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Walking the Tightrope: Europe between Europeanisation and Globalisation

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European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: A Pilot Strategy for Other Regions?

Chiara Nacchia

Introduction

The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) is the first example of a macro-regional strategy in the history of the EU. The European Commission was asked to draft a Baltic Sea Strategy document, which was presented in June 2009 and adopted by the Swedish presidency in October 2009.¹

The strategy aims to address the most immediate problems of the region through the four pillars in the European Commission (EC) Communication:

- to enable a sustainable environment;
- to enhance the region's prosperity;
- to increase accessibility and attractiveness;
- to ensure safety and security in the region.

A well-focused action plan has organized these four thematic pillars in fifteen priority areas, which are implemented through detailed projects. These projects are called “flagship-projects” because of their relevant and immediate impact on the area and were prepared following a broad consultation of Member States and Stakeholders.²

Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy from 2004 until July 2009, presented the strategy as “a major step as it marks a *new way of working together in the Union*. It does not imply new laws or institutions but rather based on the will of governments and citizens in the member states and regions to meet urgent, shared challenges.”³ The concept expressed by

¹ European Union, Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. (Brussels: COM (2009) 248 final, 10 June 2009)
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/baltic/com_baltic_en.pdf (accessed 15 February 2010).

² European Union, Directorate-General for Regional Policy, *The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Background and Analysis*. (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Union, 2010), http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/baltic/index_en.htm (accessed 13 May 2010).

³ European Union, Europa Press Room, *European Commission launches Strategy to boost development of Baltic Sea Region*. (Brussels: IP/09/893, 10 June 2009),

Commissioner Hübner, (the so-called “Three NOs”),⁴ means that this form of cooperation will be based on a strong political will to tackle these challenges, not on a new institutional structure. The EU Commission has declared that the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) Strategy could also serve as a pilot blueprint for other macro-regional strategies (MRSs) in the next future;⁵ for instance, the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), which should be approved before the end of 2010.⁶

This new kind of strategy and the related expectations brings the debate on analyzing the concept of macro-region and its new features and suitability to the forefront for other regions within the EU. The aim of this paper is to investigate what the favourable pre-conditions and features for a macro-area are in order to plan and develop a MRS. Next, the paper will clarify whether the EUSBSR can be a pilot strategy and in what terms. The EUSBSR will be the empirical model for the theoretical framework. In my hypothesis, the regions within the EU should reach a certain level of governance expertise and experience before shaping this kind of macro-regional cooperation (MRC). The first part of this paper is dedicated to outlining the concept of “macro-region” in the EU context, analyzing what the advantages and the new features that have been introduced through this new opportunity of cooperation are. Next, the required prerequisites that enable the emergence of MRC in other areas following the empirical example of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) will be underlined. Further remarks on the paper and the research question will be discussed in the conclusions.

Macro-regions and macro-regional strategies within the EU

The recent use of the term macro-regions, as well as the recent development of this strategy in the European context, does not consent to provide a standard definition. This section will reflect upon the concept and the most important features and innovations by analyzing the research and the official EU documents released thus far.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/893> (accessed 15 February 2010). Emphasis added, CN.

⁴ Commission of the European Communities, *Communication concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region*. (COM (2009) 248 final, 10 June 2009).

⁵ European Union, *From the Baltic Sea Strategy to the Danube Basin – a macro-regional strategy for the EU* (IP/09/1326, 10 June 2009).

⁶ European Union, European Commission, *EU Strategy for the Danube Region. Scoping Paper for the public consultation*. (Brussels: REGIO/E1/EN/NV/OB D, 2010).

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultation/danube/doc/scoping_danube_strategy.pdf (accessed 20 March 2010).

Macro-region: definition

Traditionally, the term macro-region (MR) was used by scholars working in the field of International Relations (IR). In this paradigm, the term was associated with the “old regionalism” approach in which the process of regional integration was seen to take place exclusively between sovereign states for security oriented objectives. These kinds of integration were created from above with the so-called “top-down” method, utilizing the unilateral approach to economic integration.⁷ A well-known example was the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1950.⁸

The theoretical and empirical context related to the IR system radically changed during the twentieth century, mostly in the last two decades. The end of the Cold War not only restored the balance but also the challenges created by globalization impulses, along with and the consequent interdependence, which has created a new scenario. This is also the historical phase in which the European integration process came to know a new propulsion. The European project became a model which influenced not only the economic sphere, but was also recognized as a new form of political cooperation.⁹

This new phase has been analyzed by Björn Hettne, theorist of the “New Regionalism” process.¹⁰ “New regionalism” is a broad process which deals not only with economics, but involves a multidimensional and political process as well. According to Hettne this process became evident in the 1990s and as the current development of regional integration shows, it could still be usable.

This process has taken place simultaneously at the regional, national, sub-national as well as trans-national micro-regional level,¹¹ (which could also be identified within the space of the MRs). The emergence of new actors in the international political arena is, in fact, one of the new features of new regionalism, which weakens the role of sovereign states as it was understood in the Westphalian System. The perspective of the economic integration has

⁷ Björn Hettne, “Globalization and the New Regionalism: the Second Great Transformation,” in *Globalism and New Regionalism vol.1*, ed. Björn Hettne, Andras Inotai, Osvaldo Sunkel (London: Macmillian Press, 1999), 7-8.

⁸ Alexander Dubois et al., “EU Macro-regions and Macro-regional Strategies – a Scoping Study”, (working paper for NORDREGIO – Nordic Centre for Spatial Development, Stockholm, Sweden, 2009), 13.

⁹ Georg Howard Joffè, “Regionalism – a New Paradigm?” in *European Union and New Regionalism. Regional Actors and Global Governance in a Post Hegemonic Era*, ed. Mario Telò (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), xiv.

¹⁰ Mario Telò, “Globalization, New Regionalism and the Role of the European Union”, in *European Union and New Regionalism. Regional Actors and Global Governance in a Post Hegemonic Era*, ed. Mario Telò (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 2-3.

¹¹ Hettne, “Globalization and the New Regionalism”, 14.

changed too, abandoning the inward-oriented and protectionist model for a more open and interdependent economy. The more spontaneous and open system has developed new challenges that call for a multidimensional approach; the need of integrated policies has overthrown the traditional “security oriented vision”.¹² The involvement of new actors has created a more spontaneous process, driven also from below, with the so-called “bottom up” approach. It appears clear that the European integration process, which has officially recognized the new role of the sub-national actors, particularly after the Treaty of Maastricht,¹³ is a paradigmatic example of this transformation. The “new regionalism” process is undoubtedly the theoretical context in which the MRC can be included.

According to the definition of the EU, a “macro-region” is “an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features and challenges.”¹⁴ This is a concise definition that does not include a number of unique features which must be analyzed to single it out as a distinctive pattern of co-operation.

Advantages of the macro-regional co-operation

The objective of a macro-regional strategy, as the EUSBSR teaches, is to achieve specific goals successfully using existing rules, policies, institutions and funds in a more appropriate way. The approach is a very pragmatic one and aims to rapidly obtain substantial benefits.¹⁵ This high problem solving capacity necessary to the strategy must be analyzed through the elements that enable its success. The strategy shows some co-operation-features, which must be recognized as specific advantages of the macro-regional cooperation.

First of all, it must be pointed out that the identified challenges cannot be solved by acting alone: coordinated actions across different policy areas among different actors will achieve better results than individual initiatives. Moreover, resolving issues in a relatively small group of countries and regions is easier than working in the EU-27. This matter is also related to the pillars: the issues are strictly tied with the interests of the region and could not be perceived in the same way by other EU members.

¹² Ibid., 7-8.

¹³ Clara Mine Baad Berkkan, Ulrik Kjolsen Olsen, Lena Tempel, Ian Manners, “Macro-regional Strategies in the EU – a New Form of Governance?” (paper presented as semester project, Roskilde University, 2009), 19.

¹⁴ Pawel Samecki, “Macro-regional Strategies in the European Union” (discussion paper presented at the Ministerial Conference in Stockholm, Sweden, 18 September 2009).

¹⁵ Ibid.

This previous point is related to another advantage of working in a macro-regional context: the achievement of common understanding and mutual trust would be easier in a region which recognizes common goals and already has a background in cooperation.¹⁶ Another fundamental issue related to the MRC is the possibility of its emergence in heterogeneous areas: with a functional approach concentrated on common scopes and practical issues a homogeneous economic, political and cultural background is not necessary.¹⁷ The main inspiration supporting this kind of cooperation is, as a matter of fact, the awareness that all the actors involved are interdependent on each other because of the main role played by the Baltic Sea in the region.¹⁸

New features introduced by the macro-regional cooperation

The strategy *per se* is more than just a territorial cooperation among different member states within a region. As the official EU documents and several research papers try to underline, it has some innovative features which present it as an experimental type of cooperation.

The first aspect to be considered is the strategy involves three set of tasks. First, a multi-sectoral approach: many of the actions need to be based on the co-ordination of different EU policies involved in the strategy (Environmental Policy, Neighbourhood Policy, Cohesion Policy, Fishery Policy, Maritime Affairs, ACP, Single Market Policies, Energy Policies).¹⁹ Secondly, a multi-instrumental approach: the funds which will support the strategy come from different budget programmes because, at the moment, there are not specific funds for the macro-regional strategies (this condition could change with the budgeting period post-2013).²⁰ The third task is a multi-actor approach: different types of actors collaborate at various levels. The EU institutions, member states, regional and local authorities, and representatives of civil society organizations of the private sector and the academic sector

¹⁶ Marion Salines, "Success Factors of Macro-Regional Co-operation: The Example of the Baltic Sea Region", (paper based on the Master's Thesis "Towards a Europe of the Macro-Regions? Success Factors and Benefits of Macro-regional Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region", College of Europe, Department of European Political and Administrative Studies Bruges, 2009), 4.

¹⁷ Alexander Dubois et al., "EU Macro-regions and Macro-regional Strategies – a Scoping Study", 19.

¹⁸ Baad Berkkan et al., "Macro-regional Strategies in the EU – a New Form of Governance?", Hans Brask's interview, 39.

¹⁹ Alexander Dubois et al., "EU Macro-regions and Macro-regional Strategies – a Scoping Study", 23.

²⁰ European Union, *From the Baltic Sea Strategy to the Danube Basin – a Macro-regional Strategy for the EU*. (IP/09/1326, 10 June 2009).

have worked together to prepare the strategy and should continue working together for its implementation.²¹

These three tasks, although presenting a truly integrated approach, represent an operative practical obstacle as well, because the stakeholders must be able to cope with this multi-lateral governance concerning several policies and instruments. This working approach on different strands has been commonly referred to as “multi-level governance” (MLG).²²

The term MLG is intrinsically related with the European Cohesion Policy. As a matter of fact, it was developed, for the first time, by Gary Marks in relation to the reform of structural funds policy in 1988. The administration of these funds had to be organized through partnerships established between the EU (at that time European Community) and the regions. For the first time, sub-national actors were involved in EU policy-making.²³ This vertical policy interaction in the EU and the idea that, at the same time, interdependent work among different actors should exist, is today a common practice that has become stronger with more emphasis given to the sub-national actors.

The macro-regional strategies have been presented as a new level of governance that stand between the nation state and the supranational community²⁴ and are able to coordinate the vertical and horizontal issues effectively.

An interesting analyse was recently presented at the Roskilde University about the role of the MLG in the strategy and the new level introduced by the MR itself. The essay, entitled “Macro Regional Strategies in the EU – a New Form of Governance?”, presents in detail the new features of this governance. The essay elaborates upon the definition of MLG expressed by Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe in *Unravelling the Central State but How? Types of Multi-Level Governance*. According to the two scholars, there are two types of MLG: “type 1” describes governance on different levels on which there is a clear division of power and no interference with each other, giving the nation state much power; “type 2” recognizes a more flexible approach in which the jurisdiction of the actors involved operates on different levels

²¹ Alexander Dubois et al., “EU Macro-regions and Macro-regional Strategies – a Scoping Study”, 10.

²² Ibid., 31, 41.

²³ Ian Bache, “Multilevel Governance and Policy Networks”, in *Europeanization and Multilevel Governance: Cohesion Policy in the European Union and Britain*, ed. Ian Bache (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 23-24.

²⁴ Unione Europea, Parlamento Europeo, Commissione per lo Sviluppo Regionale, *Documento di lavoro sulla Strategia dell’Unione Europea per la Regione del Mar Baltico e il Ruolo delle Macroregioni nella Futura Politica di Coesione*, relatore: Wojciech Michal Olejniczak (Brussels: PE431.006v01-00, 2010), http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/regi/dt/799/799506/799506it.pdf (accessed 3 April 2010).

and thus presents a sort of “overlapping.” After the theoretical reconstruction, the conclusion is that a MRC can be placed between these two types, as a kind of “hybrid:” although different stakeholders have a role in several parts of the process, intersecting different levels of governance, there is a hierarchical structure²⁵ that puts the European Commission in a guiding and monitoring role and the member states as coordinators of the priority areas. A more flexible part is foreseen for the implementation of the projects in which all the stakeholders are involved.²⁶ The implementation of the MLG depends on respect for the principle of subsidiarity, which guarantees that policies are conceived and applied at the most appropriate level.²⁷

As the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy has pointed out in its working document, “the strategy should focus primarily on dealing with issues that cannot be solved by national or local means alone”,²⁸ and just in this case, it has to manage them on a macro-regional level. Accordingly, the success of the strategy relates to involving the right actors at the suitable level in the field where which they show real expertise.²⁹

Now that it is clear what the MLG in the macro-regional context means, the focus will shift to the factual management of this multi-integrated approach. This setting offers a high risk of tensions between the actors on different levels, the institutions involved, as well as the risk of policy “overlapping.”

The concept of integration in “patches”³⁰ can solve potential coordinating and instrumental tensions. As a matter of fact, the functional approach of the strategy is not based on a compromise between all actors, but rather on a consensus between the actors “directly concerned by the issue at hand”.³¹ The strategy should not necessarily integrate all the parts at once, but at the optimal scale to reach its aim. This could solve unexpected tensions

²⁵ Baad Berkkan et al., “Macro-regional Strategies in the EU – a New Form of Governance?”, Hans Brask’s interview, 33- 41.

²⁶ European Union, Commission of the European Communities, *Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region – Action Plan* (Brussels: SEC (2009) 712, 2009), http://www.europa-nu.nl/9353000/1/j4nvgs5kjg27kof_j9vvh6nf08temv0/vi7jgtc5uczbf=/pdf (accessed 15 February 2010).

²⁷ European Union, Committee of the Regions, *The White Paper on Multi-level Governance* (Brussels: CONST-IV-020, 2009).

²⁸ European Union, Committee of the Regions, *Working Document of the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy – European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region*, Rapporteur: Pauliina Haijanen (Brussels: COTER-IV- 029, 2009).

²⁹ European Union, Committee of the Regions, *The White Paper on Multi-level Governance*.

³⁰ Alexander Dubois et al., “EU Macro-regions and Macro-regional Strategies – a Scoping Study”, 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

originating from the multi-dimensional approach. This approach works on a vertical and on a horizontal dimension, involving actors at the same level (for instance, cooperation among states) but also on different levels (cooperation among states and associations, for example).

As we have seen, the four pillars are divided into priority areas. Every area will have a 'coordinator' which, normally, should be a member state. All these aspects are presented in the action plan which underlines the close contact needed for the implementation among the coordinator, the commission and the stakeholders (especially regions and local authorities).³²

The action plan, at the moment of its presentation, was already quite complete concerning the implementation through flagship projects. In order to improve the comprehension of this multidimensional level of cooperation, it is interesting to introduce one of the projects, presenting the various levels of accountability.

The first pillar ("to make the Baltic Sea Region an environmentally sustainable place") is organised into five priority areas. Each of them is coordinated, in most of the cases, by a state. The first area ("to reduce nutrient inputs to the Sea to acceptable levels") is managed by a joined cooperation: Poland and Finland. These two states will be responsible for the implementation of the projects belonging to this specific area. The project itself, however, will have its own lead-partner which will clearly work in close contact with the coordinators. The project "Putting Best Practices in Agriculture into Work" oversees a group of associations working as lead-partners of that specific project. Four associations, coming from different countries, have to implement the project on the ground: the Federation of Swedish Farmers, the Danish Agricultural Advisory Service, the MTK and SLC Agricultural Organisations of Finland and the German Farmers Association. The achievement of the objectives should be performed in a closely linked cooperation among co-ordinators, lead-partners and other actors, which take part in the specific project. The actors involved, thus, not only have different origins, and sometimes differing interests, but also a different nature (states and associations in this case).³³

As this practical example underlines again, the implementation of the strategy requests a high level of expertise, but also knowledge among the actors. A good level of both of these features can only be reached through previous cooperation and a healthy attitude towards it. These last aspects mentioned will be further and more deeply discussed in the next section.

³² European Union, Commission of the European Communities, *Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication – Action Plan*.

³³ *Ibid.*

Preconditions for the emergence of a macro-regional strategy

As we have seen in the previous section, there are some special features that characterize MRCs. These features are related to the dimension of cooperation and co-ordination of several policies and actors, in other words, to the MLG. As I have introduced in my hypothesis, not every European macro-regional area has already reached a high problem-solving level of expertise, nor the capacity to reach consensus about the matter.

As Pawel Samecki (2009-2010), Commissioner after Danuta Hübner, has stated in September 2009, “there will be very specific and visible opportunities or problems that cannot be satisfactorily addressed by regions or countries acting alone” and this is actually the case in which a MRS is requested. The examples mentioned by the Commissioner, environmental issues, transport linkages and maritime actions, are exactly related to transnational and macro-regional challenges. Hence, he maintains “there may be no obvious primary issues to stimulate the creation of a macro-regional strategy” and moreover, I suggest, there are not any previous favourable conditions either. As Samecki has said, “it is essential that macro-regional strategies are prepared only where the impact, in form of clear, concrete actions, is high and visible”.³⁴

The factors which must be present in order to develop a MRS will now be elaborated upon.

Agreement on a common main challenge

The EUSBSR was initiated following the idea that the main issue of the strategy was to solve the environmental risks related to the Baltic Sea.³⁵ This matter represents a fundamental pillar for the strategy, not just for the environmental problem *per se*. As a matter of fact, the Baltic basin is not just a symbol, but a real factor of interdependence for the region. The Baltic Sea includes maritime connections, energy, fishery and tourism, which are necessarily interlinked with each other. The needs related to the basin have been tied together in a broader action-framework, which has become a strategy³⁶ thematically focused on territorial cooperation

³⁴ Samecki, “Macro-regional Strategies in the European Union.”

³⁵ European Union, European Commission, *European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Public Consultation*, 2008. http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultation/baltic/doc/consul_baltic_en.pdf (accessed 15 February 2010).

³⁶ Samecki, “Macro-regional Strategies in the European Union.”

throughout the basin.³⁷ The starting point was a common geo-strategic arena that could work as a bond of interests.

The practical case (EUSBSR) shows how economic reasons are not only sufficient to develop cooperation, but also requires a common perception of policy-makers, amongst other actively involved actors. The perception of common interests and goals is the main determinant for success at the political level.³⁸ Another point to highlight, concerning political will and cooperation, is that the achievement of an agreement, in this case the MRS, is not “a sudden occurrence but resembles a gradual learning process”.³⁹ This aspect represents a tangible situation that can be found in the BSR: the awareness and understanding among policy-makers regarding common problems that had already met a model of regional cooperation independent of the EU intervention.⁴⁰ The data from the environmental trans-border cooperation in the BSR documents more than thirty years (since 1972) of previous regional involvement, although it also shows a low profile because of static Cold War diplomacy.⁴¹ These kinds of agreements, which precede the EU intervention, are examples of a strong and enduring history of cooperation and networking.

Networking and Cooperation background

The gradual learning process introduced above is the leading concept of co-operation and networking in the Baltic Region. The issue is highly related to the idea that a multi-sectoral, multi-instrumental and multi-actor co-operation should be driven by a background of high expertise in the field of trans-national and cross-border territorial cooperation.

As the BSR case shows, any area which would develop a MRS, should already have a background of co-operation and networking which enables further developments. Analyzing the example of the Baltic Sea countries, it appears that the tendency to co-operate was in fact developed already after World War II: in that period, co-operation was highly

³⁷ Alexander Dubois et al., “EU Macro-regions and Macro-regional Strategies – a Scoping Study”, 29.

³⁸ Salines, “Success Factors of Macro-Regional Co-operation: The Example of the Baltic Sea Region”, 5 - 10.

³⁹ Riccardo Cappellin, “Interregional Co-operation in Europe: an Introduction”, in *Regional Networks, Border Region and European Integration*, ed. Ricardo Cappellin, Peter W.J. Batey (London: Pion Limited, 1993), 13.

⁴⁰ Carsten Schymik, “Blueprint for a Macro-Region. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea. Executive Summary” (research paper for Research Division EU Integration, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, September 2009).

⁴¹ Fabrizio Tassinari and Leena-Kaarina Williams, “Soft Security in the Baltic Sea Region: Environmental Co-operation as a Pilot Project for Regional Integration in the Baltic Sea Area”, in *The Baltic Sea Region in the European Union: Reflections on Identity, Soft-Security and Marginality*, ed. Fabrizio Tassinari (Berlin: BaltSeaNet, 2003), 40-41.

intergovernmental and averse to any form of integration (Nordic Council 1952).⁴² If we want to re-consider the roots of the cross-border cooperation, at least for the Nordic countries, we can already find an example in 1964 between the Copenhagen region and the city of Malmö. When the INTERREG programme (1990) was launched,⁴³ cross-border co-operation could boast more than twenty years of experience in the field. Nation-states, as well as regions and cities financed the projects.⁴⁴ The call for the INTERREG programme applications played an important role and opened cross-border co-operation beyond the vanished iron curtain.⁴⁵ The experience of co-operation in the region, on different levels and matters, evidently has a long tradition and has prepared a fruitful basis for the EUSBSR.

The end of the Cold War, the process of Europeanisation, and (neo-)liberalization of the markets has made readily available opportunities to create a booming area in the Baltic region, through a great proliferation of networks and non-state actors in region-building efforts.⁴⁶ Data from 2001 show there were seventy networks in the region involving different actors, in both private and public sectors, promoting cultural and economic exchanges, therefore, spreading ideas and links within the region.⁴⁷

The first use of trans-regional networks was pushed by NGOs in the early 1980s, a method which also worked for enterprises, cities and municipalities, cultural organizations, research and teaching institutions for projects in the field of tourism, spatial planning, transportation linkage and youth policies. Now, this knowledge is playing a fundamental role in the integration and implementation of the Strategy.⁴⁸

This background and will to participate was greatly visible during the Public Consultation for the Strategy: the EC received about 110 written contributions from different actors, such

⁴² Leena-Kaarina Williams, "The Baltic Sea Co-operation: Forms and Functions of Regional Co-operation" (MA dissertation, Free University Berlin, 2001), 7.

⁴³ Unione Europea, Commissione Europea, Direzione Generale Politica Regionale, "Regioni come Partner. L'obiettivo 'Cooperazione Territoriale'", in *Inforegion-Panorama*, no. 24, (Brussels: dicembre 2007), http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_it.htm (accessed 10 February 2010).

⁴⁴ Marten Johansson, "Patterns in Nordic Cross-Border Region Building – An Overview", in *Nordic Region-Building in a European Perspective*, ed. Harald Baldersheim and Kirsten Stahlberg (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 23.

⁴⁵ "Success Factors of Macro-Regional Co-operation: The example of the Baltic Sea Region", 26.

⁴⁶ Alexander Dubois et al., "EU Macro-regions and Macro-regional Strategies – a Scoping Study", 14.

⁴⁷ Williams, "The Baltic Sea Co-operation: Forms and Functions of Regional Co-operation", 10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

as member states, sub-national governments, Baltic Sea Region Organizations, NGOs and also European institutions.⁴⁹

The importance of networks in strategic spatial planning is crucial today, not only to create understanding between the actors but also to flow the information from stakeholders to the policy-makers.⁵⁰ These exchanges of information are the key to prepare a strategy based on real necessities, participation and the following implementation, instead of an elite driver process. How the strategy should emerge, developed and be implemented is also a fundamental question. The general integration and cooperation process in the BSR, as previously explained, is based on a “bottom-up” approach.⁵¹ Is this also the suitable way for a MRS?

“Bottom-up” and “top-down”: finding a “well-balanced” method

Region-building in the BSR was established through a “bottom-up” process, which already began in the 1980s. Therefore, several initiatives have been supported by the lobbying activity of the ‘new’ actors.⁵² These were cases of single cooperation in a specific field or unproblematic situations handled from a coordination point of view.

The case of the EUSBSR has been developed into a multi-dimensional approach concerning the management of fifteen priority areas. It also demands the participation of eight member states with different backgrounds, the involvement of Russia, Norway and Belarus, without any new institutions, legislation nor new funding instruments. Under these circumstances, the risk is related to the tension of powers in the sphere of leading and accountability roles.⁵³ Should the process of the strategy development be headed by the EU institutions and nation states (“top-down”) or should it be lobbied, created and lead by regional and local authorities with the participation of non-state actors (“bottom-up”)?

⁴⁹ Carsten Schymik and Peer Krümrey, “EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Core Europe in the Northern Periphery?” (Working paper for the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, Germany, 2009).

⁵⁰ Judith E. Innes and David E. Booher, “Planning Institutions in the Network Society: Theory of Collaborative Planning”, in *The Revival of Strategic Spatial Planning*, ed. Willem Salet and Andreas Faludi (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Science, 2000), 179-182.

⁵¹ J. Storm Pedersen, The Baltic Region and the New Europe, in *Regional Networks, Border Region and European Integration*, ed. Ricardo Cappellin, Peter W.J. Batey (London: Pion Limited, 1993), 141-143.

⁵² Anders J Hingel, “The Prime Role of Regional Co-operation in European Integration”, in *Regional Networks, Border Region and European Integration*, ed. Ricardo Cappellin, Peter W.J. Batey (London: Pion Limited, 1993), 42.

⁵³ Alexander Dubois et al., “EU Macro-regions and Macro-regional Strategies – a Scoping Study”, 39.

These two approaches should not necessarily be exclusive; they can intervene in different ways and create a “well-balanced method”. Firstly, there are “bottom-up” dynamics. This concerns the way in which sub-national and non-state actors start to network as a response to common challenges and goals. Looking at our empirical example, regional and non-state actors have shown specific knowledge essential for the strategy. Moreover, the revival co-operation, which took place after the fall of the Iron Curtain between NGOs, universities, cities, churches and political parties, had already started to reduce the gap and the distance between the region, creating the defining moment of civil society awareness.⁵⁴

Secondly, there is nation-states accountability: even if the networks of civil society and local authorities can individually recognize the problems and also lobby with the EU institutions (most of all, after the new opportunities offered by the Master Treaty, e.g. the Committee of the Regions), the next step should be done by the nation-states. The nation-state, as well as its intergovernmental expressions, gaining power from the civil society-awareness, can play an essential role in the EU institutions. The accountability for the fulfilment of the strategy is related to the nation state.⁵⁵ This is exactly what happened within the European Parliament in late 2005: the Europe Baltic Intergroup, an informal group of members of the European Parliament (MEPs), introduced the idea of a special strategy for the BSR. The response at the beginning was negative, but it served as a good basis for the Swedish EU presidency to encourage the European Council to agree on the Commission mandate to present the Strategy.⁵⁶

Thirdly, there is EU institution full-involvement: MRS are internal EU strategies and therefore the monitoring and leading role should be invested by the EU institutions, and in this case, by the EC. After the Public Consultation, the summary of the results and the preparation of the strategy were due. As another research has already highlighted, the Commission, “through its call for application and its subsequent action, played a role of a facilitator by accelerating and guiding the development of cooperation ... This demonstrates the relevance of EU involvement as a success factor.”⁵⁷ The Council has furthermore created a group, “the High-Level Group of Officials from EU Member States”, which involved all the twenty seven member states. This is a monitoring body which will assist the EC.

⁵⁴ Salines, “Success Factors of Macro-Regional Co-operation: The Example of the Baltic Sea Region”, 21-22.

⁵⁵ Parlamento Europeo, Commissione per lo Sviluppo Regionale, *Documento di Lavoro sulla Strategia dell’Unione Europea per la Regione del Mar Baltico*.

⁵⁶ Schymik and Krumrey, “EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Core Europe in the Northern Periphery?”

⁵⁷ Salines, “Success Factors of Macro-Regional Co-operation: The Example of the Baltic Sea Region”, 26.

Fourthly, there is strategy implementation: once the strategy is prepared on the institutional level, the implementation of the area is connected with the nation-state, but also with all the stakeholders, who have greater expertise and are able to suggest solutions regarding each specific field. The projects should be developed by sub-national actors and NGOs, which are responsible for the success of the strategy.⁵⁸

As I have pointed out, this is a European Union strategy that should be lead by the European institution in term of priorities, schedule and funds. It does not mean that the approach is completely top-down: the previous networking, understanding of the challenges, lobbying actions toward the nation states and the EU institutions serve as the trial to show the strategy's ability to be implemented afterwards.

Homogenous presence of EU Member States in the area

The factors previously analyzed could be recognized as endogenous and related to the issue of governance: setting out goals, preparing priority actions, and intervening in the most effective way to achieve the aim. This last precondition can be seen as an external geo-political factor which represents a *conditio sine qua non* to shape the strategy.

If the previously presented factors can be supported and improved with some device (for example, increasing the structural funds to boost the objective of territorial cooperation), this fourth aspect can be related to the external dimension of the EU, its enlargement policy, and geo-strategic balance.

The appropriate way to consider this point is to start with the empirical example: after the end of the Cold War and the further EU enlargement (1995 and 2004), the Baltic Sea has become an internal Sea to the EU. Even if a non-EU member (Russia) bordered the basin, and another non-EU member joined the consultation for the Strategy (Norway), the majority of the countries that surround it, belong to the European Union. The Baltic Sea has become Europe's biggest geographical inland water body.⁵⁹

Analyzing MRSs thus means discussing the internal policy of the Union. Although the Neighbourhood policy, the Northern Dimension (in the specific case of the BSR) and, partially, the Cohesion Policy involve cooperation with third countries, the geographical area, funds, programmes, institutions as well as the decision-making belongs to the Union. Even if

⁵⁸ Parlamento Europeo, Commissione per lo Sviluppo Regionale, *Documento di Lavoro sulla Strategia dell'Unione Europea per la Regione del Mar Baltico*.

⁵⁹ Alexander Dubois et al., "EU Macro-regions and Macro-regional Strategies – a Scoping Study", 26.

the participation of third-countries may be seen as an added-value to achieve the goals, they maintain an “exceptional status” in the strategy.

A useful comparison to support this thesis could be the Mediterranean or the Black Sea. These areas could be possible regional targets for next MRCs. These two rims are predominantly bordered by states that are not members of the EU,⁶⁰ and even though the idea of co-operation must not be excluded, but rather welcomed, it would, however, not reflect the specific nature of the MRC which has been investigated in this paper.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to understand if the EUSBSR could be a pilot model of cooperation for other regions. The analysis has been accomplished by researching criteria and preconditions which, preceding the emergence of a MRC, should enable the development a successful strategy.

These favourable, if not even essential preconditions, have been singled out as four criteria:

- Agreement on a common main challenge;
- Networking and cooperation background;
- ‘Well-balanced’ method between ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down;’
- Homogenous presence of EU member states in the area.

The first three aspects enumerated are directly related to the features of the MRC: a good understanding between the actors, a high cooperation expertise, and a balanced participation of institutions and stakeholders can facilitate the implementation of the projects.

As the first section has shown, the multi-dimensional approach and the effective multi-level and multi-lateral governance are the innovative features of this type of cooperation, which involve a high number of actors on a new level (the already mentioned fourth level). The fourth aspect represents a logical condition which recognizes the MRSs as an internal policy issue of the EU.

In order to answer the research question, whether the EUSBSR could be a pilot strategy for other areas, it would be best to underline that it has accepted the requirement that the macro-areas need “tailor made” strategies, which reflect the actual necessities and conditions.

⁶⁰ Schymik, “Blueprint for a Macro-Region. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea. Executive Summary”.

Nevertheless, the four analyzed preconditions have been recognized as essential and fundamental for every future strategy. The main point is to understand which aspects must match specific features of the region and which preconditions, on the other hand, represent an indisputable background.

The pillars, the priority areas, the coordinators and lead-partners, as well as the stakeholders involved in the preparation, the number of stakeholder-conferences, can all be individually recognized per specific case. However, the emergence of a MRS in an area which does not meet the presented preconditions could have difficulties in the realization of its objectives. Nevertheless, I continue to consider the EUSBSR a model for the next MRCs because it teaches not only the compulsory and optional conditions for the emergence of a MRS, but also, in the coming years will show the good and bad practices. The EC, but perhaps, *in primis*, the regional stakeholder, should not rush to present MRSs in the whole of Europe, but wait for the results and promote the achievement of the criteria presented in this paper.

There is an aspect which deliberately has not been discussed in this paper: regional identity. Which role has identity played in the MRC and in cross-border cooperation in general? This is an important aspect which requires much research. From a functional point of view, I would hope that instead of identity, the will to cooperate for the fulfilment of better results and advancing of European integration and cohesion, would play the most important role. From another point of view, the concept of identity is related to culture, heritage, history and memory and it is certainly an important factor to investigate. Many scholars, who have researched the field of territorial cooperation, mention identity.

Evolution in terms of territorial cooperation in the next years within the EU is another interesting issue. Considering the chance that the EUSBSR will be a successful experience, and moreover, that the emergence of the EUSDR, as well as, a specific budget after 2013, seems to suggest not just the current “Europe of the Regions” but rather a “Europe of the macro-regions”.

As Esko Antola, director of the think tank ‘Centrum Balticum’, foresees in “Political Challenges for the Baltic Sea Region”, the increasing heterogeneity of the EU, caused by a EU-27, will entail the EU to push towards a differentiated integration model for different regions. This is what he calls “the Europe of Olympic circles.” According to him, the future of the EU will see five mega-regions, covering respectively the Mediterranean region, the

central European countries (Visegrad cooperation), the Danube region, the circle of Western Europe, and the Baltic region. Some of these regions will have an external dimension as well, in the sense that they potentially cover countries from outside the EU. The main feature of this model is also that if these regions operate within the EU, they will have an important external dimension at the same time, creating a flexible system in which the Olympic circles can overlap.⁶¹ It is still unclear if Antola's perspective will be the future of territorial cooperation within the EU, but as Pertti Joenniemi (Senior Research Fellow for the Danish Institute for International Studies) has recently stated during a speech at the Committee of the Regions:

The Baltic Sea Strategy . . . seems to testify [that] another change in the policies is pursued . . . My point here is that the Commission has chosen to advocate a particularly light and pluralist form of regionalization among the various forms that region-building can take. This has not only occurred because the Baltic Sea area seems to have been quite successful in turning into a European mega-region but also for the reason that the form which the area has taken seems to fit the future needs of Europeanization.⁶²

⁶¹ Esko Antola, "Political Challenges for the Baltic Sea Region", (Report for the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, London Office, London, U.K., 2009), 8-12.

⁶² Pertti Joenniemi, "The Baltic Sea Area: What Kind of Model and Why?" (Speech at the "Forum on Macro-regions", Committee of the Regions, Brussels, 2010).

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