

Integration of climate policy into regional development strategies

Dear Chairs, dear colleagues,

[The Climate challenge and our response]

According to science, the warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and oceans have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have increased. Each of the last three decades has been successively warmer at the Earth's surface than any preceding decade since 1850 and, 1983–2012 was likely the warmest 30-year period of the last 1400 years.

So, the human influence on the climate system is clear. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), it is extremely likely (95%) that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century.

Continued emissions of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and limiting climate change will require substantial and sustained reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.

In other words, climate change requires a comprehensive response at all levels: international (through the climate negotiations), European (through our EU-policies), national and regional.

There are two pillars in the response to it. Firstly, we need to **mitigate** climate change notably by reducing the emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. And secondly, we also need to **adapt** to climate change, because of the adverse impacts we are already observing today – such as sea level rise and much more frequent extreme weather events across the world. Recent events in the Philippines and in Sardinia are two more examples for this.

Regional and macro-regional development strategies can help in this regard, provide added-value with regard to climate change related challenges and opportunities, and mobilise joint efforts on climate action.

[Commission report on macro-regional strategies]

The Commission issued a report on the added-value of macro-regional strategies in June this year and my colleague Johannes Hahn will certainly elaborate further on this later today. So I will only highlight what is relevant to my portfolio.

Indeed, the report emphasises climate change adaptation among the common challenges to be addressed by macro-regional strategies and we hope that the various strategies – those existing and those under development or planned, will take this sufficiently into account.

An example of such joint effort is the BaltAdapt project, which supports the adaptation to climate change in the Baltic Sea Region with substantial financial support from the EU.

Hence, macro-regional strategies are already a useful tool for Member States to work together in addressing climate change as a common challenge. We in the Commission want to see this further developed and therefore provide the necessary possibilities in the next EU budget period 2014-2020.

[EU Adaptation Strategy]

The EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change was adopted in April this year. The strategy sets out a framework and mechanisms for taking the EU's preparedness for current and future climate impacts to a new level.

Impacts vary across the EU depending on climate, geographic and socioeconomic conditions. All the countries in the EU are exposed to climate change. However, some regions are more at risk than others. The Mediterranean basin, mountain areas, densely populated floodplains, coastal zones, outermost regions and the Arctic are particularly vulnerable. Additionally, three quarters of the population of Europe live in urban areas, which are often ill-equipped for adaptation.

Macro-regional strategies can complement the EU Adaptation Strategy by supporting the adaptation to climate change in vulnerable areas.

For example, macro-regional strategies can address cross-border management of floods, trans-boundary coastal management, forest fires in drought-prone border areas, etc.

As part of the EU Adaptation Strategy, the Commission has developed the European Climate Adaptation Platform, Climate-ADAPT. Climate-ADAPT provides information about adaptation to climate change and can be a valuable resource in the preparation and implementation of climate action in the framework of macro-regional strategies.

[MFF 2014-2020]

The EU is stepping-up the support for climate action in the next budget period, the MFF 2014-2020, with an ambitious objective to mainstream climate action across the board and reach at least 20% climate related expenditure.

EU support to macro-regional strategies, for example in European Territorial Cooperation programmes can contribute in this regard.

But – having representatives from all of our national Parliaments present and notably those from committees in charge of regional development, I would also like to make a more general appeal, beyond the theme of macro-regional strategies.

As the development of the regional operational programmes for the structural funds is currently under way, I would like to stress again our wish that all Member States and their regions fully profit from the increased funding opportunities for climate-relevant projects under all the funds in the new funding period up to 2020.

[European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020]

Indeed, the European Structural and Investment Funds in the new period will make an important contribution to the implementation of EU climate policy.

In order to assist Member States and regions, DG Climate Action has published on its website¹ a series of fact sheets on how to mainstream climate action and the potential for doing so into the five European Structural and Investment Funds, i.e. the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), Cohesion Fund, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

The fact sheets show that there is a good potential for mainstreaming climate action across all 11 thematic objectives and specifically to pursue mitigation through thematic objective 4 and adaptation through thematic objective 5.

In this way, the European Structural and Investment Funds will make an important contribution to the objective of reaching at least 20% climate related expenditure for the EU budget in the period 2014-2020.

The implementation of macro-regional strategies is already being supported by the EU, for example by the European Regional Development Fund and its goal of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC). We expect to see further support to the climate objectives in 2014-2020.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/clima/publications/index_en.htm#Mainstreaming

[LIFE 2014-2020]

In addition to these general funding opportunities and also contributing to our 20% objective, the new LIFE programme for the period 2014-2020 includes a specific sub-programme on Climate Action, which will support climate mitigation, adaptation, and governance.

LIFE funding can support and complement initiatives taking place in the framework of macro-regional strategies and will allow for so-called integrated projects, where funding from LIFE and other EU-funding programmes – such as the research programme Horizon or the structural funds – can be combined.

With all these opportunities and with your help and commitment, I hope that, at the end of the period, we will see that we reached a level well beyond our 20% objective.