

Asymmetric Influences of the EU Macro- Regional Development Policies on the EU Eastern Neighbourhood Policies

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Abstract

Macro-regionalization means to develop solutions in the course of ongoing cooperation. Based on the three NO's regarding new EU budgets, EU institutions, and EU regulations, the macro-regional strategies are characterized by a flexible set-up, bottom-up elements and a sector centered governance in priority Areas. The cooperation is based on non-binding documents setting out joint strategic goals. Macro-regional cooperation brought a new mind-set into regional cooperation moving alongside other arenas of cooperation and combining political, operational and administrative elements.

Key words: macro- regional development, Eastern neighbourhood, policies, strategies

J.E.L. classification: K

Introduction

The main objective of this article is to demonstrate that EU macro-regional development policies have highly influenced the EU Eastern Neighbourhood policies implementation process. In addition, this is reflected in the latest EU Global Strategy recently launched by the European External Action Service. Thus the main conclusion drives to the integrative dynamics of all EU policies. The asymmetrical influences are also generating new concepts as cross-cutting initiatives and programmes. In particular, another relevant point for the research objective is that more coherence between all internal and external policies is highly projected into the future.

Several authors and most EU implementation reports of the EU policies used for this research underline that EU policies (both internal and external) are building into the same conclusion on more coherence and flexibility along their implementation process. Taking into consideration the broader spectre, the European Eastern Policies, in particular the European Neighbourhood Policy becomes more and more influenced by the macro-strategies which surround the EU neighbours.

1. What is macro-regionalization?

Macro-regionalization means to develop solutions in the course of ongoing cooperation. Based on the three NO's regarding new EU budgets, EU institutions, and EU regulations, the macro-regional strategies are characterized by a flexible set-up, bottom-up elements and a sector centered governance in priority Areas. The cooperation is based on non-binding documents setting out joint strategic goals. Macro-regional cooperation brought a new mind-set into regional cooperation moving alongside other arenas of cooperation and combining political, operational and administrative elements.

Against this background of an EU wide macro-regional dynamic and the initiation of discussions on EU Cohesion Policies post-2014, the future role of EU macro-regional strategies is under discussion more than ever (Sielker, 2016). After five years of implementation, it is time to take stock of the current achievements and question the role of macro-regional strategies shall take over the coming years. This process is closely related to the question which role macro-regional

strategies can take over in the wider EU framework and how they can be better linked to Cohesion Policies and other territorial cooperation formats and EU Eastern neighbourhood policies. Nevertheless, the strength of the macro-regional cooperation so far was to allow a sui-generis development of this concept.

First attempt to evaluate the asymmetric influences of the EU macro-regional policies on the EU Eastern neighbourhood policies needs to take into consideration the internal EU evaluation of the macro-regional governance by the European Commission (COM 2013) and in the same time the implementation reports of several EU Eastern neighbourhood policies, including the recent European Neighbourhood Policy review.

2. Measuring the Macro Regional Strategies success is a challenge sui generis

The overall goals of the macro-regional strategies are usually concretised in the first year of implementation by the Priority Areas and are revised in most of cases after the first year. Only by having a look on objectives, the challenge of monitoring the success of the macro-regional strategies is obvious. In particular, the targets do not argue on the same level of concretization. Some targets can easily be watched, others might still be operationalized with regard to quantifiable outcome. Second, in many cases a concrete schedule or deadline has not been defined but depends on political dynamics and opportunities. Third, there is no "input" defined but depends on targets – following the three "no's", the quality and quantity of resources is left open. Very obviously, a simple input-output-analysis cannot be sufficient with regard to measuring the macro-regional strategies success. Instead, a more open and flexible approach had to be developed that respects the still fuzzy and complex character of the macro-regional strategies implementation process.

"At the same time, macro-regional strategies are a new form of territorial cooperation not linked to any specific kind of funding structure. By their nature, it is difficult to evaluate their outcomes the same way cohesion funds or cooperation funds are evaluated. Evaluating macro regional strategies might have some parallels to European cooperation programmes. But again, the differences are considerable: cooperation programmes have a much more fixed time frame; they have a predefined budget; the institutional procedure is much more experienced. Due to open, soft and dynamic character of macro-regional strategies, the analytical lens needs to be chosen careful." (Ganzle S. and Kern K., 2016)

The monitoring must not be restricted to outcomes, even if the contemporary literature debate on evaluation is now far beyond the input logic that was concentrating on absorption rates. Instead, up-to-date evaluation conducts sophisticated analyses that differentiate needs, objectives, results and outputs (cp. DG REGIO 2011, Gaffey 2013). However, applying this system to macro-regional strategies would mean that these are as consistent as the programming documents of funding programmes which is not (yet) the case. Instead, any monitoring also has to consider input. In particular, at the background of the three No's at EU level, the domestic and European funds that are linked with macro-regional strategies activities are an important argument. Assessing which share of cohesion funds are sectoral spending directly refers and contributes to macro-regional strategies objectives of major importance. Moreover, the simple fact how active regional, national and stakeholder representatives are in the framework of macro-regional strategies' dynamics, is very important. The more mature macro-regional strategies become and the more closely they are interlinked with European funds, they are considered to become object to classical evaluation schemes. However, macro-regional strategies specifically intend to align different funding resources.

We always have to keep in mind when measuring macro-regional strategies that the focus on activities goes beyond the financials resources but considers political and institutional dynamics: even more than classical formats of territorial cooperation, the success of macro-regional strategies depends on political commitment over time. So before, we can acknowledge the asymmetrical influences we have to better understand the added value of the macro-regional cooperation.

3. The strategic dimension is the added value

Strategies are more than projects: macro-regions build on concrete projects that translate the strategic aims and are hence one important element of the macro-regional strategies implementation. At the same time, macro-regional strategies are neither funding programmes nor projects themselves, nor they intent to replace any of them. On the contrary, in order to achieve its strategic targets implementations activities they need to link the political with the projects. The key is to further develop the strategic goals and closely interact with all political levels and actors.

Macro-regional strategies are a about *cross-sectorial coordination*: macro-regional strategies formulate objectives that focus on different policy fields (transport, environment, innovation, research, culture, education). These objectives suggest a strong sectoral implementation as the key to achieve the macro-regional goal. However, the coordination of these sectoral issues with regard to the overall aim is as well important; the macro-regional strategies objectives have to be embedded in existing policy frameworks, on the EU but as well on the national levels.

Implementing macro-regional strategies activities is a multi-level challenge. Currently, the focus lies much on the strategic orientation of European politics, including the mobilization of funding for their implementation, which means on the EU level in particular the Cohesion Policy funding. At the same time, the interface with regional and national politics is less prominent. Enhancing the multi-level of a macro-regional strategy remains a challenge. In order to fully use the macro-regional potential, the links with the national and international policies could be strengthened, in particular by linking planning documents and domestic funding programmes systematically to macro-regional objectives. This however is a politically challenging multi-level task due to the national different priorities.

Strategic approaches towards policymakers provide an added value to the macro-regional policies by allowing cooperation between different levels, different policies, different stakeholders and balancing implementation activities under the guidance of long term objectives.

Macro regional strategies are explicitly perceived as "laboratories of a new place-based approach to Cohesion policies" (EP 2015), i.e. they are meant to tackle specific goals in the region and thereby concretise the EU's overall goals. The focus on place-based strategies is very much interlinked with the drive towards smart specialisations-both approaches certainly aim to turn territorial diversity into strengths in support to the EU 2020 strategies and other pan-European strategies.

Macro-regional strategies are described as place based as the core of macro-regional cooperation is to address the functional challenge of the region. It is true that this approach is unique in the context of European territorial cooperation and European strategies in general. However, implementing a place based approach needs to go further. A place-based approach in the context of territorial cooperation necessarily has two sides of a coin: the institutional and the territorial side.

The institutional setting of a macro-regional strategy is open to bottom-up and territorial anchored activities. A place-based approach necessarily is stakeholder-based. The successful roll-out of regional policies relies to a great extent on the relationship with stakeholders (Sielker 2016). In the case of macro-regional regional strategies, without the impetus of own funds, they reveal a strong dependence on relatively strong stakeholders. There is no such thing as "objective regional priorities". Hence, the macro-regionalisation tends to strengthen those stakeholders to whom the results are favourable to. Therefore, macro- regional strategies need to better acknowledge their stakeholder-driven approach. This could in return enhance the stakeholder involvement. Decentralised decision-making is certainly an efficient way towards using the potential of endogenous potentials. It is important to involve directly stakeholders from scales of the multi-level governance system as they often know best the endogenous potential and they can help to secure efficient implementation activities.

4. What is the state of play of the of the European Neighbourhood Policy roll out, which was recently revived in 2015?

On Eastern Policies it foresees more tailor made initiatives in order to focus cooperation on common interests and partner countries 'needs. Also, the security dimension under the European

Neighbourhood Policy offers new opportunities for cooperation, but will need to be handled with some care, in particular in case of regional conflicts and sensitivities.

But, the same influence as in the case of macro-strategies regarding the financial instruments used for their implementation: less is more and more flexibility.

So the same influence of stakeholders as in the case of the macro-regional strategies is obvious. The Eastern policies become more bottom-up and more focused on ownership if each partner country to implement their priorities. Regional and multilateral cooperation are more focused on sectorial cooperation and less on high political objectives. In all review documents there is the same cross-fertilization of ideas: *we need to become more flexible and all the EU Eastern policies need to become more tailor made on the each partner country's needs. In the same time a new concept was introduced recently though the new EU Global Strategy: responsibility and resilience.*

"Responsibility goes hand in hand with revamping our external partnerships. In the pursuit of our goals, we will reach out to states, regional bodies and international organisations. We will work with core partners, like-minded countries and regional groupings. We will deepen our partnerships with civil society and the private sector as key players in a networked world." (EEAS, EU Global Strategy 2016)

State and societal resilience remains an EU's strategic priority in the Eastern Neighbourhood. "The EU will pursue a multifaceted approach to resilience in its surrounding regions. While repressive states are inherently fragile in the long term, there

are many ways to build inclusive, prosperous and secure societies. We will therefore pursue tailor-made policies to support inclusive and accountable governance, critical for the fight against terrorism, corruption and organised crime, and for the protection of human rights. Repression suffocates outlets for discontent and marginalises communities." (EEAS, EU Global Strategy 2016)

The main aim of the Eastern policies is focused on having tangible results especially on the reform process in the EU eastern neighbourhood countries. After the fourth Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga on 21-22 May 2015, the Heads of States and Government adopted the Summit Declaration. Thus, Riga was an important summit as it reconfirmed the EU's attachment to the Eastern Partnership policy against the background of a changed geopolitical landscape in the region.

Again, there was a broad recognition of the need for a more tailored, differentiated approach to the Eastern Partnership, while many participants at the same time stressed the importance of the common, inclusive Eastern Partnership framework. In Riga, the EU reiterated that the Eastern Partnership remains its priority. The EU and its Member States reaffirmed their common interest of continuing this policy based on developing strengthened relations with each of the sovereign, independent partners. Many participants expressed strong support for Ukraine and its sovereignty and territorial integrity, while some stressed at the same time importance of maintaining dialogue with Russia. Many participants also stressed the information challenge.

On balance, the Riga Summit was an important milestone in the development of the Eastern Partnership. However, there are going to be significant challenges ahead, notably, how to allow partners to have differentiated bilateral relations while maintaining a common framework based on shared values, and also how to maintain a minimum commonality when dealing with conflicts in the face of Russian pressure. Some participants underlined also the need to reflect on these issues in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy review.

Taking into consideration the broader spectre, the European Eastern Policies, in particular the European Neighbourhood Policy becomes more and more influenced by the macro-strategies which surround the EU neighbours.

The main proposals made in 2015, when the European Neighbourhood Policy was reviewed included more focus on stabilisation of the neighbourhood (state and societal resilience as described in the EU Global Strategy), a differentiated (tailor made) approach to partner countries, and enhanced ownership of the policy by all stakeholders (Member States, partner countries, civil society). So, now the roll-out of the reviewed policy takes place. For the EU associated partners, the aim is to update existing Association Agendas, taking into account new proposals of the review. With other Eastern partners, the intention is to start discussions on partnership priorities, allowing us to focus on a limited number of policy areas of joint interest.

Again, become more flexible and tailor made, the EU policies tend to become more and more reliable on all stakeholders and the asymmetric influences the Macro-regional strategies become relevant: EU MS will always care more about their internal affairs first and foremost and only afterwards on the situation with the outside neighbours.

In parallel, no new financial allocation are given to these policies so during the implementation process, the partner countries need to rely on the existing financial instruments. All the instruments become of course more flexible, but of course each stakeholder can further influence the financial allocation. Again, first the macro-regions priorities are relevant and afterwards the neighbours. But, there are also success stories where macro-regional strategies are linked with the Eastern Policies. So this paradigm becomes a win-win situation.

5. Conclusion - the integrative dynamics

In the end we observe that all EU strategies and policies become more and more located at the transnational level where they have triggered a remarkable political dynamic. They have developed as a new level of European integration, involving EU member states and regions, third countries and EU institutions. This is a contrast to the development in the past decades, when European integration has mostly been debated on the pan-European level with regards to:

- the division of labour between the domestic, the multilateral and the supranational level (multi-level governance)
- with regards to third countries and new member states

Now the tendency is to become more responsible but using less resource or the existing ones. Less is the "new more" and flexibility is needed in all policies either macro-regional or Eastern neighbourhood policies. The asymmetrical influences are also generating a new concept as cross-cutting initiatives and programmes. In the end this means that we need more coherence between all internal and external EU policies. "The external cannot be separated from the internal. In fact, internal policies often deal only with the consequences of external dynamics. We will manage interdependence, with all the opportunities, challenges and fears it brings about, by engaging in and with the wider world." (EEAS, EU Global Strategy 2016)

It is not by accident that macro-regional strategies are entitled **strategies** and the EU Eastern neighbourhood policies are mostly **policies**: the overall political objective is to increase cooperation in order to develop towards a more competitive and sustainable region within Europe and beyond. Further regional development in the neighbourhood is influenced by a multiplicity of overlapping layers of cooperation and its content is based on cross-sectoral approach. With its guiding documents, both internal and external policies provide a strategic stimulus to an overall, common goal. The added-value of these documents is the potential to coordinate all policies and a wide range of implementation activities that contribute to the achievement of the overall goal. In general, a strategic orientation must be concrete enough to be worked towards and open enough to allow political progress. Formulating visions and scenarios can be a helpful tool in triggering the debate and further develop the strategic orientation. This could be seen as the main focus of the recent EU Global Strategy.

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