

# **UACES 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

**Cork, 1-3 September 2014**

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Paper for presentation at 44<sup>th</sup> UACES Annual Conference

1-3 September 2014, Cork, Ireland

## **Priority Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action Leaders in EU Macro-region Strategies Trans-governmental Networks in the Making?**

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**Abstract:** The system of Priority Area Coordinators (PAC) and Horizontal Action Leaders (HAL) presents a unique feature of the governance architecture established by. The primary role of PAC and HAL is to involve relevant stakeholders in the implementation of a macro-regional strategy. This paper unpacks the internal dynamic within the core element of the governance architecture and hence to map, in a comparative way, the role, main tasks, patterns of inter-organizational contacts and self-perception of PAC and HAL in the EUSBSR and EUSDR. Building on data provided by an online survey conducted in 2013 and involving more than 30 BSR/DR PAC and HAL, it explores the infrastructure provided by the 'home institutions' for PAC and HAL, how PAC/HAL work and to whom they 'lean', but also how they perceive of important challenges and opportunities posed by EU macro-regional strategies. One of the key findings suggests that PAC/HAL not only constitute a form of transnational governmental network between participating countries, but at the same time extend the reach of a thinly staffed European Commission DG Regio into (sub)national bureaucracies of EU members and partner countries.

## INTRODUCTION

Macro-regional strategies of the European Union (EU) constitute a relatively new element in EU cohesion policy, which aims to improve cooperation amongst EU member as well as partner countries. These strategies cover geographical areas that include “territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges” (European Commission, 2009) and provide an “integrated framework” (European Commission, 2013a, 2) for collective action in a wide range of areas particularly sensitive to the need of functional cooperation, such as e.g. the transport infrastructure, economic development and protection of the environment. Macro-regional strategies seek to implement the objective of territorial cohesion, expressed in Art. 174 of the Treaty of Lisbon, and complement the goals of social and economic cohesion of the European Union. Presently, there are two EU macro-regional strategies ‘in operation’: the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), endorsed in 2009, and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) of 2011. Other (potential) EU macro-regional strategies, such as the ones for the Ionic-Adriatic basin, the Alpine and the North Sea regions, are currently under different stages of development.<sup>1</sup>

Cooperation beyond the nation state is a well-known fact of political life in Europe. In some few instances, transnational cooperation, such as the Hanseatic League of tradesmen in North-Eastern Europe, even occurred before the establishment of a state system proper. . Following a string of consultations with actors and ‘stake-holders’ of both the Baltic Sea and Danube regions, the Commission eventually identified priorities within broader ‘pillars’ or ‘objectives’ that embrace, in the case of the EUSBSR, the aim (1) to save the sea; (2) to connect the region; and (3) to increase prosperity.<sup>2</sup> Each of these identified priority areas (PAs) and horizontal actions (HAs), such as PA Energy and HA Sustainability – the latter cutting across all priority areas – falls under the leadership of one or two Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) or Horizontal Action Leaders (HALs). Altogether there are approximately 20 PACs in the EUSDR as well as 40 PACs and HALs in the EUSBSR, a unique feature of the latter (see table 1).

The European Union emphasizes that macro-regional strategies will neither be accompanied by new institutions, nor new legislation or new funding – the so-called three ‘No’s’. Hence, the governance architecture of macro-regional strategies builds, by and large, into existing structures of EU governance linking the strategic, operational and implementation levels closely together. The governance architecture encompasses EU institutions as well as EU

member states, partner countries, international organisations, subnational authorities and private actors through the High Level Group as the EU level as well as National Contact Points, Priority Area Focal Points, Priority Area Coordinators, Horizontal Action Leaders, Flagship Project Leaders and other bodies in charge of implementing programmes/financial instruments at the (sub-)national level (for roles and responsibilities, see EUSBSR Task Force, 2013).

Within this governance architecture, Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) and Horizontal Action Leaders (HALs) present rather unique features (see Gänzle and Schneider, 2013). The primary role of PACs and HALs is to “[f]acilitate involvement of and cooperation with relevant stakeholders from the entire macro-region” (EUSBSR Task Force, 2013, 9 and 10). The system of PACs and HALs capitalizes on the promotion of sectorial interdependence and ties across various national and subnational governments; because of this it is being framed as one if not the “key to the future success of macro-regional strategies” (interview with Swedish government official, July 2, 2013). Its high degree of flexibility introduces new forms of ‘experimentalist governance’ that provide a testing ground for future practices and ways of interaction.<sup>3</sup>

It is the aim of this briefing note to report the core findings of an online survey conducted in summer/fall 2013. The survey aimed at uncovering the internal dynamic of the PACs/HALs governance architecture and mapping the role, main tasks, patterns of inter-organizational contacts and self-perception of PACs and HALs in the EUSBSR and EUSDR. Building on this unique set of data drawing on information provided by 31 BSR/DR PACs and HALs in total, it explores the support that ‘home institutions’ provide to PACs and HALs; how PACs/HALs work and to whom they are ‘leaning’ in terms of contact patterns and which policy preferences and arguments these actors support or are more inclined to follow, but also how they perceive of important challenges and opportunities posed by EU macro-regional strategies. Although – or precisely because – the macro-regional governance architecture for the time being not only is a moving target, but also relatively recent endeavor, it is important to come to grips with these organizational dynamics precisely at such early stage: First, from the perspective of historical institutionalism, newly established organizational structures tend to pave the ground for future avenues of development of new institutions, norms and practices (‘path dependency’); it is therefore important to understand the impact that PACs and HALs of the ‘first generation’ trigger for the future design of macro-regional strategies in general. Second, assuming that the basic demographic profile of PACs and HALs shapes basic

features of their decision-making behavior (see Meier and Nigro, 1976) and that the preferences of officials is likely determined by the interests of the respective societal groups from which they originate (see Wise, 2003), it is paramount to better grasp their personal and professional background.<sup>4</sup>

Drawing on these assumptions, we expect, *first* that the PACs/HALs have significant potential of forging closer relations amongst EU-level actors (various Commission DGs), stake-holders and governments as they build on sectorial links and interdependence. In addition, the system by which two PACs – one from an old and one from a new EU or partner country are ‘twinned’ (e.g. DR PA 9 Moldova and Austria, see table 1) – may also trigger mutual learning effects on administrations at national and/or (sub)national level. *Second*, we would expect PACs/HALs to function as facilitators for improving (cross-)sectorial integration of policy areas (horizontal integration) across several levels of governance encompassing the European, EU member and partner countries as well as subnational levels (vertical integration). Thus it may be possible to regard PACs/HALs as a new type of civil servants/officials operating as part of a highly flexible and increasingly networked bureaucracy across borders. *For the time being, however, our findings suggest that PACs/HALs are still facing severe constraints in living up to these potentials in terms of horizontal and vertical integration. Still, it is clear that the system of PACs/HALs not only constitutes a new form of transnational governmental network (TGN) between participating countries and other stakeholders, but at the same time extends the ‘reach’ of the European Commission into (sub-)national bureaucracies of EU members and partner countries.*<sup>5</sup>

This paper proceeds as follows: After a short discussion of the development of Priority Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action Leaders and their function in the governance architecture, the methods and results of the online survey conducted amongst PAC and HAL from the Baltic Sea and Danube Region in the summer/fall of 2013 will be presented and discussed. The questionnaire was designed in way to learn more about the tasks, patterns of contact and self-perceptions of PAC and HAL in order to get a better grasp of their respective roles in administering macro-regional strategies.

## **THE EMERGING GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE OF MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES: THE ROLE OF PRIORITY AREA COORDINATORS (PAC) AND HORIZONTAL ACTION LEADERS (HAL)**

Having been in discussion for about four years and following a stake-holder consultation process initiated by the European Commission in 2008, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), the European Union's first macro-regional strategy, was announced in June 2009. Concomitantly, the first EUSBSR Action Plan released at the same time, entrusted the European Commission with a number of tasks referring to "co-ordination, monitoring, reporting, facilitation of the implementation and follow-up" (European Commission, 2009, 10). Calling for a broader ownership of the Strategy, this document did not yet explicitly mention Priority Area Coordinators or Horizontal Action Leaders. It was only after the release of the Action Plan and after the European Council had endorsed the EUSBSR in October 2009 under the Swedish EU Presidency that the macro-regional governance structure started to emerge gradually; the Council Review of the EUSBSR of June 2012 eventually suggested much more detailed guidance on roles and responsibilities. In both Strategies, however, Priority Areas and Horizontal Actions have developed along different paths, highly dependent on the political will of core stake-holders, such as for instance the individuals filling the positions of PACs and HALs.

There are now 17 Priority Areas and 5 Horizontal Actions in the EUSBSR; 11 priority areas have been identified in the EUSDR. Each of these areas and actions is led by at least one Priority Area Coordinator or Horizontal Action Leader (see table for EUSBSR PACs/HALs in annex). In its most recent Progress Report on the EUSDR, the European Commission confirmed that there are "24 Priority Area Coordinators [...] driving implementation forward" (European Commission, 2013a, 3). Yet, these numbers may be subject to fluctuation due to internal rotations or changes of government that may result in unexpected vacancies of PAC/HAL positions. The process of designating PACs/HALs in both Strategies involved close interaction between Member States and the European Commission, with at times the Member States taking the initiative and/or the Commission asking some countries to take the lead on a number of specific areas. Most Priority Areas and Horizontal Actions involve at least two 'leaders', from Member States and/or international organizations (see table 1). Some thematic issues such as Health (PA 12) are coordinated by an international body, i.e. the Northern Dimension for Public Health and Social Well Being.

With regard to financing the positions of PACs/HALs, the European Commission appropriates up to 120 000 euro for a period of three years to these positions. A report on the EUSBSR concluded: "In 2011 each of the PACs had the opportunity to receive 120 000 euro from the budget allocated by the European Parliament to help implement their PA in 2011,

2012 and 2013. The PACs were required to complete a rather detailed application form to apply for this funding, which was done by most of them. The agreements for receipt of the grant were signed at the end of 2011 and the PACs have received an 80% advance payment” (DEABaltika, 2012, 12f). Hence, one may assume that this financial ‘kick-off’ provided by the European Commission (through the European Parliament) presented an additional incentive for regional activities for getting some Member States involved. That said, it still needs to be seen whether or not these Member States take into account the roles and functions associated with a PAC in a financially sustainable way.

EUSBSR: On October 27, 2009 the General Affairs Council of the EU (GAERC) called upon the “concerned Member States, the Commission and other parties to identify coordinators with the role of coordinating and supervising the progress of the actions and flagship projects [...]” (EU Council, 2009, 5). In terms of core tasks, the coordinators are expected to “report on a regular basis to the high-level group and the Commission, and in cooperation with the Commission seek to identify lead partners for the flagships projects identified within each priority area. The lead partners should on a regular basis report to the coordinators” (ibid.). Subsequently, the catalogue of functions and duties has been elaborated further (see EUSBSR Task Force, 2013). In February 2013 a revised Action Plan was launched calling for ‘focal points’ to further streamline the EUSBSR. Another major change concerned the introduction of steering groups in the EUSBSR and the addition of ‘Culture’ as yet another PA on the demand of the German region of Schleswig-Holstein. In addition, a ‘Seed Money Facility’ was introduced to provide some start-up funding for project initiatives. Following a small interim implementation report in 2010, the first major report was drawn up in June 2011. The Commission found that the EUSBSR’s overall impact had been successful; in particular, it “has led to concrete action, with a more streamlined use of resources. New working methods and networks have been established, and many initiatives developed” (European Commission, 2011, 3). Clearly, as the EUSBSR was launched in the midst of the 2007–13 funding period, a great deal of financial resources had already been earmarked for other projects. Still, a number of new projects were launched, such as a project is often referred to as a show case, the ‘Baltic Deal’, whereby members would work “with farmers across the Region to reduce nutrient run-off, and therefore eutrophication” (European Commission, 2011, 2).

EUSDR: Upon the strong request of Austria, Serbia and Romania as well as the preparatory steps of the government of Baden-Württemberg from 2006-2008<sup>6</sup>, steps towards the EUSDR were initiated in 2008 by the then EU Commissioner for Regional Policy Danuta Hübner. The Commissioner called for a strategy similar to the one for the Baltic Sea Area. Many features of the EUSDR Communication, Action Plan and governance architecture just built on the EUSBSR model. The Commission's Communication and Action Plan was presented in December 2010. In July 2011, the Hungarian EU-Presidency eventually put the EUSDR up on the agenda for endorsement by the European Council (see Ágh, 2012). Interestingly, in the case of the EUSDR, so-called Steering Groups were put in place from the very beginning aiming to bring together experts from ministries, agencies and international bodies.

Finally, in 2013, the European Commission carried out an evaluation exercise which tapped on an extensive survey of more than 100 key stakeholders, as well as independent assessments by external experts. The evaluation concludes that macro-regional strategies have triggered clear results “evident in terms of projects and more integrated policy making, although further improvements are essential in implementation and planning” (European Commission, 2013b, 11); yet, at the same time, the “issue of leadership” (European Commission, *ibid.*) is being identified as an important challenge to be addressed. It is the objective of this briefing note to contribute towards a better understanding of the sociological and organizational underpinnings of leadership issues concerning the core of the macro-regional governance architecture established by the system of Priority Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action Leaders.

## **METHOD AND DATA**

The paper draws on an online survey<sup>7</sup> conducted amongst Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) and Horizontal Action Leaders (HALs) of both the EU Strategies for the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region in summer 2013. Our project was endorsed by one of the PACs of the EUSDR, who encouraged his counterparts to take part in the survey, and thus provided a peer stamp of approval for the project within the group of PACs. An email containing the link to the survey was received by the DR PACs and BSR PACs/HALs. After two rounds of reminders, 11 questionnaires from PAC of the EUSDR and 20 questionnaires from PAC/HAL

from the EUSBSR were harvested. As there are 22 DR PACs and 41 BSR PACs/HALs, this presents a response rate of 50% in the case of the EUSDR and just under half (48.8%) in the case of the EUSBSR. The questionnaire also aimed at members of Steering Groups; yet, given to the low response rates we received from that surveyed population, and due to the fact that a significant number of Steering Groups are still being established (in particular in the context of the EUSBSR), we decided to discard them from our analysis. It also seemed that some PACs/HALs found that they were not familiar enough with their jobs and responsibilities given the very new nature of their respective PA/HA positions.<sup>8</sup> Still, given a response rate of (close to) 50 % in both the EUSBSR and EUSDR, the data builds a rather solid base and provides a ‘first glimpse’ assessment. Given the anonymous nature of the survey, we do not anticipate any significant bias effects related to the answers respondents provided. Occasional strong responses against the ‘best’ answer also provide evidence that this is the case.

## **UNRAVELLING THE CORE OF THE MACROREGIONAL GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Demographic background and support infrastructure of PACs and HALs**

*Affiliation and fields of training:* A majority of surveyed PACs/HALs is employed by a national government ministry or agency (BSR PACs/HALs: 62% and DR PACs: 73%) and were formally trained in economics/business administration or other disciplines in the social sciences. In contrast, *almost one of two DR PACs affirms to have a background in Engineering, the Natural Sciences or Technology; a number which is down to 15% in the case of BSR PACs/HALs. Interestingly, while 65% of BSR PACs/HALs report having studied abroad for a period of at least 6 months, only 18% of DR PACs have spent at least some time (of at least 6 months) in a foreign country as part of their university training.*<sup>9</sup>

*Becoming a PACs or HALs and future work plans:* When it comes to the issue of becoming a PAC/HAL, it seems that ‘superiors’ from home institutions have been involved rather prominently in more than 50% of cases reported in the survey. Irrespectively of wishes by of a superior, *25% of BSR PACs/HALs and 20% of DR PACs concede that they have also found job-related tasks attractive. Interestingly, it is 45% of BSR PACs/HALs that admit to be “committed to the idea of macro-regional strategies”, but only 10% of DR PACs.* Ability and

expertise were cited as one of the more important factors for ‘landing the job’, up to 70% in the case of BSR PACs/HALs and 91% in the case of DR PACs. One third of BSR PACs/HALs (35%) perceives principles of seniority as yet another important element (only 9% in case of DR PACs). While around 50% of survey participants intend to continue work (DR 53% und BR 43%) in the current position or with the national government, it is interesting to note that 32% of BSR PACs/HALs express their willingness to also consider positions within the European Union or other international organizations. This number is about 21% in the case of DR PACs. Interestingly, *40% of BSR PACs/HALs and 54% of DR PACs consider their work to be beneficial for future career prospects.*

**Infrastructure and support:** 45% of surveyed PACs and HALs in both the BSR and the DR noted that tasks related to their duties amount to no more than 25% of their overall work. *One out of four PACs/HALs in the BSR (DR: 27%) report that working as a PAC or HAL makes up for more than half of a full-time position, and for 15% of BSR PACs/HALs it accounts for even more than 75% (DR: 0%).* In short, *one can safely assume that PAC/HAL-related duties come on top of a regular job;* however, drawing on the survey data as well as insights from face-to-face or telephone interviews with PACs/HALs complementing the survey, it seems that in the BSR, there are some trends of *professionalization discernible within the group of PACs and HALs.* Although most PACs and HALs do not advocate in favor of a permanent position as PAC or HAL, *45% of BSR PACs/HALs (DR: 36%) are supportive of the idea of creating full-time positions.* This divergence between PACs and HALs from the BSR and DR, may also be explained by the fact that 25% of BSR PACs/HALs, but only 9% of DR PACs report that they do not have any additional personnel – hence the latter, in principle, have some opportunity for delegation. From our survey, it seems that 40% of BSR PACs/HALs and 54% of DR PAC are supported by 2-3 staff (including part time).

**Steering Groups and Focal Area Points** constitute yet another important feature of the governance architecture of EU macro-regional strategies. Developed first within the context of the EUSDR, it has subsequently been adopted in the context of the EUSBSR as well. Still, 20% of BSR PAC/HAL acknowledge that Steering Groups have not (yet) been put in place; half of existing Steering Groups meet on an biannual basis which seems to become standard as it is also the frequency that is common to Steering Groups within the DR; here, 91% of PAC confirm that Steering Groups are up and running (one surveyed PAC did not provide an answer) and meet at least twice per year. In terms of overall membership, PAC/HAL report that national line ministries are strongly presented (65% in the case of the BSR, and 90% in

the DR). Although attendance in Steering Group meetings poses constraints on participating countries and regions, 45% of BSR PAC/HAL and DR PAC report a rate of equal or more than 50%.<sup>10</sup>

## **2. Role perceptions, tasks and patterns of contact of PACs and HALs**

When asked about role models informing their work, 55% of BSR PACs/HALs and 73% DR PACs perceive themselves as representative of their respective macro-regions. Whereas 64% of DR PACs admit that they look at themselves as representatives of their national governments (BSR PACs/HALs: 40%), BSR PACs/HALs, in terms of their self-perception, promote a focus on sector policy as they perceive themselves as representatives of their respective unit or departments (see table 2). When prompted to consider several options (see table 3) to depict their work as PAC/HAL, 75% of BSR and 91% of DR PACs/HALs describe themselves as “information and knowledge provider” who “manage the macro-region according to the Action Plan” (65% of PACs/HALs in both macro-regions). This is also confirmed by their main preoccupations, which are to “provide background information” (63% of BSR and 55% of DR PACs and HALs) as well as to “contacting people and networking” (75% of BSR and 73% of DR PACs and HALs). These results do not come as a surprise given the fact that the working structure of many PACs/HALs is still in a process of consolidation with some minor differences between the BSR and DR. 64% of DR PACs affirm that “drafting documents” also makes up a significant portion of their time (see table 4). When asked to discern their patterns of contacts, national governments certainly prevail in both the case of BSR PACs/HALs and DR PACs at a level of 65% and 55%. Interestingly though, Co-PACs/HALs also constitute important contact points as 65% (BSR) and 55% (DR) of survey-takers confirm. It is striking, however that, while 60% of BSR PACs/HALs identify the European Commission as important addressee, only 18% of the DR PACs do so (see table 5). When asked how much weight they assign to partners, the European Commission and national governments are named as most important ones. Again, Co-PACs are being perceived as important interlocutors for both BSR and DR PACs/HALs (see table 6).

## **3. How PACs/HALs assess opportunities and challenges of the EUSBSR/EUSDR**

When being asked for important obstacles for and benefits of implementing the EUSBSR and EUSDR, PACs and HALs (80%) of both macro-regions admit that the lack of financial resources is amongst the most important impediments; BSR PACs/HALs are also critical a lack of political commitment (80%) amongst participating countries and actors as well as deficiency in communicating EUSBSR-related matters (55%). In contrast, DR PACs are far more skeptical about the alleged ‘complexity’ (64%) of the governance architecture and report that the EUSDR has already contributed to improving the political commitment towards the Strategy (82%) (see table 7). One of the key contributions according to surveyed PACs and HALs seems to be the fact that over the previous months coordination efforts within the respective PAs/HAs have improved, whereas, in general, coordination with other actors from the international/EU, member state and sub-national levels receive weaker scores (see table 8). With regard to an overall assessment of the EU’s macro-regional strategies to date, an overwhelming majority of PACs and HALs agrees that both the EUSBSR and EUSDR are “useful tools to enhance regional cooperation and cohesion” (BSR: 95% and DR: 82%) and that they trigger a positive impact on the EU (BSR: 75% and DR: 73%). However only about half of surveyed PACs and HALs agree in that “macro-regional strategies are a useful tool to make better use of structural funding” (BSR: 50% and DR: 55%). Strikingly, 55% of PACs and HALs of both macro-regional set-up *converge in their impression that “non-EU countries have little influence on the PA/HA and SG decision-making process” and diverge significantly in subscribing to the idea of a ‘Europe of macro-regions’* (Lithuanian Presidency, 2013), which, in principle would see the entire EU territory (as well as adjacent neighbourhoods) covered by macro-regional strategies (BSR: 20% and DR: 73%) (see table 9). It seems fair to conclude that PACs/HALs from the Baltic Sea region assume that the rather special historical trajectories for transnational cooperation in this part of Europe cannot easily be replicated in other corners of the continent.

## DISCUSSION

Drawing on the results of the survey, it becomes obvious that BSR PACs/HALs and DR PACs are quite heterogeneous in terms of their demographic profile; in particular, a significantly higher share of BSR PACs/HALs has been able to gain experience abroad as part of their university training. Although it is rather difficult to conclude how the different curricula and study abroad experiences influences the day-to-day work of PACs and HALs,

one may assume that the majority of BSR PACs/HALs is more at ease in multinational political environments than their DR counterparts with more technical skills training.

Most BSR and DR PACs are government officials that fulfill several roles. Whereas almost two thirds of DR PACs conceive themselves as representatives of their national governments, BSR PACs/HALs subscribe to a more sectoral perspective on their individual portfolios. It is clearly remarkable that 55% of BSR PACs/HALs and 73% DR PACs concomitantly look at themselves as representative of their respective macro-region, although only 10% of DR PAC acknowledge that they “are committed to the idea of macro-regional strategies.” This may be interpreted as a significant gap or cognitive dissonance between ‘the’ idea of macro-regions and the somewhat more critically received way of implementing it in terms of the ‘EU macro-regional strategy’. DR PACs also admit that they find the governance structure overtly complex (see table 7). Both groups of PACs and HALs perceive themselves as “information provider” and “networkers” which certainly reflects that that both macro-regional strategies are at an early stage of implementation. Interestingly again, DR PACs also affirm that the “drafting of documents” makes up a significant portion of their working time (see table 4). In terms of working time, approximately 45% of surveyed PACs and HALs in both the BSR and the DR tell that tasks related to their duties amount to no more than 25% of their overall work. With only a few exceptions in the context of the BSR, tasks related to the position of PACs and HALs come on top of a regular job – and it is only in the case of the BSR PACs/HALs that we become aware of some processes of (full time) professionalization.

When asked to discern their patterns of contacts, national governments certainly prevail in both the case of BSR PACs/HALs and DR PACs. 65% (BSR) and 55% (DR) of respondents also perceive Co-PACs/HALs as important contact. It is striking, however that, while 60% of BSR PACs/HALs identify the European Commission as important addressee, only 18% of the DR PACs do so (see table 5). When asked how much weight they assign to partners, the European Commission and national governments are named as most important ones. Again, Co-PACs are being perceived as important interlocutors for both BSR and DR PACs/HALs (see table 6). It is interesting to note that there is a strong relationship between a PAC and his or her Co-PACs in a given priority area – and it seems that this is one of the central potential entry points for mutual learning effects. For example, system of Co-PACs in some of the Priority Areas – e.g. in the PA ‘Energy’ led by Latvia and Denmark – seem to have triggered closer forms of consultations and cooperation (Interview with PAC, June 3, 2013). It remains

to be seen in the future how sustainable these relations are and who is primarily benefitting from them.

The core results of the survey is that horizontal integration centred around the individual priority areas or horizontal actions of a PAC/HAL has increased, whereas there is no evidence (yet) of closer integration across policy sectors within a given macro-region. At the same time, the survey suggests a similar ‘silo-ization effects’ with regards to vertical integration across the EU, national and subnational levels. For the time being, it remains an important task to ensure that PACs and HALs are supported by well-informed and committed steering groups that would ensure that the Strategy extends beyond the inner circles of a prime minister’s or foreign minister’s office dealing with EUSBSR/EUSDR matters, or limited to particular personalities and individuals. While BSR PACs/HALs come up with particularly high scores of contacts to the Commission in terms of communication patterns (in contrast to DR PACs), both BSR PACs/HALs and DR identify the Commission as a partner whose arguments they lend their ears. Hence it is safe to assume that the European Commission is in a process of building up its outreach capacities into this new group of actors in EU territorial governance.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the governance architecture set up by the EUSBSR and the EUSDR is still at a relatively early stage of development, it important not only to get a clear picture of the demographic background and profile of HALs and PACs which is likely to inform future pathways of this new trans-governmental network but also not rush into premature conclusions and make radical changes. This said, the survey has clearly demonstrated that both BSR PACs/HALs and DR PACs are highly qualified officials of various line ministries and regional organisations united in their the ambition to continue their current occupations. In a few instances of BSR PACs/HALs, the survey has revealed some modest trends of professionalization with regards to more working time allocated to PACs/HALs-related task and duties. Let us now turn to those findings of the survey that have some far-reaching implications beyond the demographic profile of PACs/HALs:

*First*, PACs and HALs serve as key interlocutors of a growing network of EU territorial governance mechanisms. In the instances of both the EUSBSR and EUSDR it becomes clear, however, that the implementation of the ‘integrated framework’ is very much limited to areas

within or immediately adjacent to PAs and HAs. Many PACs and HALs have not yet been able to reach out horizontally – across sectors – and vertically – across layers of governance – involving EU, other international bodies, member states partner countries and subnational authorities in a more strategic manner. Or, as put in a recent concept note: “Working in the capacity of PAC/HAL implies having to tackle a great deal of complexity. Besides, it often takes place in environments characterized by uncertainty (e.g. of mandates, agendas, possibilities) and ambiguity (e.g. unclear roles, poor information). Some individuals are better equipped than others for doing the job properly.” (Bergström 2013, 2). At the same time, and despite the perceived complexity of the structure in some corners of PACs/HALs, it seems that there is now a flexible governance architecture in place which may in the near future – provided that it is sufficiently supported by the new multiannual financial framework of the EU and bolstered by the political commitment of member states and other stake-holders – support the emergence of a sustainable trans-governmental network (TGN) capable of reaching out to a number of important actors around functionally defined areas of cooperation. As this system of governance builds on both sectorial interdependence and trans-governmental ties, it is likely to escape what some scholars are expecting for “political regional projects such as the Union for the Mediterranean or also broadly defined macro-regional approaches”, namely to “fail if they concentrate too strongly on the formal intergovernmental level“ (Lavenex, 2013, 3).

*Second*, in both macro-regional strategies discussed here the European Commission has been received as a core interlocutor – with some differences between the EUSBSR and the EUSDR. We perceive this as a clear indication that the EU’s executive branch effectively expands its reach into various corners of national and subnational authorities of EU member and (to a smaller degree) partner countries.

*Finally*, the macro-regional governance architecture needs to account for the specific underlying trends of governance in each and every macro-region. It seems that the BSR is much more consolidated as a space of and for transnational governance than the DR given its established track record of in regional cooperation. In different macro-regions, the European Commission (as well as other actors) is compelled to employ different strategic approaches, instruments and eventually more active forms of engagement in order to achieve the objectives to which the macro-regional strategies subscribe.

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## Annex

**Table 1: Priority Areas (PAs) and Horizontal Actions (HAs) of the EUSBSR and EUSDR**

Priority Areas (PAs)	Coordinator(s)	Number of PACs/HALs
<b>EUSDR</b>		
<b>Connecting the Region</b>		
PA Improving mobility and multimodality		
A To improve mobility and intermodality of inland waterways	Austria, Romania	2
B To improve mobility and intermodality - rail, road and air	Serbia, Slovenia	2
PA Energy	Hungary, Czech Republic	2
PA Culture and tourism	Bulgaria, Romania	2
<b>Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region</b>		
PA Water quality	Hungary, Slovakia	2
PA Environmental risks	Hungary, Romania.	2
PA Biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils	Bavaria (Germany), Croatia	2
<b>Building Prosperity in the Danube Region</b>		
PA Knowledge Society	Serbia, Slovakia	2
PA Competitiveness	Baden-Württemberg (Germany), Croatia	2
PA People and skills	Austria, Moldova	2
<b>Strengthening the Danube Region</b>		
PA Institutional capacity and cooperation	City of Vienna (Austria) and Slovenia	2
Security	Germany, Bulgaria	2
<b>EUSBSR</b>		
<b>Save the Sea</b>		
PA Agri – Reinforcing sustainability of agriculture, forestry and fisheries	Finland, Lithuania, Sweden	3
PA Bio – Preserving natural zones and biodiversity, including fisheries	Germany	1
PA Hazards – Reducing the use and impact of hazardous substances	Sweden	1
PA Nutri – Reducing nutrients input to the sea to acceptable levels	Finland, Poland	2
PA Safe – To become a leading region in maritime safety and security	Denmark, Finland	2
PA Secure – Protection from emergencies and accidents on land	Sweden, Council of the Baltic Sea States	2

	(CBSS)	
PA Ship – Becoming a model region for clean shipping	Denmark	1
<b>Connect the Region</b>		
PA Crime – Fighting cross-border crime	Finland, Lithuania	2
PA Energy – Improving the access to, and the efficiency and security of, the energy markets	Denmark, Latvia	2
PA Transport – Improving internal and external transport links	Lithuania, Sweden	2
<b>Increase Prosperity</b>		
PA Culture – Developing and promoting the common culture and cultural identity	Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), Poland	2
PA Education – Developing innovative education and youth	Hamburg (Germany), Norden (Sweden)	2
PA Health – Improving and promoting people’s health, including its social aspects	Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being	1
PA Innovation – Exploiting the full potential of the region in research and innovation	Sweden, Poland	3
PA Internal Market – Removing hindrances of the internal market	Estonia	1
PA SME – Promote entrepreneurship and strengthen the growth of SMEs	Denmark	1
PA Tourism – Reinforcing cohesiveness of the macro-region through tourism	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	1
<b>Horizontal Actions (HAs)</b>		
HA Involve – Strengthening multilevel governance including involving civil society, business and academia	Region Västerbotten and Kalmar, the Baltic Sea NGO network	2
HA Neighbours –increase cooperation with neighbouring countries to tackle joint challenges in the BSR	City of Turku (Finland), CBSS	2
HA Promo – Boosting joint promotion and regional identity building actions	Baltic Metropolises Network, Baltic Development Forum	2
HA Spatial Planning – Encouraging the use of maritime and land-based spatial planning in all member states around the Baltic Sea and develop a common approach for cross-border cooperation	VASAB, HELCOM	2
HA Sustainable development and bio-energy	CBSS, Nordic Council of Ministers	2

Based on European Commission, 2013c, 42

**Table 2: Which of these models apply to your role as PACs/HALs?**

	<b>BSR PACs/HALs</b>	<b>DR PACs</b>
Independent expert	20	27
Representative of my unit and/or department	50	37
Representative of my country's government	40	64
Representative of my region's government	10	37
Representative of my macro-region	55	73
Representative of the European Union	35	28

In per cent; notes: This table combines the values 1 and 2 (strongly agree, agree) on the following five-point scale: (1), (2), (3), (4), (5) – multiple answers possible

**Table 3: What describes your work as PACs/HALs best?**

	<b>BSR PAC/HAL</b>	<b>DR PAC</b>
Information and knowledge provider	75	91
Manage the macro-region according to Action Plan	65	65
Moderate the interests in the macro-region	55	27
Mediate conflicts in the macro-region	20	0
Advocate of the MR	50	64

In per cent; notes: This table combines the values 1 and 2 (strongly agree, agree) on the following five-point scale: (1), (2), (3), (4), (5) – multiple answers possible

**Table 4: PACs/HALs spending much time on the following issues**

	<b>BSR PAC/HAL</b>	<b>DR PAC</b>
Drafting documents	45	64
Providing scientific, technical, legal advice	21	18
Giving general advice	55	36
Providing background information	63	55
Meeting/contacting people and networking	75	73
Project development and management	45	32
Finding financial resources	25	18

In per cent; notes: This table combines the values 1 and 2 (strongly agree, agree) on the following five-point scale: (1), (2), (3), (4), (5) – multiple answers possible

**Table 5: Patterns of contacts – PACs/HALs having much contact through meetings, e-mails, phone, etc.**

	<b>BSR PAC/HAL</b>	<b>DR PAC</b>
European Commission	60	18
Other EU institutions	15	9
National contact points	40	36
Co-PAC/HAL	65	54
Other PACs/HALs (from your own EU macro-region)	50	27
Other PACs/HALs (from other EU macro-region)	0	0
Members of Steering Group (own priority/action)	50	18
Members of Steering Group (other priority/action)	5	0
Civil society	45	18
National government	65	55
Subnational authorities	55	46
Municipal authorities	25	9
IOs in macro-regions	50	18
Universities/research inst.	45	27

In per cent; notes: This table combines the values 1 and 2 (a lot, quite a lot) on the following five-point scale: (1), (2), (3), (4), (5) – multiple answers possible

**Table 6: Appreciation of partners – PACs and HALs assigning weight to the arguments/advice of the following**

	<b>BSR PACs/HALs</b>	<b>DR PACs</b>
European Commission	100	91
Other EU institutions	40	55
National contact points	70	70
Co-PAC/HAL	80	73
Other PACs/HALs (from your own EU macro-region)	55	64
Other PACs/HALs (from other EU macro-region)	15	27
Members of Steering Group (own priority/action)	65	82
Members of Steering Group (other priority/action)	15	18
Civil society	40	46
National government	90	91
Subnational authorities	40	40
Municipal authorities	30	18
International organizations in macro-regions (e.g. HELCOM, ICPDR, etc.)	70	64
Universities/research institutes	50	55

In per cent; notes: This table combines the values 1 and 2 (a lot, quite a lot) on the following five-point scale: (1), (2), (3), (4), (5) – multiple answers possible

**Table 7: Most important obstacles and benefits in the implementation of the Macro-regional Strategy according to PACs and HALs**

	<b>BSR PACs/HALs</b>	<b>DR PACs</b>
<b><i>Obstacles</i></b>		
Lack of financial resources	80	80
Lack of political commitment	80	55
Deficiency in communication	55	37
Complexity	30	64
Lack of expertise	0	18
Lack of interest among the stakeholders/multipliers/general public	35	37
<b><i>Benefits</i></b>		
Increase of political commitment, sense of ownership	55	82
Raised awareness of macro-regional needs	65	73
Improvement of quality of project proposals	50	27
Improvement of implementation of projects	40	27
Improvement of absorption of funds	25	18

In per cent; notes: This table combines the values 1 and 2 (strongly agree, agree) on the following five-point scale: (1), (2), (3), (4), (5) – multiple answers possible

**Table 8: Discernibility of impact of (and tensions within) macro-regional governance architecture according to PACs and HALs**

	<b>BSR PACs/HALs</b>	<b>DR PACs</b>
<i>Within your priority area/horizontal action</i>	60	82
Between the priority areas/horizontal actions	30	46
With European institutions	35	27
With other organizations	20	27
With national administrations	25	36
With regional administrations	20	18
With local administrations	5	0 0
<i>Governance architecture within your priority area/horizontal action</i>	45	55
Governance architecture in general	40	27
Conflict between PA	5	0
Conflict SG/WG	5	0
Conflict different stakeholders	0	10
Conflict with EU	0	0
Conflict regional government	0	0
Conflict national government	15	9
Tensions generally	30	18

In per cent; notes: This table combines the values 1 and 2 (a lot, quite a lot) on the following five-point scale: (1), (2), (3), (4), (5) – multiple answers possible

**Table 9: Overall assessment of Macro-regional Strategies**

	<b>BSR PACs/HALs</b>	<b>DR PACs</b>
Macro-regional Strategies are a useful tool to enhance regional cooperation and cohesion	95	82
Macro-regional Strategies are a useful tool to make better use of structural funding	50	55
Macro-regional Strategies should cover the whole “EU-Territory”	20	73
Macro-regional Strategies should have their own funding resources	65	73
Macro-regional Strategies will improve EU governance	75	73
The implementation of Macro-Regional Strategies will be enhanced within the new 2014-2020 period	70	73
The decision making process is mainly influenced by the interests of the “old” (prior to 2004) EU Members	15	27
The “new” (post 2004] EU Member States have little influence on the PA/HA and SG decision-making	10	18
The non-EU countries have little influence on the PA/HA and SG decision-making process	55	55
Macro-regional strategies have overall a positive impact on the unity of the European Union	75	73

In per cent; notes: This table combines the values 1 and 2 (strongly agree, agree) on the following five-point scale: (1), (2), (3), (4), (5) – multiple answers possible

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## Endnotes

\* Based on Briefing note entitled ‘The Emerging Core of the EU’s Macro-regional Governance Architecture: Mapping the Roles, Tasks and Self-Perceptions of Priority Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action Leaders in the EU Strategies for the Baltic Sea and the Danube Regions’ by Stefan Gänzle and Johann-Jakob Wulf. Work in progress, do not cite.

<sup>1</sup> On December 14, 2012, the European Council called upon the Commission to elaborate “subject to the evaluation of the concept of macro-regional strategies [...] a new EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region before the end of 2014” (European Council, 2012, 11). On May 15, 2013, the European Parliament adopted a resolution in support of an Alpine macro-regional strategy (European Parliament, 2013), and the European Council of Council of December 20, 2013 eventually invited “the Commission, in cooperation with Member States, to elaborate an EU Strategy for the Alpine Region by June 2015” (European Council, 2013, 25). In the same vein, the European Parliament, at its plenary meeting on October 23, 2013, endorsed approved a budget line of €250.000 in 2014 for a preparatory action to study the feasibility of a North Sea Strategy.

<sup>2</sup> In the case of the EUSDR, the objectives are to (1) connect the region, (2) protect the environment, (3) build prosperity and (4) strengthen the Danube region – primarily in terms of institutional capacity and cooperation.

<sup>3</sup> According to Radaelli/Dunlop (2013, 930) the core feature of experimentalist governance is “to connect different actors in multi-level networks that monitor, diffuse information on policy performance and generate feedback. Instruments like annual reporting and peer review create the necessary informational conditions for monitorability. Socialization in multi-level networks creates opportunities for exchanging and adapting local solutions found in one place to another place.”

<sup>4</sup> We are grateful to Jarle Trondal for drawing our attention to this body of literature.

<sup>5</sup> At the same time, it should be born in mind that the Commission’s DG region is rather thinly staffed: “In terms of human resources, two national experts, one and a half EC staff plus an assistant work with EUSBSR issues in the Commission. [...] In addition, one person works with EUSBSR issues on a full-time basis at INTERACT Point Turku and some work has also been done for the Strategy by other staff members that in total would constitute half of one full-time staff position” (DEABaltika, 2012, 13).

<sup>6</sup> It is also important to mention the various efforts of the city of Ulm in Baden-Württemberg since 1998 to bring up the issue of collaboration along the river Danube onto the international agenda.

<sup>7</sup> The survey tool was provided by limelight.

<sup>8</sup> One BSR HAL posited in a written correspondence: “Being HAL [anonymous], however, I entered your questionnaire, but quickly realized that the survey is too early for me, and gave up. We are only just about to establish a Co-ordination Group [anonymous]. I believe many PACs and HALs might feel the same. You should give us more time!” (author’s correspondence, September 19, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Some of the key findings are in italics.

<sup>10</sup> In 53% of instances in the BSR (73% in the DR), specialists and observers have been invited to the Steering Groups.