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Europe and its neighbourhood: towards macro-regions? *Political and operational perspectives*

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Meeting room:
European Parliament, Jozsef Antall Room, 4Q2

SEMINAR REPORT

The event brought together nearly 180 participants, including: 84 regional representatives of whom half were from the Mediterranean, 37 representatives of national governments, 9 representatives from the Committee of the Regions, 14 representatives from the European institutions and 31 observers, mostly members of organisations active within the Mediterranean area.

INTRODUCTORY SESSION

After thanking all the participants, Michel Vauzelle, President of the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission and President of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region, stressed the symbolic importance of organising the seminar in the European Parliament. As regionally-elected representatives within the Committee of the Regions, the presidents of the regions had a duty to develop closer cooperation with MEPs. This could also be achieved through the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), which had officially been launched in January 2010. He stressed the importance of bringing territories in Europe closer together, with a view to promoting multi-level governance.

He then spoke of the extensive work done by the network of Mediterranean institutes to develop and promote the regions' debate on the subject. The Medgovernance project led by Tuscany Region was accordingly helping to further develop the debate between the regions.

Michel Vauzelle then spoke about the "macro-regional fever" that had taken hold of Europe and invited the participants to place the seminar discussions within the specific context of EU 2020 strategy and neighbourhood policy. He said it was important for Europe to take its neighbourhood into consideration, particularly its Mediterranean neighbourhood, and mentioned the idea of extending convergence policy beyond EU borders, which the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission had proposed in 2008.

A Mediterranean macro-region would constitute a development of transnational and cross-border policy, to promote consistency between existing initiatives and enhance the strategic and structural content of projects.

The macro-region would also be developed within a context in which the Union for the Mediterranean was at a standstill, which should not prevent the territorial stakeholders from being prepared to work together.

Mr Vauzelle lastly said that a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean should not seek to replicate the initiatives developed in the Baltic and around the Danube. It did not have to be an initiative submitted by the Council to the European Commission, but would require the adjustment of instruments in order to establish an overall framework for the territorial dimension of Mediterranean policies during the 2014-2020 period.

Mercedes Bresso, President of the Committee of the Regions, outlined the current framework for Euro-Mediterranean relations, with the launch of neighbourhood policy in 2004, which aimed to reduce the divide between the EU and its neighbours to the south and east, and the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008. She then mentioned the creation of ARLEM, which aimed to revive the Euro Mediterranean partnership firstly by acting as a mouthpiece for territories within the Union for the Mediterranean and secondly by facilitating the delivery of innovative projects. She then discussed three points she felt should be given attention when addressing the macro-regional debate in the Mediterranean. Firstly, it was necessary to think about the concept and thus the appropriate scale for solving problems and pursuing priorities shared by all of the potential partners. Secondly, it was necessary to take account of the external dimension and thus existing partnerships between the EU and countries from the south and east, in order to avoid “starting from scratch”. Lastly, it was necessary to respect the three noes (legislation, funding, institutions), although she did stress the need to establish programme coordination mechanisms. It was also important to find solutions aimed at increasing the strategic capacity of transnational cooperation programmes and to make better use of the possibilities offered by European groupings for territorial cooperation (EGTCs). She said that EGTCs constituted “an early attempt to develop territorial cooperation at macro-regional level” and should therefore play a key role in the pursuit of a macro-regional strategy. ARLEM constituted an ideal framework for the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean ECGT and the Committee of the Regions was working on submitting some suitable proposals. A consultation process was open until the 20 July in order to gather opinions on the subject.

Philippe Suinen, General Administrator for Wallonie Bruxelles International, brought the introductory session to a close by presenting the programme of the Belgian Presidency of the EU. He firstly stressed the quality of CPMR’s proposals and the Belgian Presidency’s eagerness to cooperate on the territorial cohesion issue. Economic, social and territorial cohesion would be one of the priorities of the new Presidency, especially in the run up to the publication of the Fifth Report on Cohesion. This report would prepare for the future by identifying both progress and delays and by reflecting on the best way to coordinate cohesion policy with other EU policies. EU 2020 strategy would need to “draw on” cohesion policy. To ensure this policy was effective, it would be vital to adopt an approach based on priority themes, as the strategy required, and to ensure geographical concentration.

He then mentioned the macro-regional issue, in particular the case of the “Grande Region”, which involves regions from Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and France using the territorial cooperation instrument. He said that key question that needs to be addressed before formally adopting a macro-regional strategy was the effectiveness of public policies.

To conclude, he said that the Belgian Presidency would organise a high-level seminar on the future of territorial cooperation, which could be used to address any questions on the macro-regions.

Session I: Regional policy and neighbourhood after 2013: macro-regions, an opportunity for progress?

Gunn Marit Helgesen, Vice-President of CPMR and County Mayor of Telemark (Norway), in turn thanked the participants. Introducing the subject, she said that EU 2020 strategy was a vital challenge that was shared by all European stakeholders and it should help to establish the balanced development of European territory. It was thus necessary for regional policy to benefit all European regions, and there should be a decentralised management approach.

Political decision-makers currently had several constraints (budgetary ones, the legitimacy of the European project in the eyes of citizens, and so on) and macro-regions offered some interesting solutions. They could

have a number of general objectives set at European level while providing a geographically-differentiated response to territories' development, thus generating more tangible results for citizens.

Various points needed to be addressed when launching the debate on new macro-regional strategies. Firstly, it was a long-term process, hence the importance of avoiding any delay in launching the debate. Next, it would be desirable to draw on the examples of the Baltic and the Danube, as well as the transnational cooperation instrument. Lastly, it would be necessary to ensure that the regions were represented and fully participated in the governance of the macro-regional system.

CPMR thus proposed that these strategies should be supported by regional policy and that the Council should ask the European Commission to establish a general European framework for them.

Macro-regional strategies should take the neighbourhood into account with a view to establishing a geostrategic area of 800 million inhabitants. While taking into account the diversity of institutional situations and the need to integrate different policies in partner states, it was necessary to propose ways for them to participate in macro-regional strategies. Future neighbourhood policy should generally take more account of territories and be based on an inclusive and integrated strategy. It should allow interested partner states to spend part of their national budget on the implementation of the priorities of a macro-regional operational programme. Cross-border cooperation programmes in sea basins could also be included in this operational programme. Although this approach was ambitious, it needed to be planned now in order to convince central governments of the importance of the territorial dimension of policies.

Dirk Ahner, Director General of DG REGIO, said that the seminar coincided with the last phase of the work to prepare the future 2014-2020 programming period. However, he wished to add some further explanations about the comments that had been made before him. He believed there was one positive point: despite great uncertainty about future regional policy (whether or not it would be centralised, with which coverage?), there was consensus on the territorial cooperation objective and the need to simplify it.

He said that DG REGIO was still cautious about the issue of macro-regions. He wanted to be very clear that macro-regions should not be a "fashion" and they would not be given additional funding in comparison to funds currently allocated to cooperation programmes.

The main condition for this was states' desire to work together. He also stressed that macro-regional strategies required the deployment of extensive resources for the regions as well as European Commission services. Thus not all macro-regional strategies necessarily needed the European Commission and "groups of states and regions" should think about whether it was appropriate to ask it to help. When it did intervene to coordinate work on a macro-regional strategy, the objectives should have been defined beforehand.

Regarding the regions' involvement in the strategy, they needed to give a clear indication of their commitment, in contrast to what happened in the Baltic. Lastly, only projects benefiting all the partners concerned by the strategy would be able to receive extra funding.

To conclude, he mentioned that the European Commission was available to provide technical support to the various stakeholders if the decision was effectively approved by the member states.

Lambert Van Nistelrooij, MEP and member of the REGI Committee, firstly said that the cities and regions should be able to get involved in implementing EU 2020 strategy. He then said that Objective 3 provided the legal basis for macro-regions, and that the ERDF instruments used in the framework of neighbourhood policy (cross-border cooperation) had not achieved good results. Lastly, he emphasised states' lack of interest in pooling efforts and initiatives, especially in the framework of the Baltic strategy.

Vincent Ledolley, Adviser for Regional Development and European Policies at DATAR (the French spatial planning agency), considered that macro-regions constituted a major step forward for territorial cooperation in conceptual terms. They were also a good response for the neighbourhood. He also stressed that cohesion policy should not be a policy for catching up.



He also presented the multi-regional programmes being piloted in France during the 2007–2013 programming period, which had helped to develop a common mode of governance. This also demonstrated the major difficulty of coordinating funding.

Concerning macro-regions more specifically, **Mr Ledolley** said it would be necessary to give thought to the suitability of acting on a major scale: some issues were effectively better dealt with on a smaller scale.

France's position was that it was in favour of continuing experimental macro-regional schemes, in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean or even in the overseas territories. However, it was necessary to be cautious in order to avoid the formation of "macro-regional bubbles", which would lead to a loss of visibility for macro-regions, hence the need for overall coordination at European level.

John O'Rourke, Acting Director in charge of the coordination of neighbourhood policy, DG RELEX, European Commission, emphasised the link between the peripheral maritime regions and neighbourhood policy issues. He talked about the experience acquired and the learning process regarding cooperation that had made the ENPI cross-border cooperation programmes possible. He thought these achievements were more important than the specific results obtained and they could be used for the continuation of these programmes after 2013. The goal of providing support for south/south cooperation and east/east cooperation should also be pursued further during the 2014-2020 period.

He also said that economic integration could only take place if it was underpinned by economic development, and thus an external cohesion policy that would help bring this about.

As far as macro-regions were concerned, it would be necessary to avoid spreading funding too thinly when working on a very large scale: the whole Mediterranean basin was thus not the only scale of action that should be envisaged. Furthermore, territorial cooperation on its own would not guarantee the implementation of effective policies in the Mediterranean, so intervention at supranational level was vital. Lastly, several instruments in the Mediterranean (such as the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Fund Investment and Partnership) were not fully exploited.

SESSION II: Developing an EU Strategy for a macro-region in the Mediterranean



Luis Valcarcel Siso, Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions and President of the Autonomous Community of Murcia (Spain), said that the European Commission should work with the different stakeholders in order to establish what the added value of the macro-region could be. He also spoke about the different sectors that could be a priority for a Mediterranean macro-region, such as water, efforts to tackle climate change and migration.

Gianni Pitella, Vice-President of the European Parliament and delegate of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, said that macro-regions represented a container and it was now necessary to develop the content. He also said that with enlargement to the east, cooperation with partners from the south had become of secondary importance and it was thus necessary to revive it, notably with the Union from the Mediterranean. It was also essential to have realistic and achievable objectives for cooperation in the Mediterranean. It was clear that funding currently available was insufficient and existing cooperation potential was underexploited. Lastly, he stressed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should not serve as an excuse for the EU to avoid developing a strategy for the Mediterranean and that the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) was working to ensure this.

Jean Claude Turret, Director of the Institut de la Méditerranée (Marseille), stressed that the conditions for the emergence of a macro-region in the Mediterranean exist because states and regions were confronted with common difficulties concerning transport, energy and innovation, which currently remained unsolved.

He emphasised that the macro-regional trend was already underway because a great many cooperation projects and networks of regions and cities had been developed in the last ten years. The Mediterranean area was also the only area to have launched strategic projects, and these would no doubt constitute a source of inspiration to other areas.

It appeared that this trend was essentially territorial in nature in contrast to what had happened in the Baltic and the Danube region, where the cooperation processes basically involved central governments.

Mr Turret thus felt that the added value of cooperation in the Mediterranean did not need to be proved. It was a fact, although it immediately needed to be given more political visibility.

Alberto Moreno, Secretary for the EU at the Generalitat de Catalunya, emphasised the importance of the Mediterranean to Catalonia, which organised its external policy at both the European and the Mediterranean level.

He spoke about the significant doubts his region had about a macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean. To date there was no certainty about its form (fixed instrument or flexible entity?) or content (economic or political?). It also seemed important to measure its potential added value with regard to existing territorial groupings. Any macro-regional strategy should therefore avoid duplicating the efforts of the Union for the Mediterranean and ARLEM. Owing to its recent creation, ARLEM had not yet been able to show what it could do. In this context, a macro-region would run the risk of increasing the level of complexity in the Mediterranean, whereas it was necessary to strengthen existing instruments.

Rossella Rusca, speaking on behalf of **Rafaele Fitto**, Minister for Regional Affairs of the Italian Government, stressed how important macro-regional strategy was for Italy as an integrated instrument for cooperation. Owing to its geographical position, history of cooperation and its strategies in the Alps in the Adriatic, Italy was naturally interested in this concept. Experiences in the Baltic and around the Danube were thus a source of inspiration. Macro-regions also seemed to offer a way of strengthening and renewing future cohesion policy.

The Italian government would thus rapidly develop a clear position on macro-regions. This would take into account the fact that it was necessary to have conditions regarding a specific instrument (the three noes) and to formalise a strategic vision for territorial cooperation.

It was the European Commission's task to establish and generate links aimed at strengthening territories and to propose aid mechanisms to help partner countries. Dialogue between member states and the European Commission should make it possible to develop an ambitious regional development policy.

Carla Montesi, Director "Maritime Policy Mediterranean and Black Sea", DG MARE of the European Commission, explained how the maritime dimension could be introduced in the debate on a Mediterranean macro-region. Regarding the numerous economic challenges in the Mediterranean and its potential in terms of communication links, it was important to reflect upon the governance of these issues. The high number of stakeholders made decision-making complex and often ineffective and fragmented. The issue of the management of international waters was also specific to this area.

Integrated maritime policy aimed to forge interdependency between the different areas (coastal areas, the economy, transport) but it also raised the issue of the appropriate political level of management.

The regions often had responsibility for maritime affairs and some of them were already involved in integrated initiatives such as water management plans and maritime competitiveness clusters.

Integrated maritime policy offered a range of tools for meeting the need for joint management, particularly in maritime spatial planning. Several projects had been launched at the level of Mediterranean sub-basins.

DG MARE would be monitoring the debates on macro-regional strategy. **Carla Montesi** also stressed that a strategy focused on the sea basin level seemed appropriate, but the example of the Baltic was not necessarily replicable in another context.

She said the future debate on a potential macro-region would go hand in hand with the implementation of the maritime policy framework directive, which had recognised the major role local and regional authorities had to play.

Jean Claude Turret summed up the session by outlining the different points made during the debate. Firstly, it seemed that a number of issues should be dealt with at a scale that would permit consultation

between the different levels of decision-making and public action: the issue of governance of public policies was thus central for improving the effectiveness. It was then necessary to draw on existing momentum in the field of maritime policy, for example, in order to forge a common framework for solving problems. Lastly, it was necessary to take into account the specific influence of the regions in the Mediterranean, because they were responsible for over half of all investments.

CONCLUDING SESSION



Michel Vauzelle concluded the seminar by emphasising that a Mediterranean macro-region would not entail the creation of a new area. It was about taking into account the fact that the Mediterranean exists. He stressed that Europe could not be built if it turned its back on the Mediterranean. For most Mediterranean regions, the close cultural, economic and demographic ties with the southern shores meant that it was more a matter of coexistence than neighbourhood. The PACA Region cooperated directly with each of the states on the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

Lastly, he outlined several major principles which should underpin European policies in the Mediterranean. Firstly, it was necessary to work with ideas that had helped further European integration, namely democracy, respect for others and the need to appreciate diversity. It would then be necessary to distinguish between the political and diplomatic initiative of the Union for the Mediterranean at the Euro-Mediterranean level, from the macro-region, which was a policy coordination instrument for regions and states in the area. Efforts were therefore required in order to forge the macro-regional level, even though it was legitimate and currently seen in the transnational cooperation programme. Mr Vauzelle concluded by thanking all of the participants and speakers who had made it possible to hold such an interesting and open discussion.

