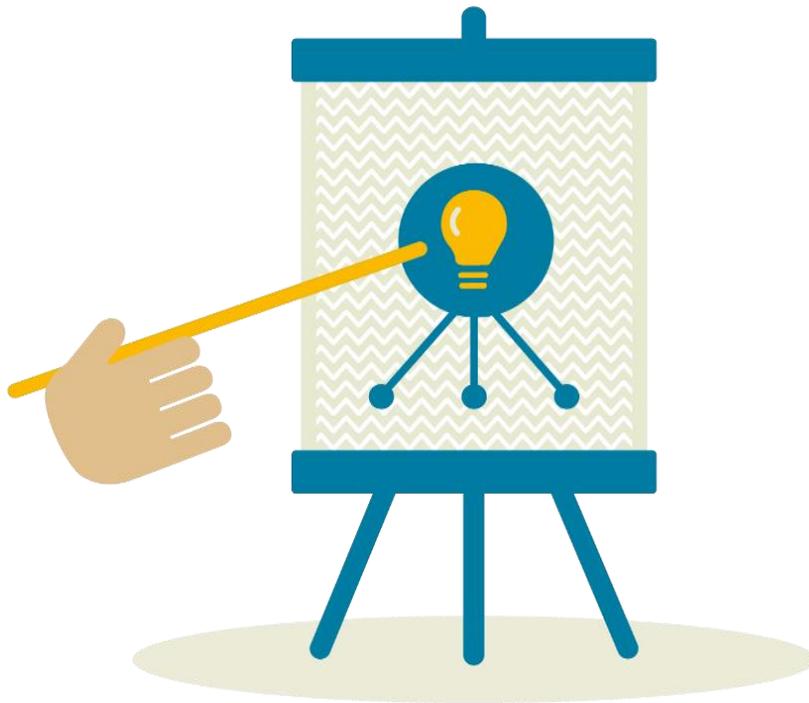


# Embedding macro-regional strategies

---

**Cooperation methods and tools to embed the macro-regional strategies for the Danube and Adriatic-Ionian regions into EU funding programmes**  
June 2017



**Disclaimer:** This material can be used for public use, provided the source is acknowledged and the publisher is given a prior notice. None of this material may be used for commercial purposes. The information and views set out in this interact document reflect Interact's opinions. Responsibility for the information and views set out in this document lies entirely with Interact.

**Publisher** Interact Programme **Date** June 2017 **Publication Leader** Jörg Mirtl **Contributors** Jürgen Pucher, Metis, Thomas Stumm, EureConsult **ISBN** 978-80-972433-3-3

**[www.interact-eu.net](http://www.interact-eu.net)**

# Table of Content

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2. Policy context and overview on methods / tools for embedding the EUSDR and EUSAIR into EU funding programmes</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3. Role of the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the strategic reference documents and in the approved EU funding programmes</b>	<b>28</b>
3.1. Partnership Agreements of EU Member States involved in the EUSDR	28
3.2. EU-level reference documents and country-specific programming documents elaborated for IPA II and ENI	30
3.3. Consideration of the EUSDR or EUSAIR during the elaboration of the 23 EU funding programmes and in the final programming documents	31
<b>4. Support to the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the early starting phase of EU funding programmes and during their ongoing implementation</b>	<b>44</b>
4.1. Targeted guidance / advice for applicants and specific approaches in the application and selection processes for operations	44
4.2. Monitoring, reporting and evaluation activities for determining and describing a programmes' contribution to the EUSDR / EUSAIR	51
4.3. Raising awareness on the EUSDR or EUSAIR through programme-level communication and information activities	58
<b>5. Support to an implementation of the EUSDR and EUSAIR through coordination cooperation and information exchange</b>	<b>62</b>
5.1. Country-wide and regional-level processes ensuring coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR / EUSAIR	63
5.2. Programme-internal activities ensuring coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR / EUSAIR	63
5.3. "External" cooperation and information exchange with other administrations or EU programmes in the EUSDR and EUSAIR	72
<b>6. Overall conclusions on an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR and recommendations for the short and medium-term</b>	<b>75</b>
6.1. Conclusions on weaknesses that hamper a systematic embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR into the examined EU funding programmes	76
6.2. Conclusions on achievements of EU funding programmes that enhance a more systematic embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR	85
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Annexes to the Final Report</b>	<b>97</b>
Annex 1: Basic structuring Elements of the EUSDR and EUSAIR	97
Annex 2: Basic features of the 23 pre-selected programmes to be analysed	98
Annex 3: Specifications for the main study tasks and work accomplished in relation to these tasks	100
Annex 4: Role of the EUSD and EUSAIR in strategic reference and programming documents elaborated for the ESIF, ENI and IPA	103

Annex 4 – Table A: Consideration of the EUSDR and EUSAIR in the nine ESIF Partnership Agreements	103
Annex 4 – Table B: Consideration of the EUSDR and EUSAIR in EU-wide reference documents and the country-specific programming documents elaborated for IPA II and ENI	105
Annex 5: Consideration of the EUSDR or EUSAIR during the elaboration process and in the strategy of the 23 EU funding programmes	106
Annex 6: Specific approaches or tools supporting the EUSDR or EUSAIR within the intervention strategies of EU funding programmes	108
Annex 7: Specific tools enhancing cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR within the programmes' provisions on financing and eligibility	111
Annex 8: The EUSDR or EUSAIR in guidance material for applicants and in application / selection processes of EU funding programmes	114
Annex 9: Consideration of the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the monitoring, reporting and evaluation activities of EU funding programmes	117
Annex 10: Consideration of the EUSDR or EUSAIR in communication strategies and information activities of EU funding programmes	120
Annex 11: Main feature of country-specific processes for coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR/EUSAIR	122
Annex 12: Supporting an implementation of the EUSDR and EUSAIR through coordination, cooperation and information exchange	126
Annex 12 – Table A: National or regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal	126
Annex 12 – Table B: Cooperation programmes under the ETC goal, IPA II and ENI	129

## Executive summary

This study provides an analysis of the cooperation and coordination methods and tools applied by EU funding programmes that aim to embed the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) into 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes in the period 2014-2020. These programmes are partly supported by different European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and partly by the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance II (IPA II) or the new European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI).

This study shows that the systematic embedding of the EUSDR and EUSAIR is the result of a continuous, comprehensive process, comprising a range of actions with three main dimensions:

1. Actions to ensure compliance with the provisions of macro-regional strategies in the relevant EU regulations for the funding period 2014-2020;
2. Actions that apply “synergy-enabling rules” to the current EU regulation and associated non-regulatory approaches and tools that support the implementation of macro-regional strategy;
3. Actions in the field of coordination, cooperation and information exchange to ensure a more coherent implementation of a macro-regional strategy.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that a **systematic embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR primarily relies upon individual initiatives of EU funding programmes**. However, **embedding should not be considered a “one-way street” because the EUSDR and EUSAIR have clear potential to generate benefits at different stages of the programme and project cycle**. This helps to improve the policy-orientation, capitalisation, efficiency and coherence of EU funding programmes, as highlighted in a recent Interact study on the added value of macro-regional strategies.<sup>1</sup>

The summary analysis of the 23 EU funding programmes (see: Chapters 3 - 5) reveals that a number of weaknesses persist which hamper more systematic embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. At the same time, one can also observe that many of these EU funding programmes are on a positive development path for several of the 5 themes<sup>2</sup> this study has looked at. The key messages for both of these weaknesses and achievements are summarised below, and related recommendations for the short term (period 2014-2020) and the medium term (period post-2020) are presented in the final chapter of this study (chapter 6).

---

<sup>1</sup> Added value of macro-regional strategies: project and programme perspective, Interact (2017)

<sup>2</sup> Realisation of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related embedding actions under the following themes: (1) elaboration and finalisation of programming documents, (2) guidance for applicants and project application/selection processes, (3) monitoring, evaluation and reporting, (4) programme-level communication and information and (5) coordination, cooperation and information exchange.

**Key messages on weaknesses that hamper a more systematic embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR into the EU funding programmes**

- 1. The lack of transparency and coherence in the EU 2014-2020 regulations regarding macro-regional contributions.** The analysis of selected EU funding programmes did not identify the range of direct and indirect approaches as an obstacle to supporting the EUSDR or EUSAIR. However, it is recommended that there is a review of the existing regulatory frameworks and potential new options for European regulations to provide increased coherence across strategies.
- 2. Substantial gap in the EU programmes' intervention logic related to support to the EUSDR / EUSAIR.** In the majority of the analysed EU funding programmes' priorities and investment strategies there is no direct reference to either the EUSDR/EUSAIR or they do not mention concrete macro-regional activities to be supported. This creates a substantial gap in the intervention logic, as omitting the concrete instruments, tools and effects of the EUSDR/EUSAIR means that it is difficult to assess what the intended results and impact will be. This gap creates further difficulties for effective monitoring and evaluation of support to the EUSDR/EUSAIR and for demonstrating their contribution in the programme Annual Implementation Reports and Final Report.
- 3. Insufficient or no guidance to applicants to bottom-up operations supporting an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.** Majority of EU funding programmes rely on bottom-up operations with macro-regional relevance to show their contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR. Therefore, EU funding programmes should provide national, regional and local stakeholders with sufficient information and guidance on the EUSDR or EUSAIR. However, this study found that 11 of the 23 EU funding programmes analysed do not provide any information related to the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the guidance material for applicants. Even where ESIF programmes are proactive in supporting the EUSDR/EUSAIR, guidance documents rarely explain how future operations could contribute to the EUSDR or EUSAIR.
- 4. Little use of monitoring and evaluation activities for determining the programmes' contributions to the EUSDR / EUSAIR.** Over two thirds of the 23 examined EU funding programmes studied are not collecting information and data from approved operations on their EUSDR/EUSAIR contribution (17 programmes). Similar shares of programmes are not generating aggregated information on their contributions to the EUSDR or EUSAIR at the monitoring system level (16 programmes) and are not yet envisaging specific activities for evaluating their contributions to the EUSDR/EUSAIR (15 programmes).
- 5. Little use is made of programme-level communication activities for raising awareness on the EUSDR or EUSAIR.** Most of the programmes studied are strongly reliant on bottom-up operations with macro-relevance for the EUSDR/EUSAIR contribution. It is therefore necessary that potential local, regional and national actors interested in these initiatives are aware of both the Strategies and potential cooperation opportunities and mechanisms. Currently, the 23 programmes studied are adopting a passive stance, with 21 programmes not mentioning the EUSDR/EUSAIR in their

communication strategies. Furthermore, over half do not have any specific communication strategies to promote the Strategies towards beneficiaries or other stakeholder organisations.

6. **Lacking involvement of EUSDR or EUSAIR stakeholders in the implementation of the EU programmes.** Shortcomings in this respect exist under half of the examined EU funding programmes. In the case of 6 programmes<sup>3</sup> there is potential for direct interaction at the EUSDR or EUSAIR level<sup>4</sup>, but they are not yet fully using the potential available to enhance their work on one or both Strategies. In the case of the other 6 programmes<sup>5</sup>, there is limited or no direct interaction with the macro-regional stakeholders.
7. **Limited cooperation and information exchange with administrations or EU programmes in other EU Member States or non-EU countries<sup>6</sup>.** The analysis shows that only 7 out of the 18 examined programmes are realising such activities in the context of the EUSDR but not in the EUSAIR. Among these programmes, only three ESF programmes are involved in a more substantial and structured cooperation through a macro-regional network among the ESF Managing Authorities of Danube Region countries (ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary). This network is a good instrument for creating stronger and sustained “macro-regional thinking and acting” within the involved ESF programmes and can also serve as an example for launching similar initiatives for other types of programmes (e.g., ERDF/CF, EAFRD, ETC), similarly to existing networks established in the framework of the Baltic Sea Strategy.
8. Nearly half of the 23 examined EU funding programmes reached a **low degree of embedding** the EUSDR and EUSAIR into their own context. This means that the 11 concerned EU funding programmes have only realised a few of the possible actions that can support an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.<sup>7</sup> While 6 programmes can reach a medium degree of embedding in the period 2014-2020 through some further actions, the other 5 programmes must undertake substantially more actions for improving an embedding of the EUSDR and EUSAIR.

---

<sup>3</sup> i.e. Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia; ERDF Programme Bayern; EAFRD Programme Bayern; Regional Development Programme Romania; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania; ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova.

<sup>4</sup> Such direct interaction becomes possible if administrative stakeholders of an EU funding programme (e.g. Managing Authority, other involved ministries or specific funding agencies being members of the Monitoring Committee etc.) are also acting in specific functions or formal structures established for the EUSDR (e.g. Priority Area Coordinator; members of Priority Area Steering Groups etc.) or EUSAIR (Pillar Coordinator, members of Thematic Steering Groups).

<sup>5</sup> i.e. Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro.

<sup>6</sup> This aspect was examined only for the national / regional ESIF programmes.

<sup>7</sup> i.e. realisation of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related embedding actions under the following themes: (1) elaboration and finalisation of programming documents, (2) guidance for applicants and project application/selection processes, (3) monitoring, evaluation and reporting, (4) programme-level communication and information and (5) coordination, cooperation and information exchange.

**Key messages on achievements of EU funding programmes that enhance a more systematic embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR**

1. **The EU programmes take a wide range of actions to ensure a systematic embedding of the EUSDR and EUSAIR.**
2. **The majority of the EU programmes involved national EUSDR/EUSAIR stakeholders in their elaboration and set out a coherent contribution to the EUSDR / EUSAIR.** The 23 EU examined funding programmes generally comply with the provisions in the respectively relevant EU regulations that require them to either set out their contribution to relevant macro-regional or sea basin strategies (i.e. here the EUSDR and EUSAIR) or to be coherent with macro-regional strategies. The large majority of the examined EU funding programmes (i.e. 19 programmes) have often substantially involved relevant national or regional EUSDR and EUSAIR stakeholders during the elaboration phase and also described their envisaged contributions to the EUSDR / EUSAIR either extensively or adequately.
3. **One third of the analysed programmes “earmarked” parts of their funding for supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.** Four EU programmes<sup>8</sup> apply specific funding schemes or implement actions that support the EUSDR or EUSAIR directly. These programmes have also established adequate approaches for monitoring and evaluating their actual contribution to the macro-regional strategies. Partly budgetary earmarking is observed in the case of 3 EU programmes<sup>9</sup>. This is due to the fact that they do not apply specific funding schemes; include only few or no actions that support the EUSDR directly; and their monitoring approaches show slight weaknesses in terms of objectivity<sup>10</sup>.
4. **Most programmes are undertaking their own activities for actively increasing their awareness of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.** Information gathering on the EUSDR / EUSAIR is identified as important for 19 out of the 23 examined programmes. This is done most often directly through the participation of programme stakeholders (e.g. Managing Authority representatives; Monitoring Committee members) in the Annual Fora of the Strategies or other workshops / seminars that are organised in the framework of the EUSDR or EUSAIR (relevant for 14 programmes). The other 5 programmes gather information on the EUSDR or EUSAIR indirectly, for example through formal or informal information dissemination processes established at the national and regional level. This self-generated interest in EU funding programmes should be further encouraged and supported by the macro-regional stakeholders.
5. **Solid support for an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR through the programmes’ participation in formal coordination, cooperation and information exchange processes.** All EU Member States of the Danube Region have established

---

<sup>8</sup> i.e. Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Regional Development Programme Romania; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro

<sup>9</sup> i.e. ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg, ERDF Programme Bayern; ERDF Programme Austria

<sup>10</sup> i.e. no direct information collection from approved operations, but determination of contribution by MA assessments and no external evaluations realised (*ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg, ERDF Programme Bayern*); only qualitative monitoring and not yet developed evaluation activities (*ERDF Programme Austria*)

formal country-wide and/or regional-level processes for administrative coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR or EUSAIR, which regularly and also actively involve nearly all examined EU funding programmes<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, 14 EU funding programmes are realising further coordination and exchange of information activities to ensure a better alignment of their implementation with that of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. These activities most often involve the Monitoring Committee (or Joint Monitoring Committee) on which a National Coordinator is represented, but also formal or informal information exchanges and cooperation between various administrative stakeholders involved in programmes.

6. **An embedding of the EUSDR and EUSAIR is an ongoing process.** When comparing the embedding status reached by the examined EU funding programmes at the end of the preparation phase (i.e. adoption of programming documents) with the status reached at the end of 2016, one can observe that further progress was made on two aspects linked to the ongoing implementation process: (1) the preferential treatment of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-relevant operations in the selection process (e.g. specific selection criteria, allocation of bonus points) and the use of specific approaches for supporting an implementation of both macro-regional strategies (e.g. calls for proposals dedicated to the EUSDR or EUSAIR), but also (2) the realisation of programme-level coordination, cooperation and exchange of information. This underpins our view that a systematic embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR cannot be reached at the end of the programming phase but instead is the result of an ongoing process.
7. **One half of the examined EU funding programmes reached a high or medium degree of embedding the EUSDR or EUSAIR into their own context.** This means that the 12 concerned EU funding programmes have realised a larger number of the possible actions that can support an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. The 8 EU funding programmes with a high degree of embedding<sup>12</sup> have realised actions that are linked to at least four of the five themes which this study has considered for analysis<sup>13</sup>, whereas the other 4 EU funding programmes with a medium degree of embedding<sup>14</sup> have realised actions from two of the examined themes.

---

<sup>11</sup> Only in case of the *Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia*, no judgement can be made because the wider domestic coordination arrangement was set up recently and the sub-committees on coordination with the EUSDR and EUSAIR were not yet fully established (Status: November 2016).

<sup>12</sup> i.e. ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro; ERDF Programme Austria; ERDF Programme Bayern; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria

<sup>13</sup> i.e. realisation of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related embedding actions under the following themes: (1) elaboration and finalisation of programming documents, (2) guidance for applicants and project application/selection processes, (3) monitoring, evaluation and reporting, (4) programme-level communication and information and (5) coordination, cooperation and information exchange.

<sup>14</sup> i.e. Regional Development Programme Romania; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia

## 1. Introduction

This is the Final Report of the Interact study on “*Cooperation methods and tools applied by EU funding programmes for 2014-2020 to support implementation of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region*”. The study is an extension of a similar service conducted for Interact in 2015 on the “*European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region*” (EUSBSR).<sup>15</sup>

**The wider aim of the present study** is to provide Interact and macro-regional stakeholders with data and information about the cooperation modalities in place, but also to come up with more a detailed analysis and with conclusions on the alignment of funding and coordination processes for supporting an implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)<sup>16</sup> and of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)<sup>17</sup>. The EUSAIR had to be considered in the scope of the analysis because of the partial geographical overlap of both strategy areas.<sup>18</sup>

At the core of each macro-regional strategy is a so-called Action Plan, which was adopted for the EUSDR in 2010<sup>19</sup> and for the EUSAIR in 2014<sup>20</sup>. These Action Plans represent the main themes for which macro-regional cooperation shall help address shared challenges or seize joint development opportunities in the respective areas. Each Action Plan consists of four Pillars and of a limited number of related Priority Areas (EUSDR) or Topics (EUSAIR). An overview on the main structuring elements of both Strategies can be found in the Annex part of this study (see: Annex 1).

The study was expected to identify, describe and analyse cooperation and coordination methods and tools foreseen within 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes of the period 2014-2020 (see: Annex 2). These programmes are partly supported by different European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and partly by the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance II (IPA II) or the new European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The programme sample represents around 25% of all ESIF, IPA II and ENI programmes that are implemented in the EUSDR area during the period 2014-2020. The sample is characterised by a number of particularities<sup>21</sup> that had to be considered throughout the analysis under the study’s three research tasks (see: Annex 3).

---

<sup>15</sup>Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015a), Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015b), Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c).

<sup>16</sup>The EUSDR was adopted by the European Commission in 2010 (European Commission, 2010a) and endorsed by the Council of the European Union in 2011 (Council of the European Union, 2011). The EUSDR covers the territory of 14 European countries (either in full or in parts), among which are nine EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), three Candidate countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia) and two Neighbourhood Countries (Moldova, Ukraine).

<sup>17</sup>The EUSAIR was adopted by the European Commission in 2014 (European Commission, 2014b) and in the same year also endorsed by the European Council (European Council, 2014). The EUSAIR covers four EU Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia) and four Candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia).

<sup>18</sup>This overlap exists for two EU Member States (Croatia, Slovenia) and three Candidate countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia).

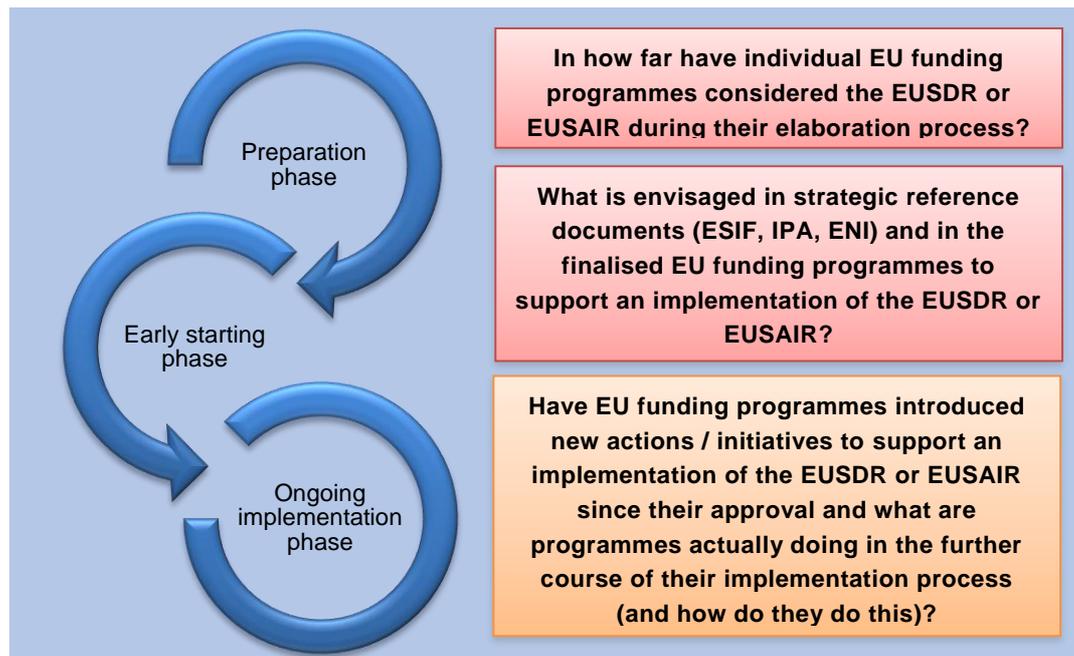
<sup>19</sup>European Commission (2010b)

<sup>20</sup>European Commission (2014c)

<sup>21</sup>i.e. diversity of regulatory provisions governing the programme sample, which also creates different requirements on and options for programmes to support macro-regional strategies (i.e. esp. between ESIF rules and IPA II / ENI rules); different types of ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal (i.e. national and regional programmes; multi-funds and mono-funds programmes) and different types of cooperation programmes (i.e. ETC transnational and cross-border programmes; IPA II and ENI cross-border programmes); significantly different volumes of Union support allocated to these 23 programmes (i.e. ranging from just EUR 29 million to over EUR 10 billion), which also influence the programmes’ potential impact on these macro-regional strategies.

Tasks 1 and 2 of the study carried out a “preparatory analysis” that explored a few strategic questions and a larger number of related sub-questions for three different phases of the programme cycle (see: Figure 1). Task 3 then conducted a summary analysis and drew overall conclusions with respect to the methods and tools applied by the 23 EU funding programmes for supporting an implementation of the EUSDR and EUSAIR.

Figure 1. Simplified presentation of the analytical focus under task 1 (red) and task 2 (orange)



As the present summary analysis and also the related overall conclusions emerge from the narrow focus of this study (i.e. 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes), it is obvious that this report can only show a part of the bigger picture on embedding the EUSDR and EUSAIR into EU funding programmes. Nevertheless, **two aspects call on placing the study's main findings and overall conclusions into a wider context.**

The first aspect is that the contractor was expected to consider conclusions of the Interact study on the EUSBSR (see above) while conducting the analysis and drawing conclusions and also to highlight conclusions from the EUSBSR study that are found similar to those of the present study. The similar research focus of this earlier EUSBSR study and also its results indeed inspired the work of this study, but significant differences between both assignments and also the further evolved time context<sup>22</sup> clearly limit the possibility for making systematic comparisons.

<sup>22</sup>The previous Interact study on the EUSBSR examined 18 ESIF programmes (national/regional, ETC), whereas this Study had to consider 23 programmes supported by the ESIF (i.e. national/regional, ETC-programmes) and by the EU's external financial instruments IPA II and ENI. The EUSBSR study examined programmes at the end of their preparation phase when operational implementation provisions were sometimes even not fully finalised, whereas this Study has analysed the finalised programmes as well as their early starting phase and their ongoing implementation until the end of 2016.

The second aspect is the recent publication of the European Commission's report on an implementation of EU macro-regional strategies,<sup>23</sup> for which the main findings of our in-depth analysis of the 23 EU funding programmes and also the related overall conclusion can give a complementary insight view on aspects that are addressed in the general part as well as in the EUSDR- and EUSAIR-related sections of this report.

This Final Report starts with presenting the general policy context in the EUSDR and EUSAIR as regards an embedding of both Strategies into EU funding programmes and provides a detailed overview on the variety of methods or tools that can be used in the period 2014-2020 for achieving a systematic embedding (**Chapter 2**).

The following chapters then show how the EUSDR or EUSAIR were taken into account during the preparation phase of strategic reference documents and of the pre-selected EU funding programmes (**Chapter 3**), how the ongoing implementation of EU funding programmes supports the EUSDR and EUSAIR (**Chapter 4**) and in what ways activities in the field of coordination, cooperation and an exchange of information enhance a more coherent implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR (**Chapter 5**).

The final chapter (**Chapter 6**) presents the study's overall conclusions and also recommendations for the short term (i.e. issues to be addressed in the remainder of the period 2014-2020) and for the medium-term (i.e. issues to be addressed in the post-2020 period).

## **2. Policy context and overview on methods / tools for embedding the EUSDR and EUSAIR into EU funding programmes**

Already in 2013 and 2014, the European Commission published two reports on EU macro-regional strategies which included a number of aspects that key implementers of such strategies and also the new EU funding programmes should consider in the programming period 2014-2020. The report on the added value of macro-regional strategies<sup>24</sup> clarified the concept of macro-regional strategies by defining its general features and also the five basic principles<sup>25</sup> this concept incorporates. The report on the governance of macro-regional strategies<sup>26</sup> looked at three inter-related fields (i.e. political leadership / ownership, coordination and implementation) for which further improvements are needed in order to maximise the results and impact of existing EU macro-regional strategies.

---

<sup>23</sup>European Commission (2016a), European Commission (2016b)

<sup>24</sup> European Commission (2013b)

<sup>25</sup> (1) Integration – objectives should be embedded in existing policy frameworks (EU, regional, national, local, pre-accession), programmes (EU, country-specific, territorial cooperation, sectorial), and financial instruments. (2) Coordination – policies, strategies and funding resources should avoid compartmentalisation whether between sectorial policies, actors or different tiers of government. (3) Cooperation – countries should cooperate, and sectors also, across the region, changing the 'mind-set' from inward to outward-looking regional development ideas. (4) Multi-level governance – different levels of policy-makers should work better together, without creating new tiers of decision-making. (5) Partnership – EU and non-EU countries can work together on the basis of mutual interest and respect.

<sup>26</sup> European Commission (2014a)

Both Commission reports have also influenced the policy agendas for shaping the continuing implementation of the EUSDR and for preparing the launch of the EUSAIR, which was endorsed only in 2014. One among the many issues addressed in both agendas is the need to ensure a systematic and coherent “embedding” of these strategies into the relevant EU funding programmes of the period 2014-2020.

In case of the EUSDR, the first reflections on this were already included in the 2013 report of the European Commission on the EUSDR’s early implementation phase (2011-2013)<sup>27</sup>. The report addressed a number of recommendations to the countries and regions of the Danube Region with a view to ensure that the continuing implementation of the EUSDR makes further progress in the period 2014-2020. Because it will be crucial that EU programmes and policies can be utilised to implement the EUSDR, one of these recommendations calls on a (...) “systematic embedding of the Strategy in EU, national and regional programmes (...), especially European Structural and Investment Funds (...), using the expertise of Danube networks and key stakeholders in programming and implementation” (...).<sup>28</sup>

During the EUSDR Presidencies of Austria (2014) and Baden-Württemberg (2015), the countries and regions of the Danube Region identified a wide range of issues that they considered important for the continuing implementation of the EUSDR in the period 2014-2020. These issues were also set out in three high-level “joint statements on the EUSDR” that were adopted in Vienna (June 2014)<sup>29</sup>, Brussels (May 2015)<sup>30</sup> and Ulm (October 2015).<sup>31</sup> The Vienna and Brussels statements of the Foreign Ministers of the Danube states formulated a clear political support and commitment to ensure overall embedding of the EUSDR into relevant EU funding programmes<sup>32</sup> and also to improve coordination of funds available at EU, state, regional and local level<sup>33</sup>. For this to be achieved, the Ministers in charge of EU Funds, European Affairs or European Integration from the Danube states and regions and the European Commissioner for Regional Policy have set out a detailed agenda with necessary further steps in the Ulm statement (see: Box 1).

---

<sup>27</sup> European Commission (2013c)

<sup>28</sup> European Commission (2013c), pp. 6, 9, 10

<sup>29</sup> Danube Region Strategy (2014)

<sup>30</sup> Danube Region Strategy (2015a)

<sup>31</sup> Danube Region Strategy (2015b)

<sup>32</sup> Joint Statement of Vienna (2014): “Ministers expressed their support for the overall embedding of the Danube Strategy in the programming documents of the Danube countries concerning the European Structural and Investment Funds and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, where appropriate and possible”.

<sup>33</sup> Joint Statement of Brussels (2015): “Unlocking of all available funds contributing to the EUSDR is needed for the full implementation of the Strategy through necessary investments. Ministers are committed to take the necessary actions to improve the coordination of funds available at EU, state, regional and local level. The participating states will put their efforts in coordinating the potential of the existing 2014 - 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds, Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance and the European Neighbourhood Instrument where appropriate and possible. In this respect, Ministers welcomed that the Ministers in charge of these funds in their countries will be invited to meet during the Annual Forum 2015. The Forum will also provide room for the exchange between Managing Authorities, Programme Secretariats and other fund coordinators with the EUSDR actors. (...) Ministers are committed to take the necessary actions to improve also the coordination of other EU funds (but ESIF) available at the EU level. The participating states will put all efforts in coordinating the potential of the existing 2014 - 2020 Multiannual Financial Framework funds and financial mechanisms where appropriate and possible.”

**Box 1. Joint Statement of Ulm (2015) – references to an embedding of the EUSDR into EU funding programmes**

- **Improve the exchange of information:** Transparent and timely communication and exchange of information between the actors managing the ESIF Programmes and the equivalent instruments for non-EU countries, and those in charge of the EUSDR implementation is vital in building trust and represents a basis for new partnerships and also more effective cooperation. In order to create synergies between financed projects and that they build upon each other, it is necessary to ensure an exchange of information on projects financed in different countries and from different instruments. In this respect, the permanent strategic advisory role of the European Commission is crucial.
- **Enhance coordination:** Coordination between the relevant ESIF Operational and Cooperation Programmes and the equivalent instruments for non-EU countries and EUSDR actors is of essential importance. EUSDR actors have an overview of the targets of the Strategy and may advise on projects contributing to the achievement of these targets. Where appropriate Managing Authorities, National Coordinators, Priority Area Coordinators and Steering Group Members should identify ways to enable ongoing coordination, e.g. by involving them into Monitoring Committees, by setting up dedicated coordination meetings or by using synergies with existing mechanisms. National coordination mechanisms are crucial in this respect and have to take the respective context into consideration. The European Commission and the Danube Strategy Point should play an active role in supporting this coordination and cooperation processes.
- **Streamline project selection:** Within the applicable legal framework and where appropriate, the 2014-20 ESIF Programmes can use part of the funds to co-finance actions or projects of macro-regional scope and interest (e.g. by stimulating the inclusion of a specific work package for cooperation activities). Where appropriate, Managing Authorities and Monitoring Committees should, in cooperation with the relevant EUSDR actors, develop and apply specific project selection criteria recognising the added value of macro-regional projects and their contribution to the EUSDR Priority Areas and targets. Furthermore, appropriate calls may foresee – inter alia – the allocation of bonus points to projects contributing to the implementation of the EUSDR targets and actions.
- **Consider EUSDR related calls:** Ministers take note of examples of Operational Programmes which have earmarked a certain percentage of their funds for actions which may have a macro-regional impact. Where relevant, such calls aim at allocating funds in a well-targeted manner through specific calls for EUSDR projects within the Priority Axis of Operational Programmes or to a duly justified limited geographical perimeter.

- **Facilitate exchange of experience and development of joint solutions within the Danube Region:** There are different options for programmes and EUSDR actors to share experiences and to jointly develop new solutions for a better administration and use of funds. (...)

**In case of the EUSAIR**, with its still short-lived implementation phase that started only at the end of 2014, early activities have essentially focussed on putting into place effective governance structures and also on identifying processes, actions and projects that can contribute to the Strategy's objectives.<sup>34</sup> However, important and closely related aspects are also a stronger embedding of the EUSAIR into EU funding programmes and an improvement of coordination within countries and between various levels of administration to support an implementation of the Strategy. Both aspects were clearly addressed by the "Dubrovnik Declaration" that was adopted in May 2016 at the 1st Forum of the EUSAIR (12/13 May 2016)<sup>35</sup> as well as by the recent Commission report on an implementation of EU macro-regional strategies.<sup>36</sup> Especially with respect to the first steps made in establishing cooperation between ESIF and IPA programme authorities and EUSAIR key implementers, the report highlighted that this (...) "process is ongoing and will require coordination among the different actors concerned."<sup>37</sup>

The above-described policy context in the EUSDR and EUSAIR makes clear that "embedding" cannot be reduced to just ensuring an integration of objectives of macro-regional strategies into existing policy frameworks (EU, regional, national, local, pre-accession) or funding programmes (EU-wide, country-specific, territorial cooperation, sectorial). Instead, **a systematic and coherent embedding requires the realisation of a wide range of actions at different levels of the Cohesion Policy framework in the period 2014-2020** (i.e. EU-wide strategic planning, country-specific Partnership Agreements, individual EU programmes) **and also in different stages of Cohesion Policy implementation.**

For this to become clearer, an overview is now given on the main dimensions of action as well as on the most relevant methods, tools and approaches that can be applied for ensuring a systematic and coherent embedding of the EUSDR and EUSAIR.

---

<sup>34</sup>European Commission (2016b), pp.36,37

<sup>35</sup>The Dubrovnik Declaration calls on the responsible national and regional authorities to ensure that ESIF and IPA programmes as well as all other region-wide available EU and national/regional funds are (...) "*in the best possible way aligned with the priorities of the Strategy and concretely contribute to the achievement of its objectives*" (...), while inviting the Commission (...) "*to promote the coordination of EU funds and instruments, notably those directly managed by its services, with the aim to contribute to the implementation of the Strategy*". See: Adriatic and Ionian Strategy (2016)

<sup>36</sup>Coordination within the countries, between the various levels of the administration is a distinctive requirement for a successful participation in the MRS. (...) Alignment of ESIF/IPA funds with the EUSAIR is all the more important in a region where those resources constitute a large share of countries' public investments. (...) With the exception of the ADRION programme; at implementation level, the cooperation between TSGs and ESIF/IPA programme authorities has so far been somewhat hesitant and uneven. (...) Concerning the EU funds in the Region, a long way remains to go to change mind-sets and bring the ESIF/IPA programming authorities and the EUSAIR key implementers closer together to cooperate towards their common goal (...). See: European Commission (2016b), pp. 40, 41, 43

<sup>37</sup>European Commission (2016a), p.8

## Compliance with provisions on macro-regional strategies in relevant EU regulations governing the funding period 2014-2020

During the funding period 2014-2020, strategic reference documents and individual EU funding programmes have to comply with a number of provisions on macro-regional (and sea basin) strategies that are laid down in various EU regulations.

The Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)<sup>38</sup> sets out in Article 2 (31) and (32) the definitions for macro-regional and sea basin strategies and specifies the overall approach for their integration into the ESIF in Annex I (esp. points 6.4 (c), 7.1 (4) and 7.3). At the strategic planning level, macro-regional and sea basin strategies had to be taken into account by the “Common Strategic Framework”<sup>39</sup> and also by ESIF Partnership Agreements in accordance with Article 11 (f) and Article 15 (2) (a) (ii) of the CPR.

At the level of the different types of EU programmes, the overall approach is implemented through further regulatory provisions that explicitly mention macro-regional and sea basin strategies. They are found in the CPR and the Regulation on European territorial cooperation (ETC Regulation)<sup>40</sup>, but also in the IPA II Regulation<sup>41</sup> and the Commission’s Implementing Regulation for IPA II<sup>42</sup> as well as in the ENI Regulation<sup>43</sup>. Basically, these provisions set out clear requirements for supporting an implementation of macro-regional and sea basin strategies.

- ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal and under the ETC goal have to set out their contribution to such strategies<sup>44</sup>, whereas IPA II and ENI programmes have to contribute to or to be coherent with these strategies.<sup>45</sup>
- Furthermore, ESIF programmes are expected to mobilise (or “earmark”) parts of their Union contribution for supporting an implementation of macro-regional or sea basin strategies. This emanates from point 7.3 (2) in Annex I to the CPR<sup>46</sup> and can be considered a geographically specific alignment of ESIF funding within the general approach of aligning the ESIF to provide complementary support for a delivery of the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, which is set out in Article 4 (1) of the CPR and is also further specified by other articles of that regulation.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup>Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.

<sup>39</sup>European Commission (2013a)

<sup>40</sup>Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal.

<sup>41</sup>Regulation (EU) No. 231/2014 establishing the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II)

<sup>42</sup>Commission Implementing Regulation for IPA II (EU) No 447/2014

<sup>43</sup>Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI).

<sup>44</sup>i.e. Article 27 (3) and Article 96 (3) (e) of the CPR; Article 8 (3) (d) of the ETC Regulation

<sup>45</sup>i.e. Article 9 (5) of the IPA II Regulation, Article 4 (2) (c) of the IPA II Commission Implementing Regulation, Article 8 (5) of the ENI Regulation

<sup>46</sup>“In accordance with point (a) (ii) of Article 15(2) of this Regulation and the relevant provisions of the Fund-specific rules Member States shall seek to ensure successful mobilisation of Union funding for macro-regional and sea- basin strategies in line with the needs of the programme area identified by the Member States.”

<sup>47</sup>e.g. Article 11 (a), Article 15 (1) (a) and Article 27 (1) of the CPR.

- Finally, Article 111 (4) (d) of the CPR and Article 14 (4) of the ETC Regulation require from national/regional and cooperation programmes under the ESIF to set out their contributions to macro-regional and sea basin strategies in the comprehensive Annual Implementation Reports for 2017 and 2019 as well as in the Final Report.

In the funds-specific regulations for the ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund and EAFRD as well as in the Commission Implementing Regulations for the ESIF<sup>48</sup> and for ENI cross-border cooperation programmes<sup>49</sup>, no further explicit provisions on macro-regional or sea-basin strategies are included.

The above-described set of rules makes clear that action has to be taken mostly during the preparation phase of strategic reference documents and of the individual EU funding programmes (i.e. adequate consideration of macro-regional strategies; setting out the envisaged contribution to the objectives of macro-regional strategies), but only to some extent during the ongoing implementation and final phase of the programme cycle (i.e. reporting on the actual contribution to macro-regional strategies).

#### **“Synergy-enabling rules” and other non-regulatory actions / approaches / tools that support an implementation of macro-regional strategies**

The current EU regulations also include a number of other provisions without explicit references to macro-regional and sea basin strategies that create options which ESIF and IPA II programmes may use for enhancing cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

These so-called synergy-enabling rules<sup>50</sup> can be applied within the programme-specific provisions on implementation, eligibility and financing, either at priority axis level or in a programme-wide context.

#### **Box 2. Regulatory provisions creating options for ESIF programmes to support macro-regional cooperation**

All ESIF and IPA II programmes can use a **first option**, which is created by different regulatory provisions allowing programmes to dedicate variable shares of their funding to operations that are located outside the programme area. Article 70 (2) of the CPR stipulates a possibility that up to 15% of the support from the ERDF, CF and EMFF at the level of the priority or up to 5% of the support from the EAFRD at the level of the programme can be dedicated to operations that are located outside the programme area but within the Union. Also Article 13 (3) of the ESF Regulation allows that expenditure occurred outside the Union can be eligible up to 3% of the budget of an ESF operational programme or the ESF part of a multi fund programme.

<sup>48</sup>Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 215/2014 laying down rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

<sup>49</sup>Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 897/2014 laying down specific provisions for the implementation of cross-border cooperation programmes financed under the ENI.

<sup>50</sup>See on this general term: European Commission, DG Regional and Urban policy (2014), pp.4-5

Finally, Article 20 (2) (b) of the ETC Regulation and Article 44 (2) (b) of the IPA II Commission Implementing Regulation stipulate a possibility that up to 20% can be allocated to operations which are located outside the Union part of the programme area (ETC) or outside the programme area (IPA II).

All ESIF programmes can use a **second option**, which is created by Article 65 (11) of the CPR. It provides for a possibility of cumulating grants from different EU funding instruments (or from one or more ESI Funds through one or more programmes and other Union instruments) for the same beneficiary or the same project, provided that the same expenditure/cost item does not receive support also from another EU fund (from the same Fund under different programmes, from another Fund or from other Union instruments).

A **third option**, only for ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal, is created by Article 96 (3) (d) of the CPR. It foresees that interregional+ or transnational actions with beneficiaries located in at least one other Member State or region belonging to the EU can be established in order to support the integrated approach to territorial development under a programme.

A **fourth option**, again only for ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal, is created by Article 120 (3) of the CPR. This provision foresees that the maximum co-financing rate can be increased for each priority axis dedicated to transnational cooperation in accordance with fund-specific rules.

All ESIF programmes can use a **fifth option**, which emerges from the new intervention concepts promoting an integrated approach to territorial development. They are generally introduced by the CPR on grounds of Articles 32-35 (Community-led Local Development, CLLD), Article 36 (Integrated Territorial Investment - ITI) and Article 104 (1) (Joint Action Plans - JAP). These concepts also apply to the ETC goal for which the ETC Regulation sets out specific implementation provisions on JAP (Article 9), CLLD (Article 10) and ITI (Article 10).<sup>51</sup>

In addition, EU funding programmes can also apply a wide range of other actions and approaches / tools that are not emanating from provisions in the EU regulations. An implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR can be supported by:

- ensuring a direct involvement of national key stakeholders of the EUSDR (e.g. Priority Area Coordinators, members of Priority Area Steering Groups, National Coordinators) or of the EUSAIR (e.g. Pillar Coordinators, members of the Governing Board or of Thematic Steering Groups, National Coordinators) into the elaboration of EU funding programmes;

---

<sup>51</sup> The new instruments can also be used by cross-border cooperation programmes under IPA II, in accordance with Article 34 (3) of the Commission's Implementing Regulation for IPA II.

- explicitly mentioning EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related actions or measures within a programme's priority axes and investment priorities;
- providing targeted guidance / practical advice to applicants in order to stimulate an initiation of operations that support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR;
- introducing specific approaches into a programme's application and selection processes for operations, some of which were already suggested in the CPR (i.e. Annex I, point 7.3) in order to ensure a successful mobilisation of Union funding for macro-regional strategies (e.g. organising specific calls for macro-regional projects; giving priority to operations with macro-regional relevance in the selection process);
- introducing specific approaches into a programme's monitoring and evaluation activities in order to create appropriate preconditions for adequately determining and reporting the actual contribution of programmes to an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR;
- using a programme's communication strategy and related activities in order to promote the EUSDR or EUSAIR within the programme context;
- a direct participation of programme-level stakeholders in events organised at the EUSDR or EUSAIR levels.

An application of the above-mentioned synergy-enabling rules and also of the other actions / approaches / tools takes place in all stages of the programme cycle but is largely dependent upon the own initiative and good will of programme-level stakeholders.

### **Coordination, cooperation and information exchange for supporting an implementation of macro-regional strategies**

The Commission report on the added value of macro-regional strategies identified coordination as an objective of the macro-regional approach and also as one of the five principles of the macro-regional concept<sup>52</sup>, while the Commission report on governance stresses that coordination at the macro-regional and national levels is crucial for supporting an implementation of macro-regional strategies.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, an earlier analysis of ways for better integrating the EUSBSR into EU funding instruments highlighted that also a number of organisational and methodological changes need to occur in the strategic and programme-level governance of the ESIF, so that the latter can more effectively support an achievement of macro-regional strategy objectives<sup>54</sup>. Since these aspects are also of high relevance for this study, we present below a generalised version of the most important recommendations that were formulated for the EUSBSR.

---

<sup>52</sup>The objective (of the macro-regional approach) is a coordinated response to issues better handled together than separately (...). The approach encourages participants to overcome not only national frontiers, but also barriers to thinking more strategically and imaginatively about the opportunities available. (...) The concept also incorporates principles of: (...) coordination – policies, strategies and funding resources should avoid compartmentalisation whether between sectorial policies, actors or different tiers of government; (...). See: European Commission (2013b), pp. 2, 3

<sup>53</sup>A strong and operational macro-regional strategy needs professional management and coordination, both at national and macro-regional level. This coordination is the link between the political leadership and those charged with implementation. It includes tasks such as operational guidance, reporting and evaluation of performance, national/regional coordination, and facilitation of major events. It should include cooperation with existing regional organisations. See: European Commission (2014a), p.6

<sup>54</sup> ESTEP (2013), p.15

**Box 3. Recommendations for intensifying coordination and cooperation to support an implementation of macro-regional strategies<sup>55</sup>**

**For ensuring an articulated use of the ESIF and other EU instruments in support of an implementation of macro-regional strategies, it is recommended to ...**

... consider coordination and cooperation activities as a core component of a territorial or sectorial development strategy and clarify from the beginning of the strategy building which cooperation interests to serve and activities to implement (e.g. through internal and external consultation processes);

... define the coordination and cooperation arrangements between different Funds and implementation instruments for ensuring their articulated use, by specifying responsible structures and practical coordination mechanisms or monitoring tools that have to be set up between the respective ministries and bodies involved in the implementation of national and regional programmes;

... strengthen national inter-ministerial coordination functions and responsibility for the strategic planning, operational implementation and monitoring of a macro-regional strategy (e.g. by setting-up a national coordination committee with regular inter-ministerial meetings that involve ministries/departments in charge of policy forming and managing authorities/bodies responsible for the implementation of programmes);

... take into account the governmental organisation and the respective coordination and leadership capacities of different governmental institutions and consider, if necessary, a review and adaptation of the institutional organisation and working methods by involving closely the line ministries into this process;

... ensure that the National Coordinator and responsible persons for Priority Area Coordination at national level participate with programme-responsible bodies (e.g. Managing Authorities) in the coordination body set up at national level;

... ensure that the National Coordinator and responsible persons for Priority Area Coordination at national level seat in the Monitoring Committees of relevant programmes, as regular meetings and reciprocal membership facilitate a coordinated implementation of policy instruments;

... ensure that national policy planners and implementers are also working together with National Coordinators, relevant Priority Area Coordinators and corresponding ministries in the partner countries;

---

<sup>55</sup> Own adaptation of text elements presented in: ESTEP (2013), pp.13-17, 44

... set up or use existing transnational platforms for informal and formal dialogue between public administrations and different actors and undertake coordination initiatives to build the necessary transnational / interregional cooperation agreements with relevant public authorities and social and economic actors.

Because coordination has become one of the general principles for the ESIF in the period 2014-2020 (i.e. Article 4 (6) of the CPR), strategic reference documents and especially the different types of ESIF programmes have to consider regulatory provisions that include direct requirements or indirect options for ensuring a more coherent implementation of macro-regional (and sea basin) strategies.

- Several direct requirements exist in case of cooperation activities under the ESIF. In accordance with point 7.1 of Annex I to the CPR, general coordination and complementarity have to be ensured between cooperation activities and other actions supported by the ESIF. Within this context and in cases where macro-regional or sea basin strategies have been put in place, it is explicitly stated that the efficient implementation of such strategies shall also be ensured by coordination with other Union-funded instruments and other relevant instruments (point 7.1 (4) of Annex I to the CPR). A further general provision that supports coordination in the context of ETC also emerges from Article 2 (ii) of the Commission Delegated Regulation on the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP):<sup>56</sup> in case of ETC programmes, Member States may involve in the partnership also authorities or bodies that are involved in the development or implementation of a macro-regional or sea-basin strategy in the programme area, including Priority Area Coordinators for macro-regional strategies.<sup>57</sup> Finally, the ETC Regulation also foresees in Article 7 (1) (b) that transnational cooperation may enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by developing and coordinating macro-regional and sea-basin strategies (i.e. Investment Priority 11c).
- Indirect options for all types of ESIF programmes emanate from the wider approach to coordination and synergies between the ESIF and other Union policies or instruments that is set out in point 4 of Annex I to the CPR. These provisions are relevant for the strategic planning of the ESIF in the Member States' Partnership Agreements and in particular for the individual ESIF programmes<sup>58</sup>. The variety of funding instruments addressed by the CPR's wider coordination approach also includes ENI and IPA, for which increasing coordination and complementarity is considered particularly important (i.e. point 4.9 (1)).

<sup>56</sup>Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds.

<sup>57</sup>see: Article 2 (ii) of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds.

<sup>58</sup>ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal as well as under the ETC goal are required to describe and set up adequate procedures in accordance with Article 96 (6) (a) of the CPR and Article 8 (5) (a) of the ETC Regulation.

Furthermore, also cooperation programmes under IPA II and ENI may consider several provisions of their respectively relevant regulations which indirectly create options for supporting an implementation of macro-regional and sea basin strategies. These are the coordination provisions set out under the “principle of ownership” that is defined in Article 4 (2) of the IPA II Commission Implementing Regulation (esp. points (a), (b) and (d)) as well as the provisions on coherence and donor coordination set out by Article 5 of the ENI Regulation.

The entirety of these legal provisions creates many possibilities for all types of EU funding programmes to become active on supporting a more coherent implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. Programmes can regularly and actively participate in formal inter-ministerial coordination procedures established at the national or regional levels, set up internal processes for coordination and regular information exchange on the EUSDR or EUSAIR, involve national EUSDR- or EUSAIR-stakeholders in their Monitoring Committee / Joint Monitoring Committee<sup>59</sup> and initiate cooperation or information exchange with other administrations and EU programmes in the domestic context or in Member States and non-EU countries of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

### **Towards a systematic embedding of the EUSDR and EUSAIR into EU funding programmes**

The above-described policy context in the EUSDR and EUSAIR as well as the overview on methods and tools makes clear that **systematic embedding is the result of a comprehensive and ongoing process** which comprises a variety of actions that have to be undertaken in the following three main dimensions: (1) actions for ensuring compliance with the provisions on macro-regional strategies in the relevant EU regulations governing the funding period 2014-2020, (2) actions for applying “synergy-enabling rules” and other non-regulatory approaches / tools to support the implementation of a macro-regional strategy and finally (3) actions in the field of coordination, cooperation and information exchange to ensure a more coherent implementation of a macro-regional strategy.

By arranging these possible actions from the three main dimensions according to the relevant phases of a programmes’ life cycle, one obtains a sort of “checklist” that allows verifying in how far EU funding programmes have ensured a systematic embedding of the EUSDR and EUSAIR (see: Table 2).<sup>60</sup> The tabular presentation also shows that for most of these specific actions no direct legal provisions (or obligations) exist in the current EU regulations for the period 2014-2020. This makes clear that **a systematic embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR primarily relies upon the own initiative of EU funding programmes and that key stakeholders involved in the programme-level decision making process bear considerable responsibility for achieving this.**

However, **embedding should not be considered a “one-way street” because macro-regional strategies can generate various benefits in different stages of the programme cycle** (i.e.

---

<sup>59</sup>e.g. National Coordinators, Priority Area Coordinators, Pillar Coordinators, members of Priority Area steering groups or of Thematic Steering Groups.

<sup>60</sup>This checklist can, with slight modifications, also be applied to EU funding programmes that are implemented in the EUSBSR and EUSALP in order to verify in how far the relevant macro-regional strategies are truly integrated into the programme context.

elaboration phase, ongoing implementation and steering phase, finalisation / closure phase), as highlighted by a study on the added value of macro-regional strategies published by Interact<sup>61</sup>. These added value elements help to improve policy-orientation, efficiency and coherence of EU funding programmes, but unfortunately they are often not known to programme-level stakeholders. Therefore, possible win-win situations between EU funding programmes and macro-regional strategies are often not yet fully exploited.<sup>62</sup>

**Table 1. Checklist for a systematic embedding of the EUSDR / EUSAIR into strategic reference documents and EU funding programmes**

<b>Core activities in different phases of the programme life cycle</b>	<b>Specific actions of EU funding programmes which support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR</b>	<b>Existing legal provisions</b>
<b>Preparation Phase (strategic reference documents and EU funding programmes)</b>		
Elaboration of ESIF partnership agreements for the IfGJ and ETC goals and of strategic or country-specific programming documents for IPA and ENI	Involvement and/or consultation of national EUSDR- or EUSAIR-stakeholders (NC, PACs, Pillar Coordinators members of PA steering groups or of TSGs)	No
	Consultation of macro-regional networks or initiatives existing in the EUSDR (*) or the EUSAIR (**)	No
	Description of the envisaged contribution to the EUSDR / EUSAIR within the integrated approach to territorial development (ESIF) or of the coherence with objectives of the EUSDR / EUSAIR (IPA II / ENI)	Yes
	Consideration of the EUSDR and EUSAIR in the definition of country-wide arrangements for ensuring coordination, complementarity and coherence between the ESIF and the ESIF and other relevant Union-funded instruments (e.g. definition of country-wide and/or regional-level processes for coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR or EUSAIR).	Yes  No (IPA & ENI)

<sup>61</sup>Interact (2017)

<sup>62</sup>Interact (2017), pp.14-21; 25-29; Spatial Foresight (2016), pp.2, 5-7

Core activities in different phases of the programme life cycle	Specific actions of EU funding programmes which support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Existing legal provisions
Partnership-based elaboration and finalisation of national / regional programmes for IfGJ goal and of cooperation programmes for ETC, IPA II and ENI	Involvement of national EUSDR- or EUSAIR-stakeholders (NC, PACs, Pillar Coordinators, members of PA steering groups or of TSGs)	No
	Consultation of macro-regional networks or initiatives existing in the EUSDR (*) or the EUSAIR (**)	No
	Identification and description of the programmes' envisaged contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR	Yes
	Application of interregional / transnational cooperation (***) to support macro-regional activities in the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Yes
	Application of new intervention concepts promoting an integrated approach to territorial development (i.e. JAP, CLLD and ITI) for supporting the EUSDR or EUSAIR.	Yes
	Inclusion of specific actions that support an implementation of the EUSDR / EUSAIR under the programmes' priority axes and/or specific investment priorities	No
	Inclusion of specific provisions into the "guiding principles for a selection of operations" that support macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Yes (indirectly)
	Application of synergy-enabling rules for financing and eligibility to facilitate / enhance support for macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR (i.e. funds-specific provisions on an eligibility of operations depending on location; cumulating grants from different EU funding instruments; increasing the maximum co-financing rate)	Yes

Core activities in different phases of the programme life cycle	Specific actions of EU funding programmes which support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Existing legal provisions
	“Earmarking” of parts of a programme’s total EU contribution that is explicitly dedicated to support macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR	No
	Consideration of the EUSDR and EUSAIR in the definition of programme-level arrangements for ensuring coordination, complementarity and coherence with other ESIF and EU funding instruments (e.g. definition of programme-specific processes for coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR or EUSAIR)	Yes
<b>Early Starting Phase (EU funding programmes only)</b>		
Set-up of arrangements for coordination, complementarity and coherence with other ESIF or EU instruments	Establishment of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related coordination and exchange of information activities within the programme (e.g. Monitoring Committee), but also of cooperation activities with other administrations or funding programmes in the domestic context and in other countries / regions of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.	No
Set-up of decision-making and management structures	Inclusion of national EUSDR- or EUSAIR-stakeholders (e.g. NC, PACs, Pillar Coordinators, members of PA steering groups or of TSGs) into the programme Monitoring Committee	Yes (only ETC) <sup>63</sup>  No (other programmes)
Elaboration of the Communication Strategy	Inclusion of specific actions that promote the EUSDR and/or EUSAIR towards stakeholders in the programme area and other actors in wider macro-regional context	No

<sup>63</sup> Article 2 (ii) of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds stipulates that in case of ETC programmes, Member States may involve in the partnership also authorities or bodies that are involved in the development or implementation of a macro-regional or sea-basin strategy in the programme area, including Priority Area Coordinators for macro-regional strategies.

Core activities in different phases of the programme life cycle	Specific actions of EU funding programmes which support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Existing legal provisions
Elaboration of the Evaluation Plan	Inclusion of specific actions for evaluating a programme's actual contribution to the EUSDR and/or EUSAIR	No
Design and set up of the programme monitoring system	Inclusion of a specific section into the progress reporting form for approved operations to indicate the contributions to the EUSDR or EUSDR	No
	Inclusion of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related indicators or criteria into the programme's monitoring system	No
Definition of the processes for an application and selection of operations	Inclusion of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related information into programme manuals or other guidance resources for applicants	No
	Inclusion of a specific section into application forms for describing a proposals' envisaged contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR	No
	Inclusion of specific selection criteria for prioritising proposals that are of relevance for the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Yes (indirectly)
<b>Implementation Phase (EU funding programmes only)</b>		
Ongoing work of decision-making and management bodies	Regular and active involvement of the Managing Authority (or of the responsible line ministry) in the established national / regional processes ensuring coordination and information exchange on the EUSDR or EUSAIR	No
	Regular direct interaction of the programme with the macro-regional level (e.g. through MA representatives or MC members also acting in formal functions or structures of the EUSDR or EUSAIR) and use of this interaction potential in the ongoing work e.g. within Monitoring Committee	No
	Regular cooperation and information exchange with other funding programmes (EU, national, regional) and administrations from the domestic context or from other EUSDR / EUSAIR countries	No

Core activities in different phases of the programme life cycle	Specific actions of EU funding programmes which support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Existing legal provisions
Ongoing information and assistance to potential beneficiaries	Organisation of specific events for informing about opportunities linked to macro-regional cooperation or about implementation modalities of specific funding schemes / calls that support the EUSDR or EUSAIR (see also below communication & information activities)	No
Implementation of priority axes and investment priorities	Organisation of specific calls for operations with relevance for the EUSDR and/or EUSAIR or direct support to macro-regional projects defined in the Action Plans of both Strategies	Yes (indirectly)
Ongoing data gathering and monitoring activities	Collection of basic information on EUSDR- or EUSDR-related activities through the formal progress reporting of approved operations	No
	Processing and registration of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related information in the programme's monitoring system (e.g. by making use of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related indicators or criteria).	No
Periodic reporting on programme implementation	Description of a programmes' qualitative and quantitative (i.e. financial) contribution to the EUSDR and/or EUSAIR in the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs)	Yes
Programme-level evaluation activities	Realisation of shorter "thematic evaluations" or "ad-hoc evaluations" on macro-regional cooperation activities supported under the programme	No
Ongoing communication and information activities	Participation of programme representatives (i.e. Managing Authority, Monitoring Committee members) in events and workshops / seminars organised at the EUSDR or EUSAIR levels for gathering information about ongoing developments at the macro-regional levels and for promoting the own programme (e.g. general achievements, specific projects)	No

Core activities in different phases of the programme life cycle	Specific actions of EU funding programmes which support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Existing legal provisions
	Realisation of communication / promotion activities to raise awareness about the EUSDR or EUSAIR among actors potentially interested in macro-regional cooperation and among the wider public (e.g. through events, newsletters or websites and other appropriate information formats)	No
<p>(*) e.g. International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), Danube Commission, the Central European Initiative, the Energy Community and the Regional Co-operation Council etc.</p> <p>(**) e.g. the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII), the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce (AIC Forum), the Adriatic Ionian Euroregion (AIE) etc.</p> <p>(***) Only national/regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs (IfGJ) goal</p>		

### 3. Role of the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the strategic reference documents and in the approved EU funding programmes

This chapter looks at the preparation phase of the programming period 2014-2020 in order to see which status of embedding the EUSDR or EUSAIR was reached just before the actual start of the implementation process. For this to be achieved, we briefly analyse the role of the EUSDR or EUSAIR in different strategic reference documents elaborated for the ESIF, IPA II and ENI (Sections 3.1 and 3.2) and then examine in more detail how both strategies were considered during the elaboration of EU funding programmes and within the wider strategy of the approved programming documents (Section 3.3).

#### 3.1. Partnership Agreements of EU Member States involved in the EUSDR

The ESIF Partnership Agreements of the nine EU Member States involved in the EUSDR have all integrated the ESIF's overall approach on EU macro-regional and sea basin strategies (i.e. Annex I of the CPR) into the country-specific strategic planning of ESIF interventions and the related integrated approach to territorial development. However, a summary overview on the main findings of our analysis shows (see: Annex 4 - Table A) that these Partnership Agreements have quite differently taken into account the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

**The role of the EUSDR or EUSAIR** is described fairly differently under the main priority areas for cooperation within the Partnership Agreements. While only one Partnership Agreement provided a weak description (HU), the others have done this either adequately (CZ, DE, SK) or extensively (AT, BG, HR, RO, SI). The latter Partnership Agreements can be considered examples of good practice because they allocate an important role to the EUSDR or EUSAIR in their overall strategic approach and also assess the envisaged national contribution to relevant strategies in a detailed way.

**The envisaged national contributions to the EUSDR or EUSAIR** are also very different in the examined Partnership Agreements, which often is a direct result of the respective “national development priorities” at stake. Six out of the nine Partnership Agreements envisage thematically wide national contributions to the EUSDR or EUSAIR: they address several pillars and also a larger number of the Priority Areas / Topics set out in the Action Plans of each Strategy (EUSDR: CZ, DE, HU, RO, SK; EUSAIR: HR). The other three Agreements envisage national contributions to only some pillars and a limited number of EUSDR Priority Areas or EUSAIR Topics (EUSDR: AT, BG, HR, SI; EUSAIR: SI).

Most Partnership Agreements do not address the issue of **allocating parts of the programmes’ ESIF support to operations that are located outside their eligible areas**. The use of this option for supporting macro-regional cooperation is left in these cases to the entire discretion of the individual programmes, just as foreseen by the provisions in the relevant EU regulations.<sup>64</sup>

Only the Partnership Agreements of Bulgaria and Germany address this issue indirectly in connection to transnational or interregional cooperation activities that are set up by programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal in accordance with Article 96 (3) (d) of the CPR. Both Agreements generally acknowledge the territorial needs or the added value that motivate programmes to realise such activities<sup>65</sup>, but only the German Agreement defines a number of basic funding rules<sup>66</sup> for cases that will use this option. However, the main rationale of these Germany-wide rules is that of keeping ESIF-funding primarily within the country.

All Partnership Agreements foresee **specific county-wide processes for coordination, cooperation and exchange of information on the EUSDR or EUSAIR**. These processes are frequently embedded into the wider domestic arrangements set up for ensuring coordination between the ESIF and between the ESIF and other relevant policies, strategies or instruments at Union or national level. However, these EUSDR- and

---

<sup>64</sup> i.e. Article 70 (2) (b) of the CPR, Article 13 (3) of the ESF Regulation, Article 20 (2) (b) of the ETC Regulation and Article 44 (2) (b) of the IPA II Commission Implementing Regulation

<sup>65</sup> e.g. Germany: support of projects between different German Länder or with other Member States, in case of metropolitan or integration areas and in natural areas representing a coherent tourism destination as well as in other functional areas or functional contexts such as innovation clusters involving various European regions. Bulgaria: exchange of information and experiences in relevant policy fields, establishment of networks and twinning with actors from other countries, testing of innovative policy approaches on ground of good practices existing elsewhere etc.

<sup>66</sup> These funding rules establish clear conditions for the use of Article 70 (2) (b) and of Article 65 (11) of the CPR. (1) Investment projects are generally supported by the operational programme and the rules which apply at the place of investment. (2) The decisive support criteria for non-investment projects are the location of the project, or alternatively if such a place does not exist or a series of events is planned, the legal domicile of the beneficiary so that the funding remains in the respective country(ies). (3) In exceptional cases, projects can in advance be broken down into country-specific funding shares which are then examined and approved by the respective operational programmes (and separately supported according to Article 65 (11) of the CPR).

EUSAIR-related processes are described at different levels of detail in the finalised documents: three Agreements include extensive descriptions (AT, BG, HR), whereas the others describe such processes either adequately (HU, SI, SK, CZ, DE) or weakly (RO).

These EUSDR- and EUSAIR-related processes are established in accordance with the main features that characterise the governance system of each country concerned. Most countries have set up formal processes for horizontal (inter-ministerial) coordination and information exchange at the central government level (HU, SI, SK, CZ, RO, BG, HR). Two countries apply vertical processes of coordination cooperation and information exchange that involve the respective federal governments and the governments of the concerned regions (DE, AT). More detailed information on the structural features and working practices of these processes is given in Chapter 5 of this study.

### **3.2. EU-level reference documents and country-specific programming documents elaborated for IPA II and ENI**

In order to see how both macro-regional strategies were taken into account at the strategic level of IPA II and ENI, the study has examined relevant EU-level reference documents<sup>67</sup> and also programming documents for several Western Balkan non-EU countries involved in the EUSDR or EUSAIR (i.e. Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina)<sup>68</sup>. The main findings of the in-depth analysis are summarised in an overview table that can be found in the Annex part of this study (see: Annex 4 – Table B).

The overview reveals that information on macro-regional (and sea-basin) strategies and in particular on the contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR is weak in most of these EU-level and country-specific documents.

- Only the Indicative IPA II Strategy Paper for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Indicative IPA II Strategy Paper for Montenegro provide an adequate description of their consideration of and/or contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR (see: Box 4).
- The other programming documents are characterised either by weaknesses (i.e. IPA II Multi-Country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020) or even by significant shortcomings in this respect (i.e. Indicative IPA II Strategy Paper for Serbia; ENI Programming document for EU support to Cross-Border Cooperation 2014-2020).

---

<sup>67</sup> IPA II Multi-Country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020 (European Commission, DG Enlargement, 2014a), ENI Programming document for EU support to Cross-Border Cooperation 2014-2020 (European Commission, DG Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid, no date mentioned)

<sup>68</sup> Indicative IPA II Country Strategy Paper Bosnia and Herzegovina (European Commission, DG Enlargement, 2014b); Indicative IPA II Country Strategy Paper Montenegro (European Commission, DG Enlargement, 2014c); Indicative IPA II Country Strategy Paper Serbia (European Commission, DG Enlargement, 2014d)

The above situation may partly be explained by the fact that EU regulations governing the IPA II and ENI only set out very general provisions on macro-regional (and sea-basin) strategies, which are clearly less specific than the CPR provisions applying to the Common Strategic Framework and to the ESIF Partnership Agreements.

Significant shortcomings also exist when it comes to defining arrangements for coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR or EUSAIR. In fact, none of the examined EU-level and country-wide documents includes a description of specific procedures or processes for coordination, cooperation and an exchange of information to support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

**Box 4. Consideration of the EUSDR and EUSAIR in strategy papers for selected Western Balkan non-EU countries**

The IPA Indicative Country Strategy Papers for the three Western Balkan countries all mention that they form part of the EUSDR and EUSAIR and that the Strategy Papers are in line with these macro-regional strategies. The most direct references on a contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR pillars can be found in the **Indicative Strategy Paper for Bosnia and Herzegovina** (i.e. in the field of “education, employment and social policies” and in the context of “competitiveness and innovation”) and also in the **Indicative Strategy Paper for Montenegro** (i.e. in the fields of “environment and climate action” and “transport”).

**3.3. Consideration of the EUSDR or EUSAIR during the elaboration of the 23 EU funding programmes and in the final programming documents**

During the preparation phase, EU funding programmes were mainly obliged to take into account the objectives of relevant macro-regional (or sea basin) strategies and to define their envisaged contributions, which then had to be set out in the final programme documents. Apart from this, EU funding programmes were largely free to use (or not) specific instruments or approaches/tools and financial resources that allow achieving their foreseen contributions to relevant macro-regional or sea basin strategies.

For getting an impression about the early status of embedding the EUSDR or EUSAIR into the 23 EU funding programmes, we analysed the elaboration process and the envisaged programme contributions to both strategies as well as the operational implementing provisions foreseen in the programme documents (i.e. interventions under priority axes and investment priorities; provisions on the eligibility of operations; realised budgetary allocations).

**Role of the EUSDR and EUSAIR during the programme elaboration process**

An overview on the results of our in-depth analysis (see: Annex 5) shows that the large majority of the 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes considered the EUSDR and

EUSAIR either extensively or adequately when elaborating the content of their future programme strategy.

**The involvement of relevant national or regional EUSDR- and EUSAIR-stakeholders** (e.g. National Coordinators, EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators, EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators) in the elaboration process was either intensive or adequate under 19 EU funding programmes<sup>69</sup> and in general also considered helpful.

Among the 23 programmes examined, 9 programmes can be considered good practice<sup>70</sup> because their elaboration has intensively involved national/regional EUSDR or EUSAIR stakeholders and also extensively considered the EUSDR or EUSAIR. Under several of these programmes (see: Box 5), the elaboration of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related contents for the future programme strategies involved inter-ministerial coordination and also vertical or cross-programme cooperation and information exchange among different administrative stakeholders. Also other domestic stakeholders have made inputs to the elaboration process, which sometimes even led to an introduction of concrete EUSDR-related interventions that were initially not planned and helped to better focus programme strategies on the EUSDR (Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg VA Romania-Bulgaria Programme).

Despite of this often substantial participation of national EUSDR or EUSAIR stakeholders, it can be observed that none of the 23 examined EU funding programmes has either directly or indirectly involved other macro-regional structures or networks / initiatives from the EUSDR<sup>71</sup> or EUSAIR<sup>72</sup> in the elaboration process.

Nevertheless, the above-described overall situation seems to be fairly different from that observed by the earlier Interact study on the EUSBSR: here, the programme elaboration process was characterised by a low involvement of EUSBSR actors<sup>73</sup> and also by limited coordination between programmes.

#### **Box 5. Extensive consideration of the EUSDR / EUSAIR and intense stakeholder participation during the programming process**

The preparation of the **ERDF Programme Austria** directly and intensively involved a wide range of domestic stakeholders concerned by the EUSDR (i.e. federal

<sup>69</sup> i.e. Only four national ESIF programmes show evident weaknesses in this respect (i.e. Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Environment Programme Czech Republic; Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Czech Republic; Programme for the implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia).

<sup>70</sup> i.e. ERDF Programme Austria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern; Human Resources development Programme Bulgaria; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg VA Romania-Bulgaria Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro.

<sup>71</sup> e.g. the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the Danube Commission, the Central European Initiative, the Energy Community and the Regional Co-operation Council.

<sup>72</sup> e.g. the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII), the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce (AIC Forum) and the Adriatic Ionian Euroregion (AIE).

<sup>73</sup> "EUSBSR actors are not systematically involved in the elaboration of the programmes. Even when they appear in the lists of actors annexed to most OPs and the CP (cooperation programme), their concrete contributions and influence are in most cases limited". Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c), pp.8, 24

chancellery, other federal ministries, governments & administrations of all Austrian provinces, local authorities, economic and social partners etc.). During the elaboration of the country-wide ERDF programme, relevant documents for existing or upcoming macro-regional strategies (EUSDR, future EUSALP) were systematically considered in order to identify relevant contribution potentials. The latter aspect was mainly realised during the drafting process of the Austrian Partnership Agreement, which considered the EUSDR explicitly as one of the strategic reference documents for achieving thematic concentration during the preparation phase (e.g. at the same level as the Europe 2020 Strategy).

The elaboration processes of the **ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg**, the **ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg** and the **ERDF Programme Bayern** have all directly and intensively involved the ministries or administrative units ensuring horizontal coordination on all EUSDR-related matters within the respective Land governments<sup>74</sup>, but also other Land-ministries from Baden-Württemberg and Bayern that are acting as PACs for the EUSDR Priority Areas 6 and 8. In addition, other regional stakeholders potentially concerned by the EUSDR were directly or indirectly involved. During the preparation phase of the ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg, coordination on EUSDR-related issues took place with the ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg and also with the ERDF Programme Bayern. Also the ERDF Programme Bayern realised coordination on EUSDR-related issues during the elaboration phase with the EAFRD Programme Bayern.

The elaboration of the **Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria** directly involved important national EUSDR stakeholders and also other EUSDR-relevant domestic stakeholders (e.g. Regional Development Councils of NUTS II regions, national representative organisations of employers, workers and employees, the National Association of Municipalities and also non-governmental organisations in the field of social inclusion, social care, youth or culture). Especially the latter, through their direct involvement in the thematic working group for the programming, have highlighted the need to take into account the EUSDR Priority Areas in the programme. This led to an incorporation of EUSDR-specific actions into the programme's priority axis 4 on "Transnational cooperation".

The **Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme** was from the very start conceived and launched as a transnational policy lever that will be vital for a sustained coordination of the EUSDR and for giving momentum to its future implementation. The Programming Committee (PC) included representatives from all participating countries and also several EUSDR National Coordinators (NCs) were permanent members of the national delegations to the PC. The NCs provided written inputs or reflections during the programme elaboration, both on the selection of thematic objectives and on the development of the programmes' intervention logic. Furthermore, three one-day meetings were organised with PACs (Ljubljana, May

---

<sup>74</sup> i.e. in Baden-Württemberg the service office of the "Special Representative for the EUSDR" located within the State Ministry of the Land (Staatsministerium); in Bayern the State Chancellery of the Land (Bayerische Staatskanzlei).

2013), NCs (Budapest, January 2014) and the European Commission (Brussels, September 2014) to foster appropriate coordination of the programme with the EUSDR during the programming phase. The PC also organised and facilitated a dialogue with relevant national and international stakeholders (incl. EUSDR stakeholders) and established a linkage to the national stakeholder consultation events held in most of the programme participating countries, in which again national EUSDR stakeholders took part. Finally, also the individual Danube partner states continuously involved their national EUSDR stakeholders - directly or indirectly - into the elaboration process. Overall, the Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme has clearly taken into consideration Article 2 (ii) of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership when establishing its support for developing and coordinating the EUSDR in accordance with Article 7 (b) of the ETC Regulation (i.e. under specific objective 4.2 of the programme).

The Joint Working Group for Programming of the **Interreg VA Romania-Bulgaria Programme** included the EUSDR office (established within the Romanian ministry of regional development where the Managing Authority is located), the former EUSDR National Contact Points, relevant PACs (i.e. Romania and Bulgaria coordinate together EUSDR Priority Area 3 "To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts") and also other members of steering groups for EUSDR Priority Areas. This broad participation also had positive effects, because the introduction of EUSDR-relevant interventions improving the navigability of the Danube River into the cooperation programme (i.e. specific objective 1.2. under priority axis 1) was directly resulting from of a proposal made by EUSDR-related stakeholders.

During the preparation phase of the **Interreg IPA Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro**, the Managing Authority and individual partner countries ensured an involvement of the former National Contact Points (NCPs) for the EUSDR and of the PACs for the EUSDR. This was done by inviting them to take part in public consultations and consultative workshops with stakeholders. The process of partner involvement was coordinated by the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds of the Republic of Croatia and by the Task Force in charge of preparing the programme.

**Only under some national ESIF programmes**, it can be observed that **an elaboration of the intervention strategy and a consideration of the EUSDR or EUSAIR were largely dissociated processes**. In case of the Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria, for example, strategy elaboration did not directly relate to issues addressed by the EUSDR. In case of other programmes, EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related elements and also the envisaged contribution to these Strategies were elaborated separately from the programmes' main intervention strategy and later "attached" to the programme (Large Infrastructures Programme Romania; Regional Development Programme Romania; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia) or integrated

into the strategy at a rather general level (Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia).

**The provisions on macro-regional strategies** in the CPR and other relevant EU regulations (ETC, IPA II, ENI) **were in general not perceived as an obstacle for planning macro-regional activities during the elaboration and finalisation of programmes.**

Especially the examined cooperation programmes were in general familiar with the direct and indirect provisions on macro-regional strategies in the ETC, IPA and ENI regulations and knew how to use these in the context of programming.

Only in case of some national ESIF programmes, it can be observed that authorities involved in the programming were not aware of all options that exist under the CPR for supporting macro-regional cooperation (Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia) or did not consider the provisions particularly helpful for ensuring an adequate consideration of the EUSDR and EUSAIR (Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia).

Overall, this situation is again clearly different from that observed in the EUSBSR, where several of the examined programmes perceived the provisions in EU regulations to be an obstacle for further cooperation.<sup>75</sup>

### **The foreseen contributions of EU funding programmes to the EUSDR and EUSAIR**

The large majority of the 23 examined programmes are fully or largely complying with the provisions in the relevant EU regulations, which require them to either set out their contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR<sup>76</sup> or to be coherent with these strategies<sup>77</sup>. The envisaged contributions to the EUSDR or EUSAIR took account of relevant country-wide development challenges (i.e. national ESIF programmes) or of specific needs existing in the concerned programme areas (i.e. regional ESIF programmes; cooperation programmes).

The overview on the results of our in-depth analysis (see: Annex 5) shows that **the description of contributions to the EUSDR and EUSAIR is either extensive or adequate under most national or regional ESIF programmes** (i.e. 14 out of 18 programmes)<sup>78</sup> **and also under the 5 cooperation programmes.** These 19 programmes provided clear and detailed descriptions in the section explicitly dedicated to macro-regional strategies. Some national or regional ESIF programmes also mention concrete examples for specific macro-regional themes and issues to be addressed by the

---

<sup>75</sup> "The CPR provides examples of how cooperation between ESI Funds programmes can be approached (...) and (...) also lists thematic fields where ESI Funds can be used. In spite of these concrete suggestions, interviewees consider that regulations do not describe possible contributions of the ESI Funds to the objectives of the EUSBSR with sufficient clarity. (...) Overall, interviews suggest that not all MAs fully perceive the possibilities offered by the new ESI Funds regulations." See: Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c), pp.8, 24, 25

<sup>76</sup> i.e. Article 27 (3) and Article 96 (3) (e) of the CPR (national / regional ESIF programmes); Article 8 (3) (d) of the ETC regulation (transnational and cross-border programmes).

<sup>77</sup> i.e. Article 9 (5) of the IPA II regulation and Article 4 (2) (c) of the Commission Implementing Regulation for IPA II (cross-border programmes); Article 8 (5) of the ENI regulation (cross-border programmes).

<sup>78</sup> Only four national ESIF programmes show evident weaknesses in this respect (i.e. Integrated Infrastructure Programme Slovakia; Environment Programme Czech Republic; Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Programme Czech Republic; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary).

planned interventions (e.g. ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; EAFRD Programme Bayern). Several descriptions are also supported by a specific annex that presents in detail how actions under the programme priority axes are matching the pillars and Priority Areas of the EUSDR. This is observed in case of the four ETC and IPA II cooperation programmes, but also under the Large Infrastructures Programme Romania. Several national or regional ESIF programmes have, in addition, also described their contribution in the first section dedicated to the programme strategy (e.g. ERDF Programme Austria; Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary). An innovative aspect observed in case of the Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia and the Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia is that the envisaged contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR is also directly used for justifying a selection of thematic objectives and investment priorities.

Only under 4 national ESIF programmes<sup>79</sup>, the description of the envisaged contribution is very short or general and does not provide much information about the precise EUSDR themes and issues addressed.

The **scope of the foreseen contributions** to themes and issues of the EUSDR or EUSAIR Action Plans starkly differs between the two programme types:

- **National or regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal envisage contributions that are in most cases focussed** (i.e. 15 out of 18 programmes). This means that the planned programme interventions expect to address only some pillars and a few of the related EUSDR Priority Areas or EUSAIR Topics that are defined in the Action Plans of both Strategies. A focussed contribution is frequently the result of a programmes' orientation on a particular strategic development theme (e.g. on large infrastructures or transport infrastructure, human resources development, environment, R&D / innovation etc.). Sometimes, a focussed contribution also emerges from a strong thematic concentration of programme strategies (e.g. ERDF Programme Bayern; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Regional Development Programme Romania) or from the fact that certain EUSDR policy areas and actions are not or only very marginally co-financed by the ESIF or by specific interventions of a programme (e.g. ERDF Programme Austria).
- **Cooperation programmes under ETC, IPA II and ENI all envisage wide contributions to the EUSDR<sup>80</sup>**, which means that programme interventions are expected to address most pillars and also a larger number of Priority Areas from the EUSDR Action Plan.

In order to see whether the described contributions are also well-reflecting the contents of the EUSDR or EUSAIR Action Plans, the study realised a **“strategy mapping**

---

<sup>79</sup> i.e. Integrated Infrastructure Programme Slovakia; Environment Programme Czech Republic; Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Programme Czech Republic; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary.

<sup>80</sup> A contribution to the EUSAIR is only envisaged by the Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro. This programme contribution is focussed.

**exercise”<sup>81</sup> for each of the 23 EU funding programmes that produced a generally positive result:**

- The large majority of the examined programmes (18 out of 23) show high degrees of correspondence between their foreseen contribution and the potentials identified by the strategy mapping. In case of national and regional ESIF programmes, a very good match of both was often facilitated by their focus on a specific development theme or by a strong thematic concentration. Across both programme types, however, the evidence suggests that especially an extensive consideration of the EUSDR or EUSAIR and intense stakeholder participation during the programming process have been decisive factors for achieving high degrees of correspondence.<sup>82</sup>
- Only 5 programmes show moderate or low degrees of correspondence. They have either neglected some important contribution potentials (i.e. Regional Development Programme Romania) or even considerably underestimated their real contribution potential (i.e. ERDF Programme Bayern; EAFRD Programme Bayern) and, in addition, also mentioned contributions for which no real importance could be detected if the envisaged programme interventions were looked at in more detail (i.e. Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova).

Still, a general aspect worth mentioning is that nearly all examined national or regional ESIF programmes have neglected contribution potentials to EUSDR pillar 4 and specific actions under Priority Area 10 (To step up institutional capacity and cooperation)<sup>83</sup>, as among the examined programmes, only the EAFRD Programme Bayern explicitly envisages a contribution to this aspect of the EUSDR Action Plan.

Out of the 23 EU funding programmes examined, **9 programmes can be considered good practice**<sup>84</sup> because they have extensively described their contributions to the EUSDR or EUSAIR and also achieved a high degree of correspondence under the study’s strategy mapping exercise.

**Planned interventions under priority axes and investment priorities of EU funding programmes**

The overview on results of our in-depth analysis (see: Annex 6) shows that the **descriptions of priority axes and investment priorities** rarely mention the EUSDR or EUSAIR and related actions that programmes envisage to support directly. However, 3

---

<sup>81</sup> This mapping exercise related the main strategy elements of ESIF programmes (i.e. priority axes and investment priorities/specific objectives) and of IPA II or ENI cooperation programmes (i.e. priority axes and thematic priorities/specific objectives or thematic objectives/priorities) to the four pillars of the EUSDR and/or EUSAIR in order to identify thematically corresponding EUSDR Priority Areas / actions or EUSAIR Topics / actions in the Action Plans of both macro-regional strategies.

<sup>82</sup> This is supported by the fact that nearly all programmes identified as good practices for the preparation phase (except the ERDF Programme Bayern) are also showing high degrees of correspondence under the strategy mapping.

<sup>83</sup> This weakness does - with one exception (ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova) - not exist in the context of the four other examined cooperation programmes, as they have identified a related potential.

<sup>84</sup> i.e. ERDF Programme Austria; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro.

national ESIF programmes<sup>85</sup> and also 3 ETC and IPA II cooperation programmes<sup>86</sup> included more substantial references to relevant macro-regional strategies and sometimes also gave concrete examples for EUSDR- or EUSDR-related actions that will be supported directly.

A specific approach that national and regional ESIF programmes could introduce into their intervention strategies for supporting the EUSDR or EUSAIR is the **realisation of interregional or transnational cooperation with beneficiaries from other EU Member States or regions** in accordance with the relevant provisions in different EU regulations.<sup>87</sup> However, only 5 national and regional ESIF programmes use this option explicitly for supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR and most of these are national or regional human resources development programmes<sup>88</sup> (see: Box 6).

This strong presence of human resources programmes may also be explained by the fact that programme-level support of transnational cooperation is much more obliging under the ESF Regulation<sup>89</sup> than under the general rule of the CPR.

#### **Box 6. Interregional or transnational activities under national / regional ESIF programmes supporting also macro-regional cooperation**

The **Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria** established a priority axis on “transnational cooperation” (PA 4) in accordance with Article 10 of the ESF Regulation, which also includes various actions that are explicitly dedicated to contribute to an implementation of EUSDR. A variety of themes will be addressed (e.g. labour market, social inclusion, healthcare, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, strengthening the institutional capacity to implement innovative practices), on which an exchange of experience and good practice will be realised with other Member States that also takes into account the EUSDR (esp. for promoting social inclusion and combating poverty).

The **Human Resources Development Programme Hungary** aims to deepen the international and macro-regional dimension of its intervention and therefore intends (...) “to seize the opportunity for the cross-border and trans-regional application of operations outside the programme area.” In line with this approach, the programme envisages specific measures under the ESF supported priority axes 1 and 3 that (...) “may comprise developments which are implemented in the territory of any other EU country if, supported by objective data at project level, they are proven to have an impact on the less developed regions.”

<sup>85</sup> i.e. ERDF Programme Austria; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia.

<sup>86</sup> i.e. Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro.

<sup>87</sup> i.e. Article 96 (3) (d) of the CPR; Article 10 of the ESF Regulation; Article 35 (7) or Article 44 (1) (a) of the EAFRD Regulation.

<sup>88</sup> i.e. Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia.

<sup>89</sup> Article 10 (2) ESF Regulation: By way of derogation from paragraph 1, Member States with a single operational programme supported by the ESF or a single multi-fund operational programme may exceptionally choose not to support transnational cooperation actions, in duly justified cases and taking account of the principle of proportionality.

The **ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg** supports transnational cooperation as a horizontal objective under all priority axes (incl. technical assistance) with a view to promote the European idea, to support mutual learning and to increase the European added value of ESF-funded interventions. Within this context, also support of macro-regional partnerships that contribute to a successful implementation of the EUSDR is explicitly foreseen.

The ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg foresees under its two priority axes “Research, technological development and innovation” and “Reduction of CO2 emissions” support to projects that transgress the boundaries of the eligible programme area. Within this context, it is (...) “also thinkable to implement joint projects under the EUSDR for which no own funds but a strategic concentration of existing funding is envisaged”.

The **Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia** foresees support for selected projects with a potential for “transnational action” that develop or strengthen cooperation with other European partners and projects in the EUSDR and EUSAIR cooperation areas.

**Specific criteria or approaches for supporting EUSDR or EUSAIR-related operations** are foreseen in the implementation provisions of only 5 national or regional ESIF programmes<sup>90</sup> and 2 ETC cooperation programmes<sup>91</sup> (see: Box 7).

The national or regional ESIF programmes mention specific criteria or a preferential treatment (e.g. allocation of extra points) and other approaches (i.e. organisation of EUSDR-dedicated calls for proposals) directly under a priority axis and in the “guiding principles for a selection of operations”. The scope of application is either comprehensive (i.e. for most or all priority axes or IPs) or selective (i.e. for one priority axis or one IP).

The two ETC cooperation programmes introduced such approaches indirectly through their description of management and control arrangements.

#### **Box 7. Programmes with specific selection criteria or approaches that support a realisation of EUSDR or EUSAIR-related operations**

The **Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria** envisages under priority axis 4 on transnational cooperation a specific grant scheme explicitly dedicated to

<sup>90</sup> i.e. Human Resource Development Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Bayern; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Regional Development Programme Romania; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania;

<sup>91</sup> i.e. Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria.

support EUSDR-relevant operations (i.e. “Danube Partnerships for Growth”), which will be selected on ground of specific criteria<sup>92</sup>.

The **ERDF Programme Bayern** mentions in the guiding principles of all investment priorities that (...) “in case of otherwise comparable projects, those projects supporting the EUSDR (and also the EUSALP) will be preferred”.

The **Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia** mentions in the guiding principles of nearly all investment priorities (23 out of 24 IPs) that a contribution to the implementation of the EUSDR and EUSAIR will be considered in this respect. Still, it is also mentioned in the programme that (...) “at the moment no specific selection criteria are envisaged for projects falling under these specific objectives”.

The **Regional Development Programme Romania** briefly mentions that “coherence with relevant strategies” (including the EUSDR) is the first among all principles which will guide the selection of projects. A similar principle that is relevant for the EUSDR is found under the **Large Infrastructures Programme Romania**, but only under IP 7i / SO 1.3 (“Increase use of waterways and ports on the central TEN-T network”). Under a few priority axes / specific objectives representing approximately 5% of the total programme budget that are implemented through competitive mechanisms, extra points will be allocated to EUSDR-related projects.

The **Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme** does not set out specific approaches for supporting cooperation in the EUSDR within the guiding principles for a selection of operations under any of the IPs (not even under IP 11c). The general selection criteria to be used are listed in a specific sub-section on “project development and selection” within the description of management and control arrangements. Under that sub-section however, an organisation of restricted calls for proposals for specific beneficiaries designated by the Monitoring Committee is foreseen which explicitly focus on supporting the EUSDR.

The **Interreg VA Programme Romania–Bulgaria** does not include direct references to cooperation in the EUSDR within the “guiding principles” at IP level. However, the programme document states in another part that operations deriving from macro-regional strategies can be supported and that the Monitoring Committee will have to decide which of the three options foreseen in Annex 1 of the CPR (i.e. point 7.3 (1)) is the most suitable for a cross-border programme. A preference for the third option is already expressed in the programme document (giving priority to operations in the selection process through identification of operations which can be jointly financed from different programmes). Because the NCs and PACs of the EUSDR are also members of the programme’s Monitoring Committee, it will be ensured that (...) “proposals, initiatives and project ideas identified by the Steering Groups and

---

<sup>92</sup> In early 2017, a specific call relating to the Danube Region was launched by the programme. See: <http://esf.bg/en/procedures/transnational-and-danube-partnerships-for-employment-and-growth/>.

Priority Area Coordinators may be promoted through one common voice among decision making bodies of the programme, in all life stages of the programme” (...).

**The newly introduced instruments for an integrated approach to territorial development (JAPs, CLLD, ITI) are indeed applied by some of the examined EU funding programmes in a domestic perspective, but not for supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.** However, these instruments can in principle be used for integrated territorial development measures that cover larger metropolitan or urban integration areas and important natural areas or other functional areas which are of strategic relevance for the EUSDR or EUSAIR. Also in case of the CLLD-based LEADER approach, the transnational cooperation component can in principle be used for supporting cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

Overall, it appears from the above analysis that **the planned interventions under priority axes and investment priorities of most EU funding programmes are insufficiently specific with respect to supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.** And even in the few cases where a direct support of EUSDR / EUSAIR related actions or an implementation of specific funding schemes are foreseen, especially national or regional ESIF programmes just included a single example, which is most often also described in a rather general way. They frequently used conditional formulations<sup>93</sup> in the descriptions instead of clearly affirmative formulations. When looking at this situation from a perspective of intervention logic, it quickly becomes clear that a “black box” exists in the strategies of most programmes with respect to the EUSDR or EUSAIR: the programmes indeed define the “initial objective” (i.e. the envisaged EUSDR/EUSAIR contribution), but they are not or only very insufficiently setting out the “means” (i.e. EUSDR or EUSAIR related interventions) by which concrete results and impact are achieved at the end of the implementation.

### **Programme-level provisions on financing and eligibility**

Already during the preparation phase, EU funding programmes could “ earmark” a share of their EU contribution that will be dedicated to support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. Furthermore, EU funding programmes could apply specific synergy-enabling rules from different EU regulations governing the ESIF and IPA II within their own provisions on financing and eligibility to enhance macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR. The main findings of our in-depth analysis of these aspects are summarised in an overview table that can be found in the Annex part of this study (see: Annex 7).

The overview shows that 6 national or regional ESIF programmes<sup>94</sup> and also 2 cooperation programmes<sup>95</sup> have **“ earmarked” amounts of their EU contribution to**

<sup>93</sup> i.e. could be envisaged ...; could be thought of ...; can be possible ...; may include etc.

<sup>94</sup> i.e. Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern; Regional Development Programme Romania; ERDF Programme Austria; Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia.

<sup>95</sup> i.e. Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina - Montenegro.

**support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.** These programmes have in general used the budget tables at priority axis level and included here the amounts of EU support that will be dedicated to the EUSDR or EUSAIR (i.e. by selecting code 04 “macro-regional cooperation area” in the budget table “territory type”). Programmes have done this for one axis or even for several axes and the earmarked amounts sometimes represent a considerable share of the total Union support dedicated to an axis (see: Box 8).

**Box 8. Programmes having “earmarked” parts of their Union support for supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR**

The **Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria** divided the budget of its priority axis 4 on “Transnational cooperation” as follows: € 3,754,661 is dedicated to the EUSDR macro-regional cooperation area, while the remaining € 15,018,645 is dedicated to ESF transnational cooperation.

The **ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg** and the **ERDF Programme Bayern** both include under several of their priority axes an earmarking of Union support that will be dedicated to macro-regional areas. The earmarked amounts are also relatively substantial under both programmes. In case of the ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg, 21% of the Union support for axis “A” (Strengthening research, technological development and innovation) and close to 20% of the total Union support for priority axis “B” (Reduction of CO2 emissions) will be dedicated to the EUSDR. Under the ERDF Programme Bayern, around 7% of the total Union support for axis 1 (Strengthening research, technological development and innovation) and 57% of the total Union support for priority axis 4 (Flood protection) will be dedicated to the two macro-regional areas EUSDR and EUSALP.

The **Regional Development Programme Romania** briefly mentions that funds will be earmarked for EUSDR-related interventions under the priority axes 3, 5, 6 and 7. According to annex 10.2 of the General Applicants Guide, these four priority axes of the programme dedicate a total of € 407 million of Union support to an implementation of the EUSDR. These funds will be spent in the 12 southernmost counties located along the Danube and are supplementary to the funds allocated at regional level.

The **ERDF Programme Austria** indicates for three out of the five priority axes amounts of the EU contribution that will be dedicated to the EUSDR and EUSALP. These amounts are in most case indicated separately for “stronger developed regions” (all Austrian provinces except Burgenland) and for the “transition region Burgenland”.

The **Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia** foresees under its priority axis 6 “Improvement of the environment and biodiversity status” (i.e. IP 6b and IP 6e, focussing on interventions for improving waste water treatment

and drinking water provision) that the entire Union support from the Cohesion Fund (i.e. € 269 million) is dedicated to support the EUSDR and EUSAIR. This amount represents 67% of the total EU funds (CF & ERDF) available for this priority axis.

The **Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme** does not indicate amounts of the Union support in the budget tables for thematic priority axes 1-3 that are dedicated to the EUSDR. Under priority axis 4 (“Well governed Danube region”), however, a share of the Union support is directly dedicated to support the development and coordination of the EUSDR (i.e. IP 11c/ETC). Yet, the axis-related budget tables do not show how much of the total budget (€ 26,272,403 or 13% of the total ERDF and around 12% of the total IPA funds) will be dedicated to IP 11c/ETC.

The **Interreg IPA Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro** dedicates a quarter of the budget for priority axis 5 on technical assistance (€ 1,428,882) to support macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR and EUSAIR.

Several of the pre-selected EU funding programmes have also **applied specific synergy-enabling rules from different EU regulations that are governing the ESIF and IPA II within their provisions on financing and eligibility.**

EU funding programmes under the ESIF and IPA II could use provisions on the eligibility of operations in the relevant EU regulations<sup>96</sup> for **dedicating shares of their Union support to EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related operations that are located outside the eligible programme area.** This was done in case of the Human Resource Development Programme Bulgaria and the Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme, which also apply this option explicitly for supporting macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR. Another 6 EU funding programmes apply this option indirectly<sup>97</sup> or somewhat restrictively<sup>98</sup> and not always explicitly for supporting macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR.

EU funding programmes under the ESIF and IPA II could also **support EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related operations by using provisions in the relevant EU regulations that allow cumulating grants** from different EU funding instruments or from one or more ESIF, through one or more programmes and other Union instruments for the same beneficiary or the same project.<sup>99</sup> This was done in case of the ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg and the ERDF Programme Bayern, which apply this option exceptionally for

<sup>96</sup> i.e. Article 70 (2) of the CPR, Article 13 (3) of the ESF Regulation, Article 20 (2) (b) of the ETC Regulation and Article 44 (2) (b) of the Commission Implementing Regulation for IPA II.

<sup>97</sup> The three cross-border programmes Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria, Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia and Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro generally foresee that a part of an operation may be implemented (and supported) outside the eligible programme area, but no direct reference is made to macro-regional operations.

<sup>98</sup> The three examined regional ESIF programmes in Germany (ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern) support macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR (or EUSALP), but they apply directly or indirectly some of the funding rules set out in the German Partnership Agreement that restrict a programme-external transfer of Union support.

<sup>99</sup> i.e. Article 65 (11) of the CPR and Article 43 (4) of the Commission Implementing Regulation for IPA II.

interregional / transnational or macro-regional operations that are concerned by the third funding rule set out under the German Partnership Agreement.<sup>100</sup>

National and regional ESIF programmes could apply Article 120 (3) of the CPR for **increasing the maximum co-financing rate under a priority axis on transnational cooperation**, which also includes interventions that support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. This option is used indirectly by the Human Resource Development Programme Bulgaria and the Human Resource Development Programme Hungary, as they apply a maximum co-financing rate to all transnational activities (incl. macro-regional activities) that are supported under these specific priority axes. Other national and regional ESIF programmes that support macro-regional cooperation through interregional or transnational cooperation have not used this option. They prefer funding EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related operations under their regular thematic priority axes (ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia).

#### **4. Support to the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the early starting phase of EU funding programmes and during their ongoing implementation**

This chapter looks at the early starting phase of the pre-selected EU funding programmes and at their ongoing implementation in order to see which decisions and actions were taken for supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. For this, we analysed how the EUSDR or EUSAIR are considered in the context of three wider themes: the guidance provided to applicants and the programmes' application / selection processes for operations (Section 4.1), the programme-level monitoring and evaluation activities and the description of EUSDR or EUSAIR contributions in the Annual Implementation Reports (Section 4.2) and finally the programmes' communication and information activities (Section 4.3).

##### **4.1. Targeted guidance / advice for applicants and specific approaches in the application and selection processes for operations**

Earlier analyses of experiences in the EUSBSR show that many actors involved in ESIF programmes were sceptical about the added value and possible benefits emerging from macro-regional cooperation and often also had a misleading understanding or too narrow conceptualisation of cooperation at the level of macro-regional projects.<sup>101</sup> The continuing and also wider relevance of these observations is confirmed by a recent Interact study on the added value of macro-regional strategies, which looked at a range of projects realised in the EUSBSR and EUSDR in order to see what they and also various types of funding programmes can gain from their links to a macro-regional strategy. The study also stresses that projects had in many cases very little or even no knowledge of the macro-regional strategy to whose implementation they contributed, which makes it particularly important to increase awareness of macro-regional

---

<sup>100</sup> This rule foresees that operations can in advance be broken down into country-specific funding shares, which are first examined and approved by the concerned operational programmes and then supported separately by these programmes.

<sup>101</sup> ESTEP (2013), pp.12, 13; Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c), pp.6, 16-19

strategies among project-level actors already during the project initiation and development phase.<sup>102</sup>

Therefore, EU funding programmes should become active on three aspects that are closely connected to their operations-based implementation process. (1) Programmes should explain in their manuals and other guidance resources (e.g. online support tools, measure-specific guidance material etc.) how operations can support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR and how applicants can set up relevant operations with domestic actors or cooperation partners from outside the eligible programme area and/or from other Danube countries. (2) Programmes should also include specific sections in the application forms which enable or even oblige applicants to describe the envisaged contribution of their proposal to the EUSDR or EUSAIR. (3) Finally, programmes should foresee specific criteria in their general or axis-specific processes for a selection of operations or introduce other approaches that aim at supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR (e.g. specific funding schemes; organisation of EUSDR/EUSAIR dedicated calls etc.).

An overview on the results of our analysis of these aspects for the 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes (see: Annex 8) shows that **12 programmes can be considered good practice**<sup>103</sup> because each of them has become active in at least two or all three fields mentioned above.

### **EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related information in the guidance material for applicants**

Our analysis shows that nearly half of the 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes (11 programmes<sup>104</sup>) provide EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related information in

- programme-wide manuals or general guidance documents<sup>105</sup>;
- guidance documents elaborated for selected priority axes and investment priorities / specific objectives (Large Infrastructures Programme Romania);
- guidance documents elaborated for transnational cooperation that is supported under a specific priority axis (Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria) or as a horizontal objective under all priority axes (ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg);
- applicant guides elaborated for individual project calls (Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Environment and Energy Efficiency Programme

---

<sup>102</sup> Interact (2017), pp.5, 14

<sup>103</sup> Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Human Resource Development Programme Bulgaria; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania; Regional Development Programme Romania; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia.

<sup>104</sup> Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Environment and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary, Regional Development Programme Romania; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro.

<sup>105</sup> Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro.

- Hungary; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme) or specific calls that are explicitly dedicated to support the EUSDR (Regional Development Programme Romania);
- specific information letters sent by the Managing Authority to major applicants of a programme (Environment and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary).

The **extent and quality of this information on the EUSDR or EUSAIR varies significantly** between these 11 programmes. The first and last positions in the group are taken respectively by the Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme (i.e. extensive and very detailed information) and by the Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia (i.e. relatively little and rather general information).

Information in the documents of the nine other programmes is adequate. They usually mention the EUSDR or EUSAIR explicitly and also highlight the fact that relevant proposals have to contribute to an implementation of one or both of these macro-regional strategies. Some documents also underline that additional points are granted to EUSDR-relevant proposals (Large Infrastructures Programme Romania), indicate the investment priorities that are particularly relevant in this respect (Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania) and sometimes even help applicants to answer the difficult question on how a proposal can contribute to the EUSDR or EUSAIR (Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro).

Moreover, several programmes inform applicants that further information and advice is available in their mother tongue on national websites dedicated to the EUSDR (Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Environment and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary).

Worth highlighting in this respect **is the approach adopted by the ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg** that offers, in addition to document-based information, also direct support to ESF-related stakeholders who want to become active in transnational or macro-regional cooperation (see: Box 9).

#### **Box 9. ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg - comprehensive assistance for applicants on EUSDR cooperation**

The **ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg** issued an applicant guide for regional ESF working groups that includes a section on ESF-supported transnational cooperation (covering also macro-regional cooperation) for promoting the European idea and mutual learning and for increasing the European added value of ESF-funded interventions. Further to this general guidance on transnational cooperation (i.e. supported under all priority axes of the programme), also specific direct support is provided to applicants on EUSDR cooperation. This is done through an expert group “cross-cutting advice” (Querschnittsberatung). It consists of experts from

external service providers (i.e. the “Lawaetz Foundation” and the “Defacto Social Science Research and Consulting”) who provide practical advice to ESF-related stakeholders from Baden-Württemberg on the implementation of the horizontal principles and cross-cutting themes during the funding period 2014-2020. The consultancy mandate covers all aspects and formats of transnational cooperation as well as specific support for macro-regional cooperation.

### Description of EUSDR / EUSAIR contributions in application forms

More than half of the 23 examined EU funding programmes ask applicants to describe their proposals’ coherence with / contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR in a specific section of the application form or of another related document: this is the case under 10 national or regional ESIF programmes<sup>106</sup> and 4 cooperation programmes<sup>107</sup>.

The evidence gathered on these 14 EU funding programmes shows that they apply very different approaches:

- Information on a proposals’ coherence with / contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR has most often to be provided in the main application form (12 out of 14 programmes), but sometimes also in an annex to the application form (Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; ERDF Programme Bayern).
- In case of 8 programmes, all applications have to describe their coherence with or contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR. Under the other 6 programmes, a description is only required for proposals involving transnational cooperation activities, be this under a specific priority axis (Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria) or under all priority axes (ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg), and for proposals that are submitted under specific investment priorities (Regional Development Programme Romania; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania) or under a single programme measure / grant scheme (ERDF Programme Bayern; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria).
- Nearly all programmes mention the EUSDR or EUSAIR explicitly in their application documents and thereby inform applicants directly that, if relevant, a proposals’ coherence with / contribution to one or both Strategies has to be described. Only the online application form of the Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria does not explicitly refer to the EUSDR, although the procedural manual and the guidelines for applicants mention that the implementation process should support the EUSDR.
- Also the scope and quality of the EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related description in the forms is variable. Descriptions tend to be short or general if they are part of a general description of the coherence and consistency with objectives and

<sup>106</sup> ERDF Programme Austria; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg, ERDF Programme Bayern; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania; Regional Development Programme Romania; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia.

<sup>107</sup> Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro.

priorities of EU, national or regional strategies. More precise descriptions can be expected if a specific entry field is foreseen for this description and also if clear instructions on the expected content are provided to applicants. The most developed approach in this respect is found under the Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme (see: Box 10).

**Box 10. Interreg Danube Cooperation Programme – detailed description of the EUSDR contribution in the application phase of operations**

Under the **Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme**, a description of the coherence with / contribution to the EUSDR is only relevant for “regular projects” because projects implementing specific objective 4.2 are all directly supporting the EUSDR. In the application form for regular projects that implement priority axes 1, 2, 3 and specific objective 4.1, the EUSDR is highlighted as a subject of prime interest. Applicants are requested to describe the contribution to EU Strategies, but for the EUSDR a more detailed answer is expected. For providing this answer, the Guidelines for the Application Form also give clear instructions in the section on contribution to EU strategies and policies. (...) “In case the proposal is contributing to the EUSDR, the proposal should additionally describe the link to the relevant Priority Area(s) (PA) and the concrete contribution to the implementation of the Priority Area(s), as well as the project contribution toward achievement of the EUSDR current targets and/or corresponding actions, as described in the list of targets and actions (...)”. The entry field in the application form provides ample space for describing this point (i.e. up to 3,000 characters) and has the same size than the entry field foreseen for describing a proposals’ transnational approach.

**EUSDR- or EUSAIR-specific approaches in appraisal and selection processes**

8 national or regional ESIF programmes and also the 4 examined ETC and IPA II cooperation programmes already apply specific approaches within their appraisal and selection processes for supporting EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related operations. However, there are marked differences between the programmes and the individual approaches adopted.

- Many programmes apply EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related appraisal and selection criteria and also allocate extra points for supporting a selection of operations with a macro-regional relevance.<sup>108</sup> This approach was in one case already foreseen in the programming document (Large Infrastructures Programme Romania), but most often decided later in the programmes’ early starting phase.

<sup>108</sup> i.e. Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia

In case of the Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia, the adoption of a separate document by the Monitoring Committee indicating that one additional point is given to EUSDR-relevant proposals in the assessment / selection process has only happened because of the efforts made by the National Coordinator for the EUSDR (see: Box 11). However, the evidence from several programmes shows that extra points often have a very low weight in the overall score, which then also significantly reduces their potential for stimulating macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

- An appraisal and selection of operations for the two main implementation modes of the Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme is done by different approaches<sup>109</sup>, which both are strongly focussed on supporting an implementation of the EUSDR. To strengthen this, the programme has recently even further improved the approach applied for appraising “regular projects” (see: Box 11).
- The ERDF Programme Bayern applies a generalised preferential treatment of operations with macro-regional relevance under all priority axes of the programme (see: Box 11).
- The Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria and the Regional Development Programme Romania realise EUSDR-related calls for proposals, for which the selection criteria are already EUSDR-specific.
- The Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria includes no EUSDR-related selection criterion, but the EUSDR relevance of proposals is assessed indirectly through the criterion on “coherence and consistency of the project with the objectives and priorities of the national and EU policy for the 2014-2020 programming period”.
- The Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia has not developed programme-wide selection criteria for EUSDR- or EUSAIR-relevant operations and is also not in favour of allocating extra points. Under the permanently opened call "Increasing the development of new products and services resulting from research and development activities", however, proposals contributing to EU macro-regional strategies are rewarded with 7 points (see: Box 11).

A recent positive development is also noticed in case of the Environment and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary, because the Managing Authority recognised the importance of creating EUSDR-specific selection criteria and intends to introduce such criteria into upcoming calls. This was probably also motivated by the fact that the National Coordinator asked the Managing Authority to indicate in each upcoming call for applications that proposals need to comply with the EUSDR.

**Box 11. Programmes applying EUSDR-related criteria or preferential approaches in the project selection process (directly or indirectly)**

---

<sup>109</sup> i.e. a “two-step approach” for regular projects that implement priority axes 1, 2, 3 and specific objective 4.1 and a “one step approach” for projects that implement specific objective 4.2

The **Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia** approved a set of project assessment and selection criteria, which includes specific criteria for appraising and considering an operations' relevance for the objectives of the EUSDR. In each of the criteria types (assessment and selection), one additional point is given to a project that has clear relevance for an implementation of the EUSDR. The interview with the Managing Authority revealed that this approach was only adopted because of the strong role played by the Slovak National Coordinator for the EUSDR. Already during the preparation phase, he had strongly insisted that the programme should make a clear contribution to an implementation of the EUSDR. Subsequently, in his role as member of the programme's Monitoring Committee, the National Coordinator pushed an inclusion of selection criteria relating to EUSDR relevance. Although the Managing Authority and other Monitoring Committee members were not fully supporting this proposal, these EUSDR related assessment and selection criteria were finally adopted.

The first call for regular projects of the **Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme** applied under steps 1 and 2 of the assessment process so-called "strategic assessment criteria", which also included a criterion for assessing the contribution to relevant EU Strategies. Two related assessment questions directly concern the EUSDR: the first one focusses on the contribution to Priority Areas of the EUSDR Action Plan and the second one on the contribution to one or more actions and/or targets of the EUSDR Priority Areas. In step 2 of the assessment process, the EUSDR contribution criterion was one out of six criteria and had the same maximum score as all the other criteria. Nevertheless, after mixed experiences made with the application of this EUSDR-contribution criterion during the first call, the Joint Secretariat initiated a revision of the assessment approach for the second call for regular projects in 2017. This was approved by the Monitoring Committee and the newly introduced assessment question now reads as follows: "To what extent is the EUSDR embedded in the proposal (at the level of needs and challenges, methodology, synergy/ capitalisation, work plan, durability and transferability)?" This approach adopts a cross-cutting and holistic perspective, because the EUSDR is now considered in all major elements of a project proposal.

In case of the **ERDF Programme Bayern**, the content-related selection criteria (i.e. other categories are geographical, economic and sector policy as well as legal criteria) mention the principle that "in addition, projects promoting the EUSDR or EUSALP are preferably supported against projects with otherwise the same assessment result." According to the Managing Authority, a generalised application of this selection principle offers sufficient flexibility for considering any future operation that may support the EUSDR. This option was also chosen because it was very difficult to identify in advance potential EUSDR-related operations that could be realised under the programmes' different interventions which are all strongly focussed on specific regional needs in Bayern.

The **Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia** mentions in the approved programme document that (...) “specific criteria will be developed in the near future, through joint efforts of managing authorities and main governing actors of the strategies at the national level”. Until now, however, these programme-wide criteria are not developed. The main argument given by the programme for explaining this inactivity is of a strategic nature: as long as there is no clear labelling of macro-regional projects at the EUSDR and EUSAIR levels, there is also no clear added value seen at the programme level for adopting such criteria. Yet, this seems to be in contradiction with what is actually practiced because the Annual Implementation Report 2014/15 states that the contribution to macro-regional strategies is assessed internally for every contract by an Intermediate Body. The issue of adopting/not adopting specific criteria is also closely linked to the programmes’ negative position on applying a preferential treatment of macro-regional project applications during the selection of operations. Already the approved programme document mentions that recognising the added value of operations with macro-regional relevance and their contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR by means of allocating “bonus points” during the assessment is not envisaged. This position is upheld until now, because the absence of a labelling of projects at the macro-regional-level also makes it difficult for programme stakeholders to objectively decide which proposals should receive bonus points and which should not. But also here, this position is somehow in contradiction with what is practiced under the permanently opened call "Increasing the development of new products and services resulting from research and development activities", where proposals contributing to EU macro-regional strategies are rewarded with 7 points.

#### **4.2. Monitoring, reporting and evaluation activities for determining and describing a programmes’ contribution to the EUSDR / EUSAIR**

In order to determine the actual contribution of EU funding programmes to an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR, programme-level monitoring and evaluation processes should foresee specific tools and approaches for gathering relevant qualitative or quantitative information as well as for further aggregating and corroborating / widening this information.

Efforts in the context of monitoring should ideally start with basic information collection on EUSDR- or EUSDR-relevant actions of approved operations by means of their formal progress reporting (e.g. description of an operations’ contribution to macro-regional strategies). But also other relevant activities not linked to approved operations should be considered in this respect (e.g. coordination, communication and information exchange etc.). This bottom-up information then needs to be processed further, aggregated and finally registered into the programmes’ monitoring system. On ground of this, programmes are able to present robust and also reliable information on their actual contribution to an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

The availability of reliable information is particularly important for ESIF programmes when it comes to complying with their regulatory reporting obligations: national/regional ESIF programmes and also ETC programmes have to report their actual contribution to macro-regional (and/or sea basin) strategies in the “comprehensive” Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) for 2017 and 2019 and later also in the Final Report.<sup>110</sup> The European Commission has recently defined the “modus operandi” for reporting on macro-regional strategies in 2017 and 2019, which also foresees a provision of information in the other years and covers the IPA and ENI programmes.<sup>111</sup>

Due to this, programmes should consider using evaluation for corroborating EUSDR/EUSAIR-related information in their monitoring systems and also for further widening evidence on their actual contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR. For this, smaller “thematic evaluations” or “ad-hoc evaluations” can be realised that inform programme stakeholders and interested beneficiaries on various aspects: the tangible benefits and added value resulting from macro-regional cooperation, factors leading to successful collaborative implementation or reasons for shortcomings and finally the wide range of intangible / qualitative outcomes that are most often not captured by the usually applied monitoring indicators or reporting criteria.

These aspects were analysed for the 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes (see: Annex 9) and there are **7 programmes we consider good practice** because each has become active on the various above-mentioned aspects.

### **Programme-level monitoring of the EUSDR or EUSAIR contribution**

Around one fourth of the examined EU funding programmes make **efforts to collect information and data from approved operations on their contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR**.<sup>112</sup> These 6 programmes have usually included a specific section into the relevant reporting templates in which beneficiaries have to describe an operations’ contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

Under half of these programmes, reporting is mandatory for all approved operations (Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria, Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro). The other half asks this reporting only from operations that are approved under EUSDR-specific funding schemes (Regional Development Programme Romania, Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria) or from operations that include EUSDR-related actions which are part of their formal deliverables (ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg).

---

<sup>110</sup> i.e. Article 111 (4) (d) of the CPR and Article 14 (4) of the ETC Regulation

<sup>111</sup> During the years of the “comprehensive” Annual Implementation Report (2017 and 2019), as well as for the final reports, excel-based checklists will be incorporated in SFC 2014. Subsequently, the operational programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal shall complete part B, point 14.4 of the AIR, and the ETC cooperation programmes part B point 11.3. The other years, Managing Authorities shall also receive from the Commission excel checklists for completion. Also the IPA and ENI authorities will receive the excel checklists for completion every year. See: European Commission, DG Regional and Urban policy (2016a).

<sup>112</sup> i.e. ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Human Resources Development Programme Romania; Regional Development Programme Romania; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro.

**7 EU funding programmes generate aggregated information on their EUSDR or EUSAIR contribution**<sup>113</sup>, but the activities and the applied approaches are very different (See: Box 12):

- The establishment of a specific EUSDR-category within the programme monitoring system that also includes EUSDR-related indicators (Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme).
- A “pre-selection” of EUSDR-relevant operations is realised by the Managing Authorities of ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg and the ERDF Programme Bayern, which are then registered into the monitoring system by allocating them the territorial dimension code “04”<sup>114</sup>.
- An application of existing programme monitoring indicators (Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro) or of specific indicators defined for transnational cooperation under the Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria).
- A qualitative determination of the EUSDR-contribution, either at priority axis level (Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria) or in a programme-wide perspective (ERDF Programme Austria).

**Box 12. Approaches of EU funding programmes for collecting and aggregating information on their EUSDR or EUSAIR contribution**

The Managing Authorities of the **ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg** and the ERDF Programme Bayern consider a bottom-up reporting of approved operations on their EUSDR or EUSALP contribution not proportionate within the limited financial scope of their programmes. Instead, both programmes determine their contributions through a “pre-selection” of EUSDR-relevant operations which mainly generates financial information that is registered in the monitoring systems. These pre-selection processes involve the respective Managing Authorities and other competent funds-managing units if necessary. They identify operations that are potentially relevant for the EUSDR, relate these operations to the appropriate EUSDR topics / categories and then derive the operations’ EUSDR-contribution from the various existing progress reporting formats. Once this pre-selection is completed, EUSDR-relevant operations are then registered in the programmes’ documentation and information system by applying the territorial dimension code 04 “Macro regional cooperation area”.

The **Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria** requires all approved operations to describe their contribution to an implementation of the EUSDR, since contributing to the EUSDR is one of the eligibility criteria. The contribution of an operation is

<sup>113</sup> i.e. ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Austria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro.

<sup>114</sup> The Commission Implementing Regulation No. 215/2014 defines in table 3 of the Annex a total of seven different codes for specifying the territorial dimension of an intervention. Code “04” relates to macro regional cooperation areas.

described qualitatively in the progress reports, mainly by showing how this contribution has been achieved. Based on the information provided by relevant operations, the EUSDR-contribution is then also determined qualitatively at priority axis level because the monitoring system does not include quantitative indicators that allow measuring the impact of interventions on topics addressed by the EUSDR Action Plan.

The **Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria** will only ask approved operations under the not yet implemented grant scheme “Danube partnerships for employment and growth” (i.e. priority axis 4 of the programme) to show how they contribute to an implementation of the EUSDR. This reporting of operations will most likely be related to the programme-level performance indicator “identified innovative practices” and the result indicator “transferred innovative practices” in the field of related of social innovation. Although these indicators are not explicitly related to the EUSDR, they can be helpful for capturing specificities of macro-regional cooperation activities: the putting into practice of new or significantly improved ideas, services/models aimed at the social sphere and the transferring of skills, knowledge, models and organisation of processes or other innovative practices.

In case of the **Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro**, progress reports of approved operations will include a specific section that enables beneficiaries to describe how their realised activities contribute to an implementation of the relevant macro-regional strategies (EUSDR, EUSAIR). Data and information from the submitted progress reports will then be introduced into the monitoring system so that the programme can at any time oversee its actual contribution to an implementation of the EUSDR and EUSAIR. Because the monitoring system is constantly upgraded, the Managing Authority also thinks that new processes or relevant indicators may be added to the system at a later stage of the implementation process.

In case of the **Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme**, the new Project Implementation Handbook of January 2017 foresees a template for progress reports of “regular projects” that includes a section on the contribution to the EUSDR. In case of operations approved under specific objective 4.2, a different reporting approach was adopted for the “projects of Priority Area Coordinators”: their progress reports for the programme will also be used by the European Commission for its progress reports on the implementation of the EUSDR in order to avoid unnecessary double reporting work. Data and information from this reporting of operations will then be registered in a EUSDR-specific category within the programme’s monitoring system. This allows identifying funding activities and/or operations contributing to the EUSDR in an appropriate way. Moreover, it is foreseen that the monitoring system also allows assigning operations to the relevant EUSDR Priority Areas.

Despite of these positive examples, it is clear that the large majority of the examined EU funding programmes are not collecting information and data from approved operations on their contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR (17 programmes) and are also not generating aggregated information in the monitoring systems on their EUSDR or EUSAIR contribution (16 programmes). This general situation also corresponds to what is observed in the earlier Interact study on the EUSBSR.<sup>115</sup>

Nevertheless, and especially since the ad-hoc information request of DG Regio in spring 2016 which asked national / regional and cooperation programmes to describe their contribution to macro-regional and sea basin strategies in “excel-based checklists”<sup>116</sup>, it seems that some of the yet inactive ESIF programmes have started reflecting on a more systematic monitoring of their EUSDR or EUSAIR contribution. This is observed in case of the Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia, which envisages introducing a specific approach into the not yet fully established monitoring system. Other examples are the still ongoing and controversial discussions among different stakeholders on the use of EUSDR-specific indicators (Regional Development Programme Romania) or on the establishment of a EUSDR-specific section in the national monitoring system (Environment and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary).

#### **EUSDR or EUSAIR contributions described in the AIR for 2014 / 2015**

Most of the 23 examined EU-funding programmes (17 programmes) have not included information on their contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the Annual Implementation Report for 2014 / 2015.

This can be explained by the fact that ESIF regulations do not ask national / regional and cooperation programmes to substantially describe their contributions at this stage, but also by the fact that it was often still too early in the implementation phase for mentioning the contributions of individual operations to macro-regional strategies.

Nevertheless, **one fourth of the examined EU funding programmes have provided information on their contributions to the EUSDR or EUSAIR**<sup>117</sup>, albeit in different ways and at a variable extent:

- The Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia describes two EUSDR-relevant operations that were contracted within priority axis 3 (Business Competitiveness), both with respect to the involved financial volumes and with respect to their focus and link to EUSDR Priority Areas.

---

<sup>115</sup> “ESI Funds programme monitoring is complex, and MAs are generally reluctant at adding an additional EUSBSR dimension to the monitoring procedures. In some cases, it appears that monitoring of contributions to the EUSBSR is assimilated to monitoring of projects initially categorised as EUSBSR relevant. It is seldom envisaged to collect EUSBSR indicators unless they are already included in the foreseen list of ESI Funds programme indicators, and discussions on issues of scales of measurement and observation are limited. Current monitoring systems are not constructed to identify possible effects of programmes beyond the programme areas (...).” Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c), pp.32, 33

<sup>116</sup> European Commission, DG Regional and Urban policy (2016a)

<sup>117</sup> i.e. Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern; Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme.

- The ERDF Programme Bayern and the ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg only provide financial information on their contribution to EUSDR and/or EUSALP (i.e. in table 7, “Breakdown of cumulative financial data by intervention category for the ERDF, the ESF and the Cohesion Fund”), but no qualitative description is given in the relevant section of the Annual Implementation Report.
- Several programmes presented more or less extensive qualitative information on already supported EUSDR-related activities (ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg, Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme) or on EUSDR-relevant operations that are in the phase of approval (Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria), but no financial information.

However, most of yet inactive EU funding programmes have clearly affirmed that the forthcoming Annual Implementation Reports will describe their contribution to an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR in conformity with the regulatory provisions and other requirements set out by the European Commission.

### **EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related evaluation activities of programmes**

Although the regulations did foresee that the comprehensive Annual Implementation Reports for 2017 and 2019 as well as the Final Report will have to include evidence on the programmes’ contribution to macro-regional (and sea basin strategies), one has to observe that DG Regio’s Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans does not refer to macro-regional strategies and related evaluation activities.

Nevertheless, **one third of the 23 examined programmes foresee evaluating their contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR (8 programmes<sup>118</sup>)**. Most of these programmes have also described in their evaluation plans the related activities and questions to be addressed. An appraisal of the programmes’ contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR will be done through:

- a programme-wide approach that includes differentiated and well-elaborated evaluation activities on the EUSDR contribution (Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme, see: Box 13);
- the general evaluation activities, by addressing one or more EUSDR/EUSAIR-related evaluation questions (Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro);
- specific evaluation activities for transnational cooperation, be this for a specific priority axis (Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria) or for all priority axes (ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg, see: Box 13);
- specific evaluation activities adapted to the focus of a programme’s individual priority axes (ERDF Programme Austria);

---

<sup>118</sup> i.e. Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Austria; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro.

- qualitative evaluation only, because no measurable impact is expected to emerge (Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria);
- assessing complementarities and synergies of implemented operations with macro-regional projects approved under the EUSDR (Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia).

### **Box 13. Examples for EUSDR / EUSAIR-related evaluation activities of EU funding programmes**

The approved evaluation plan of the **ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg** includes prescriptions for evaluating its horizontal objective and cross-cutting theme of transnational cooperation, which will also be used for evaluating macro-regional actions supporting the EUSDR. For appraising the cross-cutting themes of social innovation and transnational cooperation (also covering macro-regional actions in the EUSDR), a clarification of the value of these approaches and of their contents as well as the results of transnational or trans-regional funding approaches will be in the focus of the evaluation. For this, evaluation will have to address a number of detailed research questions in relation to transnational and macro-regional projects (i.e. What is the content of interregional and transnational approaches? Which approaches do the projects pursue and what is the value of the transnational component? What problems are reported by transnational projects? Which factors make cooperation with transnational partners more successful? How is the sustainability of the project results ensured, how can this be increased if necessary? What are the successes of transnational funding?).

The **Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme** already envisaged an evaluation of EUSDR-related aspects in the programme document (p. 130). The approved evaluation plan of the programme foresees two main steps that both also include a clear focus on the EUSDR. First, an “operational evaluation” is foreseen that will focus on the functioning of programme structures. In this context, the preparation of calls for implementing the specific objective 4.2 (Support to the governance and implementation of the EUSDR) is considered a major challenge that needs to be addressed by the evaluation. Second, an “impact evaluation” is foreseen for the programme that also covers activities under specific objective 4.2. A very detailed approach was elaborated for evaluating the three main elements in the wider context of an implementation of the EUSDR (i.e. projects for Priority Area Coordinators; Danube Strategy Point, Seed Money Facility). It foresees that the evaluation will be focused on how the programme has managed to support the implementation of the EUSDR and not on the performance of the EUSDR stakeholders or structures, since the latter would evaluate the strategy itself which is not in the competence of the programme. Moreover, the approach also sets out detailed questions for evaluating the support of Priority Area Coordinators (How has the programme support influenced the coordination capacities of the PACs? How has the programme support influenced the policy development of the PACs?), of the

Danube Strategy Point (How has the programme support influenced the coordination capacities of the DSP? How has the programme support influenced monitoring and evaluation capacities of DSP in relation to the evidence-based decision making?) as well as of the Seed Money Facility (What is the rate of seed money projects successfully having the main project approved? How could the seed money projects support the achievement of the EUSDR targets?).

#### **4.3. Raising awareness on the EUSDR or EUSAIR through programme-level communication and information activities**

The recent Commission report on an implementation of macro-regional strategies highlights that awareness about macro-regional strategies has to be increased at all levels and that the communication of their added value and results has to be improved.<sup>119</sup> This is all the more important because many EU funding programmes are hardly aware of macro-regional strategies and projects often have little or even no knowledge of a relevant macro-regional strategy. And even where programmes or projects are aware of a strategy to which they may contribute to, it is often difficult for them to see the benefits of related actions.<sup>120</sup>

Due to this, communication strategies of EU funding programmes should foresee specific activities that make different actors in a programmes' own context more aware of the added value of the EUSDR/EUSAIR and also inform other actors in the wider domestic or macro-regional contexts about a programmes' thematic cooperation potentials. For this, communication activities should in particular address:

- theme-specific actors that are potentially interested in macro-regional activities, both from the programme area as well as from the wider domestic and macro-regional context (e.g. local, regional and national levels);
- key stakeholders of other EU funding programmes, both in the domestic context and also in other EUSDR/EUSAIR countries;
- relevant strategic actors at the macro-regional level (e.g. EUSDR/EUSAIR National Coordinators, EUSAIR Governing Board members, EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators, EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators, EUSDR/EUSAIR thematic steering group members etc.).

Programmes should also realise activities to increase their own awareness of the EUSDR / EUSAIR as well as their knowledge about ongoing developments at the macro-regional level. This can be achieved directly through a participation of programme stakeholders (e.g. members of the Managing Authority, the Monitoring Committee or the Joint Secretariat) in seminars/workshops or major events organised at the EUSDR or EUSAIR levels, but also indirectly through a connection to information dissemination activities in the domestic context (e.g. structured or informal processes; country-specific seminars / workshops on macro-regional strategies etc.).

---

<sup>119</sup> European Commission (2016a), p.10

<sup>120</sup> Interact (2017), p.5

As previously mentioned, the results of our in-depth analysis of these aspects for the 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes (see: Annex 10) show that **8 programmes can be considered good practice** because each of them has become active on the various above-mentioned aspects.<sup>121</sup> Among these good practice programmes, the **clearly most pro-active approaches** are adopted by the Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme, the Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and also the ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg.

### **Awareness raising through programme-level communication activities**

Among the 23 examined EU funding programmes, we only found 2 cooperation programmes that directly mention the EUSDR or EUSAIR in their adopted communication strategies and also foresee activities that aim at informing about these strategies or at promoting macro-regional cooperation (Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro).

The other cooperation programmes and especially all national / regional ESIF programmes have not mentioned the EUSDR or EUSAIR in their adopted communication strategies, although this was sometime suggested by a National Coordinator (Regional Development Programme Romania).

In the further course of the implementation process, however, the above-mentioned 2 cooperation programmes and also a further 8 national / regional ESIF programmes have actually realised EUSDR-related communication activities<sup>122</sup> or are about to realise such activities in the near future<sup>123</sup> (see: Box 14). These activities are mostly addressing a domestic audience, but in two cases also explicitly stakeholders in the wider EUSDR area (ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern).

#### **Box 14. Examples for EUSDR-related communication activities**

The Managing Authority of the **Regional Development Programme Romania** carried out communication and information activities in the Romanian counties/regions covered by the EUSDR. The Managing Authority presented in detail specific opportunities that may result from EUSDR-related actions to potential beneficiaries, but at the same time found it difficult to answer questions of potential beneficiaries on “the characteristics of a EUSDR project”. Also in case of the **Large Infrastructures Programme Romania**, EUSDR-specific aspects are presented to

<sup>121</sup> ERDF Programme Austria; Human Resource Development Programme Bulgaria; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Regional Development Programme Romania; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro.

<sup>122</sup> i.e. Regional Development Programme Romania; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg.

<sup>123</sup> i.e. ERDF Programme Austria; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern.

potential beneficiaries during general communication and information activities that are carried out by the Managing Authority.

The **Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria** plans an information campaign after launching the grant scheme “Danube partnerships for employment and growth”. This grant scheme will be open for all potential beneficiaries such as public authorities (e.g. ministries, agencies, municipalities) and other non-public organisations (e.g. non-government organisations, employers’ organisations, etc.). The campaign will involve the organisation of information meetings in different towns of the country and also the publishing of online information on the programme’s website.

The Managing Authority of the **ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg** establishes an online project database that will be operational and publicly accessible via the programme’s homepage in spring 2017. It will provide further information on EUSDR-relevant operations or innovative results of operations that may be of interest or even used by third parties in the macro-region. Linked to that, the Managing Authority also sent around a note to other partners in the Danube Area that calls upon them to make active use of the detailed descriptions in the list of operations to be established in accordance with Annex XII of the CPR (i.e. Annex XII: Information and Communication on Support from the Funds). Also the **ERDF Programme Bayern** establishes a specific EUSDR-related section on the programme homepage for providing information about operations under the measure “Technology transfer between universities and SMEs” that may be of interest for other EUSDR and EUSALP actors.

Still, more than half of the 23 examined EU funding programmes are not promoting the EUSDR or EUSAIR towards national or regional/local stakeholders in their own context (i.e. 10 national/regional ESIF programmes<sup>124</sup> and 3 cooperation programmes<sup>125</sup>).

Most programmes have not given explanations for this inactivity, but some consider this to be a task of the National Coordinator (Environment and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary)<sup>126</sup> and others think that such activities are not necessary because they are anyway contributing to the EUSDR (Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia).

---

<sup>124</sup> i.e. Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Programme Czech Republic; Environment Programme Czech Republic; EAFRD Programme Bayern; Environment and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Integrated Infrastructure Programme Slovakia.

<sup>125</sup> i.e. Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia; ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova.

<sup>126</sup> In fact, the Hungarian National Coordinator realises appropriate promotional activities (e.g. own organisation of EUSDR stakeholder events; direct participation in other stakeholder events or civic forums for promoting the EUSDR etc.), provides detailed information on the EUSDR in Hungarian language on the National Coordinator’s website and also animates a regular and structured exchange of information on the EUSDR.

### Activities increasing the programmes' own awareness of the EUSDR or EUSAIR

19 out of the 23 examined EU funding programmes ensure either directly or indirectly that they are well-informed about general developments in the EUSDR / EUSAIR or about specific programme-relevant themes and macro-regional initiatives or projects.<sup>127</sup>

**13 EU funding programmes** keep themselves directly informed through a more or less regular **participation** of Managing Authority representatives and/or Monitoring Committee members **in EUSDR / EUSAIR Annual Fora and in other events or workshops / seminars organised at the macro-regional level.**

The information gathered through this direct participation has in general improved the programmes' awareness of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. Under several programmes, direct participation has also generated clear benefits for their own work on relevant macro-regional strategies. Concrete examples for the latter are:

- an identification of EUSDR-related synergies or complementarities within the programme (Integrated Infrastructure Programme Slovakia);
- the realisation of better informed direct dialogues with potential applicants (Human Resources Development Programme Hungary);
- a smoother programme implementation process (Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme);
- wider dissemination of achievements of a programme or its individual operations towards other interested stakeholders in the EUSDR (ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg);
- wide promotion of a macro-regional cooperation network established by ESF Managing Authorities (ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary).

**5 EU funding programmes**<sup>128</sup> prefer to **update and improve their information on developments in the EUSDR or EUSAIR indirectly** (see: Box 15). This is sometimes done through intra-departmental information activities (Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia, ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova), but also through structured information dissemination processes that involve various ministries and administrative actors (ERDF Programme Bayern; EAFRD Programme Bayern).

#### Box 15. Indirect information of programmes on developments in the EUSDR

<sup>127</sup> No significant own activities in this respect are observed in case of 4 programmes: Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania; Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia.

<sup>128</sup> i.e. Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Programme Czech Republic; ERDF Programme Bayern; EAFRD Programme Bayern; ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova.

The Managing Authority of the **Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia** is not directly participating in EUSDR-level events or seminars. As another unit from the programme-responsible Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport is coordinating EUSDR Priority Area 7 (To develop the Knowledge Society through research, education and information technologies), representatives from this unit regularly attend also other EUSDR information events or workshops and usually transmit all relevant information to the Managing Authority.

In case of the **ERDF Programme Bayern** and the **EAFRD Programme Bayern**, representatives of the respective Managing Authorities are not directly participating in major events or workshops / seminars of the EUSDR. However, information on developments in the EUSDR (and EUSALP) is gathered by the Bavarian State Chancellery which then informs all concerned Land ministries through various formal and informal processes. Formal inter-ministerial coordination is one of these processes and the Managing Authorities of both programmes are directly participating in related meetings, depending on the topics addressed. Another process is the more frequent exchange of views between the State Chancellery and the “EU-affairs officials” of all concerned ministries, which also deals with matters relating to the EUSDR (and EUSALP). After such meetings, the EU-affairs officials of the line ministries responsible for the ERDF and EAFRD programmes inform the respective Managing Authorities about all relevant issues. Finally, the State Chancellery also directly informs administrative stakeholders on an ad-hoc basis (e.g. through e-mails, newsletters etc.) about macro-regional developments or the outcome of major events (e.g. Annual Forum).

Representatives of the **ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova** are not directly participating in major events or workshops / seminars of the EUSDR. However, one person within the Romanian line ministry’s “Directorate for Managing Authorities for ETC Programmes” is regularly participating in such events and then informs all ETC programmes and also the ENI programme on EUSDR-related developments.

## 5. Support to an implementation of the EUSDR and EUSAIR through coordination cooperation and information exchange

This chapter looks at different processes and activities in the field of coordination, cooperation and information exchange in order to see how they support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. For this, we briefly present EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related processes that are established at national or regional level for the funding period 2014-2020 and summarise how the pre-selected ESIF programmes are involved in these (Section 5.1). Then programme-internal activities on coordination, cooperation and information exchange (Section 5.2) as well as “external” cooperation and information exchange activities with other administrations or EU programmes (Section 5.3) are examined more closely.

### 5.1. Country-wide and regional-level processes ensuring coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR / EUSAIR

All EU Member States involved in the EUSDR have established specific processes for coordination / cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR or EUSAIR and other relevant macro-regional strategies. They are linked to the wider arrangements set out in the ESIF Partnership Agreements which aim to ensuring a stronger sectoral and territorial coordination of Union interventions under the ESIF and of the ESIF and other relevant policies or instruments at Union and Member State level (see: Section 2.1).

A summary presentation of the main characteristics of these processes for coordination, cooperation and information exchange in the nine EUSDR Member States (see: Annex 11) reveals the following overall pattern:

- Country-wide processes are established either as formal inter-ministerial coordination and exchange of information processes at the central government level (i.e. CZ, BG, HR, HU, RO, SI, SK) or as vertical cooperation and exchange of information processes between the federal and regional level (i.e. DE, AT<sup>129</sup>).
- Most of the country-wide processes focus only on the EUSDR (i.e. CZ, BG, HU, RO, SK), but some also cover the EUSAIR (i.e. HR, SI) or the EUSALP (i.e. AT, DE and SI) in correspondence with the coverage of the respective Strategy.
- Regional-level processes exist only in the two German Länder of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, where formal inter-ministerial coordination procedures and also less formal exchange of information processes on the EUSDR and EUSALP are established at the regional government level.

The summary overview in the Annex of this study shows (see: Annex 12 – Tables A and B) that **nearly all of the 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes are regularly and actively involved in the EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related processes set up at the national or regional levels.** The only exception is the Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia, as the wider national ESIF coordination arrangement was set up only recently and because the sub-committees for coordination on the EUSDR and EUSAIR are not yet fully established (status: November 2016).

### 5.2. Programme-internal activities ensuring coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR / EUSAIR

In addition to a participation in the above-mentioned country-wide or regional-level processes, EU funding programmes should also develop own initiative for ensuring that their implementation is better aligned with that of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. This is also advocated for by the findings of a recent analysis of the use of new regulatory provisions for the period 2014-2020. This study observed that in practice it was quite difficult for all ESIF programmes to achieve synergies with macro-regional (and sea-

---

<sup>129</sup> In Austria, this vertical process also involves a wider range of other relevant stakeholder organisations (e.g. national association of cities, municipalities or social partners etc.).

basin) strategies during the programming process, wherefore good coordination during implementation will be of particular importance.<sup>130</sup>

“Internal” coordination and information exchange can be enhanced in the decision-making body of a programme (i.e. Monitoring Committee or Joint Monitoring Committee), as it brings together all relevant administrative stakeholders involved in the implementation process and also includes other relevant socio-economic stakeholder organisations that are potentially interested in themes and issues addressed by EUSDR or EUSAIR. For this, however, it is necessary that aspects relating to macro-regional strategies are also finding their way into a committee’s work which usually is dominated by issues linked to the ongoing operational, administrative and financial implementation of programmes.

A decisive factor for introducing macro-regional themes into programme-level work can be the presence of a National Coordinator or of other national actors having a thematic coordination responsibility for the EUSDR / EUSAIR on a programme Monitoring Committee. Findings of a DG Regio stock-taking exercise on aligning the EUSDR with the ESIF suggest that a direct representation of national EUSDR (or EUSAIR) stakeholders on Monitoring Committees can support the implementation of macro-regional strategies.<sup>131</sup> Yet, the influence of these national stakeholders on advancing macro-regional thinking within programmes should not be over-estimated because in practice these actors usually wear different "hats" at the same time.<sup>132</sup>

Nevertheless, this representation can be important for improving programme-internal coordination and information exchange on the EUSDR or EUSAIR, especially if it enables programmes to interact directly with the macro-regional level. Such direct interaction becomes possible if administrative stakeholders of an EU funding programme (e.g. Managing Authority, other involved ministries or specific funding agencies being members of the Monitoring Committee etc.) are also acting in specific functions or formal structures established for the EUSDR (e.g. Priority Area Coordinator; members of Priority Area Steering Groups etc.) or EUSAIR (Pillar Coordinator, members of Thematic Steering Groups). For reaping benefits of this direct interaction for coordination and information exchange, it is however essential that EU funding programmes are also actively using this potential in their day-to-day work processes.

The above-mentioned aspects were analysed for the 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes and a summary of the results is presented in an overview table that can be found in the Annex part of this study (see: Annex 12 - Tables A and B).

---

<sup>130</sup> European Commission, DG Regional and Urban policy (2016b), p.131

<sup>131</sup> “The involvement of Steering Group members of the specific priority areas at national level into the work of ESIF programmes (i.e. into the work of the Monitoring Committees, etc.) via the NCs or directly brings tangible results in the implementation, while increasing ownership.” See on this: <http://www.danube-region.eu/funding/aligning-eusdr-esif>.

<sup>132</sup> i.e. they can be coordinators of the collective EUSDR or EUSAIR work that involves various countries (e.g. Priority Area Coordinators, Pillar Coordinators), reporters and spokespeople for a EUSDR or EUSAIR steering group, both in relation to the wider outside world and to the narrow domestic context (e.g. Priority Area Coordinators, Pillar Coordinators, “normal” steering group members), representatives of their own country and of specific national or regional interest (e.g. National Coordinators, Priority Area Coordinators, Pillar Coordinators, “normal” steering group members) and finally also representatives of their particular ministry within the national/regional administration they belong to (e.g. National Coordinators, Priority Area Coordinators, Pillar Coordinators, “normal” steering group members). See on this also: European Commission (2016b), p.42

### Activities for ensuring a better alignment of programme implementation with the EUSDR or EUSAIR

The overview tables show that 11 national / regional ESIF-programmes<sup>133</sup> and also 3 cooperation programmes<sup>134</sup> are realising own coordination and exchange of information activities for ensuring a better alignment of their implementation with that of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

A closer look at these 14 EU programmes (see: Box 16) reveals **a number of basic practices** that are applied either individually or in combination. A better alignment is achieved by the fact that:

- a Managing Authority of an EU funding programme is acting as National Coordinator (Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria) or plays a key role in country-wide processes for coordination / cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR (ERDF Programme Austria);
- the National Coordinator for the EUSDR or EUSAIR is a member of the programme Monitoring Committee (ERDF Programme Austria; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia and partly Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia) or that various National Coordinators are members of a Joint Monitoring Committee (Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme);
- administrative stakeholders of an EU funding programme are also members in the Monitoring Committee of another EU funding programme (Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg);
- a Managing Authority and/or a Joint Secretariat of an EU funding programme dedicates own staff to directly work on issues related to the EUSDR (Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia);
- close programme-internal working relations and a regular exchange of information exist between different departments of a programme-responsible ministry or between different ministries involved in the same EU funding programme (Environment Programme Czech Republic; Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Programme Czech Republic; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg);
- close working relations and a regular exchange of information exist between ministries of different regions in the same country that are in charge of similar

---

<sup>133</sup> i.e. ERDF Programme Austria; Human Resource Development Programme Bulgaria, Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria, Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria, Environment Programme Czech Republic; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia.

<sup>134</sup> i.e. Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia.

EU funding programmes (ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg).

The actual use of these practices suggests that a stronger alignment of programmes with the EUSDR or EUSAIR can be achieved best through an approach that combines the following main elements: coordination and information exchange within a Monitoring Committee (Joint Monitoring Committee) that includes a National Coordinator and intense inter-administrative working relations within a programme and across different programmes.

**Box 16. EUSDR-related coordination, cooperation and exchange of information activities of EU funding programmes**

The Managing Authority of the **ERDF Programme Austria** (i.e. the Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning, ÖROK) plays a key role (1) in the Austria-internal coordination platforms for the EUSDR and EUSALP as well as (2) in the country-wide and ERDF-specific approach for horizontal and vertical cooperation, coordination and information exchange on macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR (and EUSALP). Moreover, also the National Coordinator for the EUSDR (Austrian Federal Chancellery, BKA) is a member of the programme Monitoring Committee and also involved in a leading role within the afore-mentioned country-wide processes. This double-involvement of ÖROK and the BKA are also creating clear advantages for ensuring programme-level administrative and content-related coordination with respect to the EUSDR and EUSALP.

**In Bulgaria**, the Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Public Works is at the same time head of the Managing Authority of the **Regions in Growth Programme** and acting as National Coordinator of the EUSDR. This creates a solid base for a better programme-internal coordination of EUSDR-relevant intervention policies and measures within the Monitoring Committee. Cross-programme coordination and regular exchanges of information on EUSDR-related issues take place under the **Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme** and the **Human Resources Development Programme**, mainly as a result of the participation of programme representatives in Monitoring Committee meetings of other national ESIF programmes.

In case of the **Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia**, the programme-responsible Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds is also one of the two formally appointed “National Representatives” on the EUSAIR Governing Board. Although the National Coordinator of the EUSDR is not directly represented on the programme’s Monitoring Committee, a formal and informal exchange of information on EUSDR-related matters exists between both sides.

Coordination and cooperation as well as information exchange on the EUSDR takes place between the different ministries involved in **the Environment Programme Czech Republic** and also between different units of the programme-responsible ministry. Monitoring Committee members coming from other national administrations or institutions are regularly commenting draft documents elaborated for the programme and thereby also have a direct opportunity to make proposals on EUSDR-related matters. Within the Ministry of Environment, regular informal meetings on the EUSDR are taking place between the department acting as Managing Authority and colleagues from other departments of the ministry who are involved in an implementation of the EUSDR Priority Areas 4 (To restore and maintain the quality of waters), 5 (To manage environmental risks) and 6 (To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils).

In case of the **Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Programme Czech Republic**, a regular exchange of information on EUSDR-related matters exists within the programme-responsible Ministry of Industry and Trade. As the latter is also involved in the EUSDR steering group for Priority Area 8 (To support the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development), representatives from the responsible unit regularly attend steering group meetings and the Annual Fora or other EUSDR events and workshops. This participation in meetings and events enables the representatives to make proposals to other colleagues within the ministry who are in charge of the programme on how to support an implementation of the EUSDR.

In **Hungary**, the National Coordinator is now represented on the Monitoring Committees of the **Human Resources Development Programme** and the **Energy Efficiency Programme**, but also on those of almost all other national ESIF programmes and ETC programmes (either as full member or observer). This facilitates an immediate exchange of information on EUSDR-related matters within the Monitoring Committees.

Moreover, the traditionally good working relationships between the ministries in charge of the Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme and the Human Resources Development Programme also facilitate cross-programme exchanges of information on EUSDR-related matters. Finally, the Managing Authority of the Human Resources Development Programme regularly attends meetings of the national Partnership Agreement Committee which also allows it to exchange information on an implementation of the EUSDR.

In case of the **Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia**, the National Coordinator is an official member of the Monitoring Committee and provides regular updates on concrete actions that support an implementation of the EUSDR. This facilitates exchanges of information and discussions on EUSDR-related matters within the Monitoring Committee.

**In Baden-Württemberg**, the Managing Authorities of the **ESF Programme** and the **ERDF Programme** are full members with voting rights on the Monitoring Committee of the respective other programme. This cross-representation leads to close working relations between the programmes and also facilitates a regular exchange of information on EUSDR-related matters, but mostly “outside” the regular Monitoring Committee meetings. Both programmes in Baden-Württemberg have also close working relations and informal exchanges of information on the EUSDR with administrations of their corresponding ESIF programmes in Bayern. The establishment of close working relations with the ERDF Programme Bayern was facilitated by the fact that the ERDF Managing Authority in Baden-Württemberg is also the ministerial unit responsible for the EUSDR and EUSALP. In case of the ESF Programme, close cooperation and exchange with the ESF Managing Authority in Bayern mainly emerges from their joint effort to launch and further develop a macro-regional cooperation network of ESF Managing Authorities in the EUSDR.

After the start of the **Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme**, the Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat supported the elaboration of a shared governance proposal with pragmatic solutions for strengthening coordination and cooperation between national-level EUSDR stakeholders and the programmes’ management and decision-making bodies. This proposal was endorsed by the Monitoring Committee (i.e. “DTP-EUSDR Cooperation Framework”) and sets out in more detail the following options for a representation of National Coordinators on the Monitoring Committee: (1) National Coordinators for the EUSDR are invited, as part of a national delegation to the Monitoring Committee (i.e. one of the maximum 3 persons), to act as full members with voting rights (e.g. as is the case for HR and RO). (2) National Coordinators can be part of national delegations to the Monitoring Committee in a role as observers. (3) National Coordinators can take part in the National Committees that in most Member States have been set-up to pre-discuss national positions in decisions to be taken under the Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme.

The **Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia** ensures coordination of its implementation with the EUSDR primarily in the Joint Monitoring Committee. The committee is chaired by the Deputy Minister of regional development and public works (being in charge of all Bulgarian ETC programmes) who acts also as National Coordinator for the EUSDR. This double role guarantees a smooth coordination process on EUSDR-related issues in the Joint Monitoring Committee. Further to this, priority axis 4 “Technical assistance” also provides support to activities of the Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat which aim to identifying and strengthening coordination networks and contacts with representatives of other relevant EU programmes (i.e. neighbouring ETC programmes, national programmes, etc.) and the EUSDR.

The **Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria**, internal coordination and information exchange is facilitated by the fact that a staff member of the Managing Authority is dedicated to work on issues related to the EUSDR.

### **Beneficial direct interaction of programmes with the EUSDR or EUSAIR levels**

Nearly half of the 23 examined EU funding programmes directly interact with the EUSDR level and are also drawing clear benefits from this interaction for their ongoing work on the EUSDR (11 programmes).

Among these 11 programmes, there are **8 national and regional ESIF programmes**<sup>135</sup> that directly interact with the EUSDR level but not with the EUSAIR level. The observable patterns of interaction are the following:

- The administrative unit acting as programme Managing Authority is also a member of a Priority Area steering group (Integrated Infrastructure Programme Slovakia; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg).
- Various administrative units from other ministries that are full members of a Monitoring Committee are also acting as coordinator of a Priority Area or are members of several steering groups for Priority Areas (ERDF Programme Austria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg).
- Close ministry-internal working relations and also regular exchanges of information exist between the administrative unit acting as Managing Authority and other departments/units that act as coordinator of a Priority Area or are members of a Priority Area steering group (Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Programme Czech Republic; Environment Programme Czech Republic).
- Close inter-ministerial working relations exist between the Managing Authority and other ministries that are represented on the Monitoring Committee and also coordinating EUSDR Priority Areas (Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria).

Evidence from interviews with these national / regional ESIF programmes shows that this direct interaction also generates benefits for their ongoing work on EUSDR-related matters. Direct interaction:

- enhances inter-departmental coordination and closer cooperation among administrative stakeholders within a given programme,
- ensures a better and more systematic exchange of information on the EUSDR within a programme or between domestic programmes (i.e. in case of a cross-representation on Monitoring Committees),
- allows identifying thematic synergy effects in relation to the EUSDR and eases a further development of EUSDR-relevant topics within a programme,

---

<sup>135</sup> i.e. ERDF Programme Austria; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Programme Czech Republic; Environment Programme Czech Republic; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Integrated Infrastructure Programme Slovakia; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia.

- helps to establish and further develop new macro-regional cooperation initiatives with actors from the same country and partners from other Danube Region countries.

The ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg is a good example in this respect, as various above-mentioned benefits occur here at the same time (see: Box 17).

#### Box 17. Direct interaction – the case of the ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg

A large number of administrative stakeholders represented on the Monitoring Committee of the **ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg** are also acting in specific functions or formal structures at the EUSDR level.<sup>136</sup> This extensive double-representation facilitates an inter-departmental exchange of information on the EUSDR between the ESF Managing Authority and these other Land-level ministries involved at the EUSDR level, but punctually also closer inter-departmental cooperation. Inter-departmental exchange of information is in general not realised during the ESF Monitoring Committee meetings, but takes place informally and bilaterally and is focussed on specific topics or activities. This exchange helps the ESF Managing Authority to monitor the development and implementation of the EUSDR from an overall perspective and to find links to activities of other actors within Baden-Württemberg. Inter-departmental cooperation is close especially between the ESF Managing Authority and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, because both are represented in the steering group for EUSDR Priority Area 9 (Investing in People and Skills). This cooperation has also facilitated the launching and planning of a macro-regional cooperation network of ESF Managing Authorities in the EUSDR. At the first network meeting in Ulm (28 October 2015), for example, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports presented the EUSDR Priority Area 9 and, in the following, passed on any useful information gathered during Priority Area 9 steering group meetings to the ESF Managing Authority.

Also 3 out of the 5 examined cooperation programmes<sup>137</sup> are directly interacting with the EUSDR level and draw clear benefits from this for their ongoing work on the EUSDR.

In case of the Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria and the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia, administrative stakeholders of both programmes are also acting as coordinators for Priority Area 3 (To promote culture and

<sup>136</sup> The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Family, Women and Senior Persons (Managing Authority) and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MC member with voting rights) are also members of the steering group for EUSDR Priority Area 9 (Investing in People and Skills). The Managing Authority of the ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg (MC member with voting rights) is directly involved in EUSDR Priority Area 6 (To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils). The Ministry of Finance and Economics (MC member with voting rights) coordinates the EUSDR Priority Area 8 (Competitiveness of enterprises & cluster development) together with Croatia. The Ministry of Science, Research and Arts (MC member with voting rights) is also a member of the steering groups for the EUSDR Priority Areas 7 (Knowledge society through research and education) and 3 (Culture and Tourism). The Ministry of the Environment, Climate Protection and the Energy Sector (MC member with voting rights) is also a member of the steering groups for the EUSDR Priority Areas 2 (Sustainable Energy) and 5 (Environmental Risks).

<sup>137</sup> i.e. Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia.

tourism, people to people contacts) and in one case also for Priority Area 11 (Working together to promote security and tackle organised and serious crime). This double role allows them to be directly involved into the implementation-related decision making process, which also facilitates a selection of operations that contribute to the EUSDR.

The situation is different in case of the Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme, where direct interaction with the EUSDR level mostly emerges from the support to projects of Priority Area Coordinators under the programme's specific objective 4.2 (see: Box 18).

### **Box 18. Direct interaction – the case of the Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme**

The **Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme** is the main policy lever for supporting and enhancing coordination and cooperation across the entire Danube Region. Aside from the presence of National Coordinators on the Joint Monitoring Committee, direct interaction with the EUSDR-level is mainly established through interventions under the programme's specific objective 4.2 (Support to the governance and implementation of the EUSDR). Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) are directly supported through so-called "PAC-projects", which aim at enhancing institution building for the EUSDR through covering cost of support staff for Priority Area Coordinators and cost for information or communication activities. After mid/end 2017 it is also envisaged to provide direct support to the Danube Strategy Point (DSP), which aims to improve the implementation process of the EUSDR. The DSP already operates in a pilot phase since mid-2015 and is hosted by the representation of Baden-Württemberg to the EU in Brussels. Currently, the DSP supports the Commission in its coordination tasks of the EUSDR and also facilitates exchanges among Priority Area Coordinators and National Coordinators on their respective tasks.

### **Unexploited potentials or non-existing direct interaction with the EUSDR or EUSAIR levels**

Potentials for direct interaction with the EUSDR or EUSAIR level exist under 5 national/regional ESIF programmes<sup>138</sup> and also in case of the ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova, but they do not lead to noticeable benefits for the programmes' work on the EUSDR or EUSAIR. This is because:

- different persons from a programme-responsible line ministry are acting at the macro-regional level and in the Monitoring Committee (Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia) or in the Joint Monitoring Committee (ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova);

---

<sup>138</sup> i.e. Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia; ERDF Programme Bayern; EAFRD Programme Bayern; Regional Development Programme Romania; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania.

- possible inputs from administrative stakeholders of programmes who also act at the EUSDR level are not used in the Monitoring Committee due to the fact that ongoing work is very focussed on “usual” implementation-related aspects (ERDF Programme Bayern; EAFRD Programme Bayern);
- implementation delays are currently preventing programmes from using this potential for exploring new perspectives for EUSDR-related actions (Regional Development Programme Romania; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania).

Under the remaining 6 EU funding programmes, direct interaction with the macro-regional level is sometimes limited or does most often not take place at all. The reasons for this are that key programme-level stakeholders are only to some extent represented on thematically relevant Priority Area steering groups (Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria) or that neither the Managing Authority nor other members of a Monitoring Committee are involved in EUSDR Priority Area steering groups or Thematic Steering Groups of the EUSAIR (Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro). This leads especially in the latter cases to a situation where the only but essential link to a relevant macro-regional strategy emerges from a National Coordinators' presence on the Monitoring Committee.

All of the above-mentioned programmes should better use existing potentials or start developing direct interaction with the EUSDR or EUSAIR levels in order to enhance their programme-internal work on the respectively relevant macro-regional strategies.

### **5.3. “External” cooperation and information exchange with other administrations or EU programmes in the EUSDR and EUSAIR**

As “thinking beyond the boundaries” of a programme or a country is an essential feature of the macro-regional concept, EU funding programmes should also initiate or further develop cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR or EUSAIR with other administrations and EU programmes (national/regional or cooperation programmes) that are located outside the eligible programme area. Such activities can generate clear benefits for the involved EU funding programmes. They allow widening and/or deepening own knowledge on specific themes/topics of macro-regional relevance and help discovering synergy or cooperation potentials that are existing elsewhere, which can also be used for jointly framing and preparing new macro-regional cooperation initiatives.

The study has examined this aspect by adopting a different focus for national/regional ESIF programmes and for cooperation programmes under the ETC goal and IPA or ENI. This is mainly because the latter already involve substantial cooperation and exchange with actors in neighbouring countries in the context of their interventions and as part of their joint management and decision making processes. An overview on the results of our analysis of the 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes can be found in the Annex part of this study (see: Annex 12 – Tables A and B).

### Activities of national or regional ESIF programmes

In case of the pre-selected national / regional ESIF programmes, the study examined whether they have established cooperation and/or exchange of information activities on the EUSDR or EUSAIR with administrations or EU programmes located in other Member States and non-EU countries.

The overview table shows that **7 national or regional ESIF programmes<sup>139</sup> are realising such activities with administrations or EU programmes in other Member States of the Danube region**. These activities focus all on the EUSDR, but they do not concern the EUSAIR or involve non-EU countries.

The programme activities are very different because they cover strategic networking on a theme of macro-regional relevance, timely limited cooperation on EUSDR-related projects or just an informal exchange of information on the EUSDR.

- Most active in this respect are the ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg, the Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria and the Human Resources Development Programme Hungary, because they are all directly involved in a network among ESF Managing Authorities of Danube Region countries (see: Box 19).
- The Managing Authority of the Integrated Infrastructure Programme Slovakia works together with administrations in neighbouring countries to support the preparation and implementation of different cross-border road infrastructure projects that are of relevance for the EUSDR.
- The other three national ESIF-programmes undertake mostly informal and sporadic cooperation and exchange of information activities on the EUSDR with EU programmes or administrations in neighbouring Danube region countries (Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary, Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria, Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia).

#### Box 19. The network among ESF Managing Authorities from Danube Region countries

In October 2015, alongside the 4th EUSDR Annual Forum in Ulm, the Managing Authorities of the **ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg** and the ESF Programme Bayern have together launched a macro-regional network among ESF Managing Authorities from Danube Region countries. The aim of this network is to initiate cooperation in the Danube Area, both at the level of the Managing Authorities and at the level of project promoters, with a view to interlink the ESF and the EUSDR in a

<sup>139</sup> i.e. ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Integrated Infrastructure Programme Slovakia; Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia.

mutually supportive way. After the first meeting in Ulm, a second meeting with a broader participation took place on 7 and 8 July 2016 in Munich at the invitation of Bayern: it was attended by representatives of ESF Managing Authorities from Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Bulgaria, Slovenia, the Czech Republic/City of Prague and Hungary as well as by representatives from the European Commission, the Danube Strategy Point and the EUSDR Priority Area 9 "People and Skills". The network is currently coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration of Baden-Württemberg (ESF Managing Authority), which also reported at the 5th EUSDR Annual Forum in Bratislava (November 2016) on the current status of this cooperation. The close cooperation between the network and Priority Area 9 and 10 will now be followed up by the new Austrian coordinators, who will organise the next network meeting in Vienna in 2017. As the Managing Authorities of the **Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria** and the **Human Resources Development Programme Hungary** are actively participating in this network, also their external cooperation and information exchange activities have increased.

### Activities of ETC, IPA or ENI cooperation programmes

In case of the 5 pre-selected cooperation programmes, the study examined whether they have developed formal or less formal cooperation and exchange of information activities on the EUSDR or EUSAIR with "neighbouring" EU funding programmes (i.e. other cooperation programmes; relevant national / regional ESIF programmes implemented in the cooperation area) and other domestic administrations or national EUSDR or EUSAIR stakeholders.

Our overview shows that 3 cooperation programmes are undertaking such EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related activities. The interview-based evidence also suggests that these activities clearly support and enhance their own work on the respectively relevant macro-regional strategies (see: Box 20).

#### Box 20. Cooperation and information exchange of ETC and IPA programmes

The Joint Secretariat of the **Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme** took the initiative to contact EUSDR stakeholders for developing and implementing the three main interventions that are supported under specific objective 4.2 (i.e. projects for Priority Area Coordinators; Danube Strategy Point; Seed Money facility). Furthermore, Priority Area Coordinators will be invited to take part and co-lead the programme's Capitalisation Strategy with the funded projects that is about to be started. This means that Priority Area Coordinators will be invited to join related programme events (e.g. the Lead Partner Seminars) and also to act as co-leaders of the poles structured alongside the investment priorities or topics covered by the programme.

The **Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria** has dedicated one staff member of the Managing Authority to work on EUSDR-related matters, who also ensures constant contact with other international partners or neighbouring programmes. Within Romania, more specifically, the EUSDR National Coordinator organises regular meetings with all stakeholders involved in implementing the EUSDR that are also attended by the Interreg VA Programme. Moreover, the programme is also taking part in a regular non-formal information exchange with other departments or ministries on issues relating to macro-regional strategies, which is practiced by the directorate of the Romanian Ministry for Regional Development and Public Administration that deals with all five Interreg programmes concerned by the EUSDR.

The Managing Authority of the **Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro** is in regular contact with the Croatian National Coordinators for the EUSDR and EUSAIR as well as with other relevant administrations, ensuring coordination in the country (esp. Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds). Through these contacts, the Managing Authority receives all relevant information that is related to an implementation of both macro-regional strategies.

## 6. Overall conclusions on an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR and recommendations for the short and medium-term

Based on the previous summary analysis of the 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes (Chapters 3-5), this final chapter draws overall conclusions and develops recommendations for improving an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the short and medium-term. In doing so, also conclusions of the earlier Interact study on the EUSBSR<sup>140</sup> are considered in order to highlight similarities between them and the conclusions drawn for the EUSDR (and EUSAIR).

The main findings of this summary analysis can, of course, be looked at from different angles that are depending on a person's point of view, just as in the case of a glass of water which can be considered half empty or half full. Therefore, separate conclusions on an embedding of the EUSDR/EUSAIR into the examined EU funding programmes are formulated, first on persisting weaknesses (Section 6.1) and then on achievements (Section 6.2). Because both perspectives include issues that can be addressed in the current funding period but are also of wider relevance for EU Cohesion Policy in the time after 2020, different recommendations are elaborated for each case (i.e. "recommendations 2014-2020" and "recommendations post-2020").

---

<sup>140</sup> Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c)

### **6.1. Conclusions on weaknesses that hamper a systematic embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR into the examined EU funding programmes**

Our analysis of the 23 EU funding programmes shows that a number of weaknesses persist which are considerably hampering a more systematic embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. The observed weaknesses suggest that, similar to what was recommended for the EUSBSR, a combined top-down and bottom-up approach involving various stakeholders and levels of action is needed in the EUSDR (and EUSAIR) for progressively changing attitudes and modes of action of EU funding programmes.<sup>141</sup> While some of these weaknesses in the EUSDR and EUSAIR can already be addressed in the current programming period, many of them are also of a wider relevance for the time after 2020 and require that solutions are found in the forthcoming reform of the EU's Cohesion Policy.

#### **Provisions on macro-regional strategies in the EU regulations for the period 2014-2020 are lacking transparency and coherence**

The 23 examined EU funding programmes did in general not perceive the diversity of direct and indirect provisions on macro-regional and sea basin strategies in the current EU regulations as an obstacle for planning their contributions to support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

However, our analysis identified several aspects which suggest that a review of the regulatory “anchorage” of EU macro-regional and sea basin strategies should be put on the agenda for a reform of the concerned Union policies in the time after 2020:

- Several national ESIF programmes did not consider the current EU regulations to be particularly helpful for planning an embedding of the EUSDR / EUSAIR during the elaboration phase or were not aware of indirect regulatory options (e.g. “synergy enabling rules”) that can be used in this respect.
- Clear differences exist between different types of national/regional ESIF programmes in the actual use of interregional/transnational cooperation for supporting the EUSDR or EUSAIR, which tends to be closely related to the different provisions in the respective ESIF Regulations.
- Although the ESIF and IPA II / ENI funding regimes are more closely interlinked in the period 2014-2020, the analysis revealed an evident lack of coherence between the respective regulatory provisions on EU macro-regional and sea basin strategies. EU regulations governing the IPA II and ENI only set out very general provisions on macro-regional strategies, which are clearly less specific than the ESIF provisions applied to strategic reference documents and in particular to the programmes.

---

<sup>141</sup> See Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c), pp.11,12: “Engage a reflection on how ESI Funds programmes can relate to shared Baltic challenges and opportunities. The study shows that a focus on regional and national self-interest is inherent to the ways in which programme elaboration, decision-making, monitoring and evaluation processes are organised in ESI Funds programmes. A reflection on how ESI Funds programmes could be organised in view of contributing to the EUSBSR more effectively and consistently needs to be engaged. Parallel capacity-building efforts focusing on regional and local stakeholders would help to widen perspectives on development and on interdependencies between territories and levels of the Baltic Sea Region. Such combined top-down and bottom-up approaches may progressively lead to required changes in attitudes and modes of action.”

The above-mentioned aspects suggest that especially the transparency of and also the coherence between provisions on EU macro-regional and sea basin strategies should be further strengthened in the EU regulations which will govern Cohesion Policy and the Union's external actions in the time after 2020. This would also contribute to bridging the gap between these Strategies and available funding opportunities, which the Commission report on an implementation of EU macro-regional strategies has generally considered to be an important challenge.<sup>142</sup>

→ **Recommendation I (post-2020):**

When elaborating the future EU regulations governing Cohesion Policy and the Union's external actions, the competent EU institutions involved in the legislative process should ensure that provisions on EU macro-regional and sea basin strategies are designed in the most transparent and also coherent way so that different types of EU funding programmes will be able to fully deploy their support potentials for enhancing an implementation of such Strategies.

**Many programmes have a substantial gap in their EUSDR- or EUSDR-related intervention logic**

Our analysis shows that most of the examined EU funding programmes were already from the outset characterised by a considerable weakness because their descriptions of priority axes and investment priorities neither included direct references to the EUSDR or EUSAIR, nor mentioned concrete macro-regional activities to be supported directly and/or potential types of action to be realised by beneficiaries. This conclusion is also relatively similar to what was observed in case of the earlier Interact study carried out on the EUSBSR.<sup>143</sup>

This weakness creates a substantial gap (or “black box”) in their EUSDR- or EUSDR-related intervention logic, because the frequently absent definition of concrete instruments or tools (i.e. means) and of the related “transmission belts” (effects) does not make clear how the foreseen EUSDR- or EUSAIR-contributions (i.e. objectives) will actually be achieved at the end of the programme implementation process (i.e. result and impact). Moreover, this gap also makes it more difficult for programmes to monitor (or evaluate) their actual support to an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR and to demonstrate their contribution in the Annual Implementation Reports and the Final Report that have to be presented in accordance with Article 111 (4) (d) of the CPR.

<sup>142</sup> European Commission (2016a), p.5

<sup>143</sup> Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c), p.11: “Improve the capacity of ESI Funds programmes to design and implement strategic actions. The requirement to “set out the contribution to [the EUSBSR]” in art. 27(3) of the CPR has primarily been interpreted as an obligation to identify shared objectives. This proves not to be sufficient to change the ways in which ESI Funds programmes operate. A change of working methods and intervention logics is needed. The report proposes a series of awareness-raising initiatives focusing on different categories of ESI Funds programmes actors. ESI Funds programmes would, on this basis, develop a so-called ‘proactive bottom-up approach’. This implies that they would actively promote a change in attitudes among project applicants and project participants.”

Because the defined objectives and interventions of EU funding programmes cannot be substantially changed in the remainder of the funding period 2014-2020, there is also little that can be done for eliminating this weakness directly.

However, there are other options which can be used especially by EU funding programmes that do not foresee direct support of EUSDR/EUSAIR related actions or organise EUSDR- or EUSAIR-dedicated calls for proposals. These programmes should realise more communication activities on the EUSDR or EUSAIR for motivating regional / local stakeholders to initiate bottom-up initiatives that support an implementation of these strategies and, in parallel, also offer adequate guidance or direct advice to applicants for helping them to actually develop their proposals. Both types of activities are not cost-intensive for programmes and can also be realised ad-hoc by sub-contracting qualified external expertise.

**→ Recommendation II (post-2020):**

EU funding programmes should stronger mobilise and directly assist national or regional/local stakeholders in the process of initiating and developing bottom-up proposals for operations that support an implementation of both macro-regional strategies (i.e. through programme-level communication activities and targeted guidance / direct advice).

This weakness also seems to exist under other EU macro-regional strategies<sup>144</sup> and is very likely to re-appear in the future. Action should therefore be taken in the forthcoming reform of the EU's Cohesion Policy for avoiding this. The most appropriate solution seems to be a regulatory approach, for example by including a specific requirement within the provisions that will define the content of future ESIF programmes. Similar requirements should also be introduced into the future regulations that will govern IPA and ENI in the time after 2020.

**→ Recommendation III (post-2020):**

Future regulations governing the ESIF, IPA and ENI should include a specific provision in the rules that define the content of programmes: “where Member States and regions participate in macro-regional strategies and sea basin strategies, the priority axes or investment priorities of a programme shall set out concrete macro-regional actions that are supported directly and/or give examples for potential types of action with a macro-regional relevance that beneficiaries may address at their own initiative through dedicated operations”.

**Often lacking or inadequate guidance / assistance provided to bottom-up initiated operations supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR**

---

<sup>144</sup> See: European Commission (2016a), p. 5: “Managing authorities should be more proactive in the implementation of MRS in their programme objectives and should better integrate and coordinate relevant activity in the programmes.” (...).

The above-mentioned general weakness makes clear that for achieving a contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR, most of the examined EU funding programmes are strongly relying on bottom-up initiated operations with a macro-regional relevance.<sup>145</sup> For this to work, potentially interested national or regional/local stakeholders need to be well-informed about possibilities to become active under the EUSDR or EUSAIR. In addition, they should also receive adequate guidance on how to set up operations that are able to generate a contribution to these Strategies. However, our analysis shows that clear weaknesses exist in this respect.

Nearly half of the 23 examined EU funding programmes have not included EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related information in their guidance material for applicants (8 national/regional ESIF programmes<sup>146</sup> and 3 cooperation programmes<sup>147</sup>). And even in case of pro-active national/regional ESIF programmes, guidance documents rarely explain how future operations can support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR and do not give practical advice to applicants on how to set up operations with a macro-regional relevance. However, a noteworthy positive example is the comprehensive approach adopted by the ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg for providing assistance to applicants on EUSDR-related cooperation (see Box 9 in section 4.1).

Overall, however, it is very important that efforts are made from different sides to further improve this situation in the current programming period.

**→ Recommendation IV (post-2020):**

EU funding programmes should, in close collaboration with their relevant national EUSDR or EUSAIR key implementers, develop further guidance and support activities that address and answer the practical needs and questions of potential beneficiaries which are interested in setting up operations for supporting these strategies.

**→ Recommendation V (post-2020):**

Interact should, in parallel, collect good practice examples on adequate applicants guidance / direct advice activities from different types of EU funding programmes in the EUSDR or EUSAIR (and other macro-regional strategies) and elaborate (or commission the elaboration of) a short publication on this matter that is widely distributed.

**Little use of monitoring and evaluation activities for determining programme contributions to the EUSDR or EUSAIR**

<sup>145</sup> This is the case under all EU funding programmes that do not foresee a direct support of strategic projects or initiatives from the EUSDR/EUSAIR Action Plans. This reliance on bottom-up initiatives is also present under EU programmes which implement EUSDR/EUSAIR focused funding schemes or organize dedicated calls for proposals.

<sup>146</sup> i.e. ERDF Programme Austria; Environment Programme Czech Republic; Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Programme Czech Republic; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern; EAFRD Programme Bayern; Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Integrated Infrastructure Programme Slovakia.

<sup>147</sup> i.e. Interreg VA Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia; ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova.

More than two thirds of the 23 examined EU funding programmes are not collecting information and data from approved operations on their EUSDR or EUSAIR contribution (17 programmes). A similar share of the examined programmes is also not generating aggregated information on their contributions to the EUSDR or EUSAIR at the level of the monitoring systems (16 programmes). Such a situation of general inactivity is also observed for evaluation, because 15 programmes do not envisage realising specific activities for appraising their contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR. This also corresponds to what is observed in the earlier Interact study on the EUSBSR, where Managing Authorities are generally reluctant at adding an additional EUSBSR dimension to the programme-level monitoring procedures.<sup>148</sup>

Especially the widespread inactivity of programmes in the field of monitoring is a matter of concern that needs to be addressed in the current funding period. This is not only because ESIF programmes have to provide more substantial information on their contributions to the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the comprehensive Annual Implementation Reports for 2017 and 2019 as well as in their Final Reports, but also because all ESIF and the IPA II / ENI programmes are asked to deliver “lighter” information on their contributions to the Commission through excel-lists in the other years.

**→ Recommendation VI (post-2020):**

The European Commission, in collaboration with Interact, should organise an exchange of experience between different types of EU funding programmes in the EUSDR or EUSAIR (and other macro-regional strategies) for identifying good practice approaches (e.g. on bottom-up data collection, specific indicators or monitoring approaches) that can be transferred to other EU funding programmes which are not yet active in this respect.

As monitoring and evaluation are also considered important “cross-cutting issues” at the level of all macro-regional strategies for adapting them to the demand for a stronger focus on performance in the current Cohesion Policy framework<sup>149</sup>, it is advised to launch a specific EU-level action that explores how the bottom-up monitoring input of EU funding programmes can be improved in the post-2020 period.

**→ Recommendation VII (post-2020):**

A working group should be established by the European Commission that examines different practices for a programme-level monitoring of contributions to macro-regional strategies in order to design approaches that can be applied in the post-2020 programming period. These approaches should include a quantitative and also a qualitative dimension (i.e. indicators, criteria), because many aspects of a contribution to macro-regional strategies are intangible / non-quantifiable.

<sup>148</sup> Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c), pp.32, 33

<sup>149</sup> European Commission (2016a), pp. 4, 10

### **Little use of programme-level communication activities for raising awareness on the EUSDR or EUSAIR**

Recent publications highlight the need to increase awareness at all levels and to improve the communication of the added value and results of macro-regional strategies<sup>150</sup>, and also stress that this is particularly important during the initiation and development phase of operations which aim to support a macro-regional strategy.<sup>151</sup>

Bearing this in mind, the results of our analysis allow concluding that the 23 examined EU funding programmes adopt a very passive attitude in this respect: 21 programmes do not mention the EUSDR or EUSAIR in their communication strategies and more than half of the programmes have not realised specific communication activities in the further course of the implementation for promoting these strategies towards potential or actual beneficiaries and other stakeholder organisations in their own context (13 programmes).

This is somewhat problematic in a situation where most of the examined EU funding programmes are relying on bottom-up initiated operations with a macro-regional relevance for achieving their EUSDR or EUSAIR contribution. For this to work, potentially interested beneficiaries at the local/regional or national levels need to be sufficiently aware of macro-regional strategies and also of related cooperation potentials. This, however, is in practice often not yet the case<sup>152</sup>.

Considering the above-described overall context, it becomes clear that lasting progress can only be achieved if simultaneous action is taken at two levels: EU funding programmes should more intensively raise awareness among project-level actors on the EUSDR or EUSAIR, but also increase their own support capacity for being better prepared to respond to the practical questions raised by project-level actors (see also above). (2) At the EUSDR or EUSAIR governance levels, the capacity namely of Priority Area / Pillar Coordinators and Steering Group members should be increased for better planning activities in relation to the broad targets and actions of both Strategies and for better communicating these plans to programme- and project-level stakeholders so that they know what is expected or will emerge under the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

#### **→ Recommendation VIII (2014-2020):**

All EU funding programmes should realise more communication activities for raising awareness on the EUSDR or EUSAIR and strengthen their own capacities for supporting potential beneficiaries at the local/regional or national levels who are interested in realising operations that may contribute to an implementation of both strategies.

#### **→ Recommendation IX (2014-2020):**

<sup>150</sup> European Commission (2016a), p.10

<sup>151</sup> Interact (2017), p.14

<sup>152</sup> "In many cases projects had very little or even no knowledge of the macro-regional strategy to whose implementation they contributed."  
See: Interact (2017), p.14

At the EUSDR or EUSAIR governance levels, the planning and communication capacity of Priority Area / Pillar Coordinators and Steering Group members should be increased so that they can better inform programme- and project-level stakeholders about what is expected or will emerge under the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

### **Partially lacking involvement of national EUSDR or EUSAIR stakeholders in the ongoing work of programmes**

Shortcomings in this respect were already mentioned by DG Regio's stock-taking exercise on aligning the EUSDR with the ESIF<sup>153</sup> and also exist under half of the examined EU funding programmes (12 programmes). This is the case for the 6 programmes which have potentials for direct interaction with the EUSDR or EUSAIR level that are not yet sufficiently used for enhancing their own work on these strategies<sup>154</sup>, but also for another 6 programmes where direct interaction with the macro-regional level is limited or does not take place at all<sup>155</sup>. Both groups of programmes can improve this situation already in the current funding period, but they need to take different actions for achieving this.

#### **→ Recommendation X (2014-2020):**

EU funding programmes with existing direct interaction potentials that are currently not or only insufficiently used in their ongoing work should eliminate persisting weaknesses and also ensure that EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related matters are more frequently put on the work agenda of their Monitoring Committees / Joint Monitoring Committees.

#### **→ Recommendation XI (2014-2020):**

EU funding programmes that currently have no potential for direct interaction with the EUSDR or EUSAIR levels should amend the rules of procedure of their Monitoring Committees / Joint Monitoring Committees for ensuring that relevant EUSDR or EUSAIR stakeholders (i.e. members of Priority Area steering groups or Thematic Steering Groups) become involved into internal work processes of these Committees. In accordance with country- or region-specific practices, stakeholders should be represented on the Committees as observers or alternatively as full members with voting rights. In case of cooperation programmes, however, this representation should take into consideration the specific nature of joint decision making within the relevant programme Committees.

<sup>153</sup> As regards the involvement of steering group members of EUSDR Priority Areas at national level into the work of ESIF programmes (i.e. Monitoring Committees, etc.), "there are many cases where there are no links even if a steering group member works in the same institution where Managing Authority is located!" See on this: <http://www.danube-region.eu/funding/aligning-eusdr-esif>.

<sup>154</sup> i.e. Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia; ERDF Programme Bayern; EAFRD Programme Bayern; Regional Development Programme Romania; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania; ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova.

<sup>155</sup> i.e. Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro.

Because a strengthening of links between managers of EU funding programmes and key implementers of macro-regional strategies is still a challenge of wider relevance and also plays an important role in the future development of all macro-regional strategies after 2020<sup>156</sup>, it is advised to address this matter directly at the level of the future EU regulations that will govern the ESIF, IPA and ENI. A possible approach could be to generalise the current provisions in Article 2 (ii) of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership (ECCP) in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds: this article stipulates only for the case of ETC programmes that Member States may involve in the partnership also authorities or bodies that are involved in the development or implementation of a macro-regional or sea-basin strategy in the programme area, including Priority Area Coordinators for macro-regional strategies.

**→ Recommendation XII (post-2020):**

The partnership-related provisions in the new EU regulations (ESIF, IPA, ENI) and also the revised European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP) should foresee that, where relevant, national stakeholders linked to an implementation of macro-regional and sea basin strategies may also be included in the Monitoring Committee / Joint Monitoring Committee of a programme.

Little cooperation and information exchange with administrations or EU programmes in other Member States or non-EU countries

This aspect was examined only in case of national / regional ESIF programmes and the overall result is rather disappointing. Just 7 out of the 18 examined programmes are realising such activities in the context of the EUSDR<sup>157</sup> but not in the EUSAIR. Among these programmes, only the three examined human resources development programmes are involved in more substantial cooperation through a macro-regional network among ESF Managing Authorities of Danube Region countries (ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary).

---

<sup>156</sup> After seven years of implementation, MRS are producing their first results, but have not shown their full potential yet. The benefits would be much greater if the Member States who initiated these processes of cooperation would retain greater responsibility. Areas where continued effort is needed relate to the effectiveness of the governance systems (...), in particular, that (...) close cooperation is ensured between steering groups members and the managing authorities of programmes supported by ESIF or other instruments; (...). See: European Commission (2016a), pp.9, 10

<sup>157</sup> i.e. ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Integrated Infrastructure Programme Slovakia; Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia.

This ESF-network in the EUSDR and also other networks set up in the Baltic Sea Region (e.g. the Baltic Sea Network-ESF<sup>158</sup>, a network of ERDF Managing Authorities<sup>159</sup> and a network of EAFRD Managing Authorities) are good instruments for creating stronger and sustained “macro-regional thinking and acting” within EU funding programmes. As a consequence, and similar to what was recommended in the earlier Interact study on the EUSBSR<sup>160</sup>, it is advised to support further cooperation projects between Managing Authorities of other types of EU funding programmes in order to help initiating a change in their attitudes and modes of action with respect to the EUSDR (and EUSAIR).

→ **Recommendation XIII (2014-2020):**

In order to create stronger “macro-regional thinking and acting” within EU-funding programmes, further EUSDR cooperation networks among Managing Authorities of ERDF/CF programmes, EAFRD programmes and cross-border cooperation programmes (ETC, IPA, ENI) should be established. Also in the EUSAIR, such networks among different types of EU funding programmes should be initiated.

**One half of the EU funding programmes only reached a low degree of embedding, but several have potentials for reaching a medium degree**

When looking at the five main themes this study has considered for analysing an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR<sup>161</sup>, one can identify **11 EU funding programmes** that realised only a few of the possible actions that can support an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. However, further differentiation is needed within this group of programmes **with a low degree of embedding** because they have different prospects for further improving their current status in the period 2014-2020.

There are **6 programmes that have potentials for reaching a medium degree of embedding** because each of them is in one theme already among those programmes which are most active in this respect. These 6 programmes apply half or more of the potential embedding actions during the elaboration and finalisation of programming documents (Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia), for a provision of guidance to applicants and for project application/selection processes (Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania) and finally for ensuring coordination, cooperation and information exchange (Environment Programme Czech Republic; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Integrated Infrastructure Programme Slovakia). If the above is looked at from

---

<sup>158</sup> Established in 2011, the Baltic Sea Network-ESF (BSN-ESF) is a network of Managing Authorities for the ESF in the Baltic Sea Region. It aims at improving and enhancing transnational cooperation and the social dimension in the ESF and at developing a common understanding of the role of the ESF in relation to the EUSBSR. See: <http://www.esf.se/sv/Sidhuvud/The-swedish-ESF-council/Baltic-Sea-Network/>

<sup>159</sup> Established in 2016, the network of ERDF Managing Authorities shall allow a more efficient use of available resources, by supporting EUSBSR implementation with ERDF country-specific programmes and by increasing coordination among relevant stakeholders. See: European Commission (2016a), p.6

<sup>160</sup> Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c), p.12

<sup>161</sup> i.e. realisation of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related embedding actions under the following themes: (1) elaboration and finalisation of programming documents, (2) guidance for applicants and project application/selection processes, (3) monitoring, evaluation and reporting, (4) programme-level communication and information and (5) coordination, cooperation and information exchange.

an inverse perspective, it becomes clear that the programmes need to become more active in those themes which are not yet addressed.

**The remainder 5 programmes have to make clearly more efforts for reaching a medium degree of embedding**, because none of them is already very active under one of the five addressed themes (i.e. Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Programme Czech Republic; EAFRD Programme Bayern, Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia; ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova).

## **6.2. Conclusions on achievements of EU funding programmes that enhance a more systematic embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR**

The 23 EU funding programmes are on a positive development path for various aspects of the different themes this study has addressed for analysing an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. The most important key messages on observable achievements and related conclusions are now presented below.

### **All programmes realise together a wide range of actions that ensure a systematic embedding of the EUSDR and EUSAIR**

The 23 EU funding programmes address together nearly all actions from the “checklist” presented at the beginning of this study (see: Table 2), which can be undertaken for ensuring a systematic embedding of the EUSDR and EUSAIR. This is done of course very differently by the individual programmes and also at highly variable levels of intensity (see also below).

Nevertheless, **this stock of experiences should be shared more widely throughout the EUSDR and EUSAIR** with a view to identify good practices that can also be applied by other EU funding programmes implemented in both macro-regional strategy areas. In order to achieve improvements in the remainder of the funding period 2014-2020, this exchange of experience should take place more frequently<sup>162</sup> and focus on topics that are linked to the ongoing implementation of EU funding programmes (e.g. specific selection criteria or approaches for enhancing EUSDR/EUSAIR-relevant operations; use of monitoring and evaluation for determining the programmes’ EUSDR/EUSAIR contribution).

#### **→ Recommendation XIV (2014-2020):**

Exchanges of experience between EU funding programmes in the EUSDR or EUSAIR (and other macro-regional strategies) should be organised more frequently with a view to identify good practices in fields for which improvements (and progress in embedding) can be achieved in the remainder of the funding period 2014-2020. These exchanges should be initiated by the key implementers of both Strategies,

<sup>162</sup> In the EUSAIR, such exchanges of experience already take place quite comprehensively.

while focussing on different types of EU funding programmes (i.e. national/regional ESIF programmes, cooperation programmes).

Bearing in mind the breadth of practices and tools applied by the examined EU funding programmes, **it may also be useful to realise a comprehensive EU-wide stock-taking of programme-level embedding and alignment practices in all macro-regional strategy areas.** On ground of this, the terms “embedding” and “alignment” should be better defined and inter-related with a view to form the basis for an “action agenda” that provides guidance to EU funding programmes in the time after 2020.

Such an initiative is needed also because the current macro-regional thinking of many EU programmes associates “embedding” too narrowly with only connecting the objectives of both sides (i.e. of programmes and Strategies) and “alignment” with generally mobilising financial resources for supporting an implementation of macro-regional strategies. Although these aspects are closely inter-related at the programme level, one can observe that the essential link between them is often still insufficiently developed by EU funding programmes (i.e. the operational provisions for implementing interventions and operations). This problem will be addressed more specifically in the following section that presents conclusions on persisting weaknesses.

→ **Recommendation XV (post-2020):**

The European Commission should realise an EU-wide stock-taking of experiences made by different types of EU funding programmes (ESIF, IPA, ENI, EU-wide programmes) with an embedding of and alignment with macro-regional strategies. On ground of this, a Communication dedicated to this matter should be elaborated which also includes an “action agenda” that provides clear guidance to programmes on how to achieve a more systematic embedding and alignment in the time after 2020.

**A majority of programmes involved national EUSDR / EUSAIR stakeholders in their elaboration and sets out a coherent contribution to the EUSDR / EUSAIR**

The 23 EU funding programmes generally comply with the provisions in the respectively relevant EU regulations<sup>163</sup> that require them to either set out their contribution to relevant macro-regional or sea basin strategies (i.e. here the EUSDR and EUSAIR) or to be coherent with macro-regional strategies.

The large majority of the examined EU funding programmes (i.e. 19 programmes) have often substantially involved relevant national or regional EUSDR and EUSAIR stakeholders during the elaboration phase and also described their envisaged

<sup>163</sup> i.e. Article 27 (3) and Article 96 (3) (e) of the CPR (national / regional ESIF programmes); Article 8 (3) (d) of the ETC regulation (transnational and cross-border programmes); Article 9 (5) of the IPA II regulation and Article 4 (2) (c) of the Commission Implementing Regulation for IPA II (cross-border programmes); Article 8 (5) of the ENI regulation (cross-border programmes)..

contributions to the EUSDR / EUSAIR either extensively or adequately, while taking into account relevant country-wide development challenges (i.e. national ESIF programmes) or specific needs existing in smaller areas (i.e. regional ESIF programmes; ETC / IPA / ENI cooperation programmes). This practice is also fairly different from that observed in the EUSBSR, as the earlier Interact study on this strategy showed that the programme elaboration process was characterised by a low involvement of EUSBSR actors.<sup>164</sup>

**One third of the programmes “earmarked” parts of their funding for supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR**

Macro-regional strategies do not have a dedicated budget of their own, which makes their implementation relying on a mobilisation of funding from other relevant sources (EU national, regional, private, etc.) and on a well-coordinated use of available funding streams at different levels. However, a recent analysis of the use of new regulatory provisions for the period 2014-2020 shows that all ESIF programmes (national / regional, ETC) have in most cases not specifically earmarked (ring-fenced) budgets for macro-regional strategies<sup>165</sup>.

When taking this general situation into account, it is clearly an achievement that one third of the 23 examined EU funding programmes (8 programmes<sup>166</sup>) have “earmarked” often substantial amounts of their EU contribution for supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

Nevertheless, this declared earmarking of programme-level EU support for macro-regional strategies should be verified with regard to its realism by placing it into a wider context. For this we assume an earmarked amount of EU support to be realistic if it is linked to concrete EUSDR/EUSAIR-related actions or specific funding schemes within a programmes' priority axes / investment priorities, for which also the EUSDR or EUSAIR related outcomes are monitored (and evaluated) in order to ensure credibility to a programmes' financial and non-financial contribution. Having verified this, then the following conclusions can be drawn.

Budgetary earmarking is realistic in case of 4 programmes. This is because the programmes apply specific funding schemes or realise actions that support the EUSDR or EUSAIR directly and have also established adequate approaches for monitoring and evaluating their actual contribution to these macro-regional strategies (Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Regional Development Programme Romania; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro).

Budgetary earmarking is partly realistic in case of 3 programmes. This is because the programmes do not apply specific funding schemes and include only a few or no actions

---

<sup>164</sup> Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c), pp.8, 24

<sup>165</sup> European Commission, DG Regional and Urban policy (2016b), p.130

<sup>166</sup> i.e. ERDF Programme Austria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern; Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia; Regional Development Programme Romania; Human Resources Development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro

that support the EUSDR directly, but also because the monitoring approaches applied for determining their EUSDR contribution show slight weaknesses in terms of objectivity<sup>167</sup> (ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg, ERDF Programme Bayern; ERDF Programme Austria).

Only in case of the Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia, the declared budgetary earmarking should be considered merely “lip-service”. This is because the programme does not foresee any specific funding schemes or actions that support the EUSDR or EUSAIR and also does not realise activities for monitoring or evaluating its actual contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR.

### **Most programmes are actively increasing their own awareness of the EUSDR or EUSAIR**

Gathering information on general developments in the EUSDR / EUSAIR or on specific programme-relevant themes and macro-regional initiatives / projects is important for the large majority of the 23 examined programmes (19 programmes). This is done most often directly through a participation of programme stakeholders (e.g. Managing Authority representatives; Monitoring Committee members) in the Annual Fora or other workshops / seminars that are organised at the EUSDR or EUSAIR levels (14 programmes). The other 5 programmes gather information on the EUSDR or EUSAIR indirectly, for example through formal or informal information dissemination processes in the domestic context.<sup>168</sup> This attitude of programmes is somewhat different from what was observed in case of the earlier Interact study carried out on the EUSBSR, where ESIF programmes continue to consider this strategy as a “different world”.<sup>169</sup>

For further stimulating and better serving this own interest of EU funding programmes, the already existing direct dialogue between key implementers of both strategies (e.g. National Coordinators, EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators; EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators) and programme Managing Authorities should be used for identifying adequate initiatives that can be launched in the remainder of the current funding period.

One possible initiative suitable for both strategies is the organisation of thematically focussed macro-regional workshops at which EU funding programmes present their own activities, discuss implementation-related problems or challenges and jointly explore potentials for further action (unilateral and/or in cooperation).

Other more EUSDR-focussed initiatives may be launched in the context of the Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme (i.e. under specific objective 4.2 and the so-called “PAC projects”) or be introduced as an element of the future work programme of the “Danube Strategy Point”.

---

<sup>167</sup> i.e. no direct information collection from approved operations, but determination of contribution by MA assessments and no external evaluations realised (ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg, ERDF Programme Bayern); only qualitative monitoring and not yet developed evaluation activities (ERDF Programme Austria)

<sup>168</sup> i.e. Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness Programme Czech Republic; ERDF Programme Bayern; EAFRD Programme Bayern; ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova.

<sup>169</sup> Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c), p.12

→ **Recommendation XVI (2014-2020):**

Within the context of the already existing direct dialogue between key implementers of the EUSDR or EUSAIR (e.g. National Coordinators, EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators; EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators) and programme Managing Authorities, adequate initiatives should be jointly identified for further raising the EU funding programmes' interest in / awareness of macro-regional strategies.

**Solid support for an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR through coordination, cooperation and information exchange**

A clearly positive achievement is that all EU Member States of the Danube Region have established country-wide and/or regional-level processes for coordination, cooperation and information exchange which are supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

The 23 examined EU funding programmes are in nearly all cases<sup>170</sup> regularly and actively involved in these EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related processes, which also corroborates the EUSDR-related conclusions on this matter in the Commission report on an implementation of EU macro-regional strategies.<sup>171</sup>

Moreover, 14 EU funding programmes<sup>172</sup> also realise additional “own” coordination and exchange of information activities for ensuring a better alignment of their implementation with that of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. These activities most often involve the Monitoring Committee (or Joint Monitoring Committee) on which a National Coordinator is represented, but also formal or informal information exchanges and cooperation between various administrative stakeholders involved in programmes.

**Encouraging dynamic developments on some embedding themes**

When comparing the embedding status reached at the end of the programme preparation phase (i.e. adoption of programming documents) with the current status at the end of 2016, one can conclude that further progress was made on several themes.

A first example is the **preferential treatment of EUSDR- or EUSAIR-relevant operations in the selection process** (e.g. specific selection criteria, allocation of bonus points) **or the use of specific approaches for supporting an implementation of both macro-**

<sup>170</sup> Only in case of the Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia, no judgement can be made because the wider domestic coordination arrangement was set up recently and the sub-committees on coordination with the EUSDR and EUSAIR were not yet fully established (Status: November 2016).

<sup>171</sup> European Commission (2016a), pp.6, 7: “The EUSDR has also made the governance system more effective by strengthening coordination between policies and institutions at national level. It has facilitated reaching out to relevant stakeholders at both national and local level, as well as continued dialogue with civil society organisations.”

<sup>172</sup> i.e. ERDF Programme Austria; Human Resource Development Programme Bulgaria, Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria, Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria, Environment Programme Czech Republic; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia

**regional strategies** (e.g. calls for proposals dedicated to the EUSDR or EUSAIR). At the outset, only 5 national/regional ESIF programmes and 2 ETC programmes had foreseen EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related criteria within their “guiding principles for a selection of operations” or an implementation of specific approaches.<sup>173</sup> Meanwhile, there are 9 national/regional ESIF programmes and 4 cooperation programmes (2 ETC and 2 IPA II programmes) that apply specific selection criteria and organise calls for proposals which are dedicated to the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

A second example is the **realisation of programme-level coordination, cooperation and exchange of information activities** for supporting an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. At the outset, such activities were explicitly foreseen in the programming documents of only 2 national/regional ESIF programmes and 2 cooperation programmes.<sup>174</sup> By the end of 2016, 10 national / regional ESIF-programmes<sup>175</sup> and also 3 cooperation programmes<sup>176</sup> realise “own” activities for better aligning their implementation with that of the EUSDR or EUSAIR.

### **One half of the examined EU funding programmes reached a high or medium degree of embedding**

When looking at the EU funding programmes that were most active under the five main themes this study has considered for analysing an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR (see: Table 3), one can identify **8 programmes that reached a high degree of embedding and another 4 programmes that reached a medium degree of embedding**.

The **8 EU funding programmes with a high degree of embedding** realised many actions from four or all five examined themes during their preparation phase and especially during the early starting and implementation phase.

- 4 programmes are found in all five themes and always realised under each of them half or more of the possible actions that can support an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR (ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro).
- 4 programmes are found in three or four of the examined themes and always realised under each relevant theme half or more of the possible actions that can support an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. They addressed the themes elaboration and finalisation of programming documents (ERDF Programme

---

<sup>173</sup> i.e. Human Resource Development Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Bayern; Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme Croatia; Regional Development Programme Romania; Large Infrastructures Programme Romania; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria.

<sup>174</sup> i.e. Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Interreg IPA Programme Bulgaria-Serbia; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme

<sup>175</sup> i.e. Human Resource Development Programme Bulgaria, Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria, Transport and Transport Infrastructure Programme Bulgaria, Environment Programme Czech Republic; Human Resources Development Programme Hungary; Environmental and Energy Efficiency Programme Hungary; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern.

<sup>176</sup> i.e. Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia.

Austria; ERDF Programme Bayern; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg), guidance for applicants and project application / selection processes (Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Bayern), monitoring, reporting and evaluation (Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern), programme-level communication and information (Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Austria) and coordination, cooperation and information exchange (Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Austria).

The **4 EU funding programmes with a medium degree of embedding** appear each in two of the examined themes, where they are among the programmes that most actively support an embedding of the EUSDR or EUSAIR. The most relevant theme covered by all these programmes is guidance for applicants and project application / selection processes (Regional Development Programme Romania; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia), followed by coordination, cooperation and information exchange (Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia) and programme-level communication and information (Regional Development Programme Romania).

**Table 2. Most active EU funding programmes under the 5 main themes examined by the study**

Main theme	Programmes having applied half or more of the potential actions under a given theme (“most active programmes”), arranged by frequency of appearance under all themes
Elaboration and finalisation of programming documents	ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro ERDF Programme Austria; ERDF Programme Bayern; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg
Guidance for applicants and project application / selection processes	ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Bayern Regional Development Programme Romania; Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia

<b>Main theme</b>	<b>Programmes having applied half or more of the potential actions under a given theme (“most active programmes”), arranged by frequency of appearance under all themes</b>
Programme-level monitoring, evaluation and reporting	ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Bayern
Programme-level communication and information	ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Austria Regional Development Programme Romania
Coordination, cooperation and information exchange	ESF Programme Baden-Württemberg; Human Resources development Programme Bulgaria; Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme; Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro Regions in Growth Programme Bulgaria; ERDF Programme Baden-Württemberg; ERDF Programme Austria Research and Innovation Programme Slovakia; Interreg VA Programme Romania-Bulgaria; Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia

## **Bibliography**

Adriatic and Ionian Strategy (2016): 1st FORUM of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region. Adriatic and Ionian Council / EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting. Dubrovnik Declaration, 12 May 2016

Council of the European Union (2011): Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region. 3083rd General Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 13 April 2011. 8743/1/11 REV 1, PRESSE 97, PR CO 23.

Danube Region Strategy (2014): Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the participating states of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and of the European Commission. Vienna, 26 June 2014.

Danube Region Strategy (2015a): Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the participating States of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and of the European Commission. Brussels, 13 May 2015

Danube Region Strategy (2015b): Joint Statement of Ulm on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. Ulm, 29 October 2015.

Danube Region Strategy (2016): Embedding state-of-play reports on EUSDR countries, accessed at <http://www.danube-region.eu/funding/aligning-eusdr-esif>

- Austria embedding state-of-play Jan2016
- Bulgaria embedding state-of-play Jan2016
- Croatia embedding state-of-play Jan2016
- Czech Republic embedding state-of-play Jan2016
- Germany embedding state-of-play Jan2016
- Hungary embedding state-of-play Jan2016
- Romania embedding state-of-play Jan2016
- Slovakia embedding state-of-play Jan2016
- Slovenia embedding state-of-play Jan2016
- 

ESTEP (2013): "Proposals and Recommendations for (A) Integrating the European Strategy for Baltic Sea Region into Programming, Implementation and Financial Support of the EU Structural Funds 2014-2020 and Other Financial Instruments and (B) Improving the EUSBSR Monitoring and Indicators System. 20 September 2013."

European Commission (2010a): Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. European Union Strategy for Danube Region. Brussels, 08/12/2010, COM(2010) 715.

European Commission (2010b): Commission Staff Working Document, Action Plan. Accompanying document to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the

Committee of the Regions European Union Strategy for the Danube Region COM(2010) 715. Brussels, SEC(2010) 1489.

European Commission (2013a): Commission Staff Working Document. Elements for a Common Strategic Framework 2014 to 2020 - the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. SWD(2012) 61 final, Brussels, 14.3.2012 (Part I & II).

European Commission (2013b): Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies. Brussels, 27.6.2013, COM(2013) 468 final.

European Commission (2013c): Report 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 Danube Region. Brussels, 8.4.2013. COM(2013) 181 final.

European Commission (2014a): Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies. Brussels, 20.5.2014, COM(2014) 284 final.

European Commission (2014b): 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 Adriatic and Ionian Region. Brussels, 17.6.2014, COM(2014) 357 final.

European Commission (2014c): Commission Staff Working Document, Action Plan. Accompanying the document 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 Adriatic and Ionian Region. Brussels, 17.6.2014, SWD(2014) 190 final.

European Commission (2016a): Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies. Brussels, 16.12.2016, COM(2016) 805 final.

European Commission (2016b): Commission Staff Working Document, Accompanying the document Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies. {COM(2016) 805 final}. Brussels, 16.12.2016, SWD(2016) 443 final.

European Commission, DG Regional and Urban policy (2014): Enabling synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other research, innovation and competitiveness-related Union programmes. Guidance for policy-makers and implementing bodies. Luxembourg.

European Commission, DG Regional and Urban policy (2016a): Guidelines for the completion of the excel checklists on the contribution of the Operational and Cooperation Programmes 2014-2020 to the macro-regional (MRSs) and sea basin strategies (SBSs). Ref. Ares(2016)1088518 - 03/03/2016.

European Commission, DG Regional and Urban policy (2016b): The use of new provisions during the programming phase of the European Structural and Investment Funds. Final Report. May 2016. FWC Assignment Nr 2014CE16BAT06

European Commission, DG Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid (no date mentioned): Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) 2014-2020. Programming document for EU support to ENI Cross-Border Cooperation (2014-2020). Brussels.

European Commission, DG Enlargement (2014a): Multi-country indicative strategy paper (2014-2020), adopted on 30/06/2014. Brussels

European Commission, DG Enlargement (2014b): Annex 1. Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA II). Indicative strategy paper for Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014-2017).

European Commission, DG Enlargement (2014c): Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA II). Indicative strategy paper for Montenegro (2014-2020).

European Commission, DG Enlargement (2014d): Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA II). Indicative strategy paper for Serbia (2014-2020).

European Council (2014): European Council 23 and 24 October 2014: Conclusions. Brussels, 24 October 2014, EUCO 169/14, CO EUR 13, CONCL5.

Interact (2014): Opportunities for interregional cooperation in Regional Operational Programmes: Article 96.3.d) of the Common Provisions Regulation. Interact Future Pilot Activity. 16 September 2014. Milano.

Interact (2016): Macro-regional strategies in changing times - EUSBSR, EUSDR, EUSALP and EUSAIR headed towards the future together. Turku.

Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015a): Cooperation methods and tools applied by European Structural and Investment Funds programmes for 2014-2020 to support implementation of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. First Interim Report. Task 1 – Description of selected ESI Funds operational programmes. May 2015. Turku, Heisdorf.

## **Embedding macro-regional strategies**

**June 2017**

Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015b): Cooperation methods and tools applied by European Structural and Investment Funds programmes for 2014-2020 to support implementation of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Second Interim Report. Task 2 – Interviews. May 2015. Turku, Heisdorf.

Interact / Spatial Foresight (2015c): Cooperation methods and tools applied by European Structural and Investment Funds programmes for 2014-2020 to support implementation of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Final Report, June 2015. Turku, Heisdorf.

Interact (2017): Added value of macro-regional strategies. Project and programme perspective. Final report of the study. February 2017. Turku.

Spatial Foresight (2016): Added value of macro-regional cooperation: Discussion paper for the focus group Brussels, 27 October 2016 (Authors: Maria Toptsidou, Kai Böhme, Erik Gløersen, Silke Haarich). 24/10/2016.

## Annexes to the Final Report

### Annex 1: Basic structuring Elements of the EUSDR and EUSAIR

<b>EUSDR pillars and related “Priority Areas” (PAs)</b>	<b>EUSAIR pillars and related “Topics” (T) of mutual interest</b>
<p>Pillar 1 “Connecting the Danube Region”:                      PA 1 - To improve mobility and multimodality                      PA 2 - To encourage more sustainable energy                      PA 3 - To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts.</p>	<p>Pillar 1 "Blue Growth":                      T 1 - Blue technologies                      T 2 - Fisheries and aquaculture                      T 3 - Maritime and marine governance and services</p>
<p>Pillar 2 “Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region”:                      PA 4 - To restore and maintain the quality of waters;                      PA 5 - To manage environmental risks;                      PA 6 - To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils.</p>	<p>Pillar 2 "Connecting the Region":                      T 4 - Maritime transport;                      T 5 - Intermodal connections to the hinterland;                      T 6 - Energy networks</p>
<p>Pillar 3 “Building Prosperity in the Danube Region”:                      PA 7 - To develop the Knowledge Society through research, education and information technologies;                      PA 8 - To support the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development;                      PA 9 - To invest in people and skills.</p>	<p>Pillar 3 "Environmental quality":                      T 7 - The marine environment;                      T 8 - Transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity</p>
<p>Pillar 4 “Strengthening the Danube Region”:                      PA 10 - To step up institutional capacity and cooperation;                      PA 11 - To work together to promote security and tackle organised and serious crime.</p>	<p>Pillar 4 "Sustainable tourism":                      T 9 - Diversified tourism offer (products and services);                      T 10 - Sustainable and responsible tourism management (innovation and quality)</p>

**Annex 2: Basic features of the 23 pre-selected programmes to be analysed**

Country	Operational programmes	EUSDR	EUSAIR	Total Union contribution and per funds, in million EUR (*)
Austria	Austria Operational Programme Investment for Growth and Jobs in Austria	X		Total (ERDF): 536
Bulgaria	Operational Programme Transport and Transport Infrastructure	X		Total: 1,605 CF: 1,145 ERDF: 460
	Operational Programme Human Resource Development	X		Total (ESF): 939 (incl. 110 million for YEI)
	Operational Programme Regions in Growth	X		Total (ERDF): 1,312
Croatia	Operational Programme Competitiveness and Cohesion	X	X	Total: 10,676 ERDF: 4,321 ESF: 1,516 CF: 2,560 EAFRD: 2,026 EMFF: 253
Czech Republic	Operational Programme Environment	X		Total: 2,637 CF: 2,242 ERDF: 395
	Operational Programme Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness	X		Total (ERDF): 4,331
Germany	EAFRD Operational Programme Bayern	X		Total (EAFRD): 1,516 (**)
	ESF Operational Programme Baden-Württemberg	X		Total (ESF): 260
	ERDF Operational Programme under the Investment for Growth and Employment Objective, Bayern 2014-2020	X		Total (ERDF): 495

Country	Operational programmes	EUSDR	EUSAIR	Total Union contribution and per funds, in million EUR (*)
	ERDF Operational Programme Baden-Württemberg 2014-2020	X		Total (ERDF): 247
Hungary	Operational Programme Environmental and Energy Efficiency	X		Total: 3,217 CF: 3,131 ERDF: 86
	Operational Programme Human Resources Development	X		Total: 2,613 ESF: 1,708 ERDF: 905
Romania	Operational Programme Large Infrastructures	X		Total: 9,419 CF: 6,935 ERDF: 2,484
	Operational Programme Regional Development	X		Total (ERDF): 6,600
Slovakia	Operational Programme Research and Innovation	X		Total (ERDF): 2,267
	Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure	X		Total: 3,967 CF: 2,307 ERDF: 1,660
Slovenia	Operational Programme for the implementation of the cohesion policy for the period 2014- 2020	X	X	Total: 3,011 ERDF: 1,390 CF: 895 ESF: 717 YEI: 9
Danube countries	Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme	X	X	Total (ERDF & IPA): 222
Romania – Bulgaria	Interreg VA Romania – Bulgaria	X		Total (ERDF): 216
Bulgaria – Serbia	Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria – Serbia	X	(X) (only Serbia)	Total (IPA & ERDF): 29

Country	Operational programmes	EUSDR	EUSAIR	Total Union contribution and per funds, in million EUR (*)
Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro	Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020	X	X	Total (IPA & ERDF): 57
Romania – Moldova	Joint Operational Programme Romania–Republic of Moldova ENI 2014-2020	X		Total (ENI & ERDF): 81 (***)

(\*) Rounded figures as indicated at [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2014-2020/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2014-2020/) or at [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/ipa/cross-border/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/ipa/cross-border/) for the Union contribution of Cohesion Fund (CF), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI).

(\*\*) Figures as indicated in the EAFRD programme, including means transferred from the 1st pillar of the CAP of € 223.6 million, available from 2016.

(\*\*\*) Figures as indicated in the ENI cross-border programme.

### Annex 3: Specifications for the main study tasks and work accomplished in relation to these tasks

Task Specifications (according to Terms of Reference)	Work accomplished in the context of the study
<b>Task 1: Describing pre-selected EU funding programmes</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The contractor is asked to describe how the respective EU funding programme takes into consideration the EUSDR pillars or priorities and the EUSAIR pillars or topics, where relevant.</li> <li>- Identify and note are there clear references to the Articles 15(2)(a)(ii), 27(3) and 70(2)(b) of the Common Provisions Regulation and/or the ESI Funds specific regulations given in the ESI Funds operational programmes concerning the EUSDR or EUSAIR, where relevant, and specific modalities referred for a support to cooperation activities.</li> <li>- Identify and note are there any clear references to the Article 20 (2) (b) of the ETC</li> </ul>	<p>In order to determine how the EUSDR or EUSAIR were taken into account during the preparation phase, the experts reviewed and analysed in-depth relevant strategic reference documents elaborated for the ESIF (i.e. Partnership Agreements of the nine EU Member States involved in the EUSDR), EU-level reference documents and country-specific programming documents elaborated for IPA II and ENI as well as the approved programme documents for the 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes.</p>

<p><b>Task Specifications (according to Terms of Reference)</b></p>	<p><b>Work accomplished in the context of the study</b></p>
<p>regulation, Article 44 (2) (b) of the IPA II regulation and specific modalities referred for a support to cooperation activities within ETC/Interreg, IPA II and/or ENI.</p> <p>- More specifically, the contractor is expected to describe how the EU programme translates contribution to the EUSDR and where relevant the EUSAIR pillars (through e.g. programme’s strategy, priority axes, financial plan and integrated approach) into concrete working methods, coordination procedures and cooperation models. As for the ESI Funds programmes, description is to be based on Article 27 of the Common Provisions Regulation and Commission Implementing Regulation EU No 288/201418.</p>	<p>Also a mapping exercise was realised for each EU funding programme: it related the main strategy elements of ESIF programmes (i.e. priority axes and investment priorities/specific objectives) and of IPA II or ENI cooperation programmes (i.e. priority axes and thematic priorities/specific objectives or thematic objectives/priorities) to the four pillars of the EUSDR and/or EUSAIR in order to identify thematically corresponding EUSDR Priority Areas / actions or EUSAIR Topics / actions in the Action Plans of both macro-regional strategies</p>
<p><b>Task 2: Dialogue with the Managing Authorities (MA) of EU funding programmes</b></p>	
<p>The contractor will check with the MA:</p> <p>- In what way application documentation (legal disposition for implementing the programme, application form, manuals, selection criteria and processes, etc.) is contributing to the EUSDR targets and supporting the implementation of activities and example projects listed in the Action Plan accompanying the EUSDR. Where applicable, the Action Plan accompanying the EUSAIR should be considered.</p> <p>- Is there a need for mutual and/or specific cooperation arrangements with the EU funding programmes or other instruments regarding intervention models to support cooperation activities.</p> <p>- How the cooperation with priority area coordinators and other key implementers (e.g. National Coordinators) is foreseen during the implementation of the programme. Are there any other coordination mechanisms foreseen and/or established at national level.</p>	<p>The analysis focussed on the on-going implementation process of the 23 EU funding programmes. It explored whether and how the EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related approaches and tools “announced” in the programme documents are also applied in practice. Particular attention was paid to identifying new actions or initiatives that programmes have launched since their approval in 2014 with a view to better achieve their intended contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR. For the analysis, more than 150 documents relating to the implementation of the pre-selected programmes were reviewed. These were, for example, existing management arrangements of national / regional ESIF programmes and cooperation agreements of ETC/IPA/ENI programmes, the composition of programme Monitoring Committees, programme manuals or</p>

<p><b>Task Specifications (according to Terms of Reference)</b></p>	<p><b>Work accomplished in the context of the study</b></p>
<p>- How they intend to report on the contribution of the programme to the EUSDR and EUSAIR, if relevant (like in accordance to Article 52 and Annex I part 4 of the Common Provisions Regulation; Article 14 (4) of the ETC regulation and Article 42 (1) of the IPA II regulation. Operational and cooperation programmes funded by the EU are required to report on their contribution to the macro-regional and sea basin strategies. In addition to respective reporting requirements set for Annual Implementation Reports for 2017 and 2019 and the final reports, brief annual reporting on the contributions is proposed. More details on the annual reporting request will be provided to the contractor during the kick-off meeting.</p> <p>- Are there planned communication activities related to the EUSDR (e.g. in the programme’s Communication plan).</p>	<p>other guidance documents for applicants, project application forms, the approved project selection criteria and documents describing the overall selection process, documents describing specific project calls, available reporting templates to be used by approved operations, the most recent Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs 2014/2015), documents describing the programme-level monitoring systems, the programmes’ evaluation plans as well as the adopted communication strategies of programmes and various other documents addressed to the wider public (e.g. “citizen’s summary” of programmes or AIRs etc.). Moreover, interviews or round table discussions involving a total of 48 representatives from all Managing Authorities or Joint Secretariats were realised.</p>
<p><b>Task 3: Conducting an analysis and drawing conclusions</b></p>	
<p>- Based on the information collected while implementing Tasks One and Two (...), the contractor will conduct an analysis concerning the methods and tools elaborated and applied by the Member States to allow cooperation across the Danube and partly Adriatic and Ionian macro-regions.</p> <p>- The analysis should reflect information collected, present conclusions made, give best practice examples and suggest additional possibilities for cooperation methods and tools to be applied by the EU funding programmes.</p> <p>- While conducting analysis and drawing conclusions, the contractor is asked closely consider conclusions of the similar study for the EUSBSR referred above. The Contractor should highlight conclusions that are found</p>	<p>The study conducted a summary analysis that covers the three different phases of the programme cycle (i.e. preparation phase, early starting phase, ongoing implementation phase), which presents the main findings on a larger number of aspects that were examined under tasks 1 and 2. On ground of this, overall conclusions were drawn with respect to the methods and tools applied by the 23 EU funding programmes for supporting an implementation of the EUSDR and EUSAIR. The outcome of this task is the present Final Report.</p>

Task Specifications (according to Terms of Reference)	Work accomplished in the context of the study
similar from the EUSBSR study and this study.	

**Annex 4: Role of the EUSD and EUSAIR in strategic reference and programming documents elaborated for the ESIF, ENI and IPA**

**Annex 4 – Table A: Consideration of the EUSDR and EUSAIR In the nine ESIF Partnership Agreements**

Partnership Agreement	Description of the role of macro-regional cooperation within the integrated approach to territorial development and the main priority areas for cooperation (*)	Extent to which the envisaged national contributions of the Partnership Agreements address the pillars, priority areas / topics of the EUSDR / EUSAIR	Provisions on the allocation of EU support to programme operations located outside the eligible areas and links to macro-regional strategies	Description of processes for coordination, cooperation and information exchange in support on macro-regional strategies (*)
AT	+++	focussed contribution	No	+++
BG	+++	focussed contribution	Yes (indirectly)	+++
CZ	++	wide contribution	No	++
DE	++	wide contribution	Yes (indirectly)	++
HU	+	wide contribution	No	++ (but some lack of clarity)

<b>Partnership Agreement</b>	Description of the role of macro-regional cooperation within the integrated approach to territorial development and the main priority areas for cooperation (*)	Extent to which the envisaged national contributions of the Partnership Agreements address the pillars, priority areas / topics of the EUSDR / EUSAIR	Provisions on the allocation of EU support to programme operations located outside the eligible areas and links to macro-regional strategies	Description of processes for coordination, cooperation and information exchange in support on macro-regional strategies (*)
HR	+++	focussed contribution (EUSDR) wide contribution (EUSAIR)	No	+++
RO	+++	wide contribution	No	+
SI	+++	focussed contribution (EUSDR & EUSAIR)	No	++
SK	++	wide contribution	No	++

**Annex 4 – Table B: Consideration of the EUSDR and EUSAIR In EU-wide reference documents and the country-specific programming documents elaborated for IPA II and ENI**

Strategic document	Description of the consideration of or contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR (*)	Description of processes for coordination, cooperation and information exchange in support on macro-regional strategies (*)
IPA II “Multi-Country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020”	+ (EUSDR, EUSAIR)	0
Indicative IPA II “Country Strategy Paper”, Serbia	0 (EUSDR, EUSAIR)	0
Indicative IPA II “Country Strategy Paper”, Bosnia and Herzegovina	++ (EUSDR, EUSAIR)	0
Indicative IPA II “Country Strategy Paper”, Montenegro	++ (EUSDR, EUSAIR)	0
ENI Programming document for EU support to Cross-Border Cooperation 2014-2020	0 (only one short reference to macro-regional strategies)	0
(*) +++ = extensive, ++ = adequate, + = weak, 0 = not existing The above scaling is based on the experts' (subjective) impressions on scope and quality of the descriptions presented in the documents.		

**Annex 5: Consideration of the EUSDR or EUSAIR during the elaboration process and in the strategy of the 23 EU funding programmes**

<b>Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)</b>		Degree of involvement of national EUSDR- or EUSAIR-stakeholders(*)	Description of the contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR Action Plans (**)	Scope of the envisaged thematic contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR Action Plans	Correspondence of contribution with potentials identified by the strategy mapping (***)
<b>National / regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal</b>					
AT	OP Investment for Growth and Jobs in Austria (ERDF)	+++	+++	focussed contribution	+++
BG	OP Transport and Transport Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	+	++	focussed contribution	+++
	OP Human Resource Development (ESF)	+++	++	focussed contribution	+++
	OP Regions in Growth (ERDF)	++	++	focussed contribution	+ (and inconsistencies)
CZ	OP Environment (ERDF/CF)	+ / ++	+	focussed contribution	+++
	OP Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness (ERDF)	+ / ++	+	focussed contribution	+++
DE	OP Baden-Württemberg (ERDF)	+++	++	focussed contribution	+++
	OP Baden-Württemberg (ESF)	+++	+++	focussed contribution	+++
	OP Bayern (ERDF)	+++	++	focussed contribution	+
	OP Bayern (EAFRD)	++	+++	wide contribution	+
HU	OP Environmental and Energy	++ / +++	+++	focussed contribution	+++

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)		Degree of involvement of national EUSDR- or EUSAIR-stakeholders(*)	Description of the contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR Action Plans (**)	Scope of the envisaged thematic contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR Action Plans	Correspondence of contribution with potentials identified by the strategy mapping (***)
	Efficiency (ERDF/CF)				
	OP Human Resources Development (ESF/ERDF)	++ / +++	+	focussed contribution	+++
HR	OP Competitiveness and Cohesion (ERDF/CF)	+++	+++	wide contribution (EUSDR & EUSAIR)	+++ (EUSDR) +++ (EUSAIR)
RO	OP Large Infrastructures (ERDF/CF)	++	+++	focussed contribution	+++
	OP Regional Development (ERDF)	++	++	focussed contribution	++
SI	OP for the implementation of cohesion policy (ERDF/CF/ESF)	+ / ++	++	wide contribution (EUSDR & EUSAIR)	++ (EUSDR) +++ (EUSAIR)
SK	OP Research and Innovation (ERDF)	++	+++	focussed contribution	+++
	OP Integrated Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	++	+	focussed contribution	++ / +++
<b>Cooperation programmes under the ETC goal, IPA II and ENI</b>					
	Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme	+++	+++	wide contribution	+++
	Interreg VA Romania – Bulgaria	+++	+++	wide contribution	+++
	Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria – Serbia	++	+++	wide contribution	+++

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)	Degree of involvement of national EUSDR- or EUSAIR-stakeholders(*)	Description of the contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR Action Plans (**)	Scope of the envisaged thematic contribution to the EUSDR and EUSAIR Action Plans	Correspondence of contribution with potentials identified by the strategy mapping (***)
Interreg Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro	+++ (EUSDR & EUSAIR)	+++ (EUSDR) +++ (EUSAIR)	wide contribution (EUSDR) focussed contribution (EUSAIR)	+++ (EUSDR) +++ (EUSAIR)
ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova	++	++	wide contribution	+ (and inconsistencies)

(\*) +++ = intense, ++ = adequate, + = low  
The above scaling combines the experts' (subjective) impressions on scope and quality of the programme descriptions and evidence from the interviews realised under task 2.

(\*\*) +++ = extensive, ++ = adequate, + = weak, 0 = not mentioned  
The above scaling is based on the experts' (subjective) impressions on scope and quality of the descriptions presented in the programme documents.

(\*\*\*) +++ = high degree of correspondence (no or only minor contribution potentials are missing)  
++ = moderate degree of correspondence (some important contribution potentials are missing)  
+ = low degree of correspondence (many important contribution potentials are missing)

**Annex 6: Specific approaches or tools supporting the EUSDR or EUSAIR within the intervention strategies of EU funding programmes**

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)	Application of interregional or transnational cooperation (*) to support macro-regional activities in the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Specific references or types of action (**) that show how interventions will support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Specific provisions for macro-regional cooperation in the “guiding principles for a selection of operations”	Instruments for integrated territorial development applied to support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR (***)
<b>National / regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal</b>				
AT	OP Investment for Growth and Jobs in Austria (ERDF)	No	Yes (one concrete action)	No
BG	OP Transport and Transport	No	No	No

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)		Application of interregional or transnational cooperation (*) to support macro-regional activities in the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Specific references or types of action (**) that show how interventions will support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Specific provisions for macro-regional cooperation in the “guiding principles for a selection of operations”	Instruments for integrated territorial development applied to support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR (***)
	Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)				
	OP Human Resource Development (ESF)	Yes	Yes (reference & six actions)	Yes (indirectly)	No
	OP Regions in Growth (ERDF)	No	No	No	No
CZ	OP Environment (ERDF/CF)	No	No	No	No
	OP Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness (ERDF)	No	No	No	No
DE	OP Baden-Württemberg (ERDF)	Yes (under all priority axes)	No	No	No
	OP Baden-Württemberg (ESF)	Yes (under all priority axes)	No	No	No
	OP Bayern (ERDF)	No (but possible exceptionally & indirectly)	Yes (very general and indirect reference)	Yes (under all IPs)	No
	OP Bayern (EAFRD)	No (but possible via LEADER)	No	No	No (but possible via LEADER)
HU	OP Environmental and Energy Efficiency (ERDF/CF)	No	No	No	No
	OP Human Resources	Yes (but only indirectly)	No	No	No

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)		Application of interregional or transnational cooperation (*) to support macro-regional activities in the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Specific references or types of action (**) that show how interventions will support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Specific provisions for macro-regional cooperation in the “guiding principles for a selection of operations”	Instruments for integrated territorial development applied to support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR (***)
	Development (ESF/ERDF)				
HR	OP Competitiveness and Cohesion (ERDF/CF)	Yes (for EUSDR & EUSAIR)	Yes (one concrete action)	Yes (under nearly all IPs)	No
RO	OP Large Infrastructures (ERDF/CF)	No	Yes (very general reference)	Yes (under one IP)	No
	OP Regional Development (ERDF)	No (but possibly later)	No	Yes (under relevant priority axes)	No (but indirectly through ITI Danube Delta)
SI	OP for the implementation of cohesion policy (ERDF/CF/ESF)	No (but possibly later)	No	No	No
SK	OP Research and Innovation (ERDF)	No	No	No	No
	OP Integrated Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	No	Yes (very general reference)	No	No
<b>Cooperation programmes under the ETC goal, IPA II and ENI</b>					
Interreg	Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme	N.R.	Yes (especially PA 4 and IP 11c/SO 4.2)	No (directly) Yes (indirectly, by restricted calls)	No
Interreg	VA Romania – Bulgaria	N.R.	Yes (three direct references)	No (directly)	No

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)	Application of interregional or transnational cooperation (*) to support macro-regional activities in the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Specific references or types of action (**) that show how interventions will support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Specific provisions for macro-regional cooperation in the “guiding principles for a selection of operations”	Instruments for integrated territorial development applied to support an implementation of the EUSDR or EUSAIR (***)
			Yes (indirectly, for all IPs)	
Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria – Serbia	N.R.	Yes, (one direct reference and many indirect references)	No	No
Interreg Cooperation Programme Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro	N.R.	No, EUSDR Yes, EUSAIR (two indicative actions)	No	No
ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova	N.R.	No	No	N.R.
<p>(*) Only relevant for national / regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal in accordance with Article 96 (3) (d) of the CPR or other funds-specific rules on cooperation such as Article 10 of the ESF Regulation and Article 35 (7) or Article 44 (1) (a) of the EAFRD Regulation.</p> <p>(**) Denomination is different under IPA II (indicative actions) and ENI (indicative activities)</p> <p>(***) Not directly relevant for ENI, although the “Programming document for EU support to ENI Cross-Border Cooperation (2014-2020)” explicitly recognises the need for an integrated regional development across EU borders</p>				

**Annex 7: Specific tools enhancing cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR within the programmes’ provisions on financing and eligibility**

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)		Earmarking of Union support for macro-regions in the budget of priority axes	Dedicating shares of funding to operations located outside the programme area	Cumulating grants from different EU funding instruments / ESIF for the same beneficiary or project (*)	Increasing the maximum co-financing rate for a priority axis on transnational cooperation (**)
<b>National / regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal</b>					
AT	OP Investment for Growth and Jobs in Austria (ERDF)	Yes	No	No	No
BG	OP Transport and Transport Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	No	No	No	No
	OP Human Resource Development (ESF)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (indirectly)
	OP Regions in Growth (ERDF)	No	No	No	No
CZ	OP Environment (ERDF/CF)	No	No	No	No
	OP Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness (ERDF)	No	No	No	No
DE	OP Baden-Württemberg (ERDF)	Yes	Yes (but indirectly & restrictively)	Yes (but only exceptionally)	No
	OP Baden-Württemberg (ESF)	No	No	No	No
	OP Bayern (ERDF)	Yes	Yes (but indirectly & restrictively)	Yes (but only exceptionally)	No
	OP Bayern (EAFRD)	No	No (but indirectly via LEADER)	No	No (but indirectly via LEADER)

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)		Earmarking of Union support for macro-regions in the budget of priority axes	Dedicating shares of funding to operations located outside the programme area	Cumulating grants from different EU funding instruments / ESIF for the same beneficiary or project (*)	Increasing the maximum co-financing rate for a priority axis on transnational cooperation (**)
HU	OP Environmental and Energy Efficiency (ERDF/CF)	No	No	No	No
	OP Human Resources Development (ESF/ERDF)	No	No	No	Yes (indirectly)
HR	OP Competitiveness and Cohesion (ERDF/CF)	No	Yes (indirectly, but not fully clear)	Yes (indirectly, but not fully clear)	No
RO	OP Large Infrastructures (ERDF/CF)	No	No	No	No
	OP Regional Development (ERDF)	Yes	No (not yet but possibly later)	No	No
SI	OP for the implementation of cohesion policy (ERDF/CF/ESF)	Yes	No (not yet but possibly later)	No	No
SK	OP Research and Innovation (ERDF)	No	No	No	No
	OP Integrated Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	No	No	No	No
<b>Cooperation programmes under the ETC goal, IPA II and ENI</b>					
Interreg Transnational Programme	Danube Cooperation	Yes (by selecting IP 11c/ETC)	Yes	No	N.R.
Interreg Bulgaria	VA Romania -	No	Yes (but only in general terms)	No	N.R.

<b>Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)</b>	Earmarking of Union support for macro-regions in the budget of priority axes	Dedicating shares of funding to operations located outside the programme area	Cumulating grants from different EU funding instruments / ESIF for the same beneficiary or project (*)	Increasing the maximum co-financing rate for a priority axis on transnational cooperation (**)
Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria – Serbia	No	Yes (but only in general terms)	No	N.R.
Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro	Yes (in the priority axis on technical assistance)	Yes (but only in general terms)	No	N.R.
ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova	No	N.R.	N.R.	N.R.
(*) Not relevant for ENI				
(**) Only relevant for national / regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal in accordance with Article 96 (3) (d) of the CPR or other funds-specific rules (ESF, EAFRD).				

**Annex 8: The EUSDR or EUSAIR in guidance material for applicants and in application / selection processes of EU funding programmes**

<b>Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)</b>	EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related information or advice in a programme's guidance material for applicants	Description of a proposal's contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the project application form	Specific selection criteria or approaches used for stimulating EUSDR- or EUSAIR-relevant operations
<b>National / regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal</b>			
AT	OP Investment for Growth and Jobs in Austria (ERDF)	No	Yes (most often)
			No

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)		EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related information or advice in a programme's guidance material for applicants	Description of a proposal's contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the project application form	Specific selection criteria or approaches used for stimulating EUSDR- or EUSAIR-relevant operations
BG	OP Transport and Transport Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	Yes	Yes (but only indirectly)	Yes (but only indirectly)
	OP Human Resource Development (ESF)	Yes (planned but not yet ready)	Yes (planned but not yet ready)	Yes (indirectly, for the planned EUSDR-related project calls)
	OP Regions in Growth (ERDF)	Yes	Yes	Yes
CZ	OP Environment (ERDF/CF)	No	No	No
	OP Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness (ERDF)	No	No	No
DE	OP Baden-Württemberg (ERDF)	No	No	No
	OP Baden-Württemberg (ESF)	Yes	Yes (for transnational activities)	No
	OP Bayern (ERDF)	No	Yes (for an individual measure only)	Yes (for all measures)
	OP Bayern (EAFRD)	No	No	No
HU	OP Environmental and Energy Efficiency (ERDF/CF)	Yes (mostly call-specific material, but also country-wide)	No (but actually checked by assessors and planned for future calls)	No & Yes (not yet, but planned for future calls)
	OP Human Resources Development (ESF/ERDF)	Yes (mostly call-specific material, but also country-wide)	No (but actually checked by assessors)	No

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)		EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related information or advice in a programme's guidance material for applicants	Description of a proposal's contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the project application form	Specific selection criteria or approaches used for stimulating EUSDR- or EUSAIR-relevant operations
HR	OP Competitiveness and Cohesion (ERDF/CF)	Yes (indirectly in general and for one call)	Yes	No & Yes (not programme-wide, but call specific)
RO	OP Large Infrastructures (ERDF/CF)	Yes (for specific interventions)	Yes (for specific interventions)	Yes (extra points for specific interventions)
	OP Regional Development (ERDF)	Yes (but incomplete until now)	Yes (for future EUSDR-related project calls only)	Yes (indirectly, for the planned EUSDR-related project calls)
SI	OP for the implementation of cohesion policy (ERDF/CF/ESF)	No	No	No (approach foreseen but not applied)
SK	OP Research and Innovation (ERDF)	No	Yes	Yes (specific criteria and allocation of additional points)
	OP Integrated Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	No	No	No
<b>Cooperation programmes under the ETC goal, IPA II and ENI</b>				
Interreg Transnational Programme (*)	Danube Cooperation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interreg VA Bulgaria	Romania –	No	Yes	Yes
Interreg Cooperation Programme Bulgaria – Serbia	IPA Cross-border	No	Yes	Yes
Interreg Cooperation Programme and Montenegro	IPA Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina,	Yes	Yes	Yes

<b>Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)</b>	EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related information or advice in a programme's guidance material for applicants	Description of a proposal's contribution to the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the project application form	Specific selection criteria or approaches used for stimulating EUSDR- or EUSAIR-relevant operations
ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania- Republic of Moldova	No (but possible)	No	No (not ready yet, but possible)

(\* ) The assessment mainly focuses on the calls for “regular projects” implementing priority axes 1, 2, 3 and specific objective 4.1, as projects implementing specific objective 4.2 are anyway focussed on supporting institution- and capacity-building for the EUSDR.

### Annex 9: Consideration of the EUSDR or EUSAIR in the monitoring, reporting and evaluation activities of EU funding programmes

<b>Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)</b>	Description of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution in formal progress reports of approved operations	Capturing of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution within the programmes' monitoring system	Description of EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution in the “Annual Implementation Report” for 2014/2015	Appraisal of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution by programme-level evaluation activities	
<b>National / regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal</b>					
AT	OP Investment for Growth and Jobs in Austria (ERDF)	Not clear, but likely	Yes (but qualitatively)	No	Yes (but activities are still developed)
BG	OP Transport and Transport Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	No	No	Yes	No (but possible)
	OP Human Resource Development (ESF)	Yes (but only for a specific priority axis)	Yes (but no EUSDR-specific indicators)	No	Yes (but only for a specific priority axis)

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)		Description of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution in formal progress reports of approved operations	Capturing of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution within the programmes' monitoring system	Description of EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution in the "Annual Implementation Report" for 2014/2015	Appraisal of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution by programme-level evaluation activities
	OP Regions in Growth (ERDF)	Yes (qualitatively)	Yes (at priority axis level and qualitatively)	No	Yes
CZ	OP Environment (ERDF/CF)	No	No	No	No & Yes (*)
	OP Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness (ERDF)	No	No	No	No
DE	OP Baden-Württemberg (ERDF)	No (but indirectly by MA)	Yes	Yes	No
	OP Baden-Württemberg (ESF)	Yes	No (but through evaluation activities)	Yes	Yes
	OP Bayern (ERDF)	No (but indirectly by MA)	Yes	Yes	No
	OP Bayern (EAFRD)	No	No	No	No
HU	OP Environmental and Energy Efficiency (ERDF/CF)	No	No (but initiative taken on this by MA)	No (but in annual report of NC)	No (not explicitly, but possible at OP level)
	OP Human Resources Development (ESF/ERDF)	No	No	No (but in annual report of NC)	No (not explicitly, but possible at OP level)
HR	OP Competitiveness	No	No	Yes	No

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)		Description of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution in formal progress reports of approved operations	Capturing of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution within the programmes' monitoring system	Description of EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution in the "Annual Implementation Report" for 2014/2015	Appraisal of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution by programme-level evaluation activities
	and Cohesion (ERDF/CF)	(not yet, but planned)	(not yet, but planned)		
RO	OP Large Infrastructures (ERDF/CF)	No (not yet clear)	No	No (but envisaged for next AIRs)	No
	OP Regional Development (ERDF)	Yes (only projects of EUSDR-related calls)	No (matter not yet fully solved)	No (but envisaged for next AIRs)	No
SI	OP for the implementation of cohesion policy (ERDF/CF/ESF)	No	No	No	No
SK	OP Research and Innovation (ERDF)	No	No	No	Yes (but indirectly)
	OP Integrated Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	No	No	No	No
<b>Cooperation programmes under the ETC goal, IPA II and ENI</b>					
Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme		Yes	Yes	Yes (but little information)	Yes
Interreg VA Romania - Bulgaria		No	Yes (partly by one result indicator)	No	No
Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria - Serbia		No	No (but indirectly by general data)	No	Yes
Interreg Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and		Yes	Yes	No	Yes

<b>Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)</b>	Description of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution in formal progress reports of approved operations	Capturing of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution within the programmes' monitoring system	Description of EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution in the "Annual Implementation Report" for 2014/2015	Appraisal of the EUSDR / EUSAIR contribution by programme-level evaluation activities
Herzegovina, Montenegro				
ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova	No (documents still in elaboration)	No	No (situation not fully clear)	No

(\* ) There are no concrete activities in the evaluation plan, but complementarities and synergies with other programme instruments/strategies (including the EUSDR) might be considered during the evaluation.

**Annex 10: Consideration of the EUSDR or EUSAIR in communication strategies and information activities of EU funding programmes**

<b>Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)</b>	EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related provisions in the programmes' communication strategy	Realisation of communication activities on macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Direct participation of programme-level stakeholders in EUSDR or EUSAIR events or workshops
<b>National / regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal</b>			
AT	OP Investment for Growth and Jobs in Austria (ERDF)	No	Yes
BG	OP Transport and Transport Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	No	No
	OP Human Resource Development (ESF)	No	Yes (in planning)
	OP Regions in Growth (ERDF)	No	Yes (to some extent)
CZ	OP Environment (ERDF/CF)	No	No

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)		EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related provisions in the programmes' communication strategy	Realisation of communication activities on macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Direct participation of programme-level stakeholders in EUSDR or EUSAIR events or workshops
	OP Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness (ERDF)	No	No	No (but MA is informed)
DE	OP Baden-Württemberg (ERDF)	No	Yes (in planning)	Yes
	OP Baden-Württemberg (ESF)	Yes (indirectly)	Yes	Yes
	OP Bayern (ERDF)	No	Yes (in planning)	No (but MA is informed)
	OP Bayern (EAFRD)	No	No	No (but MA is informed)
HU	OP Environmental and Energy Efficiency (ERDF/CF)	No	No (but activities realised by the NC)	No
	OP Human Resources Development (ESF/ERDF)	No	No (but activities realised by the NC)	Yes
HR	OP Competitiveness and Cohesion (ERDF/CF)	No	No	Yes
RO	OP Large Infrastructures (ERDF/CF)	No	Yes	No
	OP Regional Development (ERDF)	No	Yes	Yes
SI	OP for the implementation of cohesion policy (ERDF/CF/ESF)	No	No	No
SK	OP Research and Innovation (ERDF)	No	No	No (but MA is informed)
	OP Integrated Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	No	No	Yes

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)	EUSDR- or EUSAIR-related provisions in the programmes' communication strategy	Realisation of communication activities on macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Direct participation of programme-level stakeholders in EUSDR or EUSAIR events or workshops
<b>Cooperation programmes under the ETC goal, IPA II and ENI</b>			
Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interreg VA Romania – Bulgaria	No (not considered necessary)	No (not considered necessary)	Yes
Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria – Serbia	No	No	Yes
Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro	Yes	Yes	Yes
ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova	No	No	No (but informed indirectly)

**Annex 11: Main feature of country-specific processes for coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR/EUSALP**

EU Member State	Main features
Austria	<p>Aspects relating to the EUSDR (and EUSALP) are dealt within the country-wide arrangement of vertical and horizontal cooperation, coordination and information exchange on the ESIF in the period 2014-2020. At the national government level, the Federal Chancellery (Bundeskanzleramt, BKA) is generally responsible for the overall coordination of all ESIF in Austria and in particular of the ERDF. The BKA also acts, together with the Ministry for European and International Affairs, as National Coordinator for the EUSDR and EUSALP. Two other EUSDR- and EUSALP-related mechanisms exist within this vertical arrangement, in which the office of the “Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning” (Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz, ÖROK) plays a key role.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Austria-internal coordination platforms for the EUSDR and EUSALP (EUSDR-Koordinationsplattform, EUSALP-Koordinationsplattform). These platforms involve various federal ministries, the Austrian provinces</li> </ul>

EU Member State	Main features
	<p>(Bundesländer) and other relevant stakeholder organisations such as national association of cities, municipalities or social partners. Also representatives of the management bodies and “funding units” (Förderstellen) directly involved in the implementation of ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs and the ETC goals are present on these platforms. Within this wider context, the ÖROK supports the BKA especially in the field of public relations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The country-wide and ERDF-specific process for horizontal and vertical cooperation, coordination and information exchange on macro-regional cooperation in the EUSDR and EUSALP. This strategic working process involves numerous institutional ERDF-actors that are participating at the same time in national ESIF-committees and EUSDR-related coordination / governance structures. Also for this process, the ÖROK ensures an exchange of relevant information.</li> </ul>
Bulgaria	<p>Already in 2012, a decision of the Bulgarian Council of Ministers stated that the implementation of the Partnership Agreement and of national ESIF programmes has to be consistent with the EUSDR and also has to contribute to achieve the objectives of this Strategy. For this to achieve, a more recent Council of Ministers decision of March 2015 established specific coordinating bodies at the national level: a “National High Level Group” and a “National Coordination Group”, which are both chaired by the National Coordinator of the EUSDR (Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works).</p>
Czech Republic	<p>A “Working Group for coordination on the EUSDR” is established at the central government level, which is attached to and led by the National Coordinator for the EUSDR (State Secretary for European Affairs, located in the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic). This working group is a platform for facilitating coordination in support of an implementation of the EUSDR and regular meetings are organised that bring together the Managing Authorities of ESIF programmes and other relevant institutions or stakeholders. These working group meetings ensure a continuous horizontal exchange of knowledge and information on the EUSDR, both between the National Coordinator and the relevant domestic ESIF Programmes and between the ESIF programmes.</p>
Croatia	<p>A national-level coordination mechanism is set up that covers all interventions under the two ESIF goals and also those under IPA II. A key element of this mechanism is the “National Coordination Committee” (NCC), which is a permanent coordination platform supported by thematic sub-committees and a technical secretariat. The latter is provided for by the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds (MRDEUF), which acts as Coordinating Body (CB) for the four ESIF. The NCC also coordinates the Croatian participation in the EUSDR and EUSAIR. For this to achieve, it includes the National Coordinators of these macro-regional strategies, the Croatian EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) and the EUSAIR pillar coordinators. During the ESIF implementation phase, the NCC will analyse the consistency and links between ESIF interventions and the Actions Plans of both macro-regional strategies. The NCC was established only recently and</p>

EU Member State	Main features
	<p>there had not yet been any committee meetings. Also the sub-committees on the EUSDR and EUSAIR are not yet fully established and first meetings are expected to take place in early 2017.</p>
Germany	<p>A vertical cooperation and exchange process on issues relating to the EUSDR is established between the Federal and regional level. It involves the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its role as National Coordinator for the EUSDR, the administrative units from the two concerned German Länder that are responsible for the EUSDR and ESIF programmes (Bayern, Baden-Württemberg) and occasionally also different Federal Ministries concerned by the ESIF. This cooperation and exchange process aims to ensure transparency and mutual support for an implementation of the EUSDR. It is mostly of an informal nature and takes place occasionally, either on a case-by-case or issue-related basis.</p> <p>In addition to this vertical process, also specific arrangements for inter-ministerial coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR (and EUSALP) are established within Bayern and Baden-Württemberg at the regional-government level.</p> <p>In Baden-Württemberg, the current arrangement for administrative coordination and information exchange on the EUSDR was already established in 2011 and maintained after the re-election of the previous Land government in 2016. The arrangement comprises three main elements that are playing different but complementary roles. (1) The nomination of a “Special Coordinator for the EUSDR” (Sonderkoordinator EUSDR), who has own service office located in the Minister President’s “own” administration (Staatsministerium). (2) The “Inter-ministerial Working Group” (Interministerielle Arbeitsgruppe - IMA), which ensures formal coordination on all EUSDR-related matters at Land government level and is chaired by the Special Coordinator. (3) The half-year informal meetings of the Special Coordinator’s service office with EU-fund managers, which are focussed on specific issues or allow an often bilateral ad-hoc exchange of information on EUSDR-related matters.</p> <p>In Bayern, administrative coordination and information exchange on the EUSDR (and EUSALP) is ensured through the “bundling function” of the State Chancellery, which is supported in this task by the Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection. The State Chancellery, as the Minister President’s “own” administration, ensures a close integration of the other thematically concerned ministries of the Land government and provides - together with the Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection - information on all EUSDR-relevant activities to these sector-ministries. This takes place in a formal inter-ministerial meeting, usually organised once per year. These meetings sometimes involve formal decision taking on matters relating to macro-regional cooperation, but more often a less formal information exchange and joint discussions. Another and more frequently organised activity is the exchange of views between the State Chancellery and the “EU-affairs officials” (EU Referenten) of all ministries concerned by the EUSDR and EUSALP.</p>

EU Member State	Main features
Hungary	<p>An “Inter-ministerial working group for the EUSDR” is established at the central government level (i.e. at the Prime Minister’s Office). This structure ensures formal county-internal coordination and cooperation on all EUSDR-related matters. Working group meetings involve the line ministries and Managing Authorities of all Hungarian ESIF Programmes or ministries of other relevant national sectoral programmes as well as the National Coordinator for the EUSDR and its secretariat. The latter is located in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Danube Region Strategy Ministerial Commissioner). This working group is also regularly informed about ongoing developments and activities at the macro-regional level by the Hungarian sectoral representatives in the different steering groups set up for the EUSDR Priority Areas. Another formal requirement is that actors responsible for the EUSDR (i.e. ministerial commissioner, members of Priority Area steering groups or working groups) also take part in meetings of the “Inter-ministerial working group for a planning of the ESIF in the period 2014-2020”.</p>
Romania	<p>A “Functional Working Group (FWG) Territorial Coherence and European Territorial Cooperation” is established at the national level for the Partnership Agreement, which also addresses EUSDR-related matters. Since 2013/2014, the FWG has met approximately twice a year and involves the Managing Authorities of all eight national ESIF programmes in Romania as well as the Ministry of External Affairs, which is acting as National Coordinator for EUSDR. However, general coordination is hampered by the different implementation progress of the involved ESIF programmes and also EUSDR-related discussions seem to be difficult.</p>
Slovakia	<p>A “Working Group for coordination on the EUSDR” (i.e. the Partnership Agreement mentions a “Consultation Group for the Danube Strategy”) is established at the national level. It as an advisory body of the National Coordinator for the EUSDR, which is the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic. This working group is the main platform where domestic ESIF programmes can exchange information on an implementation of the EUSDR with the National Coordinator and also between themselves.</p>
Slovenia	<p>An “Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee” is currently established at the national level, which will ensure general coordination of the ESIF and other EU or national instruments and the EIB. Within this committee, the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy will play a key role as it is also the Managing Authority of the of the Programme for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy in Slovenia and also for the ETC programmes with Slovenian involvement. The inter-ministerial committee will also monitor the contributions of ESIF programmes to the three macro-regional strategies that are relevant for Slovenia (i.e. EUSDR, EUSAIR and EUSALP), but it has no formal coordination task in relation to these strategies. This is the role of an inter-ministerial coordination group that ensures national coordination and information exchange on all matters relating to the EUSDR, EUSAIR and EUSALP, which is operated by the Croatian National Coordinator for all three macro-regional strategies (i.e. Ministry of Foreign Affairs).</p>

EU Member State	Main features
<b>Source:</b> Own elaboration on ground of information in the ESIF Partnership Agreements, the 23 pre-selected EU funding programmes and the interviews realised under Task 2 of this study.	

**Annex 12: Supporting an implementation of the EUSDR and EUSAIR through coordination, cooperation and information exchange**

**Annex 12 – Table A: National or regional ESIF programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal**

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)		Involvement of programme in domestic processes for coordination, cooperation and information exchange on the EUSDR or EUSAIR	Programme-level coordination of EUSDR / EUSAIR matters in MC or by other activities	Direct interaction of programme with the EUSDR or EUSAIR levels	Cooperation and information exchange with administrations or EU programmes in other Member States or non-EU countries
AT	OP Investment for Growth and Jobs in Austria (ERDF)	Yes (in a comprehensive vertical process of coordination, cooperation and information exchange)	Yes (in MC, by NC presence and key role of MA in national coordination processes)	Yes (MC members in SGs for PAs 1A, 9, 10)	No
BG	OP Transport and Transport Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	Yes (in a national high level group and a coordination group)	Yes (in MC)	Yes & No (MA on SG for PA 1B, but not on SG for PA 1A)	No
	OP Human Resource Development (ESF)	Yes (in a national high level group and a coordination group)	Yes (in MC)	No	Yes (through a macro-regional network of ESF MAs)

	OP Regions in Growth (ERDF)	Yes (in a national high level group and a coordination group)	Yes (in MC, by NC presence)	Yes (MC members in SGs for PA 3 & 11)	Yes (indirectly through participation of MA in MCs of ETC/IPA programmes)
CZ	OP Environment (ERDF/CF)	Yes (in a national working group for coordination)	Yes (in MC and by informal inter-departmental exchanges)	Yes (Ministry in SGs for the PAs 4, 5 and 6)	No
	OP Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness (ERDF)	Yes (in a national working group for coordination)	No	Yes (Ministry in SG for PA 8)	No
DE	OP Baden-Württemberg (ERDF)	Yes (in a formal inter-ministerial working group & another coordination meeting for ESIF OPs)	Yes (limited in MC, but informal inter-departmental exchanges)	Yes (MC members have PAC role for PA 8 and participate in SGs for PAs 2, 3, 5, 7, 9)	No
	OP Baden-Württemberg (ESF)	Yes (in a formal inter-ministerial working group & another coordination meeting for ESIF OPs)	Yes (limited in MC, but informal inter-departmental exchanges)	Yes (MC members have PAC role for PA 8 and participate in SGs for PAs 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9)	Yes (through a macro-regional network of ESF MAs)
	OP Bayern (ERDF)	Yes (in a formal inter-ministerial coordination meeting & other regular briefing meetings)	No	Yes and No (*)	No

	OP Bayern (EAFRD)	Yes (in a formal inter-ministerial coordination meeting & other regular briefing meetings)	No	Yes and No (*)	No
HU	OP Environmental and Energy Efficiency (ERDF/CF)	Yes (in a national working group for coordination)	Yes (in MC, by NC presence)	No	Yes (but only if needed and in specific fields)
	OP Human Resources Development (ESF/ERDF)	Yes (in a national working group for coordination)	Yes (in MC, by NC presence)	No	Yes (through a macro-regional network of ESF MAs)
HR	OP Competitiveness and Cohesion (ERDF/CF)	No (not yet fully operational, status 11/2016)	Yes (in MC, by presence of EUSAIR-GB member)	No	No
RO	OP Large Infrastructures (ERDF/CF)	Yes (in a national working group for coordination)	Yes and No (very limited in MC due to weak NC role)	No	No
	OP Regional Development (ERDF)	Yes (in a national working group for coordination)	Yes and No (very limited in MC due to weak NC role)	Yes and No (*)	No
SI	OP for the implementation of cohesion policy (ERDF/CF/ESF)	Yes (in a national working group for coordination)	No	Yes and No (*)	No
SK	OP Research and Innovation (ERDF)	Yes (in a national working group for coordination)	Yes (in MC, by NC presence)	Yes (MC members have PAC role for PA 7 and participate in SGs / WGs)	Yes (partly through Slovak PAC role for PA 7)

	OP Integrated Infrastructure (ERDF/CF)	Yes (in a national working group for coordination)	No	Yes (MA and ministry on SG for PA 1A & PA 1B)	Yes (through participation in cross-country transport infrastructure projects)
<p>(*) Representatives of the Managing Authority and/or other sector-ministries being members of the Monitoring Committee are acting in roles/functions at the EUSDR and/or EUSAIR level, but the programme has until now not made use of this potential in the context of its work (e.g. during Monitoring Committee meetings).</p>					

**Annex 12 – Table B: Cooperation programmes under the ETC goal, IPA II and ENI**

Pre-selected Operational Programmes (OPs)	Coordination of EUSDR / EUSAIR related matters (via domestic processes and/or JMC of OP)	Direct interaction of programme with the EUSDR or EUSAIR levels	Cooperation and information exchange with other domestic administrations or EU programmes
Interreg Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme	Yes (domestic processes in all Member States & by presence of NCs on JMC)	Yes (through direct support of PACs under SO 4.2)	Yes
Interreg VA Romania – Bulgaria	Yes (domestic processes in RO & BG; MA staff member works on the EUSDR)	Yes (presence of PAC for PA 3 on JMC)	Yes
Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria – Serbia	Yes (domestic process in BG & by NC presence on JMC)	Yes (presence of PACs for PA 3 / PA 11 on JMC)	No
Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro	Yes (domestic process in HR)	No (but potentials exist in JMC)	Yes
ENI Joint Operational Programme Romania-Republic of Moldova	Yes (domestic process in RO)	No (but potentials exist in JMC)	No

