

AN ADRIATIC-IONIAN MACRO-REGION BY THE END OF 2014 WITH A MARITIME STRATEGY FOR THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN SEAS AS A STARTING POINT

At the European Council of 14th December 2012, EU Heads of State and Government invited the European Commission to put forward a proposal for a new Macro-Regional Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region by 2014.

In particular, item 26 of the Conclusions of the European Council (EUCO 205/12) under the section "Regional Strategies" says :

"Recalling its June 2011 conclusions, and subject to the evaluation of the concept of macro regional strategies as foreseen in the Council conclusions of 13 April 2011, the European Council looks forward to the presentation by the Commission of a new EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region before the end of 2014. "

This decision was made few weeks after the **European Commission** adopted "**A Maritime Strategy of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas**", another major measure that was formally submitted to the Parliament and European Council on the 30th November 2012 (17228/12 - COM 2012-713 final). Then, **Maria Damanaki**, Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries officially launched the strategy at a high-level conference that took place in Zagreb on the 6th December 2012.

As you recall it, both initiatives were formally announced at the Open Days during the workshops about the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region organized by the Abruzzo Region in Brussels on the 10th October 2012.

Indeed, the **European Commissioner Maria Damanaki**, and the **Italian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Marta Dassù**, had chosen the most important annual event organized in Brussels about regional policies to outline the **Agenda** of the coming institutional meetings regarding the promotion and development of the entire area. This flagship event gathered **12 Territorial Authorities**, with at least **7 Italian Regions** among them as well as **4 national governments** representing **6 Member States**.

A year ago, at the same time, nobody talked about an Adriatic-Ionian macro-region. New proposals of integration strategies, in competition with the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region, seemed to be of priority to the States. The strategy for an Adriatic-Ionian macro-region seemed to be completely off the agenda.

Now, the situation is totally different, thanks to the purely **diplomatic** initiatives implemented by the **Member States**, one of them is “ **the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative**”, but also thanks to the **local and regional authorities, institutions, programming bodies** as the **managing authorities** and the **joint monitoring committees** of the major cooperation programmes implemented in the Area. For more than ten years, those organizations have been creating an institutional and operational framework while complying with the general targets of the European policies as well as the challenges and emerging needs at a local level.

On that matter, the example given by the Abruzzo Region during the Open Days is telling.

Indeed, we have worked to create a **joint approach** that goes beyond the **local, regional and national interests** in order to focus on those “ **urgent concrete and achievable needs** ” which, taken as a whole and without changing the available resources, are the cardinal principles to which the Commission stuck regarding the development of the two existing macro-regional (the **Baltic Sea macro-region** and the **Danube macro-region**).

Surely, the experience and the knowledge gained by the Abruzzo Region as the **managing authority of the “ Adriatic IPA Cross-border Co-operation Programme”** (as well as of the previous programme, **INTERREG IIIA Adriatic**) were fundamental. Those two programmes were the main financing tools at European level, preferential institutional reference point for the development of projects for the development of projects and experiences regarding the area as a whole.

Now, the Communication about the “ Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas”, which is the first official communication assessing that the European Commission will systematically tackle this issue, gives us details about both aspects when it says, right after the introduction, under the section (1) **Objectives**, page 2, that :

"Should the EU Member States decide to ask the Commission to prepare an EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region, this maritime strategy might constitute the first component of such and EU macro-regional strategy covering additional fields. "

More importantly, in the section (3) **Context**, the Communication says that :

" The coastal states of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, stemming partly from European programmes, such as the IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Adriatic Programme and future programme covering the area, and partly from other initiatives, such as the Adriatic Ionian Initiative. "

Then, about the measures and actions to be implemented by the Regional and local authorities, the section *NEXT STEPS/ TOWARDS AN ACTION PLAN*, page 13 underlines that :

" The maritime strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas will be spelled out in detail in an Action Plan due in the second half of 2013, respecting the ongoing and planned actions of relevant EU policies. Based on the pillars identified in this Communication, it will include priority areas and actions recommended for support in order to respond to the challenges and opportunities set out above. It will also set clear targets in line with those for the Europe 2020 strategy. "

To do so, The Commission will work with *"the governments and agencies, regions, municipalities, business actors, researchers and international and non-governmental organisations. organisations.* The Commission will also work with “ other institutions, programming bodies and intergovernmental organisations active in the region to align, where appropriate, their activities with the objectives of the strategy and to identify co-ordinating bodies for the envisaged actions and projects ”.

Link to a previous article regarding the participation of the Abruzzo Region in the Open Days 2012:

<http://www.regione.abruzzo.it/xEuropa/index.asp?modello=notizieSing&servizio=LE&stileDiv=sequence&b=notizia337&tom=337>

Link to the Commissioner Maria Damanaki's speech during the Open Days 2012 :

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/damanaki/headlines/speeches/2012/10/20121010_speech_en.htm

Link to the Italian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Marta Dassù's speech during the Open Days 2012 :

http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Sampa/ArchivioNotizie/Interventi/2012/10/20121012_Macroregione.htm?LANG=IT

Link to the video broadcast before the two-panel debate during the Open Days 2012 :

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?=GTvYWpvfcYKM>

Link to the press release about the launching of the Maritime strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, on the 6th December 2012 in Zagreb:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/damanaki/headlines/press-releases/2012/12/20121206-1_en.htm

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