



LATEST NEWS

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EPP/CoR hosts first debate on a potential Euro-Mediterranean macro-regional strategy

"The Euro-Mediterranean should only pursue a macro-regional strategy if there are clear objectives and benefits that cannot be achieved by other existing methods" speakers and participants agreed at an EPP Group in the Committee of the Regions' seminar yesterday. Under the title *Building partnerships towards a Mediterranean macro-regional strategy*, the discussions took place as part of the OPEN DAYS: European Week of Regions and Cities and was an opportunity to consider future macro-regional cooperation for the Mediterranean region within the context of debates on the next financial programme and cohesion policy post-2013.

"Territorial cooperation and new tools and models to better deliver the goal of territorial cohesion enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty are of particular interest today" began **Luc Van den Brande**, Chairman of the CoR's Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs. "During our meeting, and in the months to come, we will undoubtedly deepen the debate on macro-regions to consider the added value of such territorial cooperation and how it can be articulated with the overarching Europe 2020 Strategy with the full engagement of local and regional authorities." As the regional affairs coordinator of the EPP Group in the European Parliament, **Lambert Van Nistelrooij MEP** stressed that macro-regions will have to be incorporated in the new post-2013 cohesion policy. However, he also feels that it is important to ensure that the creation of macro-regions does not reduce support for other cohesion policy objectives. "We are positive about the development of macro-regional models under certain conditions namely that the coordination of policies and instruments is assured" he underlined.

Umberto Oppus, Mayor of the Sardinian city of Mandas, explained that the Union for the Mediterranean, and other existing programmes, have identified the complex nature of the region and created hopes for interregional cooperation in areas such as solar energy, research and development, SMEs and the reduction of pollution. He concluded that beginning with several macro-regions targeted towards specific objectives could prove to be useful before potentially rolling them out throughout the whole of the Mediterranean. **Joseph Mifsud**, President of the Euro-Mediterranean University of Piran, which was set up under the Union for the Mediterranean, added that it is also important to take the needs of the Southern Mediterranean partners into account highlighting the difficulties of working in a region where there are many non-EU partners.

The Baltic Sea Strategy was the main reference point for many of the speakers who praised its success whilst also noting that local and regional participation could be stronger.

However, **David Sweet**, advisor to Dirk Ahner, the European Commission's Director-General for Regional Affairs, proposed that the reason for creating any macro-region must be to ensure better programming, coordination and resource efficiency rather than gaining any extra money. Within the future cohesion policy framework, he proposed reinforcing trans-national programmes so that strategies would get priority where they exist. **Eleni Marianou**, Secretary General of Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, agreed. During her address she mirrored the view of **Michael Schneider**, President of the EPP Group in the Committee of the Regions and rapporteur on the connection between cohesion policy and the Europe 2020 Strategy, that given current financial and policy conditions, macro-regions could be a possible response to enhancing cooperation and achieving growth. She therefore called on the European Commission to provide a blue-print for regions wishing to set up macro-regional strategies.

Practitioners amongst the participants expressed the will to use existing projects in the Mediterranean to reflect on a governance model or strategy for the region. **Ramon Luis Valcárcel Siso**, 1st Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions summed up the mood of the debate suggesting that at this stage it is perhaps too soon to develop a Euro-Mediterranean macro-region for two reasons. Firstly, he believes that a thorough analysis of the existing macro-region needs to be done before it is exported to other areas and that even then, it would need to be tailor made to fit the specificities. Secondly, given the existing forms of cooperation in the Mediterranean including the and the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly - ARLEM, he would like to encourage a deep reflection into how better support and develop these instruments before looking towards a new model. "We must always make sure that such a strategy would provide an added value to other existing instruments" he affirmed. Within the context of a new cohesion policy programme after 2013, the EPP Group calls on the European Commission to develop and animate a reflection on macro-regional strategies together with the Member States and the Committee of the Regions.

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