen institutional and administrative capacity.

In conclusion, what will distinguish the EUSAIR from the other macro-regional strategies is the fact of being able to *match* a “high level” political commitment with a strong

¹²⁴ Stakeholders Consultation on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, plenary sessions and parallel thematic workshops, 6 and 7 February 2014, Athens, Greece.

“bottom-up” approach. It is all these factors that let stakeholders believe that this Strategy is very likely going to have a successful future.

The following table shows a summary of the main *characteristics* of each EU macro-regional strategy studied in this dissertation. Moreover, a clear overview on the *geographical scope* of the Strategies is provided in the “Annex section” of this paper.

Table 4: EU Macro-regional strategies

	EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea	EU Strategy for the Danube Region	EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
Members	Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (all EU members).	Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia (EU members); Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Ukraine and Moldova (non-EU members).	Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia (EU members); Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia (non-EU members).
Thematic Pillars/ Objectives	1. Save the sea; 2. Connect the region; 3. Increase prosperity;	1. Connect the region; 2. Protect the environment; 3. Strengthen the region; 4. Build prosperity.	1. Blue growth; 2. Connect the region; 3. Environmental quality; 4. Sustainable tourism.
Priority Areas	17	11	8
Cross-cutting/ Horizontal Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spatial; • Neighbours; • Involve; • Promo. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building; • Research, innovation and SMEs development.
Financial perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU Structural and Cohesion Funds (e.g. ERDF); - ENPI programmes - Baltic Sea Region Programme; - International financial institutions (i.e. EIB); - Intergovernmental funds; - National, regional and local programmes; - Private sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU Structural and Cohesion Funds (e.g. ERDF); - IPA II and ENPI programmes; - SEE Programme (Danube and South East Gateway Programme); - Balkan-Mediterranean Programme; - International financial institutions (i.e. EIB); - National, regional and local programmes; - Private sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU Structural and Cohesion Funds (e.g. ERDF); - IPA II and ENPI programmes; - SEE Programme (Danube and South East Gateway Programme); - MED Programme; - Balkan-Mediterranean Programme; - International financial institutions (i.e. EIB); - National, regional and local programmes; - Private sector.
Key documents	European Commission Communication on European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and EUSBSR Action Plan.	European Commission Communication on European Union Strategy for Danube Region and EUSDR Action Plan.	European Commission Communication on European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region and EUSAIR Action Plan.

Chapter 5. An evaluation on macro-regional strategies: challenges and opportunities

5.1 An assessment on already implemented macro-regional strategies

As thoroughly analyzed during this research, the main aim of a Macro-regional Strategy is to efficiently address challenges and opportunities in order to mobilize new projects and initiatives by creating a sense of *common responsibility*. Practitioners therefore broadly consider the macro-regional approach an important *innovation* in the European Territorial Cooperation and in a broad sense, the EU Cohesion Policy.

However, this approach, built on a tradition of cooperation evolving from Community initiatives (such as INTERREG), has to be *judged by its results*, meaning that *success* should be measured against the *efforts* required. Even though macro-regions enjoy a certain political popularity, their *implementation is still challenging* and some *improvements are urgently required*, so as to be able to deliver real *value added* in the most efficient and sustainable way (European Commission 2013b).

As Strategies are rather young, it is *too early* for long-term counterfactual assessments, therefore, at present it is difficult to tell to what degree various projects would have been implemented even without the existence of a macro-regional approach (Böhme 2013: 7). Nevertheless, several *lessons and best practices* can be drawn from the already acquired macro-regional experiences in order to further improve this innovative approach.

The implementing reports of the EUSBSR and the EUSDR clearly highlight that, so far, macro-regional strategies have indeed helped to develop new projects or give momentum to existing transnational projects. *Flagship projects* alone amount to over 100 in the Baltic Sea region, many other spin-off projects are registered and over 400 projects worth € 49 billion, of which 150 are already in implementation, are being reported by the EUSDR (European Commission 2013b). Thus, *good practice examples* of successful macro-regional actions do exist. The environmental status of the Baltic Sea is really improving - through collective action, with projects like “CleanShip”. Navigation on the Danube is actually been made easier through reinforced maintenance work and even the prevention of flooding has been addressed by projects like “Danube Floodrisk”, providing shared databases and flood mapping. Innovations concerning the environment and clean technologies are being sustained, for example, through the “Bonus Baltic Sea Research and Development Programme”, with similar work underway in the Danube region. Finally, in both areas new

macro-regional networks, previously dominated by national actors, have been launched, and new forums of macro-regional policy discussions have been established, such as the “Balt-Fish” or the “Danube Region Business Forum” (European Commission 2014a: 2).

‘Make money work harder’ is important at a time of restricted budgets. The macro-regional approach helped *align EU programmes* to act together on major shared goals. Moreover, the *lack of additional EU resources* also pushes implementers to seek funds more actively and encourages the pooling of resources. For instance, there has been established a so-called “Danube Finance Dialogue” that matches project ideas to funds, bringing together project promoters with banks, international financing institutions and funding programmes, as well as a “Baltic Seed Money Facility”, which is a small funding to develop project to the point of loans or grants (European Commission 2013b). Thus, many evidences have shown that, in the short period the *lack of direct funding* has not been a problem in pursuing many new projects at a macro-regional level.

However, as work gained *momentum*, its realization has also revealed *obstacles* to its implementation. For example, the recent devastating flooding that hit the Danube region in 2013 was, despite initiatives at high political level, not followed up by a sufficiently coordinated response (European Commission 2014a). Several experts (Dubois et al. 2009, Berionni 2012, Bengtsson 2009) highlighted a number of *critical challenges* and *fields of tension* that hindered the achievement of the Macro-regional Strategy’s objectives.

The study on the macro-regional phenomenon carried out so far has intentionally left out the *critical aspects* in order to resume them in this final section. It is said that the basic idea of macro-regional strategies is to create an overall added value for the benefit of the entire European Union. Through an integrated approach and efficient “*soft*” *governance*, the activity of various stakeholders is coordinated and already existing funds and policies are oriented toward a common transnational goal. Although the two recently implemented Strategies have already started producing some positive results in the implementation of many projects, they have also demonstrated the existence of several *structural problems* (Katsarova 2012). As Stocchiero underlines, “if the alleged *added values*, the *symbolic factor* and the *political will* do not emerge clearly, the macro-regional approach would likely fail and evaporate” (Stocchiero 2010a). Thus, can the same actors produce a greater impact on inter-governmental institutions and already existing territorial cooperation structures only by using a different approach? To put it in Stocchiero’s words, “can a new bottle transform old wine into a better product?” (Stocchiero 2010a). How it is possible to better coordinate different sources, institutions and to implement new actions and projects in the absence of rules, specific funds and new institutions? We will address the questions in the next paragraphs.

5.2 Main challenges to overcome and potential fields of tension

The “three NO rule”, at the base of a macro-regional approach can trigger a multitude of “tensions” in the *governance modalities* and along the *implementation* of the Strategy.

As we saw, various political resources, as well as individual capacities, have to be activated to initiate the process of construction of a macro-region within a multi-cultural setting. Its elaboration implies a *negotiation process* in respect to what the potential future could look like for the macro-region. This includes the *identification of trade-offs* among a bundle of stakeholders representing *different levels of responsibility* and *diverging interests* and sometimes the search for a broad consensus among a range of different actors could come at the expenses of the *efficiency* of the Strategy (Bengtsson 2009).

Once the region’s common rationale, objective and territorial shape has been mutually developed, the thorny question about the identification and launching of a *new mode of governance* comes up; this should, on the one hand, be efficient in negotiating, directing, implementing and developing policies and, on the other, should not harm the already existing modes of governance. Some scholars (Dubois, Hedin, Schmitt, Sterling 2009) have identified the *potential fields of tension*¹²⁵ that can occur during the *implementation* of a macro-regional strategy.

In the first place it is the *variety of policy agendas* of the involved stakeholders that could cause a “*thematic tension*”; it could lead to an overlapping of policy objectives that could slow down the developing of the macro-regional strategy or even confound its primary objectives (Dubois et al. 2009: 10). Then, due to the *multiplicity of stakeholders* participating in the implementation of the macro-region (such as Euro-regions, EGTC, territorial cooperation programmes), an “*institutional tension*” could occur. The macro-region, in fact, could be confronted with different *existing political structures* that pursue the same objectives; this could lead to confusion over the responsibilities and roles played by each one of the structures. Therefore, the *coordination of activities* between different sources should be implemented - at a national, regional and local level, both with respect to the various policies and to the EU programmes, in order to avoid overlaps (*Ibidem*: 10).

However, even the most positive supporters of the macro-regional approach found “the existence of *high difficulty of coordination*, especially because of the different levels of governance involved” (Berionni 2012). Since it seems that the EU wants to be the key player in the “high level” coordination of the macro-regional actions, it is open to debate as to whether other stakeholders are *ready* to get involved and engage in fruitful collaboration or whether some of them try to *defend* their specific area of responsibility (or the area in which they feel they are the key players) and profit from specific politics more than others. At the end, this could possibly lead to a “*coordinating tension*”.

Another potential problem is that the Strategy could *loose its focus*. A macro-regional strategy usually encourages stakeholders to reduce the number of priority areas, in order to gain clearer vision over a limited number of key issues. However skepticism arises about the fact that, apart from the Baltic Sea, both in the Danube and in the Adriatic and Ionian macro-regions common interests can not be clearly formulated, because there are great differences in the level of economic development and in the socio cultural traditions of the participating countries. As a consequence, regions may be too “asymmetrical” to allow for a real convergence (Katsarova 2012). Moreover, an “*instrumental tension*” could occur, because

¹²⁵ We term them “fields of tension”, since within them various kinds of contested debates and conflicting dynamics have room to emerge.

of the *diversity* of instruments. The great variety of policy tools and resources/programmes inevitably leads to the question of who are the donors and who are the recipients/addressees of the macro-regional strategy (Dubois et al. 2009).

Finally, as an additional structural problem it has to be mentioned the “*tension of powers*”. The potential for a conflict of powers can indeed derive from an unclear *ownership* and a challenged *leadership* within the Strategy (i.e. *legal, financial and communicative powers*). For example, the diverse Directorates General (DG) of the European Commission which deal with the macro-regional sectors of action (e.g. DG REGIO, DG MARE, DG Environment or DG Transport) all share a *responsibility* in the objectives and priority areas covered by one specific Strategy (Stocchiero 2010a). Regarding this latter point, we could say that it is indeed the DG REGIO that has gradually assumed the “pre-eminence” in respect to the other DGs. Firstly, because it is the one who first launched the macro-regional strategy initiative; secondly, because it was the one who had always prepared all the communications and action plans, along with periodical impact assessments and reports; finally, because it has always demonstrated the ability and capacity to gather all stakeholders around a specific Strategy’s objective.

Albeit those efforts, sometimes the Strategy’s scope cannot reach peripheral regions and vital stakeholders because of the *lack of a wide communicative power*. This could directly come at the expenses of citizens and regional organizations; they would not be well informed about the work of the macro-region and its available funds¹²⁶. As a consequence, the lack of an adequate “horizontal communication” brings about a low involvement of the civil society (that should be the first to actually benefit from a macro-regional approach). Then, regarding the *leadership* there has to be said that, even though all European Commission’s Communications clearly state that stakeholders should be on an equal footing, some institutions or structures of transnational or inter-regional cooperation operating in the region sometimes gain the upper hand in the implementation and coordination of the Strategy’s Priority Areas. As a consequence, the *lack of a clear leadership* (or a *super partes* institution with an efficient management role) may lead to serious *political contrasts*.¹²⁷

As we saw, the basic requirement for the well functioning of this new territorial cooperation model is a well-structured *macro-regional governance*. A conflictual relationship between various stakeholders (central government vs sub-national authorities, or between social and economic actors) can hinder the development of the Strategy. This is what Bengtsson calls the “*governance challenge*” (Bengtsson 2009). Given these factors, the *lack of constraints* could contribute to the intensification of the tensions and resistances already present (Berionni 2012: 754). The risk is that, without a new institution or specific resources, the Strategy would be likely to be “written on the water” (Stocchiero 2010a). In the absence of a strong and well-established *tradition of governance*, the *flexibility* of such a Strategy, instead of helping its functioning, could lead to confusion, distortions and delays. Therefore, it should be not taken for granted that a Macro-regional Strategy is always a win-win solu-

¹²⁶ EUSAIR Summary Report on the results of the public consultation. For more information: European Commission – Regional Policy - Inforegio - EU Macro-regional strategies <http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultation/eusair/index_en.cfm>.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

tion. The *added value* of this approach can only under *certain specific conditions* be universally reached through a multi-level and multi-sectoral action. A macro-region has to be built on the proper characteristics of the territories involved - on common challenges (where increased cooperation is crucial) and on common opportunities (where increased cooperation is of mutual interest). Without these *basic conditions* it is pointless to build a macro-region (European Commission 2014: 4).

Another indicator to consider is the *experience* that the concerned territories gained from previous forms of cooperation. Thus, for example, in the case of the Baltic Sea, the EUBSRS has been preceded by years of cooperation in the form of a Euroregion, but also in the form of associations, foundations, joint projects, etc. Same thing in the case of the Danube macro-region and the future Adriatic-Ionian initiative, where, the affected territories have been involved by a plurality of joint initiatives¹²⁸. Without a *territorial cooperation experience* it is indeed difficult to build up a macro-region, because the territories are not sufficiently “prepared” for a complex, wide-scope macro-regional governance.

Moreover, the rationale underlying the *interaction* between regions of the same neighbourhood is its basic prerequisite; it derives from a shared *historical and cultural heritage*, for cross-border relations depend on common needs generated by the exact same socio-economic context. Therefore, “the experience gained from the available existing instruments for cross-border cooperation is useful for the development of Macro-regional Strategies” (Committee of the Regions 2010a).

The AER has warned against the main *risks* that a macro-regional approach could bring to *local and regional authorities (LRAs)*. As we saw during the analysis of the *institution building process* of already implemented macro-regions, there has been a general *lack of involvement of LRAs* - especially during the preparation phase of the EUSBSR and EUSDR. The national governments have always played a central role and still hold the main responsibility in the implementation phase. Therefore, sometimes “it is not sufficiently clear whether the Macro-region have a bottom-up or top-down development” (Berionni 2012). The AER stresses also that during the elaboration and implementation phases it is important not to create a new level of decision-making, with *limited democratic legitimacy* and to the detriment of directly elected regional politicians. It warns also against creating *new barriers* and taking the risk of further *isolating* some peripheral areas if the role of regions in a macro-regional framework is intended to be *merely consultative*. As a conclusion, the AER outlines that only by taking care of the above-mentioned issues, the new concept of macro-region can bring genuine *benefits* to regions, becoming an interesting tool for the improvement in the design and implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy, (Assembly of European Regions 2009: 14).

Finally, another important challenge is posed by *financial and human resources*. According to the European Commission, the *financial resources* required for a Macro-regional Strategy (MRS) can be classified into two parts: the resources for preparing and running the Strategy - essentially *administrative costs* - and resources needed to implement the actions and projects associated with the Strategy - the *operational costs* (European Commis-

¹²⁸ Marche Region, *The Adriatic and Ionian Macro-region for the development of Europe*, 2011, Ancona. Source: <www.regione.marche.it/macroregione>.

sion 2009c). Regarding the *operational costs*, they will largely depend on the *content* of the Strategy. As the guiding principle of a MRS is to facilitate and better coordinate the implementation of actions, the issue is to establish the necessary *priorities* for Strategy-related interventions. It is, therefore, not necessarily appropriate, or even possible, to attempt to calculate these expenses too closely or too early: the EU's financial contribution is normally not additional to what is already available in the region and the Strategy encourages stakeholders to identify and employ additional resources, coming, for example, from international financing institutions. Also the *administrative costs*, although they may well fall "below the line" (because they are already part of the daily work of existing departments and institutions working in the area concerned) are not "budgetised" in an overall "MRS's budget line". Despite this, they should not be negligible. Whether in a coordinating body or in a stakeholder's organization, considerable *financial effort* is needed during a consultation process to identify and reach agreements on the appropriate areas for cooperation. If, for example, some vital participants come from poorly funded organizations, they won't be able to shoulder additional financial burdens; therefore, it should be necessary to provide specific resources that subsidize their participation.

In conclusion, "it would be quite misleading to suppose that a macro-regional strategy can run on "nothing" once adopted" (Stocchiero 2010a). As the Commission stresses, a more *systematic approach* should be incorporated in order to better tackle the process of *combining* structural funds with other EU financial programmes, national and regional funding (European Commission 2014). Besides, the importance of *human resources* should also not be overlooked. An interim assessment report on the Baltic Sea Strategy published in June 2010 pointed out the *lack of human resources* for administrative tasks relating to the coordination and implementation of flagship projects. A successful Strategy should develop its own momentum based on the commitment of all the various stakeholders and the value of this input would greatly lever on the *adequate preparation of its administrative staff* (Katsarova 2012).

A final weakness to be addressed here relates to the *external dimension* of macro-regional cooperation. As said, the macro-regional strategy is traditionally conceived to be an "internal EU matter", therefore, only EU Regulations can be used to meet the common challenges. The first macro-region (the Baltic Sea Strategy) has, in fact, been developed with focus on internal dynamics of EU integration and only little attention has been accorded to external relations, especially on how to work with Russia (Bengtsson 2009: 8). On a general level, it seems quite problematic to develop an EU-internal Strategy for the Baltic Sea, when the most important issues to be addressed hold an external and transnational dimension. Russia is an important player for various development fields in the Baltic Sea Region, but it is not part of the EUSBSR. As a consequence, an imbalanced involvement of EU and non-EU member states may have as a consequence the weakening of the whole MRS (Dühr 2011a). The reason is simple: the EU as an institution and the member states individually are dependent on political developments elsewhere in the world and hence vulnerable to decision making outside the EU context; the lacking of a link between internal and external dynamics may jeopardize many strong points and good intentions of a MRS (Bengtsson 2009).

The overall goal of the reasoning on the *hypothetical shortages* of a MRS's approach made in this paragraph had the aim to identify and agree upon common *solutions* for a *more*

efficient implementation of the Macro-regional Strategy. Through the analysis of the impact assessment, published by the European Commission in May 2014, and a comparison between already implemented macro-regions, the following paragraph is going to highlight which are the conditions and keys that, if put in practice, are able to solve the challenges of a macro-regional approach and lead to the *success* of this new instrument for territorial cooperation.

5.3 Lessons learned: conditions to ensure the success of a macro-regional strategy

Already in the first part of 2010 the Commission started to organize a number of priority area kick-off meetings and public consultations on how to improve the *implementation methods* and how to face the *policy dilemmas* of the macro-regional approach, searching for solutions to try to remedy shortcomings. The latest EU Commission's reports (European Commission 2013b, European Commission 2014), clearly indicate that, despite what has been already done, there is a high awareness of *what still needs to be dealt with* in the years to come for the Strategy to prove fruitful, effective and efficient. This final paragraph collects a set of the primary *policy recommendations* coming from the European Commission's Regional Policy services, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee along with scholars' analysis, in order to outline which factors and actions are able to increase the values added of the macro-regional model.

- Better governance

For a better governance there must be clarified what the success of the approach depends on, including the *responsibility* which ought to be more effectively assumed by the countries that initiated the Strategies. We recall that the term "governance" describes the process to be addressed: namely, how and by whom the Strategies are implemented, joint actions are initiated and financed. More specifically, current key elements of governance include:

- *Member State and Commission*, involved at high political (i.e. ministerial) level in order to provide authoritative political commitment and strategic orientation;
- *National Contact Points*, high level officials in each participating country coordinating work at senior administrative level;
- *Experts*, responsible for each thematic priority (e.g. environment, transport, research and innovation etc.), or horizontal issue (e.g. climate change, spatial planning), coming from each country involved and normally forming a *steering group* for the respective topic at the level of the macro-region. These elements are charged to review and strengthen the structure, in order to ensure that the implementation of the Strategies brings clear impact and better results. Greater *clarity* in the organisation of work, with explicit *lines of responsibility* are needed for an effective coordination. (European Commission 2014a: 3).

- Long term vision

The objectives of each Strategy are divided into different priority areas, emerging from the consultation process. In the course of time they may be reviewed, as recently happened in the EUSBSR129, but generally a macro-region should, in any case, maintain a robust “*long term vision*” framework. A flexible agenda setting is required, in order to ensure that the macro-regional strategy at hand will in the long-term take care of the numerous issues to be dealt with, but can also easily tackle more *immediate concerns*. As the overall goal is to reach an improved level of territorial cohesion, it can only be based on *long-term considerations* where the results usually become visible only in the long run. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm must not decline. Potential conflicts could also arise from the fact that at the outset of a Strategy some policy areas or sectors are rather selective; some stakeholders may feel excluded or passed over. But at the end even such an approach is of benefit to the Strategy and ensures its *long term efficacy* (Committee of the Regions 2013)

- Political commitment and leadership

In the previous paragraph we dealt with the problem of ownership and leadership, with how the lack of an unchallenged leadership could lead to serious difficulties in the coordination of macro-regional activities. Sources of tension in this sense could be avoided by a constant “*high level political backing*”. A high-level and structured political dimension, providing overall direction, setting priorities and taking key decisions is crucial. The current system relies heavily on the *European Commission* for strategic leadership. The Commission ensures momentum, mediates in stalemates, and organizes key events. It gives support to key actors, and is central to reporting and evaluation. The Commission is also a key facilitator and guarantor of the EU dimension (European Commission 2014a). However, an over-dependence on the Commission is not desirable; it should by no means be the principle driving force. There is a need to better balance out between the leadership provided by the countries and regions involved and the role of the Commission. According to the communications and action plans that led to the establishment of the first two European macro-regions, political leadership should be *shared* and not represented by a single entity. The reason lies in the fact that all participants should take action, should assume ownership and should get involved equally - none should dominate or overpower the others. Albeit this rationale, *political backing* is still necessary for ensuring *constant support* to the macro-regional project and for providing a “benchmark political platform” able to bring together different policy sectors and levels (Böhme 2013). This is provided by a high-level political support. The specificity of the EU macro-regional strategy lies indeed in the fact that this approach is the expression of a *joint political will* of all the 28 EU member states involving their highest political levels, in other words, their heads of state and government (Blais, Liepa 2012). As a matter of fact, *high-level political commitment* has been overtly evident in the initial calls for the Strategies - in Council conclusions and in statements at major events, like the Annual Forum (European Commission 2013a: 8). MRSs are not just the

¹²⁹ The Priority Areas considered in this paper are, in fact, based on the most recent ones; they have been reorganized in 2013 according to an efficient rationale. Source: European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

result of agreements reached at informal ministerial meetings, or conferences of transnational monitoring and steering committees. They do have the attention and backing at the level of the European General Affairs Council. This is an important asset with regard to their standing as a platform, bringing together different policy sectors and levels. Whatever will be done in future, it should be ensured that this high-level political backing remains and is not downgraded. Through periodical “high level” meetings, the Strategy’s focus would constantly be backed and improved under the supervision of the European Commission. Therefore, another decisive factor for the success of such a project is the political will and common consensus of national governments and, of course, of the sub-national public authorities. Indeed, although the main operational protagonists are the regions, we must take into account that regions still have a lower capacity to promote transnational coordination than central governments and, in a multilevel and transnational perspective, “central governments should not be seen as an obstacle for local authorities, but an opportunity for optimal coordination and a mutual strengthening” (Stocchiero 2010b).

- Funding

Alignments of funds hold a significant potential. Nevertheless, both the EUSBSR and the EUSDR were launched in *mid-financial period*, making coherence with existing policies and programmes at times problematic. At the same time the use of loans was curbed by debt levels. *Insufficient resources* (especially in non-EU countries) remain a challenge. According to the Commission, experience shows that European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes are the main source of funding. In the implementation of the approach, however, all policies and programmes, including country-specific ones, as well as private sources and support from financial institutions (e.g. European Investment Bank) etc. should be mobilised. If the macro-regional approach is to succeed, it must be embedded into 2014-2020 programming - by providing explicit references in partnership agreements, as well as in programme texts. This requires the attention of all ministries, in order to develop a positive investment climate. The blending of grants and loans, like it is exerted by the Western Balkans Investment Facility (WBIF), is a valuable way forward, particularly for non-EU countries (European Commission 2013a). In general, the approach should *increase the impact of all available funding*, strengthen the implementation of existing *acquis*, and improve and maximize the use of existing structures.

- Measuring progress

Indicators provide markers against which progress can be measured. Both EUSDR and EUSBSR already have Strategy level targets (the former uses an approach at a more general level employing headlines, while the latter goes more into detail employing local input). But this is still a *challenging task*, as progress, contrary to indicators, is due to factors not exclusively reducible to Strategies; that means that their specific contribution is hard to measure (European Commission 2013a). According to former Commissioner Samecki, further work is required, “while agreed *indicators and targets* are essential to *focus effort*; progress should also

be seen in terms of networks created, projects successfully pursued, and improvements in integration and coordination” (European Commission 2009c). The ambitions, objectives and targets of each Strategy are laid out in writing and require *close monitoring* to assess their value added over the years. This could be done through *periodical evaluations* (i.e. impact assessments) and two types of tests: the “*market and policy failure*” test and the “*indispensability*” test¹³⁰. Finally, it is also important that the new governance structures established at the national and regional level are constantly evaluated and in line with the assigned tasks.

- Focus and prioritization

As we said, every Strategy has to maintain a “long term vision” and the utterly indispensable element of every long-term vision is its *resulting action*. A macro-regional approach must be policy-focused, pragmatic and *result-driven*. Strategies that consist only of “words in documents” will not achieve their objectives. An Action Plan is, therefore, the *sine qua non* condition of an effective Strategy. However, an Action Plan that stands alone risks of being little more than a “wish list”. There is a need for an *operational approach* that explains and justifies the prioritization and sequencing of the selected actions. The Action Plan and the Commission’s Communications are *strategic documents* that are able to promote multi-sectoral initiatives through the realization of flagship projects, in order to induce an added value and simultaneously optimize the impact of the European regional and territorial policies (Stocchiero 2010a). Given the *limited resources*, especially of the Commission, it is essential for MRSs to be prepared only in areas where the *impact*, in the form of clear and concrete actions, is high and visible. This implies that *concentration* is an essential element of a Macro-regional Strategy, in respect to other forms of cooperation (European Commission 2009c). Experts have warned against the risk of weakening the Strategy’s focus by trying to cover too many priorities at the same time (Katsarova 2012). It is for these reasons that the EUSBSR’s Priority Areas have been reduced from four to three¹³¹ and the EUSAIR’s list of actions has been reduced and concentrated. As Charlina Vitcheva, director of the European Commission’s DG REGIO outlined during the closing session of the Athens Conference, “concentration on modest but realistic goals is necessary for political decision, because we should focus only on what we can do better and what is feasible to pursue in a problem-solving capacity logic”.¹³²

- Active regional involvement

As we saw, the key for a macro-region’s success is, among others, its *governance*. Guided by the principle of subsidiarity, and seeing the enormous potential for cooperation at a local

¹³⁰ The first type of test measures the market structures and policies that should lead to sub-optimal results, while the second one examines projects to be included, or those that are relevant and applicable, i.e. the one that “must” be included, otherwise the Strategy would not make sense, those that “should” be included to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Strategy and finally those who “can” be included to give support to the most essential actions (European Commission 2009c).

¹³¹ Source: EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

¹³² Stakeholders Conference on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region, plenary sessions and parallel thematic workshops, 6 and 7 February 2014, Athens, Greece.

and regional level, it is of considerable importance to create an effective, multi-level structure for cooperation. Through the promotion of *sectoral partnerships*, involving regular meetings of the responsible policy-makers, the *shared responsibility* between various partner entities can be strengthened and the organisational sovereignty of member states and regions can be safeguarded. To that effect it is absolutely necessary to improve, develop and strengthen *active regional involvement* and enhance *cross-border cooperation mechanisms*, both at local and regional level. Though the Commission will continue to play a key role, its status has to be counterbalanced by reinforced *regional ownership*, a clear decision-making and greater visibility of the regions concerned. On the one hand regional stakeholders are involved in the implementation structures (e.g. by taking on responsibilities as priority area coordinators), on the other hand they deal with concrete projects (Böhme 2013: 3 and 13). As we saw, the governance framework set up for MRSs is rather complex and relies on a wide range of stakeholders. The AER stresses that, in spite of the proclaimed territorial approach, the initiative regrettably seems to remain “top-down” and member-state-driven. Yet, the implementation of a macro-region should escape inter-governmental logics. Given their territorial cooperation experience in the field, regions and local authorities should play a crucial role in the development of a macro-region that is supposed to be built on the “place-based principle”¹³³. Therefore, the challenge is to *keep all stakeholders committed and motivated* in the long run - not only at the “high level” or by the means of national contact points (NCPs), but also and especially at the municipal, local and regional level. But why exactly LRAs may contribute to the success of a MRS? First of all it is indispensable to give a prominent role to regional and local players, because these represent the level closest to the citizens and because these players have sound, first-hand knowledge of the conditions and needs of the territory (Committee of the Regions 2010a: 7). As Commissioner-designate for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Damanaki, stressed at the EUSAIR Athens Conference, “regional and local authorities (LRAs), as well as private sector’s stakeholders should be drivers, not passengers of the Strategy”¹³⁴. Mrs Annika Annerby, President of the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime regions (CMPR), also stressed the necessity of a direct involvement of LRAs, but what she additionally underlined was that their key role in the establishment of a successful macro-regional governance derived from their long-term political commitment to the Strategy. She pointed out that it was well-known that local authorities were “politically much more stable” in respect to central governments. It may, of course, happen that there is a change in the political person acting at the top; in this case the success depends on the local authorities’ capacity to sustain the change in the central government by maintaining the links and cooperation networks established with other regional institutions in order to be able to continue the work. Political changes should in no case negatively affect the outcome of the Strategy (e.g. cause the interruption of the project’s planning). For these reasons, for a good functioning of the macro-regional governance it is nec-

¹³³ After the adoption of the Baltic Strategy the Assembly of European Regions expressed itself in this manner: “in spite of the proclaimed territorial approach, the initiative seems to be top-down and led by the Member states (...) if the role of regions is merely advisory, there will be no improvement in the definition and implementation of the Cohesion Policy” (AER Recommendations on the Future of Cohesion Policy post-2013, Strasbourg 2009, p. 14).

¹³⁴ Stakeholders Conference on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region, plenary sessions and parallel thematic workshops, 6 and 7 February 2014, Athens, Greece.

essary to consolidate a multi-level governance where local and regional bodies have a leading role “on the ground”, and are the main responsables for the implementation process (Berionni 2012: 744).

- Building awareness

Macro-regions can *fill the vacuum* between the member state level and the European level that is perceived by some people since the EU has grown large reaching 28 member states. To function, a MRS needs to *directly approach the civil society*. Making a macro-region implies a *learning process* that cannot objectively be imposed “from the top” - it can only be attained by *mutual knowledge* and *awareness*. It is a *democratic process* that starts “from the bottom” and is initiated by the citizens living in the municipalities, provinces and regions of the macro-region. Therefore, it is of extreme importance to continue to involve the civil society. Citizens must feel they are part of a “common project” and should be able to see with their own eyes the value added and opportunities (e.g. the access to funding) that it could bring to their daily lives. A true integrated macro-region should, therefore, involve, besides the states and institutions, also the *people*. The aim is to create a “common space” which is above all desired by citizens, and not only by the political power. Permanent efforts to involve the inhabitants, and particularly the *young people*, will help in overcoming *political and ideological barriers* that still persist in some poorly integrated areas, such as the Adriatic and Ionian region. As Schumann-Hitzler, Director of the DG Enlargement pointed out, “we need to invest in people not only in roads”. How could a macro-regional *sense of collective belonging* be enhanced? The planning of the stakeholders’ *Annual Forum* for the EU-SDR lifted the lid on some possibilities (European Commission 2010). In the latest report on macro-regional governance the Commission suggests an enhanced *use of technologies* to facilitate modern, fast and cheap communication between stakeholders (European Commission 2014). Moreover, the local communities’ involvement can be increased by setting up wider and more focused *communication means and consultative tools*, for example, through the employment of the *local media* (local television, radio, printed and online newspapers), but also through the creation of a special *web portal* (e.g. the Adriatic Cloud) which would act as a forum for the exchange of experiences and information regarding current and future projects undertaken by central and local governments, by NGOs and other entities involved in the macro-regional objectives. Finally, a *macro-regional awareness* can be built through the organization of *cultural exchanges and/or social events*. Regarding this latter point, the EUSAIR is distinguishing itself from its previous counterparts, because its regions (especially on the Italian side) have not only become the main protagonists in the entire process of Strategy elaboration, but are demonstrating the ability to involve the civil society in the project. For example, in June 2014, the Marche Region has organized the first “Adriatic and Ionian Youth Games”, a kind of small Olympiad that gathered 700 young people from all 8 country members of the macro-region, having as major aim to create a sense of macro-regional belonging among future generations.

- Third countries

As we saw, the issue of macro-regional *external relations* is significant which means that, if not considered, it could lead to various problems. MRSs strengthen the position of the EU, but also the interaction between EU regions and their non-EU counterparts. Cooperation with regions outside the EU must remain vital, not just for boosting the macro-regions’ economic competitiveness and cohesion, but also for developing the *EU’s external links* (Committee of the Regions 2013: 6). It is, therefore, essential to constantly leave external communication channels open. Many of the problems related to the macro-regional external dimension have already been solved. For example, in the Baltic Sea Strategy Russia is indirectly involved via the participation of Russian partners in *flagship projects* and existing frameworks, such as the Northern Dimension. Norway and Iceland have also been actively involved, especially in logistics and social issues. In the case of both the Danube and the Adriatic and Ionian Strategies it was decided to directly include non-EU countries, facilitating in so doing their future potential EU membership (European Commission 2013b). MRSs could be indeed viewed as a tool for *bridging European neighborhood policies* and *refine transnational territorial development policies*. Moreover, the involvement of non-EU partners may facilitate: a) the collaboration between institutions and governments in and outside the EU, and b) a gradually economic integration, making the EU’s external borders less of an obstacle to the flow of goods, services, capital and persons c) a greater involvement of funding sources especially targeted to non-EU areas, e.g. ENPI CBC and IPA CBC (Böhme 2013: 6).

The following table shows the “weaknesses” and “strengths” regarding the implementation modalities of the EU macro-regional strategies analysed in this final chapter. The chart uses the SWOT analysis method and is divided into two parts: the first one gathers the main “internal factors” and the second one the “external factors”. As we can see, for each “weakness” a solution is proposed for. Even though MRSs could be considered as quite “young”, there is sound evidence for thinking that they will continue to be successful in the long run; they have adequately proved to be able to periodically sweep out of the way the obstacles that could hinder their development, they have managed to surmount their past errors and have drawn the right lessons for further improvements.

Table 5: SWOT analysis for the EU macro-regional strategies

	Negative	Positive
	Weaknesses	Strengths
Internal factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>No new EU funds</u>: can limit the efficacy and efficiency of the implementation process; - <u>No new legislation</u> - <u>No new EU formal structures</u>: difficulties in coordination and effective added value; - <u>Too many objects</u>: difficulties to find a compromise in sensitive issues due to the different ideas and convictions of a large number of stakeholders; - <u>High complexity</u>: the multiplicity and heterogeneity of stakeholders may constitute potential fields of tension, risks of fading ownership and responsibilities; - <u>No leadership</u>: difficulties in coordination and weak political will; reliance on other actors, Commission cannot secure implementation on its own. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Complementarity of funding</u>: no pressure on EU budget avoids distributional conflicting logics and hostility from countries not part of the area; stimulates greater coordination and synergies, responsible management; higher efficiency and cost savings. - <u>More institutional coordination and projects</u>; - <u>Constant monitoring and periodical evaluations</u>; - <u>Functional and pragmatic approach</u>: clear objectives and concrete responses to challenges (Action Plan); - <u>Multi-level, multi-sector, multi-actor governance approach</u>: strong networks and interactions, place-based policy-making, integrated approach; - <u>Flexible cooperation</u>: avoids obstacles, conflicting logics or stringent constraints, delays, bureaucratic problems, tensions between powers; - <u>Enhanced democracy</u>: “bottom-up” approach and involvement, cross-cutting mobilization and involvement of civil society in public policy; - <u>High-level political backing</u>: great political and administrative stability and decisiveness; - <u>Economies of scale</u>.
	Threats	Opportunities
External factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Issues connected to EU foreign, military and, more generally speaking, <u>security aspects</u> cannot be elaborated together with non-EU countries, e.g. EUSBSR with Russia; - <u>Displacing the Strategy’s focus</u> from the macro-region to external relations; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Bridge to the EU’s neighboring areas</u>; - <u>Contribution to political and economic stability</u>; - <u>Chance for the non-EU member states to enhance their social, economic and environmental situation</u>, e.g. EUSAIR’s potential and candidate EU countries; - <u>More positive relationship with external partners</u>, e.g. EUSBSR with Russia, Iceland and Norway; - <u>Exchange of best practices</u>; - <u>Enhanced opportunities for possible future EU enlargements</u>, e.g. EUSDR and EUSAIR’s Western Balkan countries; - <u>Higher international visibility</u>.

Source: on the basis of the work of Monika Bogacz, June 2011, pg. 69.

Conclusion

This thesis focused on the study of the European Union macro-regional Strategies. Its ultimate goal was to identify the key elements upon which their success is based and ascertain the means by which the macro-regional approach can contribute to the effectiveness of the European Regional and Cohesion Policy.

The EU macro-regional strategy concept arose for the first time in 2009; the idea was born out of the necessity to find a collective response to the environmental deterioration of the Baltic Sea, to seize the local opportunities and undertake concerted action against a whole series of core issues in that region. Today three official macro-regions have been established in Europe: the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the new EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)¹³⁵.

To fully understand this complex concept, the dissertation started with an analysis of the notions and processes related to the macro-regional phenomenon, such as the “region”; it went on with the analysis of the evolution of “regionalism” and of the EU Regional Policy, then the concept of multi-level governance (MLG) was explained and the European Territorial Cooperation instruments and structures were set out in detail. Subsequently, the research focused only on the analysis of “macro-regions” and “Macro-regional Strategies”. These two concepts were examined from a theoretical and practical perspective. A case study on the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) was introduced, to better understand the potentialities of this approach, along with its main challenges.

It was demonstrated that macro-regional cooperation is an *innovative approach* of the EU Regional Policy, which reinforces the *territorial cohesion* among regions within and outside the EU.

Macro-regional strategies have emerged for several reasons: to face various tensions among international, national, regional and private actors of a particular macro-region in Europe, to try to solve boarder challenges, such as limited EU resources and insufficient “absorption capacity”, to boost a deeper integration and stimulate a policy coordination that can broaden the room for manoeuvre of single actors for the purpose of tackling more broadly internal and external issues.

The primary motivation for this specific form of territorial cooperation is strictly functional: the pooling of policies and resources for economic, political and cultural reasons is beneficial to shared interests and shared actions. Strategies for macro-regions are thus perceived as EU tools for reaching common goals, in line with the Community objectives. Theoretical considerations point out that the MLG approach is the only one which can ensure the well functioning of a macro-region since it includes all three dimensions: multi-sectorial, multi-actor and multi-instrumental.

¹³⁵ The EUSAIR’s implementation is expected by the end of 2014, under the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (European Commission 2014b).

Macro-regional strategies represent a new and innovative way of working in terms of the EU Regional Policy for Territorial Cooperation. They *differ* from other instruments of Territorial Cooperation, such as Working Communities, Euro-regions and EGTCs. EGTCs, for example, create a new interregional bureaucratic structure, with their own staff, entrusted with certain powers and functions, a registered official office, organs for decision-making and an own budget. The negative consequence of this instrument is that it leads to a “duplication” of existing mechanisms, meaning to further bureaucracy and additional public spending. The Macro-regional Strategy, instead, has a *different logic*. It does not create new institutions, it is not a “superstructure”, but rather a *forum* based on structures and instruments that already exist, where stakeholders meet and coordinate their work. The general aim of a macro-regional action-driven cooperation is to *jointly meet challenges* on a larger geographical scale and to create *value added* without the imposition of new funds, rules or institutions. Thus, the idea of a *multi-sectorial and multi-level cooperation*, where a plurality of actors work around different policy areas with concrete and clearly identified targets, integrating programmes and resources into a situation of genuine cooperation, untied by obstructive constraints, appears winning and innovative. Compared to other forms of cooperation, the macro-regional strategy not only provides *more benefits in terms of political efficacy*, but it also obtains them *with lower costs*. It is a renewed method of EU policy-making which significantly improves the old patterns and overcomes them, with more focus, transparency and better coordination.

Within a macro-regional framework, *regional and local authorities are to the fore*. The thesis showed that in this new framework regions are placed on “a new level”, which increases their power and their *weight* in the EU policy-making context. This improves their *visibility* and augments their *capacity* to bypass the constraints of national borders. Through facilitated direct contacts with their counterparts, regions are offered the possibility of integrating the transnational sphere in a long-term common political vision. Within a macro-regional framework regions can address region-specific problems more easily. Finally, macro-regions are a mean for rendering European regions *suitable for* globalization by improving their convergence, social and economic development, cohesion and competitiveness.

All elements considered, it is credible to think that this Strategy’s territorial dimension will lead to the concretization of the territorial cohesion concept, which the Treaty of Lisbon places on an equal footing with the economic and social cohesion.

Several *objections* have, nonetheless, been raised against the macro-regional approach, mainly outlining that its *complex governance* would hamper the achievement of its objectives. These concerns can easily be denied by looking at the SWOT analysis provided in this dissertation; it ascertains that all obstacles have successfully been addressed and *solutions* have constantly been found for the improvement of this approach. Moreover, according to the European Commission’s adoption, released on 27 June 2013, which evaluated macro-regional strategies (European Commission 2013a) the assessment turned out positive, highlighting how the Strategies had created a *community of interests* with joint responsibilities, how they had helped to formulate *joint policy objectives*, develop joint initiatives and *new projects* in sectors of strategic relevance to the macro-regions. There is no doubt also about the fact that strategies have contributed to the improvement of existing cooperation mechanisms between partic-

ipating countries and to the facilitation of coherent political decisions at collective level. Being supported at the highest political level, MRSs have the potential to *mobilize and integrate* a broad range of stakeholders on a specific thematic field, not always reached by traditional instruments for territorial cooperation. They provide *visibility* and a new momentum for cooperation projects, as well as an opportunity to follow up on their results in a *more strategic way*; thus, they increase those cooperation projects’ positive impacts. All these facts taken together, the macro-regional strategy has already proved its viability.

Macro-regions represent an opportunity not only for the territories taking part to them, but for Europe as a whole. They can work as a catalyst, in order to improve the implementation of EU policies and contribute to the transposition of EU directives and regulations. They could help to shift the focus towards issues that require cooperation at a macro-regional level, which cannot be solved individually by each single member state and are too specific to be solved by a EU wide approach - that is to say they could help confront broad, future or even current challenges, like environmental issues, climate change, energy, globalization, enlargement; they could contribute to a sustainable EU economic development (e.g. help identify new economic and political arenas in which to invest) through a more efficient use of financial resources (a laudable choice, especially in times of economic crisis and consequent reduction of expenditure), but they could also increment the “capacity-building” of regions and the “absorption capacity” of EU funds. Working together can indeed become a *habit* and a *skill*.

Macro-regions are not only an instrument for the strengthening of the European territorial cohesion, they can also provide a positive *spill-over* on the EU *external dimension*. Even though a macro-region is an EU internal “policy affair”, the need for cooperation in areas, such as environment, transport, logistics and security transcend the EU’s external borders. The development of the macro-regional approach, therefore, can open the door to the stepping up of cooperation with non-EU countries. The European macro-regions offer a completely new perspective to third countries, through them the European Union gains in “*soft-appeal*” and so they become a valuable tool also for the EU Neighbourhood Policies. Consequently, through this means of transnational cooperation non-EU countries, too, would close in.

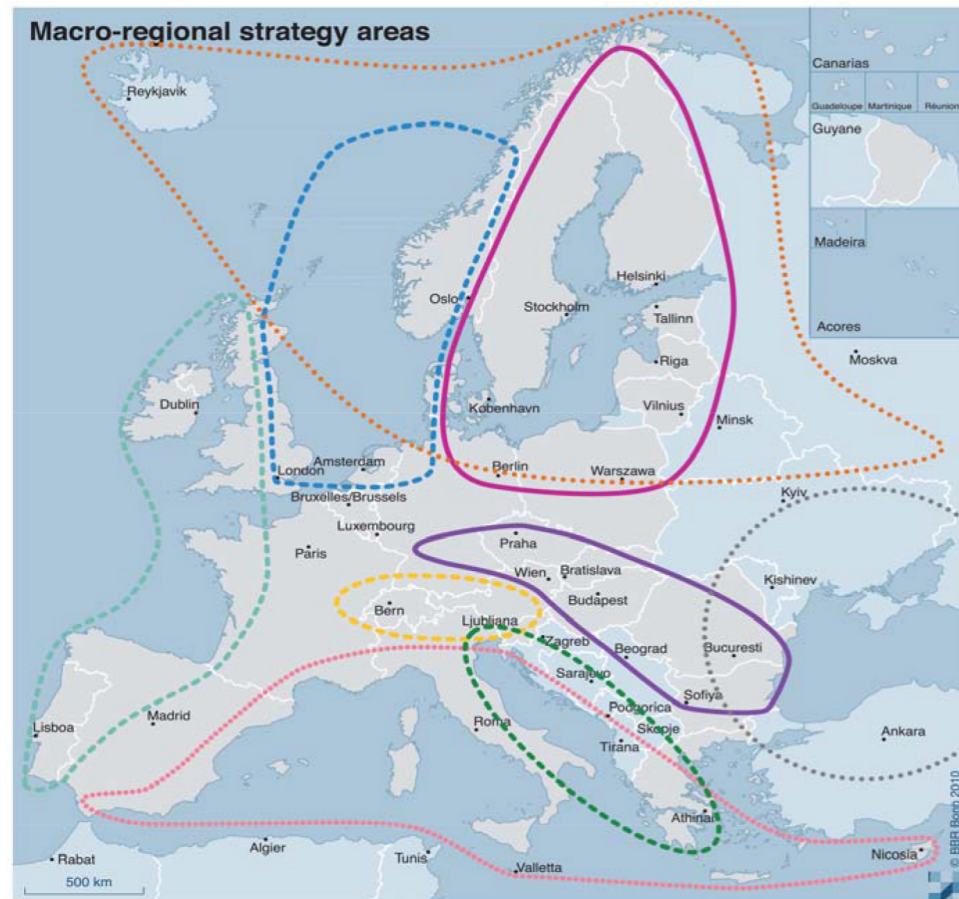
All in all, macro-regions have the potentiality to build a more united, integrated, but, at the same time, competitive Europe and thereby they largely contribute to the overall achievement of the Europe 2020 goals. The future potential benefits are numerous. The economies of scale allow public authorities to perform their tasks more effectively - for the *direct benefit of the European citizens*. Macro-regions can raise the level of social and economic development and thereby create new opportunities in terms of employment and, at the same time, improve good neighbourly relations and increase the understanding, the rapprochement between the European peoples.

Considering all these elements, this work has unfolded a positive and optimistic assessment regarding the future reserved to Macro-regional Strategies within the frame of European Territorial Cooperation. The findings of this analysis show that a Macro-regional Strategy has all the potentialities to contribute to a more versatile Europe - able to combine economy and ecology, tradition and creativity, love for one’s country and cosmopolitanism, freedom and security, market and state, administrative efficiency and subsidiarity - with an even stronger democratic participation of the civil society. If this approach proves to be success-

ful in the long term, it will certainly be extended to other parts of Europe - improving the way EU Regional policy-making works.

Annex

Figure 2: Macro-regional strategy areas in Europe



Source: BBSR Research News 2/2010 (last update: 2010).

Figure 3: Countries covered by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region



Source: European Commission

Figure 4: Countries covered by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.



Source: European Commission

Figure 5: Countries covered by the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian



Source: European Commission

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Figures

Figure 1: Governance system of the EUSBSR

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

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Figure 2: Macro-regional Strategy areas in Europe

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Figure 3: Countries covered by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

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Figure 4: Countries covered by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

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Figure 5: Countries covered by the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian

European Commission, EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/adriat_ionian/index_en.cfm.

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